

ATTITUDE TO THE DMO'S ROLES AND INTERACTION WITH STAKEHOLDERS IN TOURISM DESTINATIONS IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS REGION

Oxana I. Shebolkina*, Siuzanna V. Mirzoian**, Urs Wagenseil*** & Bettina Mandel****

Abstract

Management of tourist destinations is a priority area in the modern tourism industry and in economic science. In this regard, destination management organizations are critical players in territorial planning and tourism development. The North Caucasus republics are a growing destination for Russian and foreign tourists, which is why the issue of their development is of particular importance, as it is impossible without addressing the tasks of cooperation among the central tourism-related institutions. The article is focused on the role and problems of functioning of DMO's in North Caucasus republics, particularly on the two key issues: 1) revealing the conditions and tools for the functional relationships among stakeholders in tourist destinations of the Kabardino-Balkarian, Karachay-Cherkess, and Chechen Republics of the Russian Federation, and 2) identifying the abundance and diversity of actions taken by stakeholders for the coordinated management of these destinations. A comparative characteristic of Russian and European literature approaches to managing a tourist destination makes it possible to understand the modern functions and models of DMOs as the key tool of tourism development. A qualitative and quantitative survey of the key stakeholders' opinions in the tourist destinations considered allowed making conclusions about the implications for managing ski tourism destinations by a Destination Management Organization in Russia. The analysis of qualitative expert interviews and a quantitative stakeholder survey in the North Caucasus reveals the advantages of coordinated destination management for various stakeholder segments and their potential for further development. The results of the study indicate the underdeveloped state of the DMO system in the North Caucasus republics and highlight the need to implement a set of measures to plan the territorial development of their tourist complexes, particularly in ski tourism.

Keywords: Destination Management Organization (DMO); Stakeholder management; Tourism Destinations; North Caucasus Region; Russia.

ATITUDE COM AS ORGANIZAÇÕES DE GESTÃO DE DESTINOS PAPÉIS E INTERAÇÃO COM AS PARTES INTERESSADAS EM DESTINOS TURÍSTICOS NA REGIÃO DO NORTE DO CÁUCASO

Resumo

O artigo é dedicado ao estudo da situação das tarefas e da cooperação entre as principais instituições relacionadas com o turismo em destinos turísticos selecionados no Norte do Cáucaso. É apresentada uma caracterização comparativa das abordagens da literatura russa e europeia para a gestão de um destino turístico, incluindo o uso do modelo clássico de gestão de destino (DMO). As duas ênfases principais do trabalho são: 1) revelar as condições e os instrumentos para a formação de relações funcionais entre as partes interessadas nos destinos turísticos das Repúblicas Kabardino-Balkarian, Karachay-Cherkess e Chechena da Federação Russa; e 2) identificar a abundância e a diversidade de ações adotadas pelas partes interessadas para a gestão coordenada desses destinos. Para o estudo, realizou-se um levantamento qualitativo e quantitativo das opiniões dos principais stakeholders sobre os destinos turísticos considerados. Estes permitiram tirar conclusões sobre as direções de implicação para a gestão de destinos turísticos de esqui por uma organização de gestão de destinos na Rússia. Com base na análise dos resultados obtidos em entrevistas qualitativas com especialistas e num inquérito quantitativo às partes interessadas nos destinos turísticos das regiões acima mencionadas, foram identificadas as vantagens da gestão coordenada dos destinos para vários segmentos de partes interessadas e o desenvolvimento adicional destes destinos.

Palavras-chave: Destinos Turísticos; Organização de Gestão de Destino (DMO); Gestão dos stakeholders; Região do Norte do Cáucaso; Rússia.

ACTITUD ANTE LAS ORGANIZACIONES DE GESTIÓN DE DESTINOS ROLES E INTERACCIÓN CON LOS GRUPOS DE INTERÉS EN LOS DESTINOS TURÍSTICOS DE LA REGIÓN DEL CÁUCASO NORTE

Resumen

El artículo está dedicado al estudio del estado de las tareas y de la cooperación de las principales instituciones relacionadas con el turismo en destinos turísticos seleccionados en el Cáucaso Norte. Se ofrece una caracterización comparativa de los enfoques de la literatura rusa y europea para la gestión de un destino turístico, incluido el uso del modelo clásico de organización de destinos (DMO). Los dos énfasis clave en el trabajo son: 1) revelar las condiciones e instrumentos para la formación de relaciones funcionales entre las partes interesadas en los destinos turísticos de las Repúblicas Kabardino-Balkarian, Karachay-Cherkess y Chechenia de la Federación Rusa, y 2) identificar la abundancia y la diversidad de acciones adoptadas por los actores para la gestión coordinada de estos destinos. Para el estudio, se realizó una encuesta cualitativa y cuantitativa sobre las opiniones de los actores clave en los destinos turísticos considerados. Esto permitió sacar conclusiones sobre las implicaciones para la gestión de destinos turísticos de esquí de una organización de gestión de destinos en Rusia. A partir del análisis de los resultados de entrevistas cualitativas con expertos y de una encuesta cuantitativa a las partes interesadas en los destinos turísticos de las regiones antes mencionadas, se identificaron las ventajas de la gestión coordinada de los destinos para varios segmentos de partes interesadas y el mayor desarrollo de estos destinos.

Palabras clave: Destinos Turísticos; Organización de Gestión de Destinos (DMO); Gestión de stakeholders; Región del Cáucaso Norte, Rusia.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Influence of the latest challenges on the need for coordinated management in tourist destinations

Most tourism-oriented countries and destinations experienced negative impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting drastic decline in tourist flows in 2020, reflected in key indicators such as job losses and tourism-generated income¹. Destinations were confronted with the need for a prompt and effective response to the destabilizing challenges of the external environment and the necessity of seeking alternatives for the provision of tourism services in the changed circumstances (today referred to as “resilience”) (Afanasyev & Afanasieva, 2021, 2022). Furthermore, as claimed by Zoltan and Masiero, “the variety of products involved in tourism and the differences in competences, implementing collaborations within a destination is a complex issue” (Zoltan & Masiero, 2012).

In this context, the need for effective stakeholder interaction is becoming increasingly urgent. In the practice of destination management, a shared vision is created for this purpose, and deliberate coordination of actors is sought (Morrison, 2013). As DMOs have proven to be one of the most effective and significant forms of cooperation between different actors (Dwyer & Kim, 2003; d'Angella & Frank, 2009; Goncharova, 2013).

It will likewise be considered as a crucial and essential model for the ski destinations of the North Caucasus Federal District in the subsequent elaboration. Similarly, the importance of DMOs in image and brand building is seen as a lever for greater impact in positioning as a ski destination and in garnering collective attention. The recent challenges have particularly heightened the need for competitiveness, sustainability, and market validation of each ski destination, which can be supported and fostered through the successful use of the DMO system.

The novelty of this study lies in its investigation of specific destinations in the North Caucasus, emphasizing the relevance and purpose of introducing the DMO system in ski resorts. Therefore, from a scientific perspective, it was crucial to identify the characteristics of stakeholder interactions in North Caucasus destinations, which were investigated using a mixed-methods approach. The study comprises both a quantitative and a qualitative survey, conducted with the most authoritative representatives of the defined territories, and summarizes the results and presents them in graphical form. Based on the results, the study formulates specific conclusions about the prerequisites for the formation of the DMO model in the tourist destinations of the Karachay-Cherkess, Kabardino-Balkarian, and Chechen Republics.

1.2 Investigated destinations

The research project investigated the stakeholder management in the four destinations: Dombay and Arkhyz

(Karachay-Cherkess Republic), Elbrus (Kabardino-Balkarian Republic), and Veduchi (Chechen Republic) (Fig. 1).

Figure 1. Dombay, Arkhyz, Elbrus and Veduchi tourism destinations in the North Caucasus Federal District



Source: own elaboration, created with QGIS and CorelDraw

All these destinations have local and regional economic significance (jobs, economic structures, social networks, etc.), and therefore, the tourism industry (in a direct, indirect, and corresponding way) is relevant. Accordingly, the central questions of this research are of interest for tourist development.

Below, each destination is outlined with its unique characteristics.

A) One of the priority tasks of tourism development in the *Karachay-Cherkess Republic (KChR)*, along with general sporting activities, extreme tourism, business, cultural, educational, pilgrimage, or ethnographic orientation, is the development of ski tourism.

The importance of the latter lies in the fact that 80% of the republic's territory is occupied by the Northern Elbrus mountain range, as well as in the favourable winter climatic conditions, respectively, the investments in corresponding infrastructure facilities (ski lifts, construction of ski slopes, accommodation offers, etc.). In 2020, the KChR welcomed approximately 1.5 million tourists per year, and in 2021, that number increased to 1.7 million.

Besides its developed ski infrastructure, the destination offers a range of natural resources, including approximately 200 caves with a minimum size of 4 meters, 10 of which are classified as natural monuments. The area also features hundreds of waterfalls, more than 400 lakes, and numerous botanical and landscape natural monuments.

A1) The tourism offer in *Dombay* includes four ski lifts to climb to a maximum height of 3168 m above sea level with 25 km ski slopes. Additionally, tourists can find a

¹ 2020: Worst year in tourism history with 1 billion fewer international arrivals. URL: <https://www.unwto.org/news/2020-worst-year-in-tourism-history-with-1-billion-fewer-international-arrivals>; Tourism grows 4% in 2021 but remains far below pre-pandemic levels. URL: <https://www.unwto.org/news/tourism-grows-4-in-2021-but-remains-far-below-pre-pandemic-levels>

[grows-4-in-2021-but-remains-far-below-pre-pandemic-levels](https://www.unwto.org/news/tourism-grows-4-in-2021-but-remains-far-below-pre-pandemic-levels); International tourism and COVID-19. URL: <https://www.unwto.org/international-tourism-and-covid-19>

comprehensive tourist complex in the Dombayskaya glade, featuring hotel infrastructure and recreational and entertainment facilities. Many hiking trails start from the Dombai Valley, located at an altitude of 1600 m above sea level, and the summit of Elbrus is only 65 km away.

