



# The politics of destination marketing

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## Assessing stakeholder interaction choice orientations toward a DMO formation, using the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) are very much a part of the Scottish tourism landscape in 2011. Some regional tourism stakeholders have created DMOs to manage their respective regional attractions, but until now, this has not been the case with north-east Scotland. As a prelude to the potential creation of a regional DMO, the purpose of this paper is to empirically evaluate tourism business leaders' attitudes and likely acceptance of the DMO's structure and functions.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode (TKCM) was utilised to provide an evaluative framework, with discussion of the assertiveness versus cooperativeness needs of tourism business stakeholders in the region. The TKCM's measurement instrument was utilised along with a purpose-built questionnaire to gather information about tourism leaders' interaction orientations and their level of support for the formation of a DMO, its structure and functions.

**Findings** – Tourism leaders in north-east Scotland are collaboration-oriented. Initial findings indicate that on balance, tourism businesses (as expressed by their managers/owners) are persuaded by the attractiveness of collaboration at an integrated regional level, but would nevertheless prefer a certain degree of competition. In addition, organisational size and membership of existing destination management networks appear to moderate the interaction choice preference.

**Research limitations/implications** – First, the scale and questionnaire instrument developed to test attitudes toward a DMO formation have not been exhaustively evaluated, nor have the potential moderating factors been comprehensively assessed. A more robust and validated scale should be developed and moderators clearly modelled. Second, current sample size is limited and may not provide an adequate basis for generalisation. In future, a larger sample should be employed. Finally, this research is exploratory in scope, and future research, designed along an evaluative and analytical basis, is encouraged.

**Practical implications** – Collaboration within a new DMO in marketing to new markets and the support for this is not challenged, but some competition among tourism providers will continue. It is likely that the disparity between tourism performance in the city and rural areas will continue in the near future. The role of the DMO will therefore involve enlarging the customer base and raising the tourism profiles of both city and rural locations, in order to create a level playing field.

**Originality/value** – This research is the first to utilise the TKCM and Instrument to assess tourism business leaders' assertiveness versus cooperativeness orientations, prior to the initiation of an alliance in a region. The paper shows that this approach holds viability for future research in this direction, especially the potential of TKCM as a predictive framework for interorganisational interaction and collaboration.

**Keywords** Scotland, Tourism development, Tourism management, Destination marketing, Place branding, Destination Management Organisations, Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, Collaboration, Conflict

**Paper type** Research paper



## 1. Introduction

Critical discourse on collaborative alliance is almost unanimous that this is good for business, especially where there is a need, or it is expedient, for organisations to share resources and pool bargaining power to achieve interdependent strategic objectives such as the crafting and promotion of a place's brand (Wang and Xiang, 2007). For example, a destination marketing organisation (DMO) is a form of alliance that involves the coming together of stakeholders within an area or region, for the purpose of promoting and marketing the destinations image and attractions to potential visitors (Buhalis, 2000). It is common to find conclusions about the positive impact of such an alliance in various aspects of tourism, especially in the marketing and branding of places. For instance, it has been said that collaborative alliances enable businesses to effectively market the destination by finding the right balance between sharing and hoarding resources and knowledge in order to enhance the destination's competitiveness against other destinations (d'Angella and Go, 2009), and to increase overall profitability of the local tourism industry (Bramwell and Sharman, 1999). Furthermore, the role of stakeholder collaboration has been highlighted in both the practice of destination marketing and place branding, with links drawn to the complementary involvement of destination marketing activities and place branding strategies (Hanna and Rowley, 2008).

The concept of collaboration implies that there is collective action to a purpose, and that this action involves organisations who are otherwise at competition with one another. In fact, collaboration has been defined as the "formal institutionalised relationships among existing networks of institutions, interests and/or individual stakeholders" (d'Angella and Go, 2009, p. 430) and as "a process of shared decisions among key stakeholders of a problem domain about the future of that domain" (Gray, 1985). These definitions imply that collaboration cannot arise without conflict *a priori*, and that collaboration itself is a state of conflict, given that parties involved are expected to sacrifice their natural or chosen state of competitiveness. However, while businesses may collaborate to achieve desired outcomes, they remain primarily competitive rivals, with differing business priorities (Sharma and Kearins, 2010). Rivalry and differing priorities naturally involve underlying, and sometimes outright, conflict. Indeed, the body of extant literature on partnership and organisational collaboration clearly identifies and discusses conflict as an important dimension (Kumar and Diesel, 1996; Sharma and Kearins, 2010; Farrier *et al.*, 2010). Yet, in the tourism literature the benefits of collaborative relationships have been extensively discussed (Bramwell and Sharman, 1999), while little attention has been paid to the reality of potential conflict inherent in these relationships (Dredge, 2006), as a result of which tourism researchers have called for more studies directed at evaluating the conflict construct in relation to collaboration in tourism business (Huxham and Vangen, 2000). Some immediate questions come to mind. What is the potential for conflict among stakeholders when deciding strategies on issues like the destinations image, marketing priorities and place branding? How can conflict be predicted and successfully managed? And who should be responsible for managing potential conflict between stakeholders. It is against this background that this paper explores the application of the theoretical ideas surrounding the notions of collaboration, conflict orientation and interaction choices as a prelude to the foundations of a DMO creation in the North-east of Scotland.

The aim of this research is to explore tourism managers' attitudinal dispositions toward the development of a DMO by applying the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode

(TKCM) as a framework for the understanding of their interaction choices toward potential conflict resolution, and the impact that this can have on the success of the proposals. In utilising this approach, our research does not focus on conflict that arises in the course of collaboration, but instead explores whether understanding managers' orientations toward conflict resolution can help predict their disposition to collaborate in marketing a tourism destination. The attraction of this approach is that the TKCM framework has been successful in predicting the interaction choices and bargaining styles of executives and professional subgroups (Shell, 2001), and although it employs individual-level analysis, we consider it suitable for analysing inter-organisational relations as these relations are anchored and choreographed by individuals representing the interests of organisations (Sharma and Kearins, 2010; Borkowski, 2010). To our knowledge, the TKCM has never been applied to assess orientation toward tourism collaboration before. While the terms destination and place have been used interchangeably in existing literature to refer to the marketing, management and branding of locations, Hanna and Rowley (2008) provide some clarification by suggesting that the term "destination" indicates tourism only whereas "place" refers to broader aspects of a location's brand and image. In this paper, we focus on the tourism stakeholders of a specific location, and therefore refer to destination as a dimension of the overall place brand and image.

