

Exploring Sustainable Destinations' Development Strategies: Triggers and Maturity Levels

Francesca D'Angella¹ (francesca.dangella@iulm.it), Samuele Maccioni² (samuele.maccioni@unimib.it), Manuela De Carlo³ (manuela.decarlo@iulm.it), Bruno Sfogliarini⁴ (bruno.sfogliarini@iulm.it)

Introduction & Problem Statement

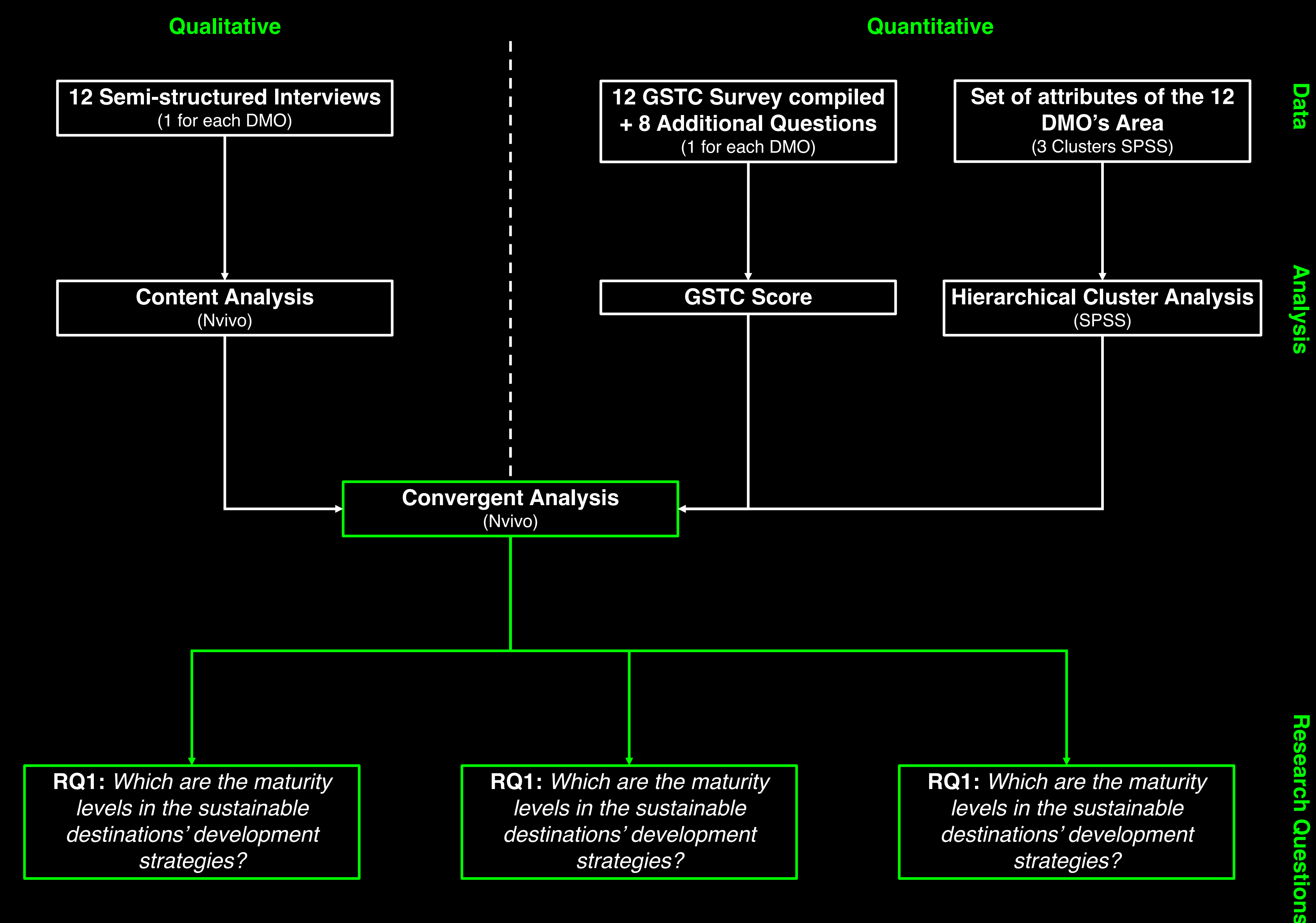
- > **Mountain lands** are more fragile and susceptible to change and degradation caused by **tourism** than other contexts (Shah & Wani, 2014);
 - Mountain areas constitute a significant part of the Italian and European territory;
 - One of the most relevant sources of earning and livelihood for the people in mountain areas is tourism;
- > Trentino Region, a well-known territory, worldwide recognized for its UNESCO Dolomites sites embodies exactly these **characteristics** and is facing exactly these **challenges**;
 - In 2022 there were more than 12 million overnights, of which 65% were domestic;
 - A recent reform assigned to 12 local DMOs (named APT – Agenzie per il turismo) significant managerial responsibilities in terms of tourism and sustainability of the territory.
- > These DMOs could play a fundamental and **crucial role** in the promotion of sustainable tourism by coordinating the different stakeholders and synergistically integrating sustainable practices (Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014);
 - However, DMOs must be aware of their role;
 - And also, they must work on the awareness of the impact they can generate with their actions.