A2) In *Arkhyz*, there are eight cableways with a capacity of 9100 people/hour, rising to a height of 2840 m, and 27 km of slopes of various difficulty levels are operated. The resort also features a cheesecake trail (tubing), a snow park, a playground, and an open-air skating rink situated at an altitude of 1,600 m. The resort's slopes are equipped with an artificial snowmaking system and lighting. There is a tandem paragliding service with a professional instructor, excursion trips on a snowcat to the evening slopes, snowmobiling on the Arkasar plateau, an outdoor pool with a sauna located at an altitude of more than 1800 m, and a heated vat.

B) In the *Kabardino-Balkarian Republic (KBR)*, there are a total of 11 recreational zones being developed with the "Nalchik" destination. In the first quarter of 2022, approximately 300,000 people visited the KBR, which is almost a quarter more than in the same period in 2021. The cable car of the Elbrus resort is included in the Russian Book of Records, which allows you to climb to a height of 3847 m. The resort features three gondola lifts and an artificial snow-making system. The total length of trails of various difficulty levels is 17 km, and the total elevation difference is 1,497 meters. In addition to ski tourism, cultural and educational tourism, and climatotherapy and balneotherapy within the realm of health and wellness tourism, are also developing in the territory of the KBR.

C) Ski tourism in the *Chechen Republic* is developing on the territory of the all-season tourist and recreational complex "Veduchi". The features of the technical equipment of the Veduchi resort are a passenger aerial cable car with a maximum carrying capacity of 1200 people/hour with the possibility of its year-round use, a blue track of the complexity (length 967 m, with a height difference of 196 m), a 1 km long track with all-season coverage, a self-supporting cable car with a length of 77 m and a capacity of 600 people/hour.

Considering the above, it is worth noting that within each of the described destinations, a network of stakeholders owns and operates businesses that contribute services and components to the tourism service chain (Li et al., 2012). Successful relationship management – with respect to vertical and horizontal relationships among stakeholders – is essential for a positive evaluation of service performance and tourist satisfaction, and thus for favourable word-of-mouth and the destination's image (Abubakar & Mavondo, 2014).

This research project was initiated with the knowledge of the importance of a comprehensive, seamless, and, as far as possible, coordinated service chain. The investigation into the interactions among the numerous independent service providers in the four selected destinations should provide insights into existing stakeholder management practices.

1.3 Relevance of the study

The functioning of a destination can be influenced by various environmental factors (natural, recreational, environmental, cultural-historical, infrastructural, political, managerial, economic, technological, socio-demographic) (Belozeroval, Mirzoiian & Wagenseil, 2021), which emphasizes the need to ensure the most effective coordination of the actions of its stakeholders and strategies to increase the competitive advantage. Additionally, the synchronization of business processes in the destination, not only to resist triggers and threats but also to maximize benefits for visitors by meeting their demands and achieve sustainable destination development, requires strategic settings for the entire destination in the form of a single leading unit – the DMO. A typical role allocation shows that "DMO activities may be organized into two significant functions: (1) External Destination Marketing; and (2) Internal Destination Development" (Foris et al., 2020).

Our statement is applicable to destinations of varying scales and focuses; nevertheless, the study of tourist destinations in the North Caucasus is of particular interest, as their development is closely linked to financing investment projects. "Joint-Stock Company Northern Caucasus Resorts intends to invest 11 billion rubles in projects in the regions of the North Caucasus Federal District in the near future [...]. The basic industries today are tourism, agriculture, and manufacturing."².

Moreover, it should be emphasized that some destinations in the North Caucasus Federal District can also be among the most promising for Russian tourists vacationing in both winter and summer³. Therefore, "every year the ski resorts of the North Caucasus show an overall increase. Thus, the tourist flow in 2019 was more than 20% higher than in 2018."⁴. Such drastic and rapid increases in tourist numbers not only generate benefits but also undesirable effects in the absence of proper and effective management, which must be avoided.

1.4 Objectives and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to investigate the existing mechanisms of stakeholder interaction in the aforementioned destinations and to identify key prerequisites for improving the destination management model.

The following four research questions were defined:

1. How do communication and cooperation interactions among stakeholders work in the destinations studied?
- 2a. How do the stakeholders relate to the DMO model?
- 2b. Do the stakeholders agree with the composition and distribution of different management tasks within their respective destinations?
3. What are the most essential benefits of coordinated destination management in the opinion of expert stakeholders?

² JSC NCR intend to invest 11 billion rubles in projects in the North Caucasus. URL: <https://tourism.interfax.ru/ru/news/articles/81726/>

³ Three regions of the North Caucasus Federal District entered the top 10 in terms of growth in the number of tourists in the winter season. URL:

<https://kavkaz.rbc.ru/kavkaz/freenews/601028c69a794703c5134059>

⁴ 25 largest projects in the field of tourism and recreation in the North Caucasus. URL: <https://severnykavkaz.ru/ratings/25-krupneyshikh-proektov-v-sfere-turizma-i-rekreatsii-na-severnom-kavkaze>

2 LITERATURE ANALYSIS

In general, the management of tourist destinations is a priority area in modern tourism economics. The focus of studying tourist destinations and methods of their management in Russian and European scientific practice mainly centers around aspects as:

- the destination concept and models for strategic marketing and management of destinations (Buhalis, 2000; d'Angella & Frank, 2009; Goncharova, 2013; Serdyukov, Serdyukova & Romanova, 2018; Luneva, 2016; Budaev, 2021);
- destination competitiveness (Crouch, 2007; Ignatiev, 2018; Morozov, 2013; Pimentel, T. D., 2017; Mukhamedova, 2019, Kara, M., & Kunt, S., 2020.);
- destination stakeholders research (Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005; Goncharova, 2015);
- DMO functions and its effectiveness (Bieger, Beritelli & Laesser, 2009; Beritelli, Bieger & Laesser, 2014; Goncharova, 2013; Nesena, 2012);
- Regional and specific practice of destination management (Karakuş, Y., 2019; della Sala, V., 2024)

2.1 Roles and tasks of DMOs

A significant place among the various scientific views and approaches to managing tourist destinations is occupied by issues related to defining the essence, functions, and

effectiveness of implementing the DMO model within the overall destination management system.

According to the opinion of Bieger, Beritelli and Laesser, "the tasks of DMOs are defined according to the boundaries of the destination" (Bieger, Beritelli & Laesser, 2009).

Buhalis believes that "DMOs tend to be part of the local, regional, or national Government and have political and legislative power as well as the financial means to manage resources rationally and to ensure that all stakeholders can benefit in the long term" (Buhalis, 2000).

UNWTO Guidelines for Institutional Strengthening of Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) state "the functions of the DMOs may vary from national to regional and local levels depending on the current and potential needs, as well as on the decentralization level of the public administration" (UNWTO DMOs, 2019).

These 1-12 (Table 1) were developed based on a comparative description of the tasks and functions for managing the destination, as well as the DMO model presented in Russian and predominantly by Western Scientists.

This analysis of various literature sources on the role and key activities of DMOs (d'Angella & Frank, 2009; Reinhold, Beritelli, & Gruenig, 2019; Richie & Crouch, 2003) enables the adaptation of 12 theses (see summary further below) and the grouping of roles as visualized in Fig. 2.

Table 1. Grouping of Russian and foreign literature approaches to characterize the main functions of managing a tourist destination

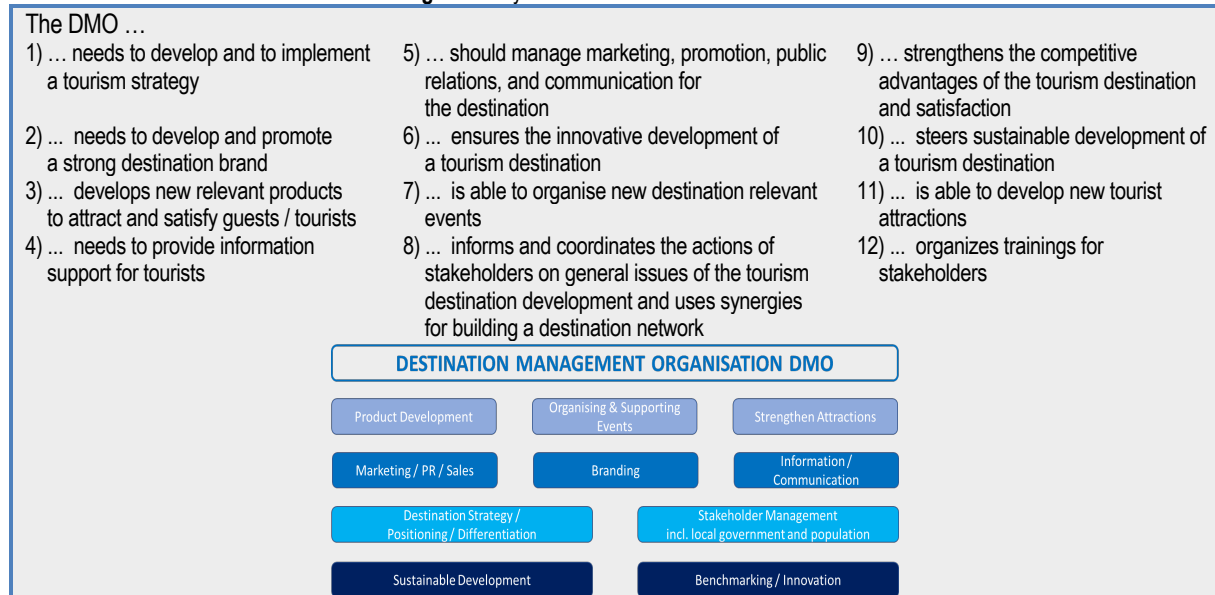
Russian sources	Foreign sources
"The purpose of this organization should be to implement the general strategy of the regions for the development of this destination, the task is to organize strategic management and marketing of the destination, develop and implement a development plan for the destination" (Nesena, 2012)	"The Destination Management Organisation's role should be to lead and coordinate activities under a coherent strategy" (UNWTO TDM, 2007). "Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) to be accountable for the planning and marketing of the region and to have the power and resources to undertake action towards achieving its strategic objectives" (Buhalis, 2000)
Thesis 1: "The DMO needs to develop and to implement a tourism strategy"	
"Acting as Destination Marketing Organisation they have their own budgets and "bridge" between national organizations and the rest of the tourism stakeholders in the destination. This is an important role, since as long as the national tourism authorities are the single most visible player (entity) in the tourism market, the collective spending of the industry will be significantly higher. If a regional DMO can pool private and public sector resources, they mutually reinforce a strategic approach and can achieve greater results with the same funding" (Goncharova, 2013)	"Still, many DMOs do essentially the same things independent of the destination they serve; they run information desks, have a promotion and a public relations department, and employ key account or sales managers" (Beritelli, Bieger & Laesser, 2014)
Thesis 2: "The DMO should manage marketing, promotion, public relations, and communication for the destination"	
"Increasing the competitiveness of tourist destinations depends on the maintenance, efficient use of environmental, social, and cultural resources. Management decisions in this context are considered as competitive strategies to increase the competitiveness of the hospitality territory" (Mukhamedova, 2019)	"DMOs should therefore be the guardians of the image and resources of destinations". (Buhalis, 2000) "Managing the flows, impacts, and behaviour of visitors to protect resources and to enhance visitor safety, experiences, and satisfaction" (Morrison, 2019)
Thesis 3: "The DMO strengthens the competitive advantages of the tourism destination and satisfaction"	
"Territorial marketing, carried out in the interests of the territory, its internal and external subjects, in whose attention the territory is interested, should be carried out in order to create, form, and maintain the attractiveness, prestige of the territory as a whole and its promotion, which is the most important condition for attracting tourists". (Morozov, 2013)	"Traditionally, DMOs lead promotional campaigns, whilst suppliers participate and contribute" (Buhalis, 2000). "Creating the destination positioning and branding, selecting the most appropriate markets and promoting the destination" (Morrison, 2019)
Thesis 4: "The DMO needs to develop and promote a strong destination brand"	
"Stakeholders are called upon to contribute to the sustainable, integrated, and innovative formation of the tourism product, the	"The DMO carries out a programme or actions to promote entrepreneurial initiatives and innovations in tourism and promotes