However, this research does not make any specific propositions or hypothesise on the existence of any relationships between conflict and preference for a DMO; instead, our objective is to provide an exploration and description of patterns emergent from the empirical application of the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI), in order to inform and stimulate future research in this area. For this reason, we explore a number of themes as summarised by the following questions:

- (1) Can the successful formation of a DMO be influenced by the interaction choices of its constituent stakeholders?
- (2) Can the TKCM framework help explain stakeholder willingness to participate in a regional DMO?
- (3) Can TKCM help explain stakeholders' preference for a DMO structure?
- (4) In general, what are the interorganisational interaction choices of tourism business executives in North-east Scotland?
- (5) Are there differences in interaction choices according to location, business size and previous experience with a DMO?

The answers to these questions are useful to both practice and research. Understanding the antecedents and prerequisites to a collaborative venture is essential for its success (Lovelock, 2002; Bramwell, 2004), and since DMOs are typically a form of collaboration, it is relevant to consider what factors might lead to their constitution and success. Collaborative structures have to address issues of complexity and ambiguity from their very inception if their intended advantages are to be sustained (Huxham and Vangen, 2000) and whether it serves a place branding or a destination marketing function, the model should consider components of leadership, resources, clarity, and the need for committed people (Kerr, 2006; Sharma and Kearins, 2010).

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. A general overview of the tourism sector in North-east Scotland is provided in order to delineate the geographic scope

of the empirical study. This is followed by a review of literature on the relevant concepts and models of business-to-business collaboration. The literature review leads to a presentation of the TKCM framework as the lens for the primary research, after which there is a description of the methodology and empirical findings. The Discussion and Conclusions section is followed by general recommendations, including research limitations and recommendations for further research.

## 2. Overview of tourism in North-east Scotland

The presence of oil in the North Sea provides the region with a valuable source of employment and is a physical resource that sets the region apart from many other cities in the UK. About 29 per cent of UK trips to Aberdeen and the larger North-east region were for business purposes, which is significantly higher than the national figure of only 16 per cent. The same is the case for overseas visitors to Aberdeen, as 27 per cent state business as the purpose of their visit, against the Scottish national figure of 17 per cent (VisitScotland, 2010). There is no doubt that the oil industry has had a pronounced impact on the regional economy and it is the oil industry that is responsible for the two micro economies that are evident in the region, namely Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire.

For nearly 25 years (since the oil crash of 1986) Aberdeen City has enjoyed a strong micro-economy. For example, strong demand for accommodation in the city has delivered healthy profits for hotels in the area, with many city centre and airport hotels reporting 100 per cent occupancy on mid-week nights. This in turn has prompted new operators to enter the market in recent years and now the supply and demand is more or less in balance.

In 2011, the regional tourism industry operators reported sound profitability and optimism about future trading. That said, there is a view expressed that increased prosperity lies in collectively marketing and promoting the region, as well as working in partnership with other businesses operating across the region. However, some stakeholders are concerned that these collective efforts are currently not happening, as a result of which consultation has been initiated on the viability of a regional DMO, by the local chamber of commerce (AGCC, 2011).

In the more peripheral areas to the north and west of the region (classified as the Shire areas) the local economies still tend to be dominated by the declining industries of agriculture and fishing. As a consequence the oil industry tends to have a reduced impact in these areas (Nash and Martin, 2003). In contrast, tourism in the city of Aberdeen has greatly benefited as a result of business generated from the oil and gas sector, as illustrated by its impact on the hotel sector in the city, where 74 per cent of custom is related to the oil and gas industries. The corresponding figure for shire hotels is only 17 per cent (Tourism Intelligence, 2011).

Out-with Aberdeen City, the more peripheral areas of the region encounter difficulties associated with their remote-ness. This is supported by the Scottish Office (1995, p. 6) who suggests that the region has 96 per cent of its land that can be classified as either "wholly less favoured or partly less favoured". The beneficial impacts of the oil industry do not tend to extend out to these regions. The dependency in the more remote areas communities on "local economies consisting of a few low growth industries makes the area highly vulnerable to changes in external conditions" (Scottish Office, 1995, p. 21). This is also true of the areas' tourism industry which "is very underdeveloped

in the northern part of the region where visitor numbers are low and there are a lack of major visitor attractions and appropriate hotel/guest house accommodation” (Scottish Office, 1995, p. 17). At the moment, the north-east is known more for its oil and gas place branding than as a tourism destination, and while this may have benefitted the oil industry and to some extent the businesses tourism sector, it has potentially harmed the extended tourism sector which has found itself struggling with issues of image and perceptions management (AGCC, 2011).

The challenge for the region as a whole is to secure economic benefits that do indeed extend to the peripheral communities. Any future branding and destination management needs to address the needs of these differing geographic areas. The initial consultation on the DMO project in North-east Scotland is focused on whether there should be one super-DMO for the region or a DMO that is essentially an alliance of existing/new area DMOs. Second, business leaders have to decide the functions of the DMO, key of which are the proposals that it should be responsible for place branding, provide marketing, lobbying and booking portal centralisation. These functions will give any DMO in the region a very crucial role in the overall image management and place branding for the region.

### 3. Literature review

#### *a. Developing a regional DMO*

Given that places are increasingly facing global competition in both their external and domestic markets, the application of branding techniques to places is growing in frequency (Hanna and Rowley, 2008). This is why in an increasingly competitive global environment, even established tourism destinations need to differentiate themselves from one another if they are to attract tourist spend and the resulting economic and social benefits that this brings (Baker and Cameron, 2007). To achieve this, Wang and Fessenmaier (2007) state that:

[...] the fragmented nature of the tourism industry requires a substantial degree of co-ordination and collaboration among the variety of different players in destination marketing. Accepting that levels of co-ordination and collaboration are necessary to bring new or increased business, how does this sit with the individual business's need to compete and win business in the operating environment that is the destination?

A major challenge to its creation relates to the dilemma that a DMO must reconcile: to rally individual stakeholders interests around a brand model while preserving their decision making autonomy (Gnoth, 2002). This is because DMOs represent alliances which involve the giving up of some level of autonomy and the surrender of power, and while they can vary in shape and form, some common characteristics are that:

- they are representative of various interests within the stakeholder community (Buhalis, 2000);
- they involve cooperation toward the achievement of a common objective; and
- they imply willingness to sacrifice some individual interest for the common good.