Characteristics of the sample

Table 1. Hierarchical Cluster Analysis

Tourism clusters and areas	Number of enterprises p.c.	Administrative expenditures € p.c.	Touristicity tourists/inhabitants	Altitude mt	Urbanization 1 to 3 Index	% Tourism expenditures
Cluster 1	115	2.217	0,413	1.123	2,957	3,092
DMO B	134	2.070	0,542	1.320	3,000	3,53
DMO D	96	2.363	0,285	925	2,915	2,66
Cluster 2	89	1.577	0,160	791	2,978	1,194
DMO C	103	1.632	0,112	893	2,914	1,05
DMO I	87	1.456	0,180	707	3,000	0,85
DMO G	90	1.671	0,124	624	3,000	2,18
DMO A	75	1.547	0,225	940	3,000	0,70
Cluster 3	69	1.113	0,051	378	2,203	0,930
DMO K	70	1.083	0,037	689	2,699	0,41
DMO E	74	1.051	0,095	332	2,408	1,80
DMO F	61	1.000	0,122	249	2,445	1,09
DMO J	82	1.356	0,005	248	1,205	0,49
DMO L	62	1.051	0,045	505	2,325	1,17
DMO H	65	1.140	0,004	245	2,130	0,63

Research questions & Methodology



Findings and Discussion (RQ 1)

Table 2. DMO's Maturity Levels

Maturity Level	DMOs
4. Monitoring	DMO E, DMO A, DMO L
3. Action	DMO I, DMO K, DMO D, DMO G, DMO F
2. Agenda	DMO J
1. Awareness	DMO B, DMO C, DMO H