Russian sources	Foreign sources
preservation of natural and cultural resources, the promotion of the well-being of the local community and the reduction of the negative impact of tourism" (Ignatiev, 2018)	stakeholder partnerships to show appropriate financial and human resource allocation in support of entrepreneurship drive" (UNWTO DMOs, 2019)
Thesis 5: "The DMO ensures the innovative development of a tourism destination"	
"For the sustainable development of a tourist destination as a key element of tourism, a necessary condition is such interaction ("co-creation", "C2C") of tourists and the local community, which does not destroy the social, cultural, and ecological system of the destination, allowing local residents and tourists to receive mutual benefit. This is possible when the destination management aims to identify ways to involve the destination community in tourism development, understand the mechanisms of interaction between tourists and the destination community and the resulting tourism experience, and consider the socio-cultural impact of tourism in relation to the sustainable development of the region" (Goncharova, 2015)	"DMOs must find a way to facilitate processes and increase the competitiveness of the variously defined territory, with the hope of ensuring sustainable development" (Beritelli, Bieger & Laesser, 2014). "One of the specific initiatives that the DMO can take is to design a sustainable tourism development charter or code of ethics for the destination" (Morrison, 2019)
Thesis 6: "The DMO steers sustainable development of a tourism destination"	
"To turn tourist resources into a tourist product, joint efforts of the state and direct organizers of tourism are required" (Penkina et al., 2020)	"DMOs also need to enhance and differentiate their products by emphasising their uniqueness" (Buhalis, 2000). "Planning and ensuring the appropriate development of physical products and services for the destination" (Morrison, 2019)
Thesis 7: "The DMO develops new relevant products to attract and satisfy guests/tourists"	
"The correct use of event marketing tools allows not only to attract tourist flows, but also to enrich and extend their stay in the destination, which is a platform for organizing events" (Luneva, 2016)	"The DMO can encourage the development of new events or festivals or the expansion of existing ones through providing financial assistance" (Morrison, 2019). "A second potential role is where the DMO creates a new festival or event, and usually this is done with the assistance of tourism stakeholders" (Morrison, 2019)
Thesis 8: "The DMO is able to organise new destination relevant events"	
"Since attractors with tourist potential are inextricably linked with the destination, you should focus not on individual attractions, but on the destination as a whole" (Budaev, 2021)	"Implementing strategies to attract tourists cannot be realized by a single actor, but rather by means of common efforts of Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) and local operators" (Zoltan & Masiero, 2012)
Thesis 9: "The DMO is able to develop new tourist attractions"	
"Information support of tourist activities is the most important factor in the attractiveness and competitiveness of a tourist destination, as well as ensuring an adequate level of quality of service for tourists and significantly affects the processes of import substitution in the Russian tourism market" (Serdyukov, Serdyukova & Romanova, 2018)	"Although DMOs often operate information- offices providing information about local suppliers, they tend to refrain from selling direct, as they regard themselves as facilitators rather than intermediaries and also avoid being seen as promoters of individual products and services against other local suppliers" (Buhalis, 2000). "More recently, promotion as well as digital sales and distribution through destination websites have become a further area for scrutinizing a DMO's performance" (Beritelli, Bieger & Laesser, 2014)
Thesis 10: "The DMO needs to provide information support for tourists"	
"When a regional DMO fully engages business in its programs, it plays a coordinating role in tourism activities at the state and regional level. For this, it is necessary to develop the mechanism of local tourist executive groups. Such groups should bring together a wide range of organizations (hotels, tour operators and travel agents, transport companies, restaurants and cafes, museums, professional associations, unions, clubs, etc.) to fulfill the DMO role of management and ensure high perceived quality of the destination" (Goncharova, 2013)	"Consequently, the DMO must establish a platform which applies a knowledge-based marketing design that enables it to match the stakeholders' capacity and specific competences to tourists' needs" (d'Angella & Frank, 2009). "...participation in DMO network interactions must be designed around a model that clearly expresses boundaries within which stakeholders are permitted to act, (e.g. 'the game rules') whilst simultaneously offering a sense of latitude to deliver the results the sightseers expect (e.g. the "perfect picture")" (d'Angella & Frank, 2009). "The DMO can improve the management and development of tourism by ensuring coordination and cooperation between the different agencies, authorities and organisations concerned at all levels, and that, where such institutions exist, their jurisdictions and responsibilities are clearly defined and complement each other" (Dwyer & Kim, 2003)
Thesis 11: "The DMO informs and coordinates the actions of stakeholders on general issues of the tourism destination development and uses synergies for building a destination network"	
"The system of training and retraining of personnel for the tourism industry should be based on the requirements and expectations of stakeholders" (Kolodiy, Rodionova & Agranovich, 2013)	"As a consequence, the DMO's role shifts away from an institution that must be preserved for the sake of the identity of the local population or for balancing the organizational power in the community to a synergetic combination of tasks, well endowed with

Russian sources	Foreign sources
	respective financial resources and professional competencies" (Beritelli, Bieger & Laesser, 2014). "In the midterm, the DMO is capable of building new competencies because of well-endowed mandates that allow the employment of specialists" (Beritelli, Bieger & Laesser, 2014)
Thesis 12: "The DMO organizes trainings for stakeholders"	

Source: own elaboration

Figure 2. Key functions and activities of the DMO



Source: own elaboration

From the above, many contemporary Russian and Western tourism scientists recognize that DMO possesses a special role in the performance of a tourist destination. At the same time, it is crucial to consider the key functions of DMO operations not only at the theoretical level but also to analyze their implementation, activities, and essential features, using individual tourist destinations as examples. It is the competent and long-term-oriented management of tourist destinations, achieved mainly through the coordination work of the DMO. Such becomes a key role in increasing the quality of tourist products and the destination's competitiveness. Additionally, the coordinated network of tourism-relevant stakeholders can/should build strategic advantages for the destination, leveraging all the territory's resources and stakeholders in an intensely competitive tourism environment.

2.2 DMOs' stakeholder management

Considering the results obtained, analyzing data from scientific sources focusing on stakeholder management and stakeholder cooperation issues in Russian and foreign destinations is relevant. Within any destination, there is a multitude of stakeholders and actors with differing objectives, skills, resources, and commitment (Laws et al., 2011). Nevertheless, despite the existing diversity in the essence of stakeholders and their functioning with a certain autonomy, they are embedded in a network within the destination, which is why cooperation is vital for long-term success, such as economic sustainability, resilience, and performance

(Beritelli, 2011; Beritelli et al., 2013). As Bruyn and Alonso also view it in terms of overcoming challenges, they argue that "no Stakeholder is nowadays in the position to oppose the upcoming strategic challenges on their own" (de Bruyn & Fernández Alonso, 2012). Therefore, the competitiveness of the created tourism product will largely depend on the effectiveness of stakeholder interaction and cooperation in the process of collective decision-making regarding the development of the destination.

In this regard, it is worth noting that stakeholder engagement is the process of effectively eliciting stakeholders' views on their relationship with the organization/program/project (Friedman & Miles, 2006). Moreover, we consider that organizational flexibility, innovation, sustainable performance, and building trust among individual groups are essential parts of effective DMO engagement. At the same time, "stakeholder engagement is a valuable tool for risk/opportunities management that can lead to the avoidance or minimization of costs and the creation and optimization of value" (Partridge et al., 2005).

That is why, when developing formal or informal ways of cooperation between stakeholders, it is essential to adhere to certain principles, which, according to Freeman and Heitmann (Freeman, 1984; Heitmann, 2010), include work in the following areas:

- identification of stakeholders and their contribution
- establishment of processes required to manage stakeholders
- The transaction between the organization and its stakeholders needs to be managed.

Thus, stakeholder coordination and management in the context of a destination should aim to ensure the consistency of diverse, often competing stakeholder interests at different levels of management, as the involvement of each stakeholder in solving everyday problems is necessary to form a tourist value chain.

Kolupanova, Belaya, and Vnuchkova (2015) consider the role of public-private partnership in the development of the tourist destination "Altai region" and identified the following areas of cooperation between key actors of the main groups of stakeholders :

- creation of a system of tourism clusters to ensure the development of tourism facilities and related infrastructure, attracting investment in the tourism industry
- improving the quality of tourism and related services
- Formation of the image of the Altai Territory as a centre of all-season tourism and a strategy for promoting the tourist potential of the Altai Territory in the Russian and foreign markets. Promotion of tourism products of the Altai Territory in the Russian and foreign markets
- scientific support for the development of the tourism industry
- training of personnel in tourism, professional development of personnel
- development and implementation of a tourist and excursion product within the framework of regional programs of social support for the population
- formation of individual and mass tourism products
- development of legislative and regulatory documents in tourism
- creation of a single information space for the region.