Hence it is important to determine a priori the disposition of individual businesses within a community as an initial step toward establishing a DMO. This is particularly important where there are existing networks of business cooperation, because the relationships in these networks may be set and may be difficult to break, replace, or integrate (Dredge, 2006). Buhalis (2000) states that there are different types

of destinations requiring different marketing strategies, hence the form and structure that a DMO takes would depend on the unique attributes of the region it is to represent, as well as the collective and individual aspirations of the stakeholders.

Although several factors have been identified as important prerequisites for the success of DMOs, place branding and other tourism collaborations (Gretzel *et al.*, 2006) it is surprising that one dimension that has not been examined is the individual managers' interaction choices as reflected by their orientation toward conflict resolution. The surprise arises because it is known that collaborative alliances involve conflict – either as conflict between the collaborators or as conflict arising from compromising ones' business interest for the sake of benefitting the whole (Dredge, 2006; d'Angella and Go, 2009) – and that this naturally leads to bargaining and negotiation to achieve common ground. Then, it becomes logical to argue that orientation to conflict and its resolution may provide capacity for predicting successful collaborations. Using network theory as the basis for criticism of existing collaborative planning theory, Dredge (2006, p. 5701) suggests that the effects of conflict within a network of collaboration must be critically evaluated as this can provide opportunity for “better process design, increased quality of collaboration, learning and innovation”.

The advantages of collaboration are numerous (Wang and Xiang, 2007), as a result of which it holds many attractions for a destination marketing strategy (World Tourism Organisation, 2004). Across the Scottish tourism landscape, several examples can be found of regional collaboration through destination marketing organisations. However, and in spite of the reported advantages, not all regions of Scotland have successfully developed a regional DMO model. For instance, in North-east Scotland, there exist several fragmented community DMOs, each interested in, and designed to, market the specific community's tourism attractions both to local and international visitors (AGCC, 2011). The result of this is that while some communities have been very successful in promoting their attractions, there is no regional-level understanding of what the North-east tourism brand is, nor is there a clear expression of the region's image as a tourism destination. This may constitute a disadvantage to the region's ability to distinguish itself and grow its tourism potential (Palmer and Bijou, 1995; Baker and Cameron, 2007).

#### *b. Conflict in destination management collaboration*

The issue of conflict and collaboration within destination management has received some attention in recent times from tourism researchers, as a result of which a number of theoretical and conceptual frameworks have emerged. Wang and Xiang (2007) proposed an integrative framework of collaborative destination marketing based upon the interorganisational models of resource dependency theory, transaction cost theory, strategic management theory and networking theory. They argued that individually, these theories did not adequately provide a comprehensive theoretical foundation for understanding tourism marketing alliances and networks within a destination. The conceptual framework they proposed is defined by four constructs that emphasise the nature and dynamics of destination marketing. These are:

- (1) the precondition construct, which defines the commercial, social and environmental conditions giving rise to the alliance and network formation;
- (2) the motivation construct, which explains why organisations choose to enter alliances and strategic networks to achieve specific goals;

- (3) the process construct, which examines the dynamics of collaborative processes such as structure, form, governance and conflict resolution; and
- (4) the outcome construct, which describes the consequences of the collaboration, commenting on the conflict sub-construct.

However, while it has identified the importance of understanding conflict in a destination marketing relationship, Wang and Xiang's (2007) framework does not proceed to provide a more comprehensive and focused evaluation of conflict orientation as an antecedent to the formation of the alliance.

Raising concern over the uncritical adoption of collaborative and communicative planning ideals as tools for managing tourism networks, Dredge (2006) argues that an important arena for future tourism research should include an evaluation of conflict and cost and benefit distribution approaches as embodied in the network theory. Dredge suggests that network theory provides a basis for understanding how boundaries of tension, conflict and instability existing between policy communities can be managed. In the network theory view, constellations of power within tourism policymaking give rise to boundaries of difference and conflict which are not necessarily wasteful but can also be sites of learning, creativity and innovation (Dredge, 2006).

On their part, d'Angella and Go (2009) apply stakeholder theory to the description of tourism alliance configurations. Similar to Friedman and Miles (2002), they propose that stakeholder configurations within a tourism destination fall into one of four categories: inclusion, opportunism, compromise, and competition. However, while d'Angella and Go (2009) successfully applied the Friedman and Miles model to categorise stakeholder participation, this model can be criticised for its failure to explicitly consider the potential impact of conflict resolution orientation as the basis for understanding stakeholder interaction choices. Furthermore, this model is similar to the previous models discussed, in the sense that it does not clearly address the antecedents of stakeholder alliances and their structures. The categorisations within Friedman and Miles' model are similar to the TKCM framework. Nevertheless, in order to adequately evaluate the antecedent effects of conflict orientation on destination marketing collaboration, TKCM is considered more appropriate. This is because TKCM expressly utilises conflict orientation as a variable upon which different interaction choices and styles can be inferred (Figure 1).

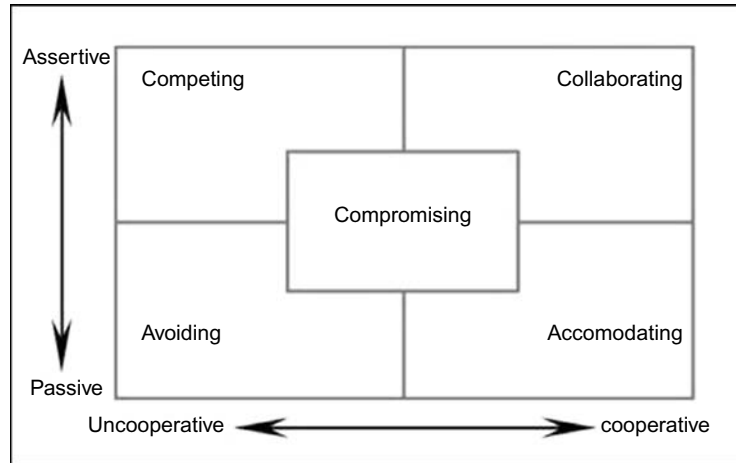
### *c. The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI)*

The TKI is the means by which TKCM is applied. It assesses behaviour in conflict situations (i.e. situations in which the concerns of two or more parties appear to be incompatible) on the basis of two dimensions of behavioural predisposition (Kilmann and Thomas, 1977). These dimensions are based on the management research of Blake and Mouton (1964) and are:

- *Assertiveness*. The extent to which a party attempts to satisfy its own concerns.
- *Cooperativeness*. The extent to which a party attempts to satisfy the other party's concerns.

