

# *The “Pink Night” festival revisited: meta-events and the role of destination partnerships in staging event tourism*

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# The “Pink Night” Festival Revisited:

## Meta-events and the Role of Destination Partnerships in Staging Event Tourism

### *Abstract*

This paper adopts a managerial perspective to revisit an original case study of the "Pink Night" festival presented by Giovanardi et al. (2014) in an earlier issue of this journal. Our in-depth qualitative study contributes to the event tourism planning and management literature in three ways. First, we shed light on how and why competing Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) cooperate to plan, develop and manage event tourism. Second, we introduce and describe the brand new concept of the meta-event, which is the main theoretical contribution of this work. Third, we elucidate the role of meta-events as brand architecture tools to rebrand and reposition wide tourism areas. We illustrate the theoretical and managerial implications of the meta-event concept for event tourism studies and destination managers.

### **Key words:**

“Pink Night” festival, meta-event, event tourism, Destination Management Organisations, destination partnerships, event portfolio.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Demand for tourism activities has expanded dramatically worldwide over the last six decades (UNWTO, 2015). Meanwhile, globalisation in travel and business, technology development, and increased income allocated to travel have intensified competition between tourism destinations and among companies. In this context, destinations and their communities are challenged to find new ways to be competitive by providing compelling and memorable tourist experiences (e.g., Coghlan et al., 2012; Snepenger et al., 2004) while preserving their sense of place (Jamal and Getz, 1995). Historically, destinations have established Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) to attract visitors and market their destinations (Ward, 1995).

Their role is progressively more crucial in the current turbulent environment (Ashworth and Page, 2011; Pike and Page, 2014), and today they operate at different levels of government (nation, state and municipality) and uncover other roles, such as leadership and coordination, planning and research, product development, partnership and team-building and community relations (DCG, 2012; Morrison, 2013). In some countries, such as England, the public sector austerity cuts have led to a rationalisation and sometimes a reduction of DMOs (Pike and Page, 2014), while in other countries DMOs still play a major role. This is the case in Italy, where a decline in public expenditure for DMOs is pushing competing DMOs to search for partnerships to achieve common goals (such as developing new tourism products) by sharing costs.

Recent literature has described the way destinations strategically deploy events to attract visitors and encourage new spending, spread tourism geographically, combat seasonality, help urban and economic development, contribute to place marketing, branding and positioning and act as catalysts for development (Getz and Page, 2016). DMOs themselves increasingly plan and develop events. For example, a study on Canadian visitor and convention bureaus found events to be one of the few areas of product development engaged in by DMOs (Getz et al., 1998). However, most of the extant research has focused on how individual destinations plan, develop, manage and market their own events, overlooking the fact that destinations are increasingly aware that they can seize opportunities for collaboration and networking with nearby destinations to increase their scale and competitiveness in a globalised arena. In this vein, the “Pink Night” festival presented by Giovanardi et al. (2014) in an earlier issue of this journal constitutes an interesting example of how event tourism products can be jointly planned and developed by two or more nearby competing destinations in a wider tourism area.

Accordingly, this paper contributes to the literature on event tourism planning and management by further exploring the aforementioned case study. In their article, the authors adopt a sociological perspective grounded in performance and performativity (Cohen and Cohen, 2012) to analyse the event through participant observation in the form of “insider-ethnography” and conclude that “residents, tourists and tourism workers co-perform to shape, reproduce and coalesce with the place” (Giovanardi et al., 2014: 113). Their units of analysis are the practices and processes inherent in encounters between residents and tourists in a wide tourism area, including a number of different competing destinations/cities and administrative units, but they also implicitly draw conclusions also about the place where encounters take place and ultimately provide insights on tourists’ place experiences.

While we recognise the value of the insider-ethnographic research in shedding light on the social dynamics and outcomes of the festival (we also participated in the event), we believe that the way (i.e., the managerial processes) those outcomes were achieved remain confined to a closed and impenetrable black box. For example, the article by Giovanardi et al. (2014) does not clarify the managerial processes and decision-making that underpin the activities involved in staging the festival and ultimately lead to the creation of a “carnival-like atmosphere” where hosts and guests interact (*ibidem*). Our investigation uncovers another dimension of the place tourism experience related to the festival, based on the perspectives of the service providers, the DMOs and the hosting community. Accordingly, we describe what happens “behind the scenes” of the festival experience from a managerial point of view (Walls and Wang, 2011). This analysis allows us to contribute to the event tourism planning and management literature in several ways. First, we shed light on how and why

competing destinations (and their DMOs) deliberately cooperate to plan, develop and manage an event capable of generating positive economic and social outcomes while influencing tourist and resident experiences and behaviours. Additionally, we partially address the issue of the “simultaneous use of competitive and collaborative strategies in tourism planning and destination management by organisational stakeholders” (Jamal and Getz, 1995: 200), beyond the boundaries of an individual destination and with specific emphasis on event tourism. Second, we deploy the “Pink Night” festival to introduce, define and explain the concept of a *meta-event* (i.e., a tourism product involving complex layers of organisational and spatial collaboration between competing destinations) which is the main theoretical contribution of the paper. This brand new concept is discussed in relation to the event portfolio model of a destination (Getz, 2005). Third, we elucidate the role of *meta-events* as brand architecture tools for competing DMOs willing to leverage their event portfolio cooperatively to rebrand and reposition wide tourism areas.

## **2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

In this section, after critically illustrating the findings of a recent study on the “Pink Night” festival (Giovanardi et al., 2014) in relation to event tourism and tourism destinations, we review the literature on event tourism planning, management and marketing. In particular, we focus on the relationship between event tourism and destination partnerships on one hand and event tourism and destination branding on the other.

### **2.1 Event tourism and destinations in the “Pink Night” Festival**

The analysis of the “Pink Night” festival carried out by Giovanardi et al. (2014) significantly contributes to the well-established sociological tradition in events and festival studies (for a review, see Cohen and Cohen, 2012). In their study, the authors conducted an insider ethnography of the event based on participant observation carried out over a four-day period in the summer of 2011 in the municipality of Rimini (Italy). Based on a sociological perspective grounded in performance and performativity (Edensor, 2001; Cohen and Cohen, 2012) as part of an inclusive ecology recognising the interrelations between the elements constituting a place and that are “in play” (Allsopp, 2000), they suggest that “residents, tourists and tourism workers co-perform to shape, reproduce and coalesce with the place” (Giovanardi et al., 2014, p. 113). Interestingly, they emphasise both the role of physical encounters of residents and tourists (i.e., the embodiment of tourism experiences through corporealised co-performance) and the role of place for the tourism experience. Overall, they implicitly suggest that important relationships exist between three elements: the event, the place or destination and the tourism experience interpreted as the co-performance of residents and tourists.

Having performed a participant observation of two editions of the event ourselves, we recognise the value of the conclusions reached by Giovanardi et al. (2014) in terms of the perceived social dynamics relating to the event. However, we believe that the observed social practices and processes that substantiate the festival experience cannot be fully understood without analysing their planning and managerial antecedents. The institutional and organisational context which triggered the event is completely missing in Giovanardi et al.'s research. In line with the socio-cultural approaches to destination marketing and management (Saraniemi and Kylanden; 2011) we recognise that production and consumption create spatiality and connect people by contextualising their experiences, and that places and destinations are storehouses of meanings that frame expectations for tourism and resident experiences (Snepenger et al., 2004). In this vein, recent studies have revealed that positive tourism event experiences seem inextricably linked to a positive tourism destination experience. For instance, Lee et al. (2012) found that satisfied festival visitors develop a moderate level of emotional attachment to the festival host destination and ultimately become loyal to that destination. Accordingly, we maintain that to fully understand the event tourism experience, it is necessary to shift the unit of analysis from the social practices and processes to the destinations (Lew, 1987; Saraniemi and Kylanden, 2011) and the DMOs actually staging the event.

While we do not suggest that there is a direct causality between the festival's planning and managerial activities and the effectiveness of the host-guest co-performance described by Giovanardi et al. (2014), we believe that certain features of the festival experiences described are closely related to the managerial activities undertaken by the hosting communities and DMOs. The plural, 'communities' and 'DMOs', should be used here as a number of different stakeholders belonging to different provinces and municipalities from a wide geographic area in the Northern part of Italy conjointly staged the event. Opening up the black box of the festival's 'behind the scenes' managerial processes, our study contributes to the literature on event tourism planning and management, by providing further context and explanation of the role of collaboration between 'host' communities represented by competing DMOs as they form an event tourism partnership. Accordingly, we propose a complementary analysis of the complexity of the issues related to event, by uncovering a dimension of event tourism based on the perspective of the providers and not on the analysis of the customers (Manthiou et al., 2014).