Denisova et al. (2016) considers the interaction of stakeholders of the tourism industry in the regions of the Siberian federal district and name stakeholders as "any entity (state and municipal authorities, legal entity or individual), which is both a resident and non-resident of this territory, whose interests and resources can directly or indirectly influence the development of tourism in the region". The authors also propose to consider the process stakeholder participation as a range of "methods and practices whereby stakeholders make decisions about further development processes" (Denisova et al., 2016).

Goncharova (2014) notes that "when considering a tourist destination as a system, the primary role is given to the actors of the tourist market, their business activity and interaction with each other". The author also established the following reasons for the inefficiency of previously created structures for managing tourism development (in the example of the Tomsk region of the Russian Federation): organizational and legal aspects; insufficient funding; lobbying and representing the narrow interests of a limited number of stakeholders (Government agency or large company); competition and inconsistency of interests of potential partners of organizations; as a result, the lack of a mechanism for the implementation of strategic programs - the unwillingness of some of the participants in the process to act as an initiative organizer, coordinator, leader to take

responsibility and most of the functions represented by the executive body of the organization (Goncharova, 2014).

Besides, the literature analyzed in Table 1 and the 12 derived theses, Russian DMOs should:

1. Develop and implement a destination development strategy, with additional strategies for strategic business fields (products/offers), marketing, target groups, and target markets.
2. Ensure comprehensive, sustainable destination development that meets international standards.
3. Develop, organize, and secure new tourism offers, events, and attractions that align with and reinforce the destination strategy.
4. Analyze the tourists' satisfaction and adapt the destinations' offer and services accordingly.
5. Inform and coordinate stakeholders' actions, and build a destination network.
6. Organize training for stakeholders.
7. Market the destination using predefined destination strategies and inform (potential) guests before, during, and after their stay.

Indeed, due to the formation of an effective mechanism of cooperation between stakeholders in terms of the above functions and tasks, the participants of such cooperation enable opportunities not only to maintain healthy competition within the framework of their relationships but also to achieve additional common goals of promoting the tourism product offered by the destination, which would be very difficult if stakeholders acted in disunity.

At the same time, the DMO's tasks could be fulfilled more successfully if it works in collaboration with destination stakeholders, as the tasks outlined above are complex to accomplish in isolation.

3 METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The scientific novelty of this study lies in the possibility of establishing prerequisites for future stakeholders' collaboration in the form of DMOs in the Caucasian Mountain destinations. To this end, we used a mixed-methods approach to investigate the forms and extent of cooperation in Caucasian Mountain destinations and their outcomes. Solely one method (with quality or quantity instruments) could not answer our research questions; it would not have yielded the same results, since they complement each other. Regarding this, Burke Johnson and Onwuegbuzie notice that "the goal of mixed methods research is not to replace either of these approaches but rather to draw from the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of both in single research studies and across studies" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

For this study, not only were expert interviews conducted with representatives of the studied destinations (round 1), but the initial findings were also verified and considered alongside additional tourism experts in the same destinations through a complementary quantitative survey (round 2).

The two different questionnaires were developed based on the findings of the literature analysis (Chapter 2) and can be viewed in Appendix 1 (qualitative expert interviews) and Appendix 2 (quantitative survey). In

progressing the interview questionnaire compilation, it was crucial to the authors to combine the conclusions from the analysis of theoretical sources with the need to obtain objective, clear answers from the stakeholders of the studied destinations. It was essential to determine management's current position in these destinations and how stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of the relationships between them (question 1, Appendix 1, 2).

Furthermore, question 2 (Appendix 1, 2) aimed to determine whether the respondents were familiar with the DMO model. Moreover, based on these 1-12 (Table 1), a list of tasks was compiled which are commonly implemented by DMOs and stakeholders in destinations. Respondents were asked to rank them on a Likert scale (questions 3 and 2, Appendix 1). At the same time, it became expedient for the respondents to identify the most important stakeholder groups in their destinations, based on their opinions (question 4, Appendix 1, 2). Additionally, recognizing the importance of coordinated management for destination development processes, one can compile a list of advantages to identify the most significant benefits for the respondents (question 5, Appendix 1, 2).

As a primary data source for conducting a quantitative interview (**round 1**), a sample of respondents was selected using the snowball method. First, a sample of the most authoritative representatives of the investigated destinations (the business community, the scientific community, and the authorities) was selected, and the first interviews were conducted. At the end of these qualitative interviews, these experts were asked for additional potential respondents to participate in the quantitative, anonymous survey (**round 2**).

Round 1 – Qualitative expert interviews. Twelve experts participated in the qualitative survey from September to November 2021. They were asked to answer six questions (partly closed, with yes/no answers and a scale from 1 = not effective at all to 5 = very practical), and partly open. Among the interviewed people (travel agents, tour operators, hotels, business representatives [large, medium, and small businesses], authorities, academic community, local population, local Government, and others), business representatives were the largest group, with seven experts.

Three experts represented the scientific community from different destinations in the North Caucasus: the more developed tourist destinations of Karachay-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria, as well as the increasingly popular and prominent Chechen Republic. The opinion of the authorities was represented by two experts, one representing the Government at the regional level and the other representing the tourism development center in the North Caucasian Federal District, as the authorized organization for tourism in the region (see Tab. 2).

Table 2. Participants in the qualitative survey

Stakeholder group	Number
Business Members	7
Scientific Community	3
Authorities	2
Total expert interviews	12

Source: own elaboration

Such a selection of experts from the group of Government representatives will also allow the opinion to be assessed from different perspectives – the core organization and the entity responsible for the overall and comprehensive social, economic, and cultural development of the region. The experts who participated in this qualitative survey were selected to create the most precise and comprehensive picture of the situation in the region. Unfortunately, some limitations were unavoidable due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the lack of face-to-face communication. Due to the reasons mentioned above, we were unable to organize additional meetings and personal communication to gather more answers for our qualitative research.

Round 2 – Quantitative survey. A total of 102 email contacts were collected through stakeholder recommendations from the qualitative survey and from other experts in the local tourism ecosystem, who were invited to participate in the survey via the online tool Unipark on 5 March 2022. Shortly before the end of the survey on 20 March 2022, a reminder email was sent on 16 March 2022. In this way, 27 stakeholders (n=27) participated in the survey. The questionnaire comprised eight questions (partly closed with yes/no answers and evaluative questions with given scales). Not all questions were answered in each case, as evidenced by the fact that in some instances only 21 responses were submitted (n = 21).

The data was exported to Excel, where the results were visualized in charts and finally analyzed. In the following chapter, the results are presented and discussed.

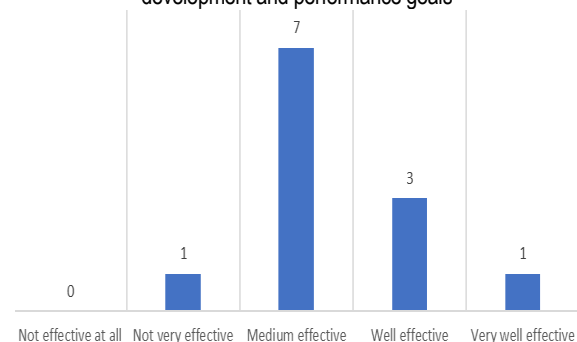
4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The data collected from the qualitative and quantitative surveys is examined chronologically and divided into the two survey rounds.

Round 1 – Qualitative expert interviews

Question/task 1: How effective are interactions between the stakeholders in your destination for achieving the general goals of the destination development and for improving the tourism quality and performance?

Figure 3. Expert evaluation regarding the effectiveness of stakeholder interactions for achieving shared development and performance goals



Source: own elaboration.

The absolute majority of experts, namely 10 representatives, evaluated the stakeholder interaction medium or well effective (3-4), one expert stated that stakeholder interaction is very well effective (5), while another one rates with two only, which means not very effective (transferring the answer options in a scale of 1-5 ["not effective at all" = 1; "very well effective" = 5] the average rate would be 3.33.) (Fig. 3).

One can observe a particular trend towards evaluating stakeholder interactions as effective; however, the interviewees did not express this with high conviction. This suggests that the respondents also had unsatisfactory experiences, that they imagine room for improvement in their cooperation, or that they are not fully aware of the shared goals among stakeholders.

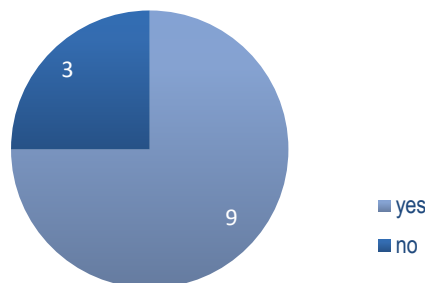
It should also be noted that authorities' representatives tended to rate stakeholders' interaction higher than that of the business and the scientific community. Thus, one may conclude that stakeholder interaction in the observed North Caucasian destinations is underway but still needs to be approached more structurally and coherently.

Question/task 2: Have you heard of the concept of DMOs before?

Three of the 12 interview partners were unaware of this concept (Fig. 4). Representatives from the business community were the least aware. Likely, the level of unawareness (25%) of the DMO model is due to the lack of DMOs in the NCR.

Figure 4. Expert's awareness of the DMO model

Have the participants heard of the concept of DMOs?

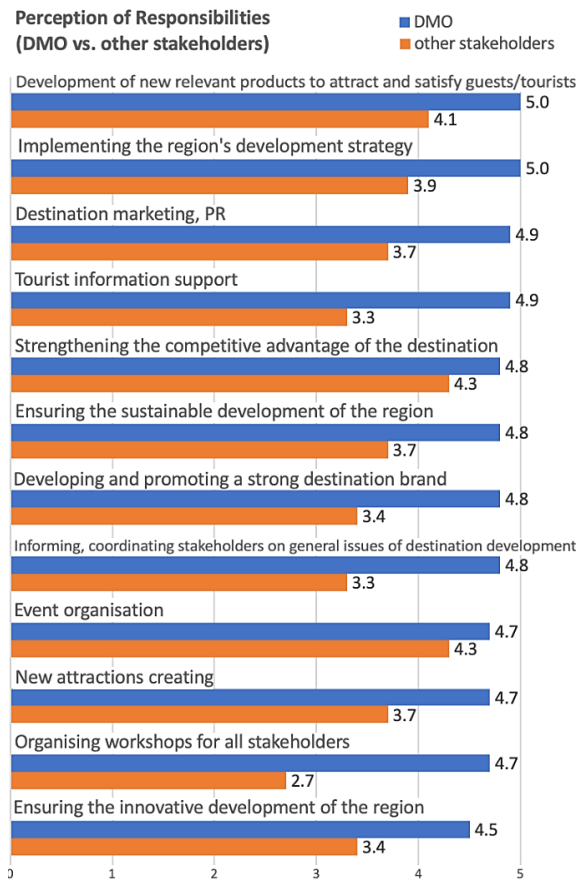


Source: own elaboration

Question/task 3: Imagining you would have such a neutral DMO with the majority of the destination's stakeholder as the DMO's members in your destination: please rate the importance of the duties to support the long-term development of your destination from the DMO's and the stakeholders' perspective (1 = being not at all important, 5 = being very important).