From the above dimensions, five methods of approaching conflict (also referred to as interaction choices) can be defined, as follows:

**Figure 1.**  
The two-dimensional  
model of conflict handling  
behaviour



**Source:** Kilmann and Thomas (1977)

- (1) *Competing*. This is an assertive and uncooperative mode in which one party pursues its own objectives and concerns at the other(s)' expense, using whatever power seems appropriate to achieve advantage.
- (2) *Collaborating*. Collaboration tends to see conflict as a problem to be solved. This is both assertive and cooperative because the parties aim to actively work together in finding a mutual solution or alternative that satisfies all (e.g. to avoid competing for some resources or address a mutual threat) while at the same time maintaining independence of action toward meeting individual objectives (e.g. by retaining competition for some resources).
- (3) *Compromise*. The compromise mode describes the middle ground between assertiveness and cooperation, in which the objective is to find an expedient, mutually acceptable solution that partially satisfies all parties. This method addresses an issue more directly than avoiding, but does not explore it in as much depth as collaboration.
- (4) *Avoiding*. Avoiding is neither assertive nor cooperative. In this mode, a party does not pursue its individual goal or interest, but at the same time, there is no attempt to satisfy the other party's concerns. Rather, the strategy is to avoid the conflict situation by withdrawing, sidestepping or postponing the issue.
- (5) *Accommodating*. Accommodating is the extreme opposite of competition and describes an unassertive, cooperative mode. A party neglects its own interests and concerns in order to satisfy those of another. This might take the form of selfless generosity or charity, obeying another person's order, or yielding to a view of point even where there is reasonable ground for counter-argument.

The TKI has been used for a variety of purposes. For example, Shell (2001) utilised the TKI as the basis for developing a bargaining styles grid and found that TKI scores differed by professional background: clinical professionals in the health care field systematically reported both less competitive and more accommodating TKI scores



than executives in more traditional businesses. Shell (2001) concluded that there is remarkable stability to the predispositions people report as the foundation for their styles. Other applications of the TKI include intergroup conflict within multinationals (Pahl and Roth, 1993), nurse/physician conflict mode choices (Hendel *et al.*, 2007), and interorganisational interaction, as summarised in Table I (Thorgren and Wincent, 2010). In fact, Chusmir and Mills (1989) observed men and women at work after administering the TKCM instrument and found that competing and avoiding strategies consistently showed a negative impact on performance while collaborating showed a very high positive impact, with mediation effects of gender evident in the preferred style as well as the actual behaviour. However, compromising and collaborating styles revealed inconsistency in its correlation to actual behaviour. Volkema and Bergmann (1995) also found a strong correlation between conflict style and interpersonal conflict behaviour among a group of business students.

Nevertheless, the outcomes associated with the TKCM instrument may be mediated by other personality and socio-demographic factors. As mentioned above, gender has been shown to have a mediating effect on conflict style as well as the actual behaviour exhibited (Chusmir and Mills, 1989), while extant research suggests that conflict orientation and resolution style may also be culture-mediated (Ting-Toomey *et al.*, 1991; Mohammed *et al.*, 2008). These effects are potentially significant to the understanding of conflict and resolutions styles, but have not been covered in the present research and should be considered in future research.

While it is not the only conflict-resolution prediction assessment tool, a key attraction of the TKI is that it addresses the problem of social desirability associated with conflict style measurements (Shell, 2001), and if used appropriately, TKI can be beneficial to researchers in obtaining insights into executives' negotiation and conflict of interest management styles (Wormack, 1988). It pairs simple, equally desirable (or undesirable) phrases representing each conflict attitude and forcing subjects to make a choice between statements in each pair. There are 30 pairs of statements with 12 statements representing each of the five conflict style methods. Hence the maximum score per style is 12 and the minimum is 0. It is because of its proven reliability and stability that even in spite of criticisms and concern about generalisability, the TKCM instrument has been the most widely used in both research and training (Wormack, 1988).

#### 4. Methodology

A total of 84 executives with decision making authority were randomly selected from a list of participants and asked to complete a licenced paper version of the full (30 item) TKI during five tourism management workshops (approximately 17 candidates per session) in exchange for management training fees discounts. These workshops were held as part of a wider local tourism network development week which involved workshops, networking and exhibition events organised by the local chamber of commerce and VisitScotland (the Scottish tourism authority). The executives were informed that completion of the TKI would help identify any employee conflict management training they might require, and that there were no right or wrong answers. In each section, once the questionnaires were returned, participants were debriefed and asked to rate the ease or difficulty of completing the TKI. Participants were then informed that they would receive feedback on their choices within a few weeks, and were thanked for their contributions.

**Table I.**  
Conflict approach tactics  
and interorganisational  
interaction

Conflict-handling tactic	Definition	Interorganisational interaction application	Interorganisational interaction example
1. Competing	The pursuit of own concerns at others' expense	Organisations employing this strategic intention try their very best to win issues and secure their own interest at the cost of others in the interorganisational interaction	A party might conceal its actual costs to appear as a competitive partner in a joint project. In this way, it strengthens its own market position, but at the same time risks project failure if the related costs become unmanageable
2. Accommodating	Neglecting own concerns for the satisfaction of others' concerns	Organisations employing this strategic intention are obliging in their interaction around interorganisational issues	A party might decide to agree on a joint solution they believe is in the best interest of the other party, as a gesture of goodwill aimed at maintaining the interorganisational link and building social credit for future issues
3. Avoiding	No immediate pursuit of either own or others' concerns	Organisations employing this strategic intention avoid confrontation and show indifference toward interaction around interorganisational issues	A party might want the interorganisational relationship to be a legitimizing arrangement in theory rather than in practice. It thus shows no interest in being active in taking and following joint decisions
4. Collaborating	Attempts to find solutions fully satisfying both own and others' concerns	Organisations employing this strategic intention aim to find integrative solutions in interaction around interorganisational issues	Each part may be open about the value they can add to the relationship by revealing comprehensive and truthful information about themselves and suggest how this could be integrated to a joint solution with the other party
5. Compromising	Attempts to find solutions partially satisfying both own and others' concerns	Organisations employing this strategic intention aim to find expedient solutions in interaction around interorganisational issues	A party may restrict its provision of too much detailed information at once because this can be to their disadvantage if they still have to negotiate and compromise to find an acceptable solution

**Source:** Thorgren and Wincent (2010)

Two weeks after the final workshop, an online questionnaire was sent to the 84 participants to solicit their views on the creation of a destination management organisation (DMO) in the region; however after a follow up reminder only 81 participants fully completed the online questionnaire. The questionnaire instrument was deliberately designed to be simple and easy to complete, as the objective was to obtain preference patterns for correlation with the interaction choices in the TKI. Hence, two types of scales were used:

- (1) a three-point scale (agree – neutral – disagree) was utilised following statements describing the formation, purpose, and desirability of a DMO; and
- (2) multiple and single choice options were used following statements describing the structure and function of the DMO (for more details on questionnaire development, testing and validation, the interested reader is encouraged to contact the authors).