## **2.2. Planning, developing, managing and marketing event tourism**

### ***2.2.1 Event tourism and destination partnerships***

Cooperation, collaboration, networks and public-private partnerships play a paramount role in the fragmented tourism field where multiple stakeholders interact with each other (Bramwell, 2011; Hall, 2011; Jamal and Getz, 1995; Palmer and Bejou, 1995; Scott et al., 2008; Sheehan and Ritchie, 2005). As

suggested by D'Angella and Go (2009), extant studies have mostly viewed cooperation and collaboration within a destination as a way to: 1) increase competitiveness (e.g., Bornhorst, Ritchie and Sheehan, 2010; Selin and Beason, 1991); 2) gather consensus and make firms' and institutions' strategies converge towards the same goals (e.g. Bramwell and Sharman, 1999; Jamal and Getz, 1995; Pforr, 2006). Tourism policy itself is increasingly conceived as a process of negotiation between public and private sector actors that pool resources, knowledge, skills and competencies within complex governance arrangements (Dredge, 2006; Dredge and Jamal, 2015). Most of the research mentioned above refers to collaboration inside individual destinations, while networks encompassing multiple destinations, though conceptualised (Spyriadis et al., 2011), have not been empirically investigated. To our knowledge, investigations on interorganisational collaboration when different competing destinations cooperate with the conjoint goal of tourism planning and development have been neglected to a certain extent.

More recently, Morrison (2013) has defined "destination partnership" as "a synergistic relationship between a DMO and other organisations or individuals within or *outside* a destination" (Morrison, 2013: p. 191) [emphasis added]. This definition well describes initiatives such as the Silk Road Programme coordinated by the UNWTO, an emblematic example bringing together 28 National Tourism Organisations from Italy in the West to Japan in the East, with the aim of creating an internationally renowned, seamless travel experience (UNWTO, 2013; Morrison, 2013). We embrace Morrison's (2013) destination partnership definition as a working definition to investigate the role of partnerships between different DMOs active in competing destinations in jointly planning event tourism. Indeed, we address relationships where competition and cooperation co-exist. So far, these relationships have been investigated only inside destinations (Wang and Krakover, 2008; Czernek and Czakon, 2016) but not between destinations.

In event tourism, partnerships, collaborations and networks have been studied starting from the first half of the 2000s (e.g., Getz et al., 2007; Larson, 2009; Mackellar and Nisbet, 2015; Stokes, 2006; Whitford, 2004). More specifically, a few scholars have adopted an inter-organisational relationships approach (Stokes, 2006), including other networks (Larson, 2009; Scott et al., 2008) and stakeholders' theories (Getz et al., 2007) to describe the organisations and individuals involved in staging and managing events. Building on management literature dealing with networks (see Håkansson and Snehota, 1995), a growing body of research has investigated the role of sporting event networks (for instance, see Cobbs and Hylton, 2012; Ericson and Kushner, 1999; Mackellar and Nisbet, 2015).

In the burgeoning literature dealing with festivals (e.g., Backman et al., 1995; Crompton and McKay, 1997; Duvignaud, 1976; Picard and Robinson, 2006), Getz and Andersson (2010) analysed the relevance of different stakeholders (public, private, customers, suppliers) in festivals taking place in

four countries: Sweden, Norway, Scotland, and Australia and found that the public sector was uniformly perceived as very relevant. When mentioning the Hans Christian Andersen festival, Stokes (2006) underlines that the event exemplifies the relevance of a network structure embracing business, government and community to create and market an international tourism attraction.

Festivals, like many other events, emphasise the importance of policies fostering collaboration among tourism stakeholders to support event tourism development and governance (Dredge and Withford, 2011). Research conducted in Australia at the state and municipality level provides evidence of the relevance of event development agencies and event tourism policies and programs as tools in regional development (Dredge and Withford, 2011; Whitford, 2004). Governments are now increasingly involved in event planning and management, both by facilitating the bidding for and staging of events, and by protecting broader public interests (Dredge and Withford, 2011; Dredge and Jamal, 2015; Phi, Dredge and Withford, 2014; Stokes, 2006; Withford, 2009). In particular, Stokes (2006) shows that an established network, including community representatives and sometimes a development agency, was present in the few states whose tourism departments planned events.

We believe that the “Pink Night” festival’s revisitation proposed here provides further international empirical evidence on the importance of DMOs and local governments in the collaborative planning and management of event tourism. It addresses the need for more case studies and cross-case analysis of event planning and destination strategies (see Getz and Page, 2016) in light of the variety of real-world cases and situations, and of the observation that events are one of the few areas of product development engaged in by DMOs (Getz, Anderson, and Sheehan, 1998). Additionally, revisiting the festival allows us to address the “simultaneous use of competitive and collaborative strategies in tourism planning and destination management by organisational stakeholders” (Jamal and Getz, 1995: 200) in event tourism. More explicitly, despite the fact that destinations and, more specifically, municipalities compete for scarce funds and to attract private investment while perceiving risks in collaborating for tourism planning (Jamal and Getz, 1995), examinations of how and why different competing DMOs and the respective destinations collaborate in event tourism planning has been neglected in the existing tourism management literature.

### ***2.2.2 Event tourism and events portfolio***

The analysis of events portfolio is of direct relevance for event tourism planning and management as an increasing number of DMOs plan, manage and market a significant number of events (see Getz, 2005, 2008; Ziakis, 2010; Ziakas, 2013). The portfolio model was normatively introduced by Getz (Getz, 2005), who used the metaphor of a pyramid to describe the bundle of events planned in a destination. The pyramid consists of four layers/tiers:



1. Local events (base of the pyramid): these can be either one-time or periodic events that are characterised by low tourism demand and low value. They are, by definition, embedded in one place and appeal mostly to residents.
2. Regional events (second tier of the pyramid): these can be either one-time or periodic events that are characterised by medium tourism demand and medium value. They are rooted in one place and appeal mostly to residents and a few tourists.
3. Periodic “hallmark” events (third tier of the pyramid): these can be repeated events that are characterised by high tourism demand and high value. Different definitions have been provided for hallmark events (Ritchie, 1984; Hall, 1989). According to Ritchie (1984), they are events of limited duration and are developed to boost the awareness, appeal and profitability of a tourism destination. They typically include World Expositions, unique carnivals and festivals, major sporting events, significant cultural and religious events and historical milestones. Hall (1989) underlines that hallmark events are of international status and provide the host community with “an opportunity to secure high prominence in the tourism market place” (Hall, 1989: 263) and can be considered as “image builders of modern tourism” (Hall, 1992: 1). Getz (2005) deploys the term to describe events able to contribute to image creating, place marketing and destination branding as their tradition, attractiveness and quality can generate a competitive advantage for the community or destination.
4. Occasional mega-events (apex of the pyramid): these are one-off events characterised by high tourism demand and high value. They typically include events such as the Olympics and World Soccer Championships.

Based on the types of events included in the “pyramid”, Getz (2005, 2008) has suggested that host communities and destinations can adopt and develop a portfolio of events of different types and scales. An event portfolio is “the strategic patterning of disparate but interrelated events taking place during the course of a year in a host community that, as a whole, is intended to achieve multiple outcomes through the implementation of joint event strategies” (Ziakas, 2013: 14).

Adopting a portfolio approach to events might allow a destination to strategically manage event tourism for destination branding by assessing the value of different events, identifying and targeting multiple market segments and trying to place events at different times of the year according to environmental conditions (e.g., Chalip, 2004; Chalip and Costa, 2005). For instance, Chalip (2004) suggests that, rather than focusing on single sport events, each event needs to be cross-leveraged with others in the host community’s portfolio to maximise intended outcomes. Ziakis (2010) conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the rural community of Fort Stockton, Texas, and observed that the local government did not carry out any strategic planning. Consequently, uncertainty arose regarding the

optimal number of events as well as the effects of new events on old ones. This uncertainty did not allow events in the portfolio to be cross-leveraged and prevented the local government from augmenting the portfolio value, in contrast with the desired outcomes of an event portfolio, whose theoretical underpinnings can be ascribed to asset management theory (O'Toole, 2011).