It is exciting to see how experts from the North Caucasus resorts view the DMO's role as the leading tourism development organization. When assessing the distribution of responsibilities in a destination, respondents indicated a high level of importance for all DMO functions noted earlier in the literature analysis.

Figure 5. Experts' evaluation of the importance of the duties of a DMO and other stakeholders



Source: own elaboration

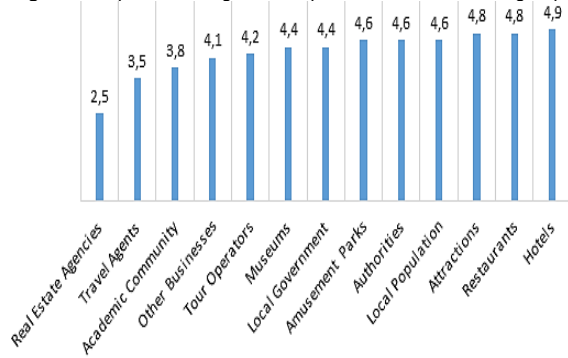
It is evident that the surveyed experts not only attribute a broad activity portfolio to the DMO (all twelve formulated tasks receive a high approval rating of at least 4.5), but also that they assign a homogeneous and, above all, enormously high rating to these DMO responsibilities (average 4.8) (Fig. 5). The most essential duties of DMOs according to the questioned experts are the implementation of the region's development strategy and the development of new relevant products to attract and satisfy visiting guests.

In contrast, all these 12 activities are clearly rated lower as duties of the other tourism stakeholders in the destination (average 3.65). The value deviation per activity ranges from 0.4 (Event Organization) to 2.0 (Organizing workshops for all stakeholders).

Question/Task 4: Please rate the following stakeholder groups on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = not important at all, 5 = significant) regarding their importance for the various duties associated with your destination.

All respondents agreed that the primary providers of tourism services within a destination – hotels and restaurants – as well as major attractions such as places of interest and amusement parks are the most critical stakeholders. The classic tourism businesses in the destinations were rated at least 4.1, indicating that these actors are of high importance to the destinations.

Figure 6. Expert's ranking of the importance of stakeholder groups



Source: own elaboration.

A significantly lower average value of 3.5 is assigned to travel agents, who are likely regarded as either outbound organizers or incoming retailers rather than tourism product owners, and are thus distinguished from tour operators with locally relevant, destination-internal offers (such as events, courses, etc.).

The academic community and real estate agencies are rated as having a more modest importance for the destinations. However, real estate agencies are probably seen as primary real estate agents rather than as driving forces of real estate construction.

Question/task 5: Please rate the following advantages of coordinated destination management on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = not important at all, 5 = significant).

All eight listed possible benefits of coordinated destination management are rated by the direct respondents, with an average agreement of 4.3-4.7. I.e., all interviewed experts recognize DMOs as beneficial entities for tourism destinations in the NCR.

The highest benefit is assumed to be the improvement of quality and increase in efficiency in the provision of tourism services within the destination (4.7). This is closely followed by the strengthening of innovation in the destination and the benefit of a common development vision (both 4.6).

Figure 7. Expert's ranking of the advantages of coordinated destination management



Source: own elaboration

Thus, the qualitative study has revealed an interesting interconnection between the respondents' answers to the first and last questions. When answering the first question of the questionnaire, more than half of the respondents (58%) noted the fact that the existing interactions between the stakeholders in their destination are at an average level of their development, which is accordingly reflected in achieving the general goals of the destination development and improving the tourism quality and performance.

Question/task 6: Please include any additional comments on destination management in your destination.

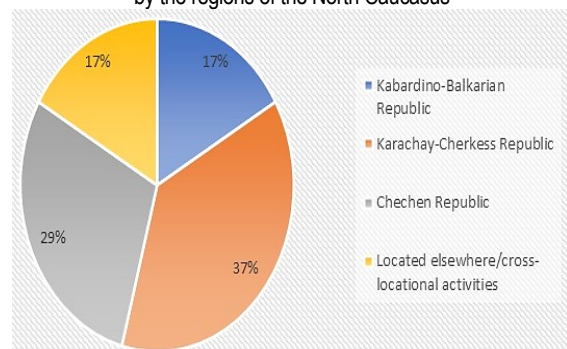
Participants emphasized the importance of local people as vital stakeholders who need to participate in discussions about crucial aspects of destination management. Additionally, it was emphasized that the significance of local culture, tradition, mentality, and authenticity should be taken into account to create better quality tourist products, considering the socio-demographics of the North Caucasus regions.

Round 2 – Quantitative survey

In addition to the above-discussed qualitative questioning, a quantitative online survey was conducted. Therefore, 102 tourism experts were approached. Twenty-seven representatives of the three tourism destinations in the North Caucasus Federal District followed the request by answering all questions, who were evaluated as key experts in the field of research (response rate: 26%).

Looking at the demographic profiles of the respondents (Fig. 8), most respondents were representatives of the Karachay-Cherkessia Republic, accounting for 37% of the total. Also, a significant number of respondents were from the Chechen Republic (29%). Representatives of the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic accounted for 17%, and the same percentage of respondents is found in other regions.

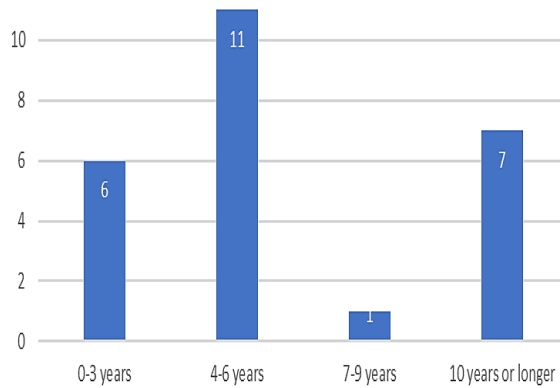
Figure 8. Classification of respondents by the regions of the North Caucasus



Source: own elaboration

Additionally, most respondents (44% of 25 valid votes) have 4-6 years of work experience. Approximately 24% of stakeholders have worked for up to 3 years, and 28% have worked for 10 years or longer. One person reported having 7-9 years of work experience (Fig. 9).

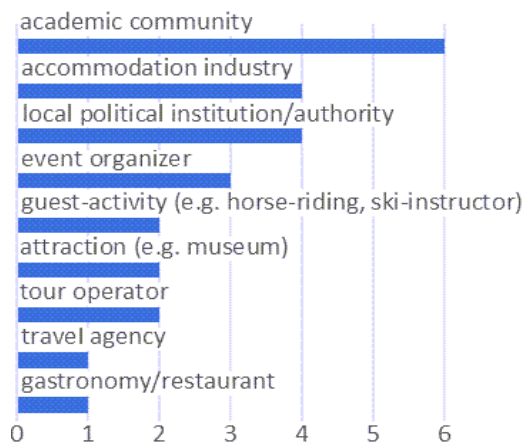
Figure 9. The duration of professional activity in the destination



Source: own elaboration

From the list of areas of professional activity, the majority of respondents are representatives of the academic community (24%), followed by the accommodation industry and local authorities (16% each). In a smaller proportion are tour operators, travel agents, event organizers, attractions, and gastronomy; not represented were such areas as DMOs, transportation, and information centers (Fig. 10).

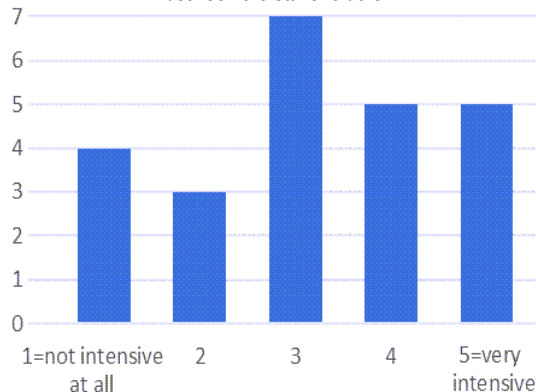
Figure 10. The list of professional activities of respondents



Source: own elaboration.

Question/task 1: How intensively does communication take place between the stakeholders in your destination (1 = not intensive at all, 5 = very intensive)?

Figure 11. The intensity of the communication between the stakeholders

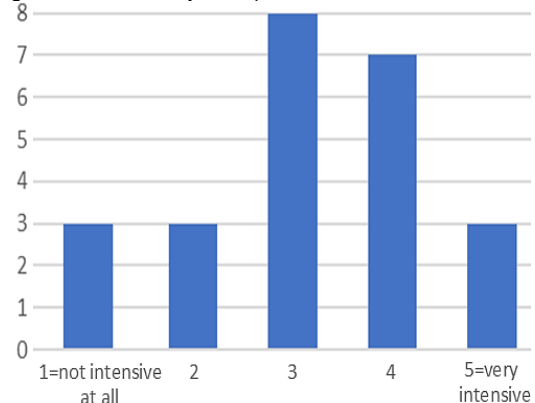


Source: own elaboration

Analyzing the first question on “how intensive the communication between the stakeholders in the destination is”, most of the representatives gave an average score (average: 3.17).

Question/task 2: How intensively in qualitative terms do cooperations take place between stakeholders in your destination (1 = not intensive at all, 5 = very intensive)?