As an example, an item requiring an “agree-neutral-disagree” choice was framed thus: “The North-east should have an organisation that has overall responsibility for marketing and promoting its tourism image, brand and attractions”.

## 5. Results

### *a. Descriptive overview*

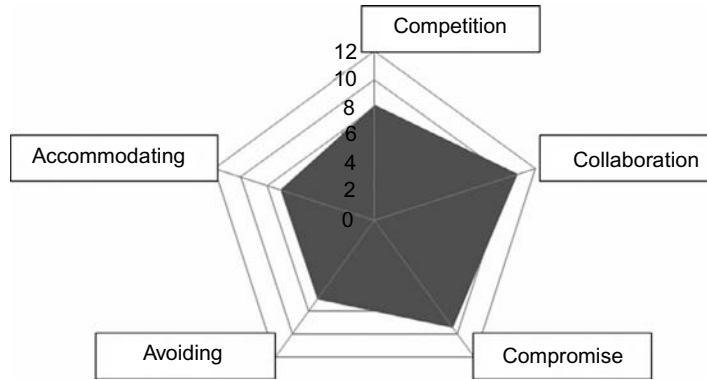
About 61 per cent of research participants were from within the city of Aberdeen while 39 per cent were from Aberdeenshire and the surrounding rural areas. In terms of tourism activity, 39 per cent of respondents were hoteliers and accommodation providers, 21 per cent were tourism attraction businesses, 12 per cent were heritage and historic sites, 12 per cent were tourism shops and retailers, 9 per cent were provenance food and drink providers, and 7 per cent were tourism event organisers. The results showed that most businesses were small in size, with fewer than 50 employees (52 per cent), followed by medium sized, with 50-250 employees (37 per cent), while businesses with more than 250 employees accounted for 11 per cent of respondents.

### *b. Assessment of TKI scores*

The raw scores were averaged on the five modes in order to arrive at aggregate scores for all respondents. This was considered to be the most appropriate method in obtaining an overall mode classification for tourism leaders in the region. Second, a mean-difference analysis was conducted on the interest variables of: location, size and previous alliance experience in order to establish whether these affected the interaction mode choices and the preferred DMO structure of respondents. Finally, overall TKI scores were calculated and assigned to respondents on a bi-polar rating, in order to plot the regression between assertiveness/cooperativeness needs and DMO acceptance/functions.

The details of these analyses are presented below.

*Group interaction choice.* The overall group performance on the five interaction choices shows that in general, respondents were favourable of a collaboration approach (Figure 2). The scores from the TKI show that average group score for collaboration are highest at 10.67, followed by compromise at 9.48. The least preferred choice is avoiding, with a score of 6.95 (Table II). However, the results reveal that there are some



**Figure 2.**  
Group rating on conflict approach and interaction choice

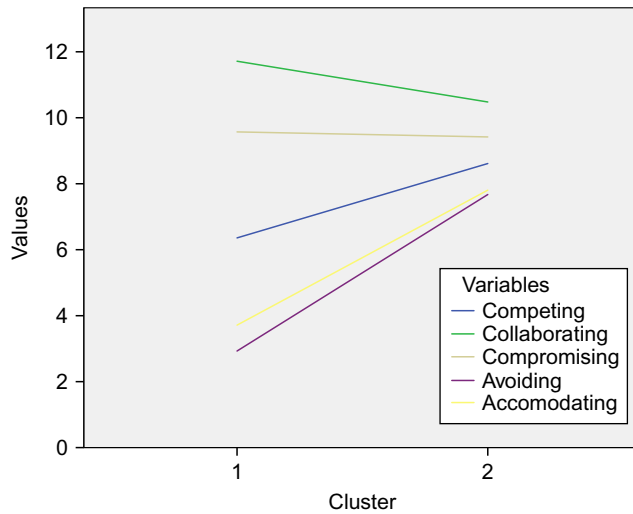
	N Statistic	Mean Statistic	SD Statistic	Skewness Statistic	SE	Kurtosis Statistic	SE
Competing	81	8.07	2.747	-0.936	0.267	0.466	0.529
Collaborating	81	10.67	1.194	-0.407	0.267	-0.740	0.529
Compromising	81	9.48	1.726	-0.170	0.267	-0.502	0.529
Avoiding	81	6.95	2.872	-0.751	0.267	-0.386	0.529
Accommodating	81	7.06	3.682	-0.475	0.267	-0.713	0.529
Valid N (listwise)	81						

**Table II.**  
Descriptive statistics of group ratings on conflict approach and interaction choice

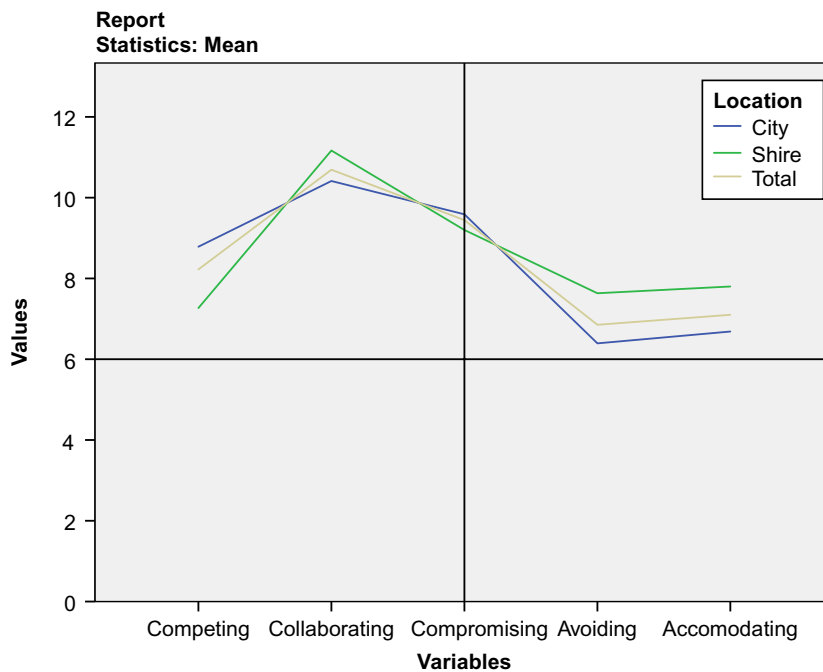
significant differences in how the TKI was rated, based on location, size of business and previous experience with a DMO.