Getz and Page (2016) have comprehensively reviewed the extant literature on event portfolios and have proposed a destination-perspective on event tourism wherein each tourism destination and the respective DMO can assess the benefits and value stemming from the events and their costs in terms of public funding. While valuable and interesting from a conceptual point of view, the events portfolio model seems to display a few theoretical and empirical limitations. For instance, it does not help to make sense of events that are conjointly planned, developed and managed by multiple destinations. Moreover, it has been empirically tested only once so far with reference to festivals held in three different Norwegian counties (Andersson, Getz and Mykletun, 2013). However, the focus is still on how individual destinations and their respective DMOs plan and develop their own events. Through the managerial analysis of the "Pink Night" festival, we introduce and describe the *meta-event* concept, whose theoretical and managerial value addresses the question of how an event portfolio model can be conjointly leveraged by two or more competing destinations (and host communities) to develop, plan, manage and market an event.

### ***2.2.3 Event tourism and destination branding***

Destination branding literature was initiated in the mid-nineties, mirroring the importance of branding within the destination marketing function of most DMOs (Morgan, Pritchard and Pride, 2004). Accordingly, destination (or place) branding has been portrayed as a practical field in which brand strategy and management are applied to places, such as towns, cities, regions and countries (Anholt, 2004), and a number of definitions have been provided. Destination branding can be defined as "the set of marketing activities that: (1) support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that readily identifies and differentiates a destination; that (2) consistently convey the expectation of a memorable travel experience; that (3) serve to consolidate and reinforce the emotional connection between the visitor and the destination; and that (4) reduce consumer search costs and perceived risk. Collectively, these activities serve to create a destination image that positively influences consumer destination choice" (Blain, Levy and Ritchie, 2005: 337), and destination image is defined as "any idea, belief, feeling or attitude that tourists associate with the place" (Bigné et al., 2009: 716).

The destination branding process consists of three elements: the destination brand identity (the image aspired to in the tourism marketplace for the destination); destination brand image (the actual image held of the brand by tourists); and brand positioning, consisting of the marketing communication

activities to have brand identity overlap with brand image. Designing, planning and communicating a brand identity for a destination is not a simple process. In fact, its “key challenges lay in: 1) effectively engaging the host community in the brand identity development, 2) agreeing on a focused direction with a diverse and eclectic range of active stakeholders, which is not only inspirational but also feasible, and then 3) harnessing their cooperation in collaboratively supporting the brand positioning required to communicate the brand identity” (Pike and Page, 2014: 212). Research relating to the latter item represents a major research gap (Pike and Page, 2014), and our paper contributes to fill in this gap from an event tourism perspective.

Event tourism can be viewed as a strategic area of tourism and place branding praxis upon which to develop unique selling propositions that differentiate the destination from its competitors (Getz and Page, 2016). A relevant body of research has addressed the capability for events to enhance destination image, improve place marketing effectiveness and reposition a destination or urban area (Boo and Busser, 2006; Ferreira and Donaldson, 2013; Kim et al., 2009; Kim et al., 2014; Kolb, 2006; Richards and Palmer, 2010; Ritchie, Sanders, and Mules, 2006). For instance, Kim et al. (2014) conducted a pre-post study on the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and suggest that a better focus should have been placed on establishing a strong positive destination image linked to the event when planning an integrated image marketing strategy. Arellano (2011) examined how the staging of the New France Festival helped the branding of the Province of Quebec; Chalip and Costa (2006) focused on how sporting event tourism can be internalised into destination branding.

The concept of umbrella branding for macro regions, such as countries and states, to design an identity that will also subsume and suit regional brands has been explored (see Crockett and Wood, 1999; D’Angella and Go, 2009). Accordingly, based on place branding literature (Dooley and Bowie, 2005), brand architecture has recently advanced as a way of structuring and organising portfolios of brands by different destinations. Datzira-Masip and Poluzzi (2014) suggest that, to be effective, a brand strategy must be shared by all the stakeholders involved in the definition of their tourist destination brand strategy and consequently an appropriate brand architecture model should: “1) cope with each destination’s vision on a long-term basis; 2) assign a priority of customer segments and target markets for each brand; 3) fill in the supply and demand gaps among the brands, without overlaps; 4) define strategies to effectively address the prioritised segments and markets” (Datzira-Masip and Poluzzi, 2014: 58). Our paper provides empirical evidence on how event tourism portfolios, when adopted through a *meta-event*, can support an effective brand architecture model aligning competing destinations and enabling them to rebrand and reposition a wider tourism area, thus enhancing their competitiveness.

### 3. METHODOLOGY AND EMPIRICAL SETTING

#### The Pink Night Festival of the Riviera di Romagna

The empirical setting of our analysis consists of the Riviera di Romagna, a coastal area located in the Northern part of the Italian Adriatic Coast. It is shared by the neighbouring provinces of Ferrara, Forlì-Cesena, Ravenna and Rimini, and includes some 50 municipalities, extending from Comacchio in the North to Cattolica in the South (see Figure 1). These destinations (at both the province and municipality levels) are competing with each other to attract tourists and stimulate their spending.

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Insert Figure 1 about here  
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The epicentre of the area, the municipality of Rimini, developed a dense network of hotels and hospitality businesses between the two World Wars to meet the demands of elite and well-off middle class tourists. Mass tourism developed immediately after WWII, particularly during the Italian economic boom of the 60s (Battilani and Fauri, 2009). Since then, the Riviera has remained one of the most popular tourism areas in Italy, with 5,869,125 arrivals and 29,338,657 overnight guests in 2013, of which 3,147,464 arrivals and 15,504,706 overnight guests were in the Rimini province alone (ISTAT, 2014). The mass tourism in the Riviera di Romagna was undermined in the 1980s by the eutrophication of the Adriatic Sea and the ensuing growth of algae (Becheri, 1991; Giovanardi et al., 2014). As a consequence, both local tourism policy makers and entrepreneurs decided to invest in leisure, entertainment activities and related facilities, such as nightclubs and discos, turning Rimini in particular into the “trendy disco capital of Italy” (Battilani, 2009, p.113). Consequently, most of the destination branding of the Riviera since the 1980s has revolved around the idea of nightlife and transgression.

Nevertheless, even this new characterisation of the tourism area was not able to counterbalance an overall decline in tourism arrivals, and, in the mid-2000s, the tourism department of the province of Rimini launched a new product: the “Pink Night” festival (La Notte Rosa).

In this paper, we present the case to capture how and why different competing destinations (and their DMOs) deliberately cooperate to plan, manage and develop an event able to generate positive economic and social outcomes while influencing tourist and resident experiences and behaviours.

The festival, labelled the “New Year’s Eve of the Summer”, is a thematic event which occurs during the first weekend of July. It is a collection of coordinated, synchronised and intertwined events taking place in the Riviera di Romagna’s 110 kilometres of coastline. The festival displays a distinctive feature: the pink colour, “the colour of relationships and hospitality”, with a “feminine connotation” (promotional brochure, Giovanardi et al., 2014: 106). By leveraging the culture of hospitality of the Riviera di Romagna, the 8<sup>th</sup> edition of the festival (which occurred in 2013) recorded

almost 2 million participants, with estimated proceeds of approximately 200 million Euros (APT, 2013). The festival offers a unique empirical context in which to study the role of partnerships between DMOs in designing and developing event tourism.

### **Data collection**

The research approach adopted in this analysis is largely exploratory and builds on a case study (Eisenhardt, 1989). We embraced a longitudinal perspective (Pettigrew, 1990) to better investigate the “stages and implementation of the collaboration process...()...with an attention paid to the development of appropriate structures for ongoing management of the planning domain” (Jamal and Getz, 1995: 200). For this reason, data were gathered by two researchers over 4 years (from May 2010 to April 2014) to shed light on the role of partnerships between competing DMOs in conjointly staging event tourism. Two researchers were involved in the study: one of them is a permanent resident of the Riviera di Romagna region (in the municipality of Riccione), while the second commutes almost daily to the local university campus (in Rimini). A number of research techniques were used, ranging from the analysis of archival data and interviews to observation.

### *Interviews*

In the initial stage of the project, we conducted four in-depth and informal open interviews with the founder of the Festival, its Coordinator, one representative of the regional DMO and one representative of the Rimini province DMO (currently involved in the steering committee and technical table of the event). Both the researchers have collaborated with public and private sector organisations in the Riviera di Romagna region for the last decade and are well acquainted with the tourism industry in the area under analysis as well as a few relevant DMO and Local Tourism Organisation (LTO) managers: consequently, we had a preferential access to key informants and data. Interviews aimed at understanding the major managerial and organisational features of the festival and the rationale for collaboration between different competing destinations and municipalities. After the initial interviews, with the help of our informants, we selected 22 individuals involved in planning and managing the festival to participate semi-structured interviews. The interviewees ranged from representatives of the DMOs involved in initiating and planning the festival, to representatives of professional associations in the local tourism industry as well as a small number of entrepreneurs who had provided the original backing to the initiative (hoteliers and managers of restaurants and entertainment facilities). While the private sector respondents might appear underrepresented, we also participated in 15 official and unofficial meetings and events related to the planning and decision-making processes associated with the festival, which allowed us to interact informally with a large number of entrepreneurs and

representatives of professional associations. Interviews aimed at understanding the rationale for collaboration between organisations (both public and private) belonging to the different competing destinations, the evolution of collaboration and the major features of the design, planning and management of the festival. These interviews were important in giving voice to the destination managers, marketers and stakeholders involved in the Festival.