Figure 12. The intensity of cooperation between the stakeholders



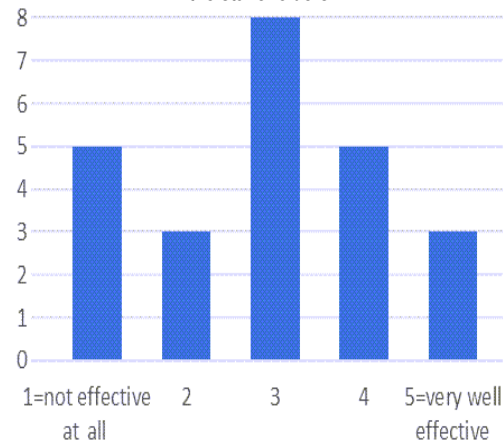
Source: own elaboration

The main result of question 2 regarding “cooperation efficiency” is unclear and varies significantly over the entire evaluation range of 1-5. A qualitative statement regarding the reasons for these evaluations cannot be made without corresponding queries and without comments from the respondents’ side.

Question/task 3: How effective are interactions between the stakeholders in your destination for achieving the goals of the destination development and for improving the tourism quality & performance (1 = not effective at all, 5 = very effective)?

While most participants reported medium efficiency in stakeholder interactions, the answers do not show a clear pattern. Just as many stakeholders chose the value four as chose the value 1, an average value of 2.92 can be derived from this question.

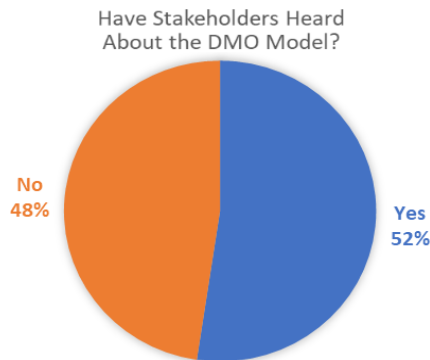
Figure 13. The effectiveness of the interaction between the stakeholders



Source: own elaboration

Question/task 4: Have you heard about the DMO model before? (was described in the questionnaire)

Figure 14. Awareness of the DMO model

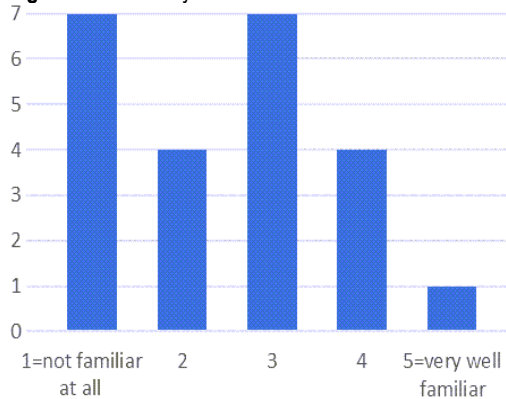


Source: own elaboration.

Regarding this question, 48% of respondents denied having knowledge of it. This high number is likely because DMOs, widely used in the West, have not yet been implemented in Russia.

Question/task 5: How familiar are you with the Destination Management Organization model (1 = not at all, 5 = very well)?

Figure 15. Familiarity of stakeholders with the DMO model



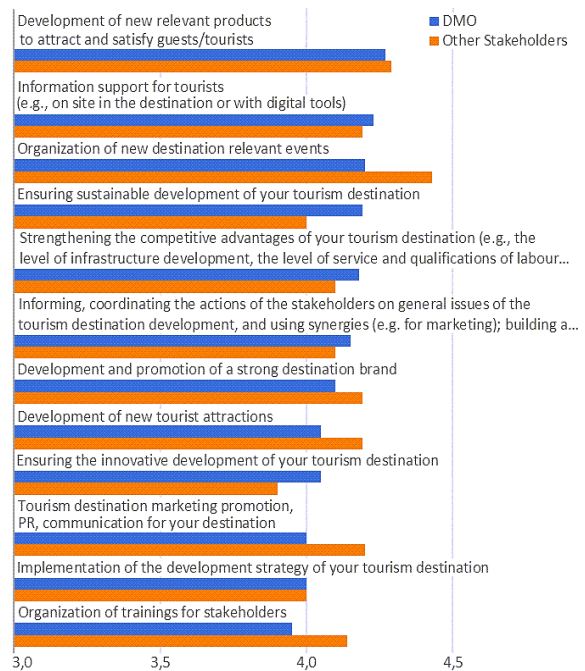
Source: own elaboration

This question revealed a diffuse picture, with a clear tendency indicating that knowledge about this structural model is low to moderate. Only one person answered this question with the highest mark, 5 ("very well familiar").

Question/task 6: Imagining you would have such a neutral DMO, please rate the following tasks on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = not important at all, 5 = significant) to support the long-term development of your destination.

Assuming the respondent's destination had a DMO, question 6 wanted an assessment of the tasks: 1. on the one hand, as the task of the DMO, on the other hand, 2. as the task of the rest of the stakeholders in the resort. The twelve tasks available for selection were rated with an average of 4.11 as DMO duties. This contrasts with an average value of 4.14 for the remaining stakeholders of the destination. These two high average values not only prove the importance of the tasks mentioned, but also underscore the plus-minus equal duty of a DMO and tourism service providers to be responsible for these tasks.

Figure 16. Importance of tasks as duties of other stakeholders and DMO

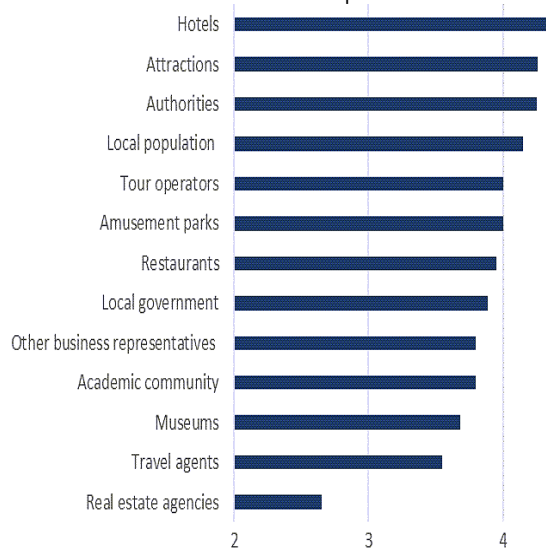


Source: own elaboration

The fundamentally minor differences in individual scores per task make it clear that none of these tasks should be assigned explicitly to a single person. This means the tasks at the destination are to be carried out equally by all involved. Nevertheless, some tasks are often seen as the DMO's primary responsibility (e.g., "ensuring sustainable development of the destination"). In contrast, others should primarily be fulfilled by private service providers (e.g., "organization of new destination-relevant events").

Question/task 7: Please rate the following stakeholder groups on a scale of 1-5 (1 = not important at all, 5 = very important) regarding their importance for the successful development of your destination.

Figure 17. The importance of stakeholders for the successful destination development



Source: own elaboration

Question 7 asked for the evaluation of the importance of the stakeholders for the destination development ("Please rate the following stakeholder groups on a scale of 1-5 (1 = not important at all, 5 = very important) regarding their importance for the successful development of your destination.") The four groups "hotel industry", "the attractions", "the local authorities", as well as "the local population" were rated as the most important stakeholders (all with average scores slightly above 4.0). However, the following eight stakeholder groups also achieved average scores of over 3.6, underscoring that a broad range of interests can influence destination development. Only the real estate agencies are rated clearly below three and thus less significant.

Question/task 8: Please rate the following advantages of coordinated destination management on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = not important at all, 5 = significant).

Question 8, which concludes the survey, wished to evaluate the benefits of coordinated destination management ("Please rate the following advantages of coordinated destination management on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = not important at all, 5 = significant)").

Table 3. Comparison of answers of experts and respondents to questions of qualitative and quantitative interviews (Question/task 1: IQ1/SQ3; Question/task 2: IQ2/SQ4; Question/task 3: IQ3/SQ6; Question/task 4: IQ4/SQ7; Question/task 5: IQ5/SQ8. Where "IQ" is an Interview Question and "SQ" is a Survey Question)

	Round 1 (qualitative survey)	Round 2 (quantitative survey)
Question / task 1	58% of experts describing the effectiveness of interactions between the stakeholders in their destinations answered "medium effective"	33%
Question / task 2	75% of experts heard of the concept of DMOs before	52%
Question / task 3	The average rating of tasks as duties for DMO is 4.8.	4.11
	The average rating of tasks as duties for other stakeholders is 3,65	4,14
Question / task 4	The highest rating between the stakeholder groups regarding their importance for the different duties for the destination is for hotels – 4,9	4,35
	The lowest – is real estate agencies – 2,5	2,65
Question / task 5	The highest rating of the advantages of coordinated destination management is "improving the quality and efficiency of service delivery in the tourism industry" – 4,7	"having one clear vision for the whole destination" – 4,5
	The lowest is "fair consideration of the views and interests of all stakeholders in the destination" – 4,3	The lowest is "balanced division of responsibility for managing the destination between all stakeholders" – 3,81

Source: own elaboration.

All nine benefits listed received average scores of 3.9 and higher. This suggests that respondents affirm the benefits of coordinated destination management.

Nevertheless, the prospect of a clear joint strategy is given the highest value and is thus ranked as the most crucial benefit (average 4.5). The two aspects, "improving quality & performance" and "strengthening the destination sustainability," are rated only slightly lower.

Within the study, it is also important to compare the results from the quantitative and qualitative studies in the context of individual interview questions and questionnaires (Table 3).

All in all, according to the opinions of 12 experts, the most significant benefit of coordinated destination management is the improvement of quality and increase in efficiency in the provision of tourism services within the destination (4.7). However, the results of the quantitative study showed that for respondents, this thesis ranks second, while the greatest usefulness lies in having a clear vision for the entire destination (4.5).

6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Discussion of the research questions

The mixed-method study enabled the identification of scientific and practical aspects of the management of tourist destinations in the North Caucasus region and answered the primary study questions.

6.1.1 Q1: How do communication and cooperation interactions between stakeholders work in the studied destinations?

At this stage, experts evaluate the level of cooperation as mediocre and the effectiveness of stakeholder interaction with the destination. On the other hand, they recognize the significant benefits of coordinated destination management. Based on these findings, it is necessary to evaluate why the intensity of cooperation and its effectiveness among the stakeholders in the destinations are only mediocre; a) is it due to a lack of platforms for exchange and/or coordination, b) is it due to a lack of will to cooperate or c) is it due to a lack of trust or a different execution of activities compared to previously made agreements?