*Location versus interaction choice.* To check the effect of location on interaction choice, two analyses were conducted – cluster identification and mean comparison. Initial cluster analysis identified two major clusters along the lines of location (Figure 3). Cluster one contains mostly businesses within the rural areas of North-east Scotland and reveals a wide gap between their rating for collaboration and the other interaction choices. This cluster appears to clearly prefer collaboration over the other choices. Cluster two contains mostly businesses within the city and immediate locations. It would appear that while these businesses also prefer collaboration, they are nevertheless more diverse in the choices they are ready to make. For example, both compromise and competition scored very highly with these businesses. The mean comparisons on all interaction choice scores between the two locations reveal significant differences. City-based businesses are more preferential of competition ( $p = 0.20$ ) than rural businesses; contrariwise, rural businesses are keener to collaborate ( $p = 0.006$ ) than are city businesses (Figure 4).

*Location versus preferred DMO structure.* Overall, respondents prefer a regional DMO structured on the basis of a loose alliance between existing area DMOs. There is no significant difference between city and shire organisations in this regard (Figure 5). However, it would appear that more city than shire organisations prefer a single super DMO ( $p = 0.001$ ). Similarly, there are some differences in the DMO functions that are preferred by city and rural businesses. Whereas city businesses would like the DMO to primarily undertake marketing as opposed to lobbying ( $p = 0.041$ ), rural-based

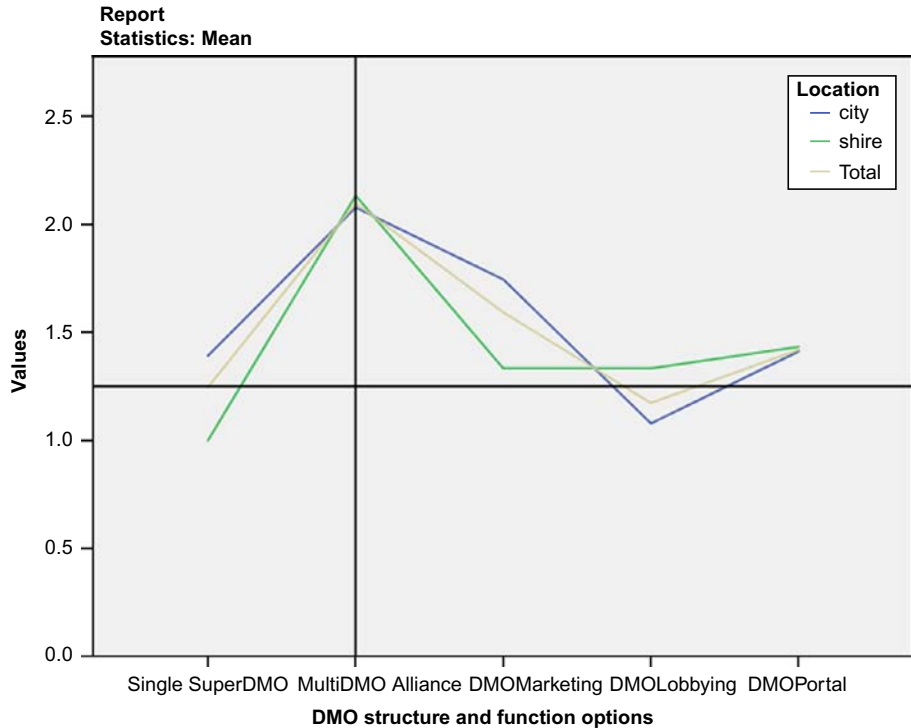


**Figure 3.**  
Primary cluster centres



**Figure 4.**  
Mean difference in interaction choice based on location

organisations would prefer the DMO to be more of a lobbying than a marketing body ( $p = 0.046$ ). There are no significant differences between the locations on the provision of a single booking portal by the regional DMO ( $p = 0.9$ ), although overall support for this is around average.

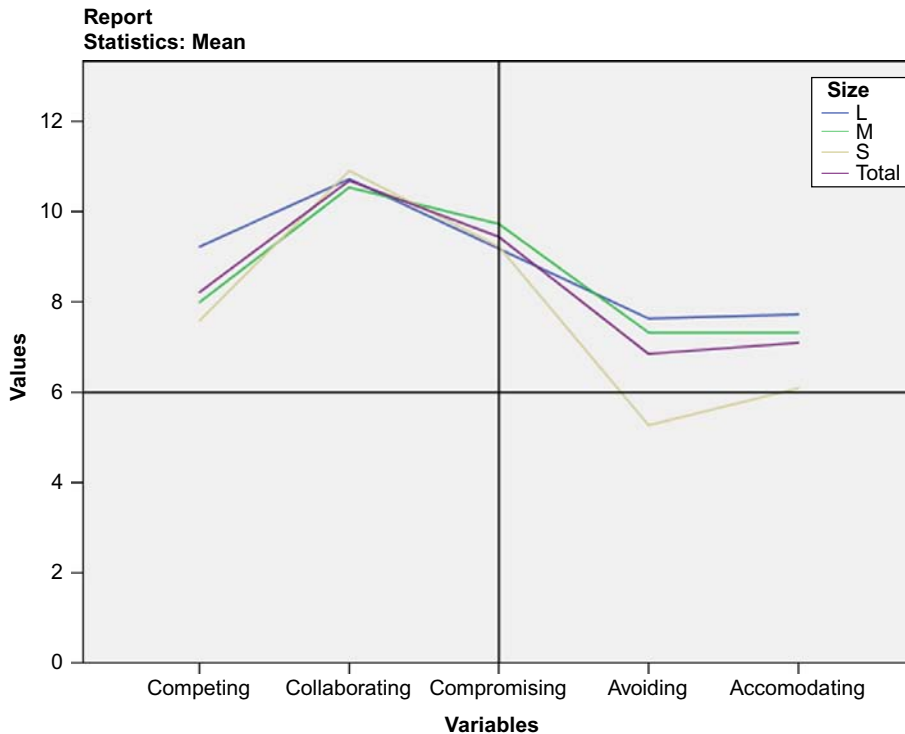


**Figure 5.**  
Mean difference in DMO structure and function based on location

*Size versus interaction choice.* Three organisational sizes were compared: large (L), medium (M), and small (S). In general, all sized organisations preferred a collaborative approach toward interorganisational interaction (Figure 6). However, large organisations appeared to be more oriented toward competition than medium or small organisations, but this difference is not found to be statistically significant. Interestingly, small organisations appear to be less likely, on average, to choose an “avoiding” strategy than medium or large organisations ( $p = 0.011$ ).