Details about the interviewees, as well as about the destinations, are available in Table 1. We conducted all the interviews in person in the four provinces involved in staging the festival (Ferrara, Forlì-Cesena, Ravenna, Rimini). Each interview lasted between 1 and 2.5 hours and was audio-recorded and transcribed with nearly verbatim notes (see Table 1).

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### *Observation*

Three editions of the festival (2011-2013) were the object of non-participant observation. They involved approximately 15 official and unofficial meetings and events related to the planning and decision-making processes associated with the festival. The two researchers also carried out participant observation of the executive part of the aforementioned editions of the festival. Our main reason for using the participant observation method was to gain a fine-grained personal insight of the meanings and values that the attendees of the “Pink Night” festival link to the event itself (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Field notes were taken and included in a journal. Participant observation also helped us to appreciate the social outcomes of the festival described by Giovanardi et al. (2014).

### *Archival data*

We used archival sources, published information and sector studies released by the local and regional tourism authorities and tourism associations of the provinces and municipalities under consideration. We also used press releases, leaflets, pamphlets, brochures and reports generated by the regional DMO, the province and municipal DMOs and the LTOs about the festival. Document data offered us detailed, written information and concrete examples on the partnership activities related to the “Pink Night” festival (Apt Emilia Romagna, 2006; 2014). Both observations and archival data integrated interviews and were employed to gain a deeper and richer understanding of the setting being studied.

### ***Data analysis and triangulation***

Inspired by Corley and Gioia (2004) and Mattarelli and Tagliaventi (2015), we analysed the data collected from interviews, observations and documents following a three-step coding process and

used the NVIVO 10 software application. In the first stage, we gained a comprehensive overview of our data by reading all the field notes and archival data. Each researcher independently coded the field note transcripts through NVIVO by separately identifying terms and patterns in the data and clustering them into categories or first-order concepts. We held joint meetings on a regular basis to examine batches of two or three transcripts and discuss our independent coding. This first stage allowed us to agree upon first-order concepts. The original language, Italian, was used.

In the second stage, each researcher separately searched for relationships among first-order concepts, both manually and through NVIVO. More specifically, we grouped convergent categories at a higher level of abstraction, thus identifying second-order themes (see the first column in Figure 2). We met to compare the second-order themes identified manually and through NVIVO and reconciled disagreements through discussion.

Overall, we identified the following aggregate theoretical dimensions: use of event tourism to rebrand a tourism area, DMO partnerships across competing destinations to reposition a wider tourism area, meta-events as part of the event portfolio of multiple DMOs, brand architecture aligning competing destinations at the tourism area level and increased competitiveness of the tourism area (see the second column of Figure 2). Moreover, based on the triangulation of our participant observation and the paper by Giovanardi et al. (2014), we crafted a further aggregate theoretical dimension, which is the potential impact on the tourism experience and host-guest co-performance in the tourism area. Finally, we looked for links between our second-order themes and between aggregate theoretical dimensions (see the discussion section). Through the coding process, we adopted an iterative approach to data comparison and contrast (Miles and Huberman, 1994) and considered an extensive collection of literature, ranging from inter-organisational relationships, destination partnerships and networks, event tourism planning, management and marketing, as well as the paper by Giovanardi et al. (2014). When a theme emerged either from the data or from the literature, we analysed the other to see if the theme was present, to justify its absence or to find differences.

The triangulation resulting from multiple data sources reduces construct validity problems and the risk of retrospectively imposing meaning on historical events based on knowledge of the outcomes (Jick, 1979; Yin, 1994). We tested the construct validity of our overall coding scheme, selecting a random sample of our data (equalling 20% of all the transcripts). The inter-rater agreement for the overall coding scheme of second order themes and aggregate theoretical dimensions was 85.67, while the Cohen's kappa (Cohen, 1960) was 0.81. The two researchers then discussed the themes and dimensions they were in disagreement on and updated the coding scheme accordingly. Afterward, each of them independently coded 50% of the field note transcripts.

## 4. FINDINGS

This section is divided into four subsections. The first section is related to the description of the planning, development and managing of the “Pink Night” festival as a conjoint initiative undertaken by the four competing destinations under analysis. The second one builds on the notion of using an events portfolio to introduce the brand-new concept of a *meta-event*. The third one describes how meta-events can be strategically deployed by nearby competing destinations in a comprehensive brand architecture to rebrand entire tourist areas. The fourth and final section presents a conceptual model wherein we elucidate the links between the theoretical constructs emerging from our data structure.

### ***4.1 Event tourism and destination partnerships: the role of DMOs partnerships in staging the “Pink Night” festival***

Based on the data collected, we identified three stages in the event’s ten-year evolution: 1) the inception of the event occurred in 2005 under the aegis of the Rimini DMO Province; 2) the emergence of a coordination structure led by the DMO of the Rimini province, which progressively involved other provincial DMOs in the wider Riviera di Romagna area (2007-2009); 3) the formalisation of the partnerships between provincial DMOs via articulation of the *Steering Committee* and the *Technical Table* (2010-present).

#### *Stage 1: The inception of the event and its first edition (2005-2006)*

Drawing his inspiration partially from the traditional format of the “White Night” or “nuit blanche”, the Head of the Rimini province DMO initially conceived the “Pink Night” festival with the ambitious strategic objective to:

“...reposition not only Rimini, but the entire Riviera di Romagna and its municipalities in the tourism market[...] Until the end of the nineties, Rimini has been associated with transgression – alcohol, drugs, fights in night clubs, and youngsters dying in car accidents early in the morning [...]. [I wanted] to get rid of the stereotype of Rimini as a place for pure transgression, providing a new image of the destination as a place where everyone, not just teenagers, can enjoy and have fun, healthy fun...We decided to advertise it [the Pink Night] as the “New Year’s Eve of the Summer”, an event which should involve everyone and should bring a smile to everyone ... (Founder of the Festival and Head of the Rimini DMO in 2005-2006)”

The theme emphasised “pink” as the colour of genuine human relationships, the “colour of women and children” (Founder of the event), and the event was organised for the first Saturday of July, when “the high season should be boosted [...] a good start of July in terms of arrivals and overnights typically is a good signal also for the customers in August [...] when Rimini starts well the season the news are spread by the media and this creates buzz and new arrivals (Coordinator of the Festival).”

For the very first edition of the festival, the initiation, planning and promotional activities were largely carried out by the DMO of the Province of Rimini. The vision of the initiator of the



event was informally shared in a relatively short time with a few stakeholders of the local tourism industry of the Rimini province, such as the professional association of the hoteliers in the Rimini province that immediately endorsed the event and provided some funding as they believed

“It was just the first edition of something new and there was a lot of risk associated but Mr. G [the founder] knew well the industry and entertainment events entrepreneurs so why not giving him a chance? In the end he was also the Head of the Rimini DMO and had done well before... (President of the Rimini professional hoteliers’ association).”

The convener, leveraging his authority as Head of the Rimini Province DMO, and an official of the province of Rimini, leveraging her experience in the tourism sector, initiated and facilitated collaboration among the different stakeholders inside the Rimini municipality, within the province of Rimini and finally between the four DMOs of the Rimini, Ferrara, Ravenna and Forlì-Cesena provinces. Interestingly, the convener knew, in some cases personally, the key tourism players to involve, mainly representatives of professional associations in the hospitality and entertainment sectors and DMO directors as well:

“We are good friends with Mr. G. When he shared with me the idea in a first informal meeting over dinner I was enthusiastic ... but the day after I thought this could be beneficial especially for Rimini which has a stronger tradition in entertainment. However I was aware that if we had not participated we would have lost tourists or had our hotel guests and even residents go to Rimini...[...]...it was better to play the game, putting some resources on the table with Rimini and the other DMOs and follow the lead of Mr. G. (Head Forlì-Cesena DMO).”

It seemed that the “Pink Night” could be at least an interesting collaborative marketing opportunity for the Rimini destination and for other competing destinations nearby as well.