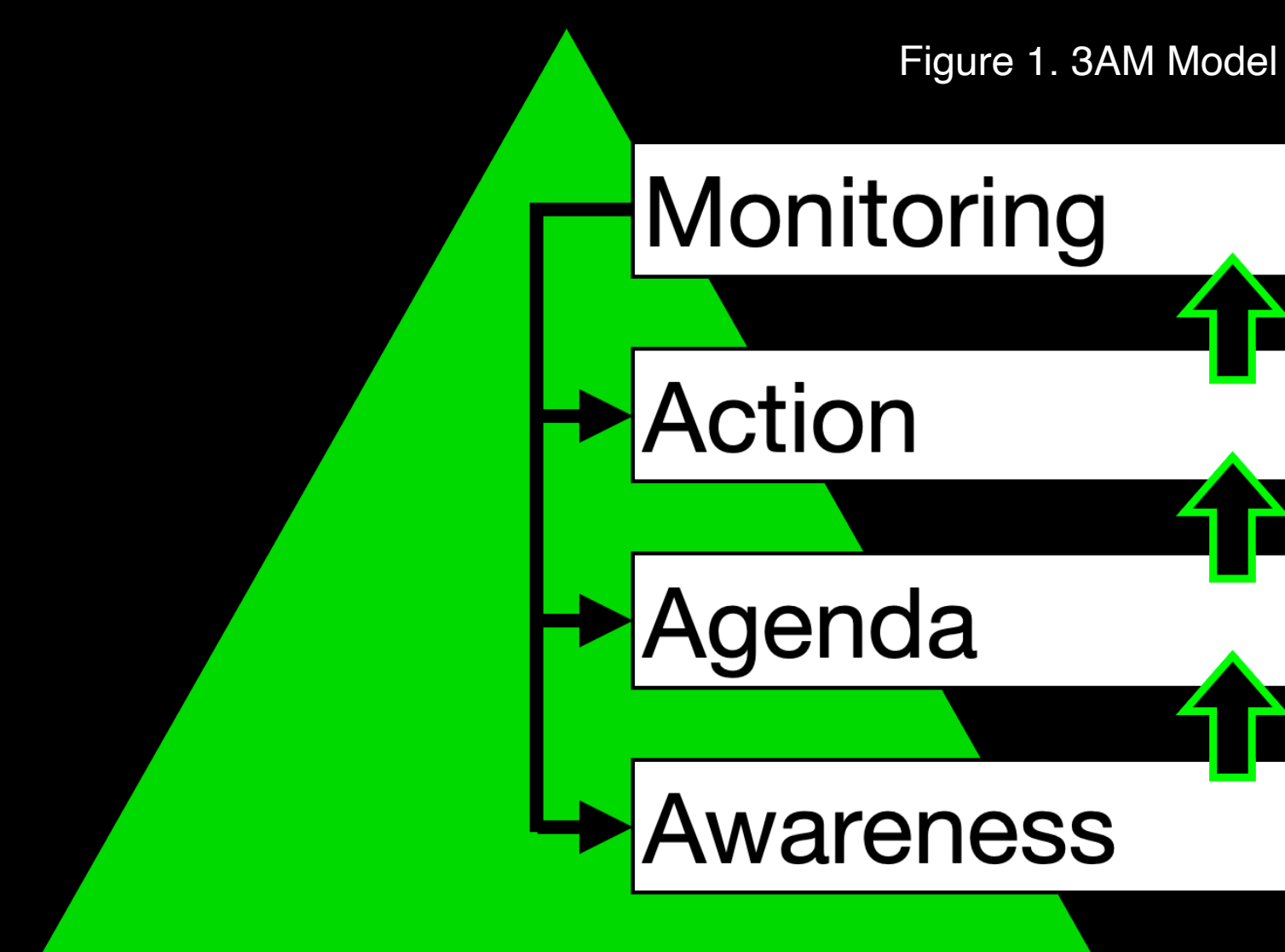
- > **Awareness level** was reached by all the DMOs investigated.
 - This stage is becoming more and more common as the historical, economic, political and environmental scenario pushes both the population and businesses to develop an awareness of the issue (Elkington, 2004)
- > **Agenda level** was not reached only by 3 DMOs.
 - However, drafting plans is much easier than their subsequent implementation into practice. In our opinion, the shift from the second level (agenda) to the third one (action) is **complex** because the results make clear that it requires **structured collective capabilities** (Sainaghi et al., 2019; Haugland 2011);
 - The synergetic and harmonious involvement of stakeholders is as key as it is complicated (Haid et al., 2021);
 - Moreover, DMOs having no hierarchical link with stakeholders nor any leverage over them must be able to engage them using different strategies;