*Size versus DMO structure and function.* Consistent with the rest of the findings, organisations of all sizes rated a multi-DMO alliance as the preferred structure with no significant differences in the level of rating (Figure 7). The most significant difference between organisational sizes appears to be on the preference for a DMO booking portal, where it would appear that large businesses particularly like this DMO function, followed by smaller businesses, but medium businesses are not equally persuaded.

*Previous alliance experience.* Belonging to an alliance in the past appears to have an effect on the preferred interaction choice of the organisation (Figure 8) but not on the DMO structure and function. Businesses that stated that they had been members of a DMO-like alliance in the past were likely to prefer collaboration as opposed to competition, while businesses that had no experience of such alliance were more willing to consider competition ( $p = 0.017$ ). Similarly, businesses with experience of alliances were more likely to use an avoiding or accommodating strategy than businesses without similar experience.



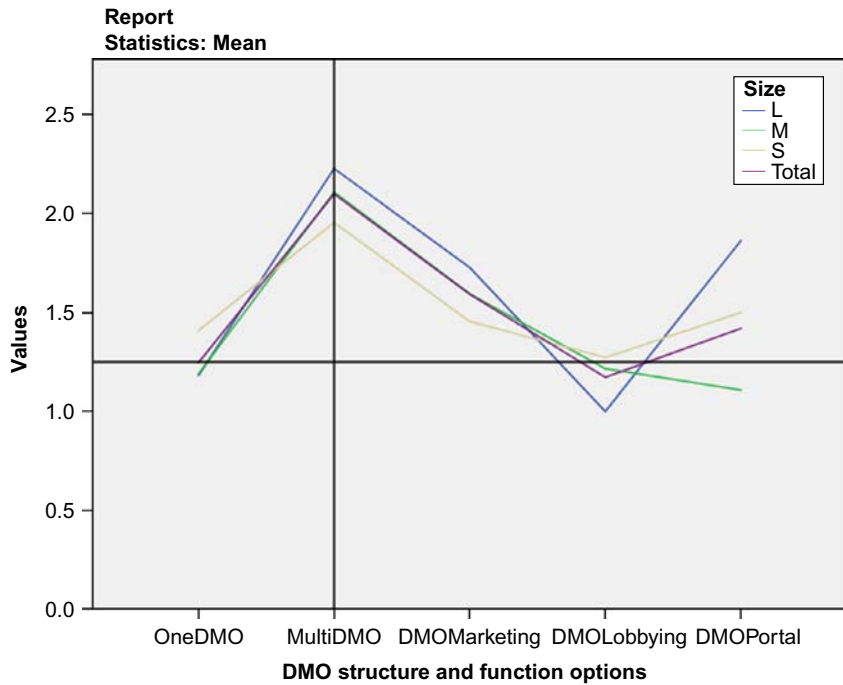
**Figure 6.** Mean difference in interaction choice based on size

*c. Predicting DMO acceptance and function preference from TKI score*

In the final analysis, consideration is given to whether the TKI scores converted to a two-dimensional scale of 1-5 (assertiveness = 1 versus collaborativeness = 5) can predict overall acceptance of a regional DMO as well as its functions, using regression techniques. The results (Table III) show that interaction choice (as modelled by the TKI choice) is a potential predictor of DMO acceptance, and that acceptance can be predicted by approximately 12 per cent if interaction choice is known ( $F = 10.36$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ;  $R^2 = 0.116$ ). However, this is not the case with the DMO's preferred function set, as knowing the interaction choice does not appear to predict preference for any particular DMO function ( $F = 0.274$ ,  $p = 0.602$ ).

**6. Conclusions and discussion**

Understanding the relationships between tourism organisations in a destination is a vital prerequisite to the success of many collaborative destination marketing initiatives (Terpstra and Simonin, 1993). From a practical perspective, this work finds that majority of tourism leaders in North-east Scotland would use a collaborative approach as their interaction choice. This is contrary to the conclusions that business professionals perform better on the ratings for “competing” orientation (Shell, 2001). This contradiction may arise from tourism stakeholders’ experience and realisation that the industry is increasingly interdependent in order to remain viable. As a result, it would appear that organisations are willing to embrace the creation of a regional DMO.



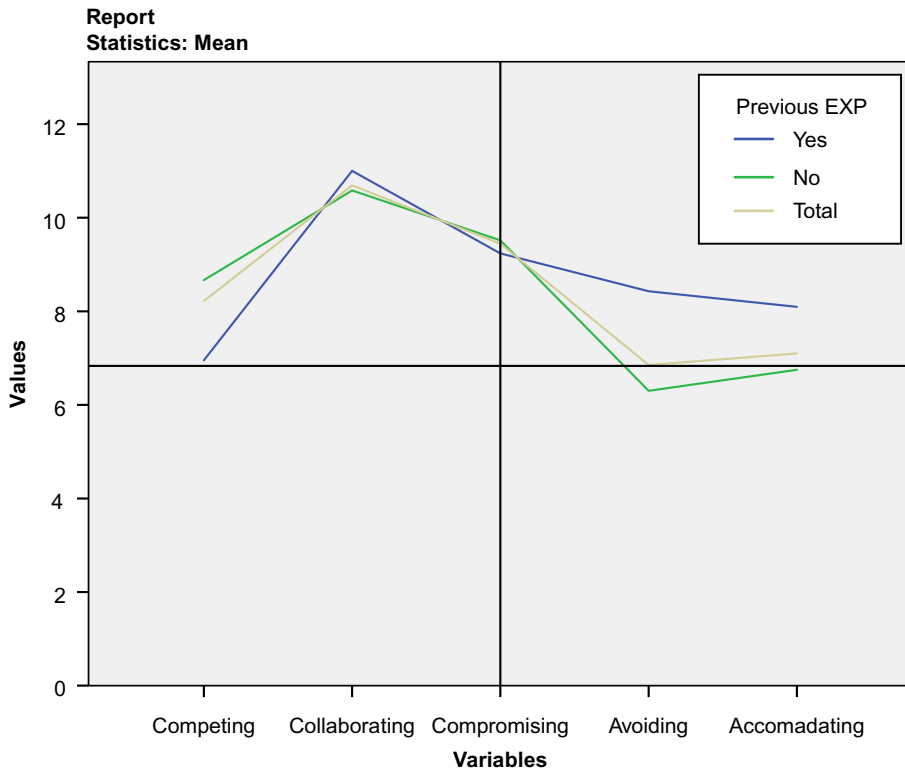
**Figure 7.**  
Mean difference in DMO  
structure and function  
based on size