The DMO of Rimini decided to stage three major concerts and a few other smaller events. In the beginning, the coordinator assembled the convener’s ideas and only partially integrated them with a few inputs coming from the informal interactions with the Directors of the competing DMOs. At that moment, there was no specific rule in place to make decisions. Most of the proposals came from the Rimini DMO and reached immediate consensus was reached among the other DMOs. The first edition of the festival (held in 2006) attracted almost 1 million visitors and was so successful that both the public and private stakeholders decided to develop it further.

#### *Stage 2: The emergence of a coordination structure led by the municipality and province of Rimini (2007-2009)*

In the period from the second edition (held in 2007) through the fifth edition (held in 2010), a coordination structure led by the municipality and province of Rimini emerged. At this stage, the DMOs of both the municipality and province of Rimini played major roles, acting also as artistic directors of the festival. In 2010, the DMO of Rimini agreed with the other competing DMOs and the regional DMO to formally constitute two coordinating entities: the Steering Committee (SC) and the Technical Table (TT).

The SC, made up of the most relevant public and private stakeholders of the tourism sector in the Riviera di Romagna, was created to strike a balance

“...between the different interests of the local Destination Management Organisations and professional associations willing to participate in the project. We must 1) determine and communicate the date of the event; 2) approve some general guidelines for all of the destinations involved (such as decorations in pink, 24 hour openings of all private and public companies during the event, pink lighting for all the roads, pink coordinated fireworks across all the municipalities at midnight); 3) determine the budget to invest for promotion; 4) allocate competences with reference to communication, fund-raising, sponsorship, and development of tourism packages; and 5) constitute the Technical Table (CEO regional DMO and member of the Steering Committee).”

The SC, which has kept its organisational structure unchanged since 2010, includes the following 14 members: two members each for the four DMOs of the provinces of Rimini, Ferrara, Ravenna and Forlì-Cesena; three members of the Union of Product Coast<sup>1</sup>; three members of the regional DMO APT Servizi.

The SC meets at least three times a year, in September (to close the previous edition and initiate/plan the ensuing edition), December and March (to assess the state of the implementation of events). The SC represents a major overarching coordination entity, which contributes to bring together partners' contributions and actively manages task interdependencies. Indeed, the Coordinator of the Union Product Coast told us:

“For the first edition of the Pink Night we were very much in line with the ideas expressed by the two members of the Rimini DMO. Since then, they have been acting as *a primus inter pares*. However, the majority rule was applied, and consensus was often achieved immediately among the stakeholders (Coordinator of the Union Product Coast).”

The SC acted mainly for the strategic purposes of the cooperative venture and created the Technical Table (TT). The TT is a collegial body in charge of the coordination of the event. It is headed by the coordinator of the first edition of the “Pink Night” festival, who is now recognised as “The Coordinator”. During our interview, she explained: “So to speak, I am together with Mr. G the ‘history’ of this event and I have an important say in the decisions of the Technical Table, which is a kind of ‘Art Director’ of the Festival (Coordinator of the Festival and Technical Table, 2006-2016).”

Her role has consolidated over time and made her a distinctive resource for the effectiveness of the event partnerships as the event planning “...requires continuous dialogue with the other DMOs and professional associations, and now I have understood that the more the event is capillary diffused in the other destinations, the better it is, and the better it is marketed (Coordinator of the Festival and Technical Table, 2006-2016).”

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<sup>1</sup> It includes more than 100 companies

The TT is responsible for the following tasks: receiving strategic input from the SC and transferring proposals to the SC; planning the festival and collaborating to identify the edition's theme; determining the timing and organisational methodology of the festival and communicating this to the provinces and municipalities involved; identifying the coordinated image of the festival for promotion; defining the macro-structure of the festival in terms of the program and providing proposals on the artistic choices that are consistent with the identified theme and ensuring a balanced distribution of the events in terms of locations and times; supporting the individual municipalities in the identification of the events to include in their own local schedule, in the inception phase for individual events, collection of information and optimising resources and opportunities; gathering periodically (at least once a month) to double check that the timeline is being respected, to share the work and to resolve any issues that may arise; collecting the analytical accounting reports from the provinces and laying down an overall report for the activities carried out and the objectives achieved by including figures and statistics.

The TT consists of six members: the coordinator for the DMO of Rimini, a representative each for the three DMOs of Ravenna, Ferrara, and Forlì, the Union of Product Coast, and APT Servizi. Decisions are made based on majority rule, but the coordinator of the DMO of Rimini has the final say.

At this stage, the TT already included the four provinces of the Riviera di Romagna destination, but Rimini acted as a *primus inter pares*, and the other provinces conformed to Rimini's guidelines and decisions.

### *Stage 3: The partnerships between the provincial DMOs of the Riviera di Romagna (2010-present)*

The third stage of development of the Pink Night is characterised by a few relevant features:

- 1) austerity measures and cuts of public funding for DMOs in tandem with the financial crisis, strengthen the cooperation between the destinations as they can pool resources for events and tourism development;
- 2) the paramount role played originally by the Rimini DMO (particularly as an artistic director) is replaced by a more balanced situation in which all of the provincial DMOs, after some experience working together, achieve equal weight in the decision-making processes inside the SC and the TT. However, Rimini continues to play an important role in coordinating the TT and as the CEO of the regional DMO,

“...the coordinator has the task to transfer the know-how accumulated by the Rimini DMO in developing tourism, events and entertainment products to other DMOs[...] Now that the festival is

established she also makes sure rather informally that the other DMOs of Ferrara, Cesena and Ravenna do not underspend (CEO regional DMO and member of the Steering Committee).”

- 3) both the SC and the TT become increasingly formalised, and each province involved in the partnership has the same say and is endowed with an equal vote. All of the members of the SC and the TT have a say in the overall scheduling activity, which became more standardised beginning in 2010;
- 4) the burden of the event promotion is equally distributed among the partners, whereas the regional DMO increases its financial contribution to the event. However, the provinces and municipalities continue to play a major role in planning and managing the events;
- 5) the “Pink Night” is thought of as a promotional event able to window dress the Riviera di Romagna based on its assets: care of the guests, kindness and creativity. For instance, the pink fireworks video shot from a helicopter makes a difference every year in terms of visibility of the Riviera di Romagna;
- 6) for the 2010 Edition of the Festival there was a shift of the event date from Friday to Saturday and the introduction of a theme (for 2010, it was “La Dolce Vita”) in addition to the common feature of the pink colour. This generated some debate among the members of the TT, which was discussed in the following filed note:

“We had a debate around the theme; in fact, “La Dolce Vita” reminds us of Fellini, whose figure is perceived as closer to Rimini from the other destinations. However, we agreed on the theme because it could be attractive, particularly for international middle-aged tourists from the German and Russian markets. [...] Moreover Fellini is recognised internationally and his image is not in conflict with the branding strategy of the tourism area...” (Forli-Cesena DMO representative in the Technical Table)

- 7) the “Pink Night” is widening its geographical scope and, starting from the 2015 edition, it has encompassed two more provinces (Pesaro-Urbino and Ancona) of the Riviera Marchigiana. The event has therefore scaled up and now involves more than 70 municipalities over 170 km of the Italian Adriatic coast (see Figure 3)

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Insert Figure 3 about here  
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The description of the “Pink Night” festival’s evolution over time has made it apparent that not only have the partnerships between the destinations and the DMOs proved crucial to planning the event but also to its continued development and growth in a wide geographic area, now encompassing not only the Riviera di Romagna but also the Riviera Marchigiana.

#### ***4.2 Event tourism and events portfolios: the “Pink Night” Festival as a ‘meta-event’***

As described in the previous section, during the first edition of the “Pink Night” festival, and for the ensuing development stage (2007-2009), the DMO of the Province and the Municipality of Rimini played a major role both in strategic and tactical terms. However, from 2010 onward, a SC took care of strategically planning the “Pink Night” event.

Higher-level tactical activities, such as promotion and overall operational coordination, were carried out by the TT (i.e., the Operational Coordinating Director). Lower-level tactical activities, such as the actual organisation of the individual events, were carried out by the local DMOs of the individual municipalities of the Riviera di Romagna.