6.1.2. Q2.a: How do the stakeholders relate to the DMO model?

First of all, it must be noted that a not insignificant proportion (approximately one-third to almost half of the respondents) do not even know the DMO model, and therefore are unable to answer question 2 from their own experience. Let us analyze the answers to question 2 as a mix of compelling experiences made and assumptions (derived from the description of the DMO model). We can see that the advantages of common goals and coordinated work at the destination level are clearly recognized (and partially confirmed).

From this result, the thesis can be derived that the tourism stakeholders in the four destinations considered would not be averse to a (coordinated/strengthened / professional) destination management, including a DMO.

This is also because the allocation of tasks to the DMO was rated "important," with an average rating of over 4.

6.1.3. Q2.b: Do the stakeholders agree with the composition and distribution of different management tasks solved within their respective destinations?

The level and modest differences in evaluations of the importance of various tasks, respectively, on the part of the DMO and on the part of tourism service providers, are not substantial throughout. This allows two conclusions: 1. the benefit of a DMO is considered low because the stakeholders have the same tasks anyway and would actually perform them, or 2. the importance of a DMO would be high in order to increase their own efforts to be able to fulfil the tasks (better/comprehensively). The aforementioned lack of knowledge about the DMO model or experience likely contributed to the lack of significant differences in assessment.

Nevertheless, it can be assumed that the respondents agree to a (partial) transfer of the extensive work in the destination from the service provider to the DMO, given the high importance values. In addition, it is essential to clarify which tasks within a destination should be transferred to a DMO and how this should be implemented, as stakeholders clearly indicate that they will also assume these tasks. Duplications should certainly be avoided, as should inefficiencies in the use of the usually scarce resources.

6.1.4. Q3: What are the most important benefits of coordinated destination management in the opinion of the expert stakeholders?

Based on the results of the quantitative and qualitative research, most survey participants see (significant) advantages in implementing a DMO in the North Caucasus destinations. In this study, we articulated the following benefits of coordinated destination management:

- balanced division of responsibility for managing the destination between all stakeholders
- fair consideration of the views and interests of all stakeholders in the destination
- Creating a general budget for conducting promotions to promote the destination as a whole
- achievement of more flexible and efficient destination management by promptly solving emerging problems
- ensuring the loyalty of stakeholders to the development strategy implemented in the destination
- having one clear vision for the whole destination
- improving the tourism quality & performance in general
- strengthening the innovative development of the destination
- strengthening the three dimensions of sustainability in and for the destination.

In the quantitative research section, the highest rating was given to the statement "having one clear vision for the whole destination," with a 4,5 grade. On the other hand, the benefit "balanced division of responsibility for managing the

destination between all stakeholders" was ranked the lowest; however, this aspect was rated 3.81, which is a good value on a scale from 1-5 as well. Means that all listed aspects in general were evaluated as tangible benefits. The benefits aspects were even rated significantly higher in the qualitative expert survey (ranging from 4.3 to 4.7). All in all, it can be concluded that the survey participants would expect a lot from a professional DMO in the destination, as the ratings are all in the "important to very important" range. In principle, these are convincing arguments for introducing or implementing a DMO based on the Western model.

6.2 Conclusions

The interviews within the study clearly showed that the basic concept of DMO as a leading organization for developing tourism-oriented destinations is not yet widely understood. Therefore, in the regions studied, it is first and foremost necessary to intensify the teaching of destination management and to communicate its advantages to stakeholders.

Additionally, the research highlighted the particular importance of having a suitable tourism structure in the destination, led by DMO, and a competent, balanced and strategically oriented management. This includes not only a complete and future-oriented development strategy, but also complementary strategies for the destination offer, target groups, quality orientation, marketing (including branding, target markets, communication channels, etc.), and possibly additional strategies.

The high ratings of the advantages of coordinated destination management, as well as the high importance attached to DMO tasks by the respondents, can also be interpreted as an expression of willingness for DMO in the four geographical areas studied. This should also be made clear and underlined by the fact that the respondents attribute a very high level of importance to all tourism stakeholder groups (except real estate agencies) for successful destination development.

Because the range of tasks of DMO can be extensive in principle, but the resources to cope with these tasks are usually scarce or too scarce, it is the case in many places that the DMOs either cannot do everything that is expected of them, or they cannot do it in a first-class manner. This means that the most comprehensive and strong networks possible must be created in the destinations to bundle forces and resources, not only to realize synergies, but above all to achieve a harmonization of the development directions of as many stakeholders as possible.

Jointly developed strategies are crucial guidelines for development, enabling the creation of a recognizable and convincing positioning in a highly competitive market. However, as the study's surveys show, the fundamental interactions and levels of cooperation among stakeholders in the studied destinations can still be significantly improved. This seems not only desirable, but perhaps even necessary. Thus, it is of great importance that the DMO can gain the support of its stakeholders for informed decision-making (d'Angella & Frank, 2009).

6.3 Potential Directions for Future Studies

Another object of investigation could be a deeper understanding of the state of general tourism knowledge, or of destination management in particular. The lack of knowledge of this doctrine, even among experts who have passed the examinations, indicates that training and further education should be intensified.

In subsequent studies, the comparative characteristics of destination management systems across different federal districts of the Russian Federation could be investigated. This will allow not only to identify the specific features of management in individual destinations of the country, but also to find the most effective models/principles, and tools for their coordinated management. The goal should be to identify the success factors for each destination in a successful DMO implementation and its ongoing operation. This should guarantee the discovery of new structures, financing schemes, and models to safeguard local authenticity on the one hand and to thrive as a tourism destination on the other.

A special focus should also be devoted to the aspect of public-private partnership (PPP). The overall tourism product of a destination consists not only of artificial tourism-relevant infrastructure (very often built and operated by private enterprises), but also of the original offer (nature, culture, language, local gastronomy, intangible cultural assets, etc.), which the inhabitants and the political authorities of a destination primarily cultivate. However, the overall experience of a tourist involves both product groups ("original" and "derived" tourism products), so that all offer elements must be maintained and "managed". This holistic view highlights the importance of PPP. The current relationships between private tourism enterprises and local authorities in tourism destinations, in the context of tourism development, would be interesting and compelling areas of study.

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APPENDIX 1 – Qualitative Expert Interviews

Dear expert,

We would be grateful for your assessment of the main conditions and mechanisms of interaction between stakeholders in the tourism destination you represent.

1. How effective are interactions between the stakeholders in your destination for achieving the general goals of the destination development and for improving the tourism quality & performance (1 = not effective at all, 5 = very well effective)?

1	2	3	4	5
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2. One of the models for managing a tourism destination is the Destination Management Organisation (DMO). Its members are representatives of stakeholders in the destination (travel agents, tour operators, hotels, business representatives [large, medium, and small businesses], authorities, academic community, local population, local government, and others). Some of the DMO's key activities aim to develop the destination in a strategic way, to unify the stakeholders and to coordinate all activities in the destination for reaching the common goals.

Have you heard about this model before?

- Yes
- No

3. Imagining you would have such a neutral DMO with the majority of the destination's stakeholder as the DMO's members in your destination: please rate the following tasks on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = not important at all, 5 = very important) to support the long-term development of your destination. Be aware; first you rate the duties of the DMO (Q3.1), afterwards you rate the same duties of the stakeholders (Q3.2).

3.1. As duties of the DMO

Implementation of the development strategy of your tourism destination	1	2	3	4	5
Tourism destination marketing promotion, PR, communication for your destination	1	2	3	4	5
Strengthening the competitive advantages of your tourism destination (e.g., the level of infrastructure development, the level of service and qualifications of labour resources, the investment climate, a favourable image of the destination, supporting existing events and other attractors to bring [more] tourists to the destination, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
Development and promotion of a strong destination brand	1	2	3	4	5
Ensuring the innovative development of your tourism destination	1	2	3	4	5
Ensuring sustainable development of your tourism destination	1	2	3	4	5
Development of new relevant products to attract and satisfy guests/tourists	1	2	3	4	5
Organization of new destination relevant events	1	2	3	4	5
Development of new tourist attractions	1	2	3	4	5
Information support for tourists (e.g., on site in the destination or with digital tools)	1	2	3	4	5
Informing, coordinating the actions of the stakeholders on general issues of the tourism destination development, and using synergies (e.g. for marketing); building a destination network	1	2	3	4	5
Organization of trainings for stakeholders	1	2	3	4	5

3.2. As duties of other stakeholders

Implementation of the development strategy of your tourism destination	1	2	3	4	5
Tourism destination marketing promotion, PR, communication for your destination	1	2	3	4	5
Strengthening the competitive advantages of your tourism destination (e.g., the level of infrastructure development, the level of service and qualifications of labour resources, the investment climate, a favourable image of the destination, supporting existing events and other attractors to bring [more] tourists to the destination, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
Development and promotion of a strong destination brand	1	2	3	4	5
Ensuring the innovative development of your tourism destination	1	2	3	4	5
Ensuring sustainable development of your tourism destination	1	2	3	4	5
Development of new relevant products to attract and satisfy guests/tourists	1	2	3	4	5
Organization of new destination relevant events	1	2	3	4	5
Development of new tourist attractions	1	2	3	4	5
Information support for tourists (e.g., on site in the destination or with digital tools)	1	2	3	4	5
Informing, coordinating the actions of the stakeholders on general issues of the tourism destination development, and using synergies (e.g. for marketing); building a destination network	1	2	3	4	5
Organization of trainings for stakeholders	1	2	3	4	5

4. Please rate the following stakeholder groups on a scale of 1-5 (1 = not important at all, 5 = very important) regarding their importance for the different duties for your destination

Travel agents	1	2	3	4	5
Tour operators	1	2	3	4	5
Hotels	1	2	3	4	5
Attractions	1	2	3	4	5
Museums	1	2	3	4	5
Restaurants	1	2	3	4	5
Amusement parks	1	2	3	4	5

Other business representatives	1	2	3	4	5
Authorities	1	2	3	4	5
Academic community	1	2	3	4	5
Local population	1	2	3	4	5
Local government	1	2	3	4	5
Real estate agencies	1	2	3	4	5

5. Please rate the following advantages of coordinated destination management on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = not important at all, 5 = very important).