Both the businesses in Aberdeen City and those in the rural communities broadly support a collaborative structure, and although there are slight differences in the preference for structure and function, it would appear that the preferred DMO model is for an alliance of several community networks into a regional DMO. This can be interpreted as the stakeholders preferring one integrated grand strategy as opposed to a number of business level strategies, but at the same time opting to retain a level of competition between the various localities in the region. Wang and Krakover (2008) pick up on the notion that both cooperative and competitive relationships can co-exist.

Akin to Wang and Fessenmaier's (2007) theory, the main motivation for organisations in Aberdeen and North-east Scotland for entering the DMO or marketing alliance is seen to be "cluster competitiveness". Recognising that the destination does not have a single magnet, businesses are seeking to pull visitors and hold them longer through complimentary offerings: accommodation, attractions, retail and such like, and this can effectively be achieved through collaborative offerings as has been proved elsewhere (AGCC, 2011).

There is an acceptance that integrated destination marketing is required and can work in the North-east. The hub of Aberdeen City with train and airport links (direct flights from Germany as of Autumn 2011) will continue to be the tourists' arrival point. That said the tourism product relies on attractions such as the distilleries, castles and Royal Deeside which are all located in the rural communities in the surrounding area. A key strength of regional tourism product is the fact that the countryside is easily accessible from Aberdeen City, and that the offerings in the city and countryside are complimentary – re-enforcing the win-win from collaboration in a super DMO.





**Figure 8.** Mean difference in interaction choice based on previous experience

	<i>Sum of squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Regression	3.386	1	3.386	10.357	0.002
Residual	25.824	79	0.327		
Total	29.210	80			
R	$R^2$	<i>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>SE of the estimate</i>		
0.340	0.116	0.105	0.572		

**Table III.** Regression results for interaction choice and DMO acceptance

**Note:** The independent variable is interaction choice

Conclusions can also be drawn from an academic perspective. First, the use of the TKCM framework as the basis for evaluating tourism managers' propensity to participate in a DMO alliance is a novel approach. And based on the results, it is clear that this approach holds promise for predicting and evaluating pre-alliance attitudes and orientations. Although this research is only exploratory, it provides interesting insights into the use of the TKCM and TKI as tools for analysing and potentially predicting managerial acceptance of collaboration; it also raises questions regarding previous business research conclusions about whether businesses view competition as the most natural way of doing business, an unavoidable state, or a choice. In future, it will be interesting to propose and test specific hypothesis relating to the use of TKI

## 7. Recommendations

The case for the creation of a DMO is obvious, at least to the extent that responses by research participants show. This body can bring a co-ordinated approach to destination marketing by bringing all stakeholders together, and pooling resources and funding. In practice in Aberdeen and NE this may be a tall order. The well established private and public sector stakeholders each have their own political agenda. In practice giving up control of real budgets and ownership of these to a super DMO is a real challenge for the leadership of the DMO. Yet, given that the North-east already shares a number of resources, it is important to consider the potential dividends that collaboration might bring, especially in terms of achieving critical marketing scale and pooling resources. While it might be argued that branding and marketing is possible at the fragmented level, the reality of current economic pressures has brought about the need for an urgent review of advantages versus disadvantages of the different levels at which the region's branding and marketing should be based.

DMO co-ordinated co-operation between: Dyce airport, VisitScotland, the Aberdeen City and Shire Hotel Association, the Chamber of Commerce, Scottish Enterprise, Aberdeen City Council and Aberdeenshire Councils can bring new business to the area. Support for new routes into the airport is a very practical example how co-operation can work successfully, and deliver benefits for all.

Scotland has witnessed a number of DMOs being created, and ultimately there will have to be some shake out in terms of mergers across the country. The proposed North-east DMO can learn from those that have been created and develop with sufficient scale, to ensure its longevity. Specifically, the regional DMO leadership must ensure that all stakeholders' interests are appropriately represented and that healthy competition is encouraged wherever possible. Collaboration within the new DMO in marketing to new markets and the support for this is not challenged, but some competition among tourism providers will continue. For example, it is likely that the disparity between accommodation performance in the city and rural areas will continue in the near future. The role of the DMO will involve enlarging the customer base and raising the tourism profiles of both city and rural locations, in order to create a level playing field.

Many of the environmental forces or pressures identified in previous studies that lead to collaboration among potential partners are present in the North-east of Scotland, namely: there are existing networks in which all the tourism stakeholders are known to each other and can see benefits in collaboration (Fyall and Garrod, 2004); the spectre of reduced economic contribution from the oil/gas industry bringing potential partners together (Crotts and Wilson, 1995); the pace of technological change which means individual operators are not able to compete successfully when acting alone (Poon, 1993). However, there is a lack of visionary leadership, which is thought to be one of the pre-requisites that lead to collaboration among potential partners (Fyall *et al.*, 2003).

It is pertinent to make some recommendations on the basis of the limitations of this research. First, the scale and questionnaire instrument developed to test attitudes toward a DMO formation have not been exhaustively evaluated, nor have the potential moderating factors been comprehensively assessed. A more robust and validated scale

should be developed for this purpose. Second, current sample size is limited and may not provide an adequate basis for generalisation. In future, a larger sample should be employed. Finally, this research is limited in its exploratory scope, and future research, designed along an evaluative and analytical basis, is encouraged. Nevertheless, as its contribution to the field, this research has provided initial indication of the potential for using TKCM to pre-assess destination management collaboration.

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