The situation is summarised in Figure 4:

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Insert Figure 4 about here  
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As Figure 4 shows, multiple organisational actors and stakeholders are involved in the staging of what we define as a *meta-event*:

1. the SC acts as a *Meta-Director* for staging the meta-event. It strategically plans the event and manages a network of competing provincial DMOs, which participate in the Technical Table;
2. the TT acts as a *Coordinating Director* for the meta-event. It provides proposals (in terms of timing, theme and other major features) for the *meta-event* to the SC, and takes care of coordinating and synchronising events staged by the provinces’ and municipalities’ DMOs, and promoting the multiple intertwined events which take place in the wide geographic area. More specifically, we were told that “...Inside the destination, events are coordinated, synchronised and intertwined [...]...the objective is to avoid huge discrepancies in the artistic offerings or in the execution of the plans of the “Pink Night”, with the overall aim of creating a holistic image for the Riviera di Romagna area.” (Coordinator of the Festival and TT, 2006-2016);
3. the provincial DMOs act as *Local Directors*. They manage their events portfolio at the destination level and deploy them cooperatively for the “Pink Night”. They collect and identify concept-based proposals generated by local operational tables at the municipality level inside their respective destinations and, after selecting them, present them to the TT, which selects the most appropriate option.

In this context, a meta-event can be defined as *a collection of coordinated, synchronised and intertwined events, occurring in a wide geographic area and encompassing two or more nearby competing destinations, which collaborate to better market themselves and/or to reposition themselves in the marketplace. It is part of the event portfolio of two or more*

*DMOs and allows them to collaborate to conjointly garner the benefits of event tourism. It addresses both the tourists and the hosting communities of the destinations involved.*

In the following sections, we first discuss the features (spatial, temporal, etc.) of a meta-event in light of, and in relation to, the existing event typologies and taxonomies underlying the events portfolio notion (Getz and Page, 2016). Secondly, we provide a conceptual demarcation explaining why the definition matters from both a theoretical and practical viewpoint. Finally, we explore its managerial implications and the implications for staging event tourism.

#### *The meta-event and the portfolio model*

As far as the features of the meta-event are concerned, we observe that the categorisation of events underlying the portfolio model (Getz, 2008; Getz and Page, 2016), while comprehensive, valuable and interesting to systematise extant research on event tourism, seems to display several weaknesses that are clarified by the managerial analysis of the “Pink Night” festival. First, if the portfolio model aims to be a reference framework to support strategic decisions by destinations in event tourism, then the boundaries of its building blocks should be more clearly defined. For example, the categories of “mega-events” and “hallmark events” seem sometimes to overlap and are often used interchangeably in extant literature (see Hall, 1992; Getz et al., 2012), and definitional issues are recurrent: “the phenomenon of hallmark events is well-accepted in the literature, even though a precise definition is absent” (Getz et al., 2012: p. 53).

The “Pink Night” Festival does not look like a mega event, as it is not the outcome of a competitive bidding process involving multiple destinations candidating themselves as hosts. It is not even a regional or local event. As we have outlined, it currently encompasses more than 60 municipalities across a wide geographic area.

It might apparently resemble a hallmark event from a functional point of view as the three outcome goals of attraction, image and branding, and community (Getz et al., 2012) are relevant from an empirical observation of the “Pink Night” and “neither ownership, type, theme, or size are defining characteristics” for a hallmark event (ibidem: p. 64).

However, the meta-event is significantly different from the other types of events for the following reasons: 1) a meta-event necessarily, and by definition, involves two or more DMOs, which simultaneously compete and cooperate; 2) a meta-event necessarily, and by definition, involves two or more destinations and communities; 3) from a spatial point of view, a meta-event embraces an area whose size is directly dependent on the number of destinations involved; 4) the higher the number of destinations involved in the meta-event, the higher its value in terms of demand; 5) the image of the

meta-event contributes to build the brand images of a larger tourism area including multiple destinations.

Second, the meta-event is typically a collection of coordinated, synchronised and intertwined events (this is not necessarily the case for a hallmark event) which have been either deliberately or emergently planned to be compatible with each other and to meet different customer needs and objectives in terms of timing of the individual events given the span of time over which the meta-event unfolds. The “Pink Night” festival, for example, is made up of three different kinds of intertwined events: “maxi-events”, “high profile cultural events” and “diffusive protagonist events”:

“For this reason, each destination knows that it should bundle its events with specific attention to “maxi events”, which are published in the official brochure and on the website of the Pink Night and musical or dancing performances staged in the main squares of the municipalities involved. Their schedules are highly synchronised, especially in view of the pink fireworks at midnight. The other events, such as “high profile cultural” and “protagonism”, are staged individually by each destination and should be coordinated inside the destination. All of them (maxi, high profile and protagonist) are helpful in building up a stronger festive atmosphere” (Coordinator of the Festival and Technical Table, 2006-2016).

The terms used here for these events are those deployed by the organisers and do not overlap with any classification proposed in the extant event tourism literature. “*Maxi-events*” are the largest events and are published in the official brochure and on the “Pink Night” website and are typically musical or dancing performances staged in the main squares of the municipalities involved. They attract the highest number of attendees/tourists and demand a higher financial commitment from the municipalities staging the performances. The coordinated programme designed by the TT implies that at least one maxi-event should be staged in each of the largest municipalities involved, with schedules that are highly synchronised, and culminate in the pink night fireworks taking place throughout the territory. “*High-profile cultural events*” aggregate all of those events (i.e., cultural, eno-gastronomic), which display a higher educational profile. Typically, they are related to visual arts exhibitions, classical or jazz music concerts directed to a niche audience and eno-gastronomic performances. They are normally held in places far from the coast, such as the historical centres. They differentiate the entertainment offerings, attempting to target audiences who do not like crowded places.

Both maxi-events and high-profile events are officially initiated, planned, executed and brought to completion by the visible hands of the Operational Coordinating Director (the TT) and the other local directors (the DMOs/tourism departments of the other provinces).

“*Diffusive protagonist events*” instead are staged by individual tourism companies (hoteliers, bath resorts, bars, pubs, nightclubs, and discos) on a voluntary and independent basis with the aim of becoming protagonists in staging the “Pink Night” experience in a loose cooperation with the DMOs to develop the product. They are not officially planned by the TT but, nonetheless, they enlarge the offerings by

directly involving private companies able to meet the needs of an audience interested in enjoying the event in a self-contained environment.

Third, and building on the previous two points, the meta-event brings a collaborative perspective to the events portfolio model, as it suggests that multiple competing destinations could leverage their event portfolios conjointly to increase the value of event tourism. If we assume that the model components proposed by Getz (2005, 2008) and Getz and Page (2016) are sufficiently exhaustive, then, for example, a *meta-event* involving four different destinations is an event which is managed simultaneously through four different portfolio models.

#### *Why the definition of meta-event matters from both a theoretical and practical viewpoint*

In this section, we explain why the definition of meta-event matters from both a theoretical and practical viewpoint. From a theoretical point of view, it is relevant for five reasons. First, it enriches the taxonomy of events underlying the portfolio model as described by Getz and Page (2016). Indeed, while the original taxonomy is based on functionality (i.e., the degree to which certain economic, tourism or political goals can be met through hosting and marketing events) and builds on two dimensions (tourism demand and value), the meta-event concept pertains to DMOs' relational capabilities beyond the idea of the event network (Ziakas and Costa, 2010, 2011). Accordingly, as the "Pink Night" well illustrates, an event that might be classified as regional from a functional point of view, could indeed display demand levels closer to those pertaining to a hallmark event. Second, it elaborates on and enriches the event portfolio model proposed by Getz and Page (2016), suggesting that a destination perspective on event tourism cannot overlook the fact that nearby destinations (and their DMOs in addition to other private stakeholders) increasingly collaborate in event tourism development, planning and management. Third, and related to the previous point, it rids us of the "silo-view" of destinations and their DMOs. While it is true that in the current turbulent economic environment competition among destinations is escalating and destinations have to find their way to achieve a sustained competitive advantage often relying on their DMOs (Pike and Page, 2014), it is also apparent that nearby destinations find it useful to pool financial and non-financial resources and marketing capabilities to reach the scale needed to survive and be successful in the marketplace. Fourth, it offers a way to overcome the static idea of a destination as an area constrained by administrative boundaries that also delimit the scope of the action of individual DMOs in favour of a more fluid idea of wider tourism areas wherein the tourism place/s is/are conjointly constructed by multiple destinations. Finally, yet importantly, it provides a way to complement and reconcile a destination perspective on events (Getz, 2008; Getz and Page, 2016) with a destination perspective on experiences



(Lugosi and Walls, 2013; Saraniemi and Kyllanen, 2011) that are the outcomes of any tourism product (events included).