Balanced distribution of responsibilities in destination management among all stakeholders	1	2	3	4	5
Fair consideration of the views and interests of all stakeholders in the destination	1	2	3	4	5
Creating an overall promotion budget to promote the destination as a whole	1	2	3	4	5
Achieve more flexible and efficient destination management by dealing with emerging issues	1	2	3	4	5
Ensuring stakeholder loyalty to the development strategy implemented in the destination	1	2	3	4	5
Having a single clear vision for the development of the entire destination	1	2	3	4	5
Improving the quality and efficiency of service delivery in the tourism industry	1	2	3	4	5
Strengthening innovative development of the destination	1	2	3	4	5

6. Please mention any additional comment(s) about destination management in your destination.

7. Please could you tell us the names/contact addresses (email-address as well!) of stakeholders in your destination, who we could contact for a standardised, anonymous questionnaire of 10 minutes about the same scope:

Business: _____ Contact Name: _____ E-Mail-Address: _____
 Business: _____ Contact Name: _____ E-Mail-Address: _____
 Business: _____ Contact Name: _____ E-Mail-Address: _____

Business: _____ Contact Name: _____ E-Mail-Address: _____

Thank you for taking time to participate in this survey!
Please write your contact details in the table below:

Your name and surname	Your e-mail address	The destination you represent	The concrete sector in the tourism destination you represent (travel agent, tour operator; business representative; authority; academic community; local population; local government)

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APPENDIX 2 – Quantitative Survey

Dear Participant,

The North-Caucasus Federal University, Department of Customs, Service and Tourism and the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Institute of Tourism and Mobility are jointly working on a research project about the current state of management systems in different ski destinations in the North Caucasus, namely the Kabardino-Balkarian, Karachay-Cherkess and Chechen Republics of the Russian Federation. The research team aims to explore the relationships between stakeholders in the mentioned region and the actions taken by stakeholders to coordinate the management of these destinations. Explicitly, the research questions are formulated as follows:

1. How do communication and cooperation interactions between stakeholders work in the studied destinations?
2. How do the stakeholders relate to the DMO model, and do they agree with the composition and distribution of different management tasks solved within their respective destination?
3. What are the most important benefits of coordinated destination management in the opinion of the expert stakeholders?

The approach is a mixed method research with a qualitative and a quantitative survey. For the quantitative survey – which we are dealing with here – numerous contacts were collected from stakeholders in the respective destinations with the aim of obtaining a widely relevant assessment. The Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, as the organisation conducting this survey, guarantees that your data will be treated 100% anonymously and will not harm you in any way.

It will take roughly **10 minutes** to fill out the form. There will be 3 questions regarding general information and 8 questions regarding the actual research topic. These are exclusively closed questions that can be answered with a selectable answer option (usually a scale rating).

With your participation you make this research possible. In return we hope to bring some improvement for the destination management to the North Caucasus. *Thank you for taking part!*

Siuzanna Mirzoian; Oxana Belozero; Urs Wagenseil & Bettina Mandel

General information about the respondent:

1. Please select your destination:
 - a) Kabardino-Balkarian Republic
 - b) Karachay-Cherkess Republic
 - c) Chechen Republic
 - d) Republic of North Ossetia Alania
 - e) Located elsewhere/cross-locational activities
2. Duration of professional activity in the named destination:
 - a) 0-3 years
 - b) 4-6 years
 - c) 7-9 years
 - d) 10 years or longer
3. Current scope of professional activity:

<input type="radio"/> DMO	<input type="radio"/> travel agency	<input type="radio"/> transport
<input type="radio"/> local political institution/authority	<input type="radio"/> event organizer	<input type="radio"/> guest-activity (e.g. horse-riding, ski-instructor)
<input type="radio"/> accommodation industry	<input type="radio"/> attraction (e.g. museum)	<input type="radio"/> information centre
<input type="radio"/> tour operator	<input type="radio"/> gastronomy/restaurant	<input type="radio"/> academic community

Questionnaire:

1. How intensively does communication take place between the stakeholders in your destination (1 = not intensive at all, 5 = very intensive)?

1	2	3	4	5
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2. How intensively in qualitative terms do cooperation take place between stakeholders in your destination (1 = not intensive at all, 5 = very intensive)?

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---
3. How effective are interactions between the stakeholders in your destination for achieving the goals of the destination development and for improving the tourism quality & performance (1 = not effective at all, 5 = very well effective)?

1	2	3	4	5
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4. One of the models for managing a tourism destination is the Destination Management Organisation (DMO). Its members are representatives of stakeholders in the destination (travel agents, tour operators; hotels, business representatives [large, medium, and small business]; authorities; academic community; local population; local government, and others). Some of the DMO's key activities aim to develop the destination in a strategic way, to unify the stakeholders and to coordinate all activities in the destination for reaching the common goals. Have you heard about this model before?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

5. How familiar are you with the Destination Management Organisation – model (1 = not at all, 5 = very well)?

1	2	3	4	5
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6. Imagining you would have such a neutral DMO (as outlined in question 4): please rate the following tasks on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = not important at all, 5 = very important) to support the long-term development of your destination. Be aware; first you rate the duties of the DMO (Q5.1), afterwards you rate the same duties of the stakeholders (Q5.2).

6.1. As duties of the DMO

Implementation of the development strategy of your tourism destination	1	2	3	4	5
Tourism destination marketing promotion, PR, communication for your destination	1	2	3	4	5
Strengthening the competitive advantages of your tourism destination (e.g., the level of infrastructure development, the level of service and qualifications of labour resources, the investment climate, a favourable image of the destination, supporting existing events and other attractors to bring [more] tourists to the destination, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
Development and promotion of a strong destination brand	1	2	3	4	5
Ensuring the innovative development of your tourism destination	1	2	3	4	5
Ensuring sustainable development of your tourism destination	1	2	3	4	5
Development of new relevant products to attract and satisfy guests/tourists	1	2	3	4	5
Organization of new destination relevant events	1	2	3	4	5
Development of new tourist attractions	1	2	3	4	5
Information support for tourists (e.g., on site in the destination or with digital tools)	1	2	3	4	5
Informing, coordinating the actions of the stakeholders on general issues of the tourism destination development, and using synergies (e.g. for marketing); building a destination network	1	2	3	4	5
Organization of trainings for stakeholders	1	2	3	4	5

6.2. As duties of other stakeholders

Implementation of the development strategy of your tourism destination	1	2	3	4	5
Tourism destination marketing promotion, PR, communication for your destination	1	2	3	4	5
Strengthening the competitive advantages of your tourism destination (e.g., the level of infrastructure development, the level of service and qualifications of labour resources, the investment climate, a favourable image of the destination, supporting existing events and other attractors to bring [more] tourists to the destination, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
Development and promotion of a strong destination brand	1	2	3	4	5
Ensuring the innovative development of your tourism destination	1	2	3	4	5
Ensuring sustainable development of your tourism destination	1	2	3	4	5
Development of new relevant products to attract and satisfy guests/tourists	1	2	3	4	5
Organization of new destination relevant events	1	2	3	4	5
Development of new tourist attractions	1	2	3	4	5
Information support for tourists (e.g., on site in the destination or with digital tools)	1	2	3	4	5
Informing, coordinating the actions of the stakeholders on general issues of the tourism destination development, and using synergies (e.g. for marketing); building a destination network	1	2	3	4	5
Organization of trainings for stakeholders	1	2	3	4	5

7. Please rate the following stakeholder groups on a scale of 1-5 (1 = not important at all, 5 = very important) regarding their importance for the successful development of your destination

Travel agents	1	2	3	4	5
Tour operators	1	2	3	4	5
Hotels	1	2	3	4	5
Attractions	1	2	3	4	5
Museums	1	2	3	4	5
Restaurants	1	2	3	4	5
Amusement parks	1	2	3	4	5

Other business representatives	1	2	3	4	5
Authorities	1	2	3	4	5
Academic community	1	2	3	4	5
Local population	1	2	3	4	5
Local government	1	2	3	4	5
Real estate agencies	1	2	3	4	5

8. Please rate the following advantages of coordinated destination management on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = not important at all, 5 = very important).

Balanced division of responsibility for managing the destination between all stakeholders	1	2	3	4	5
Fair consideration of the views and interests of all stakeholders in the destination	1	2	3	4	5
Creating a general budget for conducting promotions to promote the destination as a whole	1	2	3	4	5
Achievement of more flexible and efficient destination management by promptly solving emerging problems	1	2	3	4	5
Ensuring the loyalty of stakeholders to the development strategy implemented in the destination	1	2	3	4	5
Having one clear vision for the whole destination	1	2	3	4	5

Improving the tourism quality & performance in general	1	2	3	4	5
Strengthening the innovative development of the destination	1	2	3	4	5
Strengthening the three dimensions of sustainability in and for the destination	1	2	3	4	5

Thank you for taking time to participate in this survey!

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CRedit author statement

Term	Definition	Author 1	A2	A3	A4
Conceptualization	Ideas; formulation or evolution of overarching research goals and aims	x		x	
Methodology	Development or design of methodology; creation of models	x	x	x	x
Software	Programming, software development; designing computer programs; implementation of the computer code and supporting algorithms; testing of existing code components	x		x	x
Validation	Verification, whether as a part of the activity or separate, of the overall replication/ reproducibility of results/experiments and other research outputs		x		x
Formal analysis	Application of statistical, mathematical, computational, or other formal techniques to analyze or synthesize study data	x	x	x	x
Investigation	Conducting a research and investigation process, specifically performing the experiments, or data/evidence collection		x		x
Resources	Provision of study materials, reagents, materials, patients, laboratory samples, animals, instrumentation, computing resources, or other analysis tools	x	x	x	x
Data Curation	Management activities to annotate (produce metadata), scrub data and maintain research data (including software code, where it is necessary for interpreting the data itself) for initial use and later reuse	x	x	x	
Writing - Original Draft	Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work, specifically writing the initial draft (including substantive translation)	x	x	x	x
Writing - Review & Editing	Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work by those from the original research group, specifically critical review, commentary or revision – including pre-or post-publication stages	x		x	
Visualization	Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work, specifically visualization/ data presentation		x		x
Supervision	Oversight and leadership responsibility for the research activity planning and execution, including mentorship external to the core team	x	x	x	
Project administration	Management and coordination responsibility for the research activity planning and execution	x	x		
Funding acquisition	Acquisition of the financial support for the project leading to this publication	x	x	x	x

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