Table 3. DMO's Stakeholder Analysis

	Municipalities	Tourism companies	Experience operators	Trade Associations	Private companies	Ski-lift companies	Mobility companies	Freelancers	Natural Parks
DMO B	X			X		X	X		
DMO C	X	X		X	X				
DMO I	X		X	X					
DMO D	X	X	X			X			
DMO K	X	X			X	X			
DMO G		X	X					X	X
DMO E	X		X			X		X	
DMO F	X	X	X					X	
DMO J	X	X	X	X			X		
DMO A	X	X	X	X	X				
DMO L	X	X			X		X		
DMO H	X	X			X				X
Total	11	9	7	5	5	4	3	3	2

- > The **Action level** was reached by 5 DMOs;
 - The actions implemented were focused on the three dimensions of the Triple Bottom Line (Elkington, 1999): Socio-Economic, Cultural and Environmental;
- > Although the **Action level** according to Mihalic's (2016) model represents the highest desirable level, our data collection revealed the fundamental role played by a fourth element to guarantee success in the long term, namely a phase of **monitoring and control of results**. Indeed, starting from the results of our analyses it emerged that... **Sustainability actions must be Sustained**.
- > Therefore we added a further dimension which, drawing on the literature on **organizational change**, we called the **Monitoring stage**. Therefore, we named the new model **3AM**.

Figure 1. 3AM Model



Findings and Discussion (RQ 2;3)

- > **DMOs role:**
 - They are placed in an enviable strategic position that confers as much power as responsibility.
- DMO E:** "DMOs in my opinion are in the middle ground, that's why on paper they should do this. If they want to they can reason and communicate with both the community and the guests, and on paper with proper leadership, they should do just that."
 - They play also a key role in the road towards the development of sustainable strategies;
- DMO D:** "All I can do is say, if we don't do it, who will?"
 - DMOs sustainable strategies must take into account all the actors in the territory, collaborate with them and increase their awareness towards the topic.
- DMO G:** "DMOs are very important, but they've to remember that they're not alone, to achieve great results they must collaborate with all the actors in the territory."
- > **Triggers:**
 - Although the realities analyzed belonged to the same territory and tended to have similar characteristics, the triggers and motivations that drove each DMO to take the road towards sustainability were several and of a different nature.
 - Within the sample analyzed we divided the triggers in internal and external (Mendizabal et al., 2021).

Table 4. Triggers towards Sustainability

External	Internal
Regulatory triggers - Laws - Certifications	Enabling Skills - Internal development of dynamic sustainability capabilities
Stress Tests - "Learning from disasters" - Storms, Draughts, Wildlife accidents	Identity - Making Sustainability an identity factor - Certifications
Awareness Triggers - Overtourism	

DMO J: "(Certification) Represent a purpose to scan the practices that are taking place in the area and to have an idea about what the different actors are doing."

DMO H: "The certification obliges to orchestrate the work with the other local entities creating synergies and chance for collaboration. Also in this case function as a goal to follow orienting the efforts."

DMO L: "[...] we really needed to find something that would differentiate the territory and everything else, and so at the time we began to think about the theme of sustainability."

Implications and Contributions

- An assessment of Trentino's DMOs maturity toward sustainability;
 - All Trentino's DMOs have reached basic awareness towards Sustainability;
 - Agenda-Setting and Actions towards sustainability are commons; there's room for improvement for DMOs stuck in the Awareness phase;
 - Three DMOs are already into more advanced monitoring practices;
- We propose to extend and improve Triple A's model (Mihalic, 2016) with the Monitoring stage;
- We shed light on the crucial role of DMOs as facilitators towards sustainability;
 - However, the recognition of DMOs as key players in the race for sustainability remains a work in progress.
- We identified some barriers to sustainability that DMOs must take into account;
 - Stakeholder's engagement;
 - Lack of resources;
- We identified some potential triggers that could enable DMOs path towards sustainability;
 - External triggers like regulation and certification generally drove strategy;
 - Internal triggers such as identity-based motivations were impactful internally;