The meta-event concept also has relevance from a practical point of view in terms of its managerial implications. First, there seems to be a recent trend for DMOs and event development agencies to create and produce their own major events as part of a sophisticated branding strategy (Getz and Page, 2016; Ziakas, 2013). In the current turbulent environment, *meta-events* are a strategic management tool for nearby competing destinations that want to rebrand and reposition themselves conjointly to achieve the necessary visibility to face international competition in the global marketplace. This might lead to the constitution of strategic alliances between DMOs to design a wide tourism area identity that will also subsume and suit individual destination brands. Second, the increasing shrinkage of public subsidies for regional and local DMOs in many countries is pushing them to pool efforts and financial and non-financial resources to cost-effectively market themselves. *Meta-events* could prove a good means of increasing both tourism demand and spending for destinations with limited tourism appeal (Naipaul et al., 2009), but also for mature destinations in a declining stage, like the ones analysed. Third, it provides tourism destinations with an enhanced and upgraded version of the event portfolio model, which allows for conjoint strategic development, planning and management of event experiences that not only address tourists but also hosting communities, which might get closer to and integrate with each other. At the same time, opportunities for increased interaction and host–guest co-performance may increase (Giovanardi et al., 2014). Fourth, it allows the destination to achieve diversification that is not just based on the events included in its event portfolio but also on events included in other destinations' event portfolios. Accordingly, the benefits realised on the investment in an events portfolio will not only be various and distributed over time (O'Toole, 2011) but also distributed across destinations. Finally, the repetition of the meta-event over time might not only strengthen its appeal and tradition but also offer further opportunities for event tourism development and planning in an increasingly wider tourism area. For example, the “Pink Night” festival covered the Riviera di Romagna (and 110 km of coastline) until 2014, and is now also staged in the Riviera Marchigiana (encompassing 170 km of coastline).

#### ***4.3 Event tourism and destination branding: the role of meta-events in rebranding tourist areas***

The idea of modifying the image aspired to in the marketplace (i.e., the brand identity) of the wider Riviera di Romagna through a *meta-event* emphasises the importance of event tourism for destination branding purposes.

In a moment of mounting competition with other Mediterranean destinations particularly attractive for nightlife (e.g., Ibiza in Spain, and several other islands and coastal destinations in Greece, Egypt and

Turkey), one of the DMOs of the Riviera di Romagna recognised that event tourism could be deployed to rebrand and reposition the entire tourism area.

Interestingly, the design of the novel brand identity was the by-product of the vision of the Head of the DMO of the province of Rimini, who realised that Rimini and the entire Riviera di Romagna could no longer preserve their competitive advantage based solely on the youngsters' market. The vision of rebranding the destination was closely intertwined with the idea of staging a different experience for a wider audience of tourists and residents. A unifying theme around the pink colour was created (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). This vision was first translated into a novel brand name juxtaposing the words "Pink" and "Night", with the latter implicitly related to the consolidated tradition of organised entertainment activities in the Riviera di Romagna tourism area.

The *meta-event* proved successful because it not only achieved consensus among the relevant DMOs and industry stakeholders, but also fostered cooperation among the relevant public and private stakeholders across multiple destinations in supporting the brand positioning required to communicate the new brand identity, both to tourists and to the local tourism industry. The annual repetition of the festival since 2006 and its promotion as the "New Year's Eve of the Summer" have consistently conveyed the expectation of an event tourism experience targeting everyone (as it has been well expressed by the Festival Founder), whose tradition has strengthened over time.

The meta-event was an appropriate means of crafting a solid brand architecture model wherein each of the four competing provincial destinations could: a) agree on a long-term vision for a wider tourism area and create a unified and holistic image by avoiding huge thematic discrepancies in the artistic offerings of the event; b) address the prioritised markets not uniquely based on historical data but also on the new mass market potential brought by the festival (see quotes from the Founder and the Head of the Forlì-Cesena DMO); c) leverage their own established brands within the comprehensive tourism area brand stemming from the "Pink Night" (see quote from the Head of the Forlì-Cesena DMO); d) persuade the tourism industry that they were part of a comprehensive tourism area.

#### ***4.4 A conceptual model linking destination partnerships, destination branding and meta-events***

Figure 5 illustrates a conceptual model in which destination partnerships and destination branding are linked to event tourism and meta-events, and also includes the outcomes of meta-events:

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Insert Figure 5 about here  
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By leveraging their event portfolios cooperatively through a *meta-event*, competing DMOs were able to achieve relevant economic and social outcomes. From an economic point of view, the sustained growth of the festival in terms of number of attendees and spending (APT ER, 2006, 2010, 2014) contributed to limit the negative impact of the financial crisis on tourism activities and combat stagnation in the tourism area analysed as well as enhancing its competitiveness in the domestic market. From a social point of view, the event was able to effectively bring together the hosts and guests (Giovanardi et al., 2014), anticipating the event together and “co-performing the wait” (ibidem, p. 108), intermingling inside a “pink ocean” (ibidem, p. 109) and playing together in the festive atmosphere of a “playful pink carnival” (ibidem, p. 110). Accordingly, we complement the findings of Giovanardi et al. (2014) from a managerial perspective and suggest that for the host-guest performances and relationships to be effective, strategic partnerships between destinations (and especially between the relevant DMOs) should be initiated.

Apparently, the success of the event in its first editions (from both an economic and social point of view) elicited – through a feedback mechanism – further ideas for the development and growth of the tourism product. First, the event has been stretched over an increasingly longer time span. While for the first four editions the festival were held on a Saturday, starting in 2010, the event was shifted to a Friday to create a “Pink Week-end”, and beginning with the 2016 edition, it will span an entire week, called the “Pink Week”. Second, the event is spreading spatially. Until 2014, it mainly involved the Riviera di Romagna and its 110 km of coastline, but beginning with the 2015 edition, other major destinations (and their DMOs) in the Riviera Marchigiana (to cover 170 km of coastline) have been involved.

The consistently good economic and social outcomes stemming from the festival have contributed to the event becoming an institution as well as signalling to the competing coastal destinations on the Adriatic Sea that leveraging event tourism conjointly can be beneficial to the development of strategic networks in the hypercompetitive global market.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

By revisiting an original case study of the “Pink Night” festival presented by Giovanardi et al. (2014) in an earlier issue of this journal from a managerial perspective, this study makes three major contributions to the event tourism planning, development and management literature. First, we shed light on how and why different competing destinations (and their DMOs) deliberately cooperate to plan, develop and manage an event able to generate positive economic and social outcomes while influencing tourist and resident experiences and behaviours. Accordingly, we provide further international evidence on “organisational and strategic approaches to event tourism”, which might aid

organisational learning for destinations (Getz and Page, 2016: 7), and address the simultaneous use of cooperative and competitive strategies in tourism planning, not only inside destinations (Jamal and Getz, 1995; Wang and Krakover, 2008; Czernek and Czakon, 2016) but also across multiple destinations and with a specific emphasis on event tourism.

Second, we introduce and describe the concept of *meta-event* (i.e., an event tourism product involving complex layers of organisational and spatial collaboration between destinations), which is the main theoretical contribution of this work. The “Pink Night” festival constitutes an exemplary case of a “meta-event”, a collection of coordinated, synchronised and intertwined events occurring across a wide geographic area and deployed as part of the event portfolio of two or more DMOs of nearby competing destinations. More specifically, the *meta-event* is strategically staged by a “*meta-director*” (e.g., an SC including representatives of competing destinations’ DMOs), and tactically by a “*general director*” (a leading DMO) and “*local directors*” (local DMOs of the provinces/municipalities involved). Interestingly, local governments supported the meta-director (i.e. the Steering Committee), not only in terms of sharing a common vision and objectives, resources and coordinating events’ implementation and decision-making (Ziakis, 2010) but also in supporting the strategic tourism planning of a wider geographic area that was in a stage of stagnation (Butler, 1980, 2009). The collection of events comprised in the *meta-event* appear to be properly cross-leveraged both inside and across cooperating destinations, and functional for staging a seamless, memorable and compelling event tourism experience (Pine and Gilmore, 1998) in a new tourism place, which goes beyond the administrative and perceptual borders of individual municipal, provincial or regional destinations (Saraniemi and Kylanen, 2011). The “Pink Night” festival well illustrates how the *meta-event* reshapes the place wherein host–guest encounters and tourism experiences happen (Giovanardi et al., 2014). The reshaped tourism place is quantitatively dependent on the number of partners (i.e., DMOs and LTOs) conjointly staging the event. This translates into a blurring of the physical and perceptual boundaries of destinations and geographical areas (i.e., Rimini vs. Ravenna or the Riviera di Romagna vs. the Riviera Marchigiana) which for the duration of the festival become a liminal “pink ocean” (Giovanardi et al., 2014).

Third, and related to the previous point, we have elucidated the role of *meta-events* as brand architecture tools for competing DMOs willing to leverage their event portfolio cooperatively to rebrand and reposition wide tourism areas (encompassing multiple destinations and hosting communities) and unify their image. The provincial DMOs of the Riviera di Romagna were able to effectively coordinate their stakeholders to design, plan and communicate a new brand identity not pertaining to an individual destination (Anholt, 2010) but to a wider tourism area. Thus, they modified the perceptions of people inside and outside the region (Long, 2000) regarding the key capabilities of

the hosting communities in staging entertainment experiences. Accordingly, our empirical evidence adds to the destination branding architecture literature and supports the statement that “there is a need to improve the collaboration and coordination among tourism organisations to implement strong brands structured in a systematic way” (Datzira-Masip and Poluzzi, 2014: 58). However, the coordination necessary for destination branding can be achieved if legitimate key actors are involved at the early stages of the planning process (Gunn, 1988) and an individual or DMO endowed with authority to gain consensus takes on leadership (Pechlaner, Kozak and Volgger, 2014). This finding corroborates recent research illustrating that public actors, such as DMOs and local governments, play an irreplaceable role in acting as a catalyst for destination branding (Haven-Tang and Sedgley, 2014).

Our paper also provides several managerial and policymaking implications. First, it suggests that in the current globalised environment, parochialism and fragmentation inside tourism areas might seriously undermine their competitiveness. For this reason, local governments and policymakers should develop a shared strategic vision for wider tourism areas and foster formal and informal network structures not only within their destination (Stokes, 2006), but also across multiple destinations (Provam and Kanis, 2007) and reflecting multi-network governance structures (Beaumont and Dredge, 2010).

Second, *meta-events* can be effective strategic tools to enhance competitiveness and diversification, and improve the image and positioning of a wide tourism area, but they require different competing DMOs to cooperate in event tourism planning and management. While cooperation and pooling of resources is becoming increasingly frequent in light of the shrinkage of public subsidies for DMOs and LTOs due to austerity measures, the simultaneous presence of competition and cooperation seems to gain relevance as a promising strategic approach both inside destinations (Wang and Krakover, 2008; Czernek and Czakon, 2016) and across nearby destinations.

Third, *meta-events* might be crucial for tourism destinations as they generate positive economic outcomes and shape memorable tourism experiences (Morgan et al., 2009) and enhanced host–guest social interactions (Giovanardi et al., 2014) in wide tourism areas. This is even more relevant for community tourism destinations where event tourism development assumes the features of a public good whose benefits might be shared by a number of stakeholders inside and across destinations.

As an early attempt to explore event portfolios from a somewhat neglected destination partnership perspective, this study has some limitations. First, to generalise our results and strengthen our conceptualisation of the meta-event, it might be important to enlarge the sample and include other tourism areas and events. Second, although it is apparent that partnerships between local DMOs can increase the competitiveness of a wider tourism area, it remains unclear whether the benefits achieved

collectively by destinations actually outweigh the coordination costs incurred. A potential avenue of research could be to test whether cooperation activities are carried out by competing destinations merely because there is a perception that rewards from collaboration will outweigh the costs or actually because the impact on the destinations' economies is positive.

Future research is certainly needed to refine our definition of meta-events and to test it in different contexts, as well as to explore its connection with a number of other constructs. First, it would be relevant to test whether the meta-event concept can be applied also to destination partnerships where destinations are not geographically close to each other and/or that are very dissimilar in terms of natural and cultural assets, and in terms of the traditions and customs of their hosting communities. Second, in line with recent literature assessing the success of destinations and DMOs (Volgger and Pechlaner, 2014), it might be interesting to explore the relationships between the *meta-director's* perceived success and its perceived networking capabilities. Third, further research might be conducted to explore the relationships between the *meta-event* concept and the perceptual nuance of the concept of destination (Saraniemi and Kylanen, 2011). Fourth, more empirical analyses are needed to examine how *meta-event* planning relates to the planning of other primary products in the destinations (Benur and Bramwell, 2015). Indeed, complex relationships and tensions could emerge between primary products and a *meta-event*, especially if the primary products are sufficient by themselves to provide a strong destination brand identity and tourism appeal. In this case, each individual DMO might find it useful to evaluate to what extent the newly created brand image for the tourism area might bring tangible benefits to its destination.

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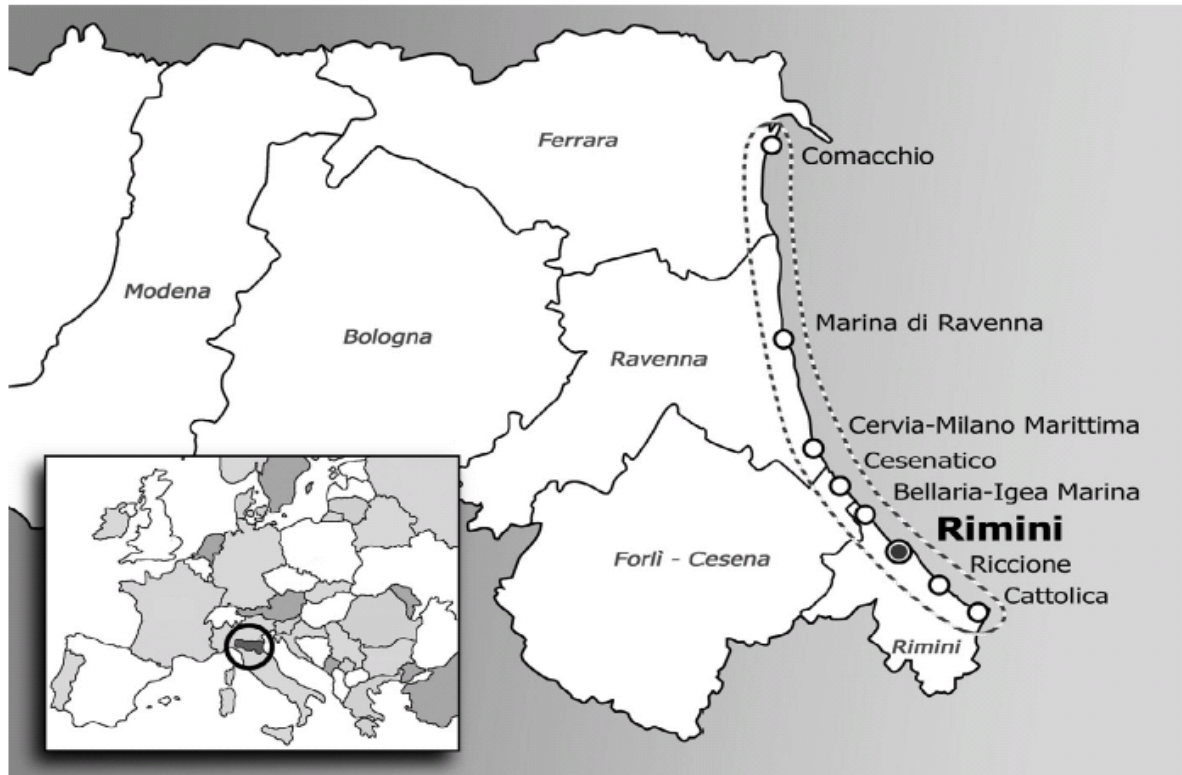
### Websites

E-R Il portale della regione Emilia-Romagna. <http://www.regione.emilia-romagna.it/>

La Notte Rosa. <http://www.lanotterosa.it/>

Riviera Emilia-Romagna. <http://www.adriacoast.com/>

Figure 1 – The Riviera di Romagna (Giovanardi et al., 2014: p. 105)



**Table 1 – Comparison of Research Sites and Data Collection**

	Ferrara	Forlì-Cesena	Ravenna	Rimini
Archival documents	12	11	12	27
No. of interviewees	3	4	5	8
Roles of interviewees*	Head of Ferrara DMO (1) Representative of the Ferrara DMO in the Technical Table (1) Hoteliers (1)	Head of Forlì-Cesena DMO (1) Representative of the Forlì-Cesena DMO in the Technical Table (1) Hoteliers (1) Entertainment Entrepreneurs (1)	Head of Ravenna DMO (1) Representative of the Ravenna DMO in the Technical Table (1) Director Professional Commerce Association in Ravenna (1) Hoteliers (1) Entertainment Entrepreneurs (1)	Head of Rimini DMO (1) Coordinator of the Pink Night, 2006-2015 (1) President of the professional hoteliers' association (1) Coordinator of the Union Product Coast (1) Hoteliers (2) Entertainment Entrepreneurs (2)
Number of males (females) interviewees	2 (1)	2 (2)	3 (2)	6 (2)
Average age interviewees	43	46	51	42
Average professional tenure interviewees	17	14	18	19
Average organizational tenure interviewees	10	9	11	12
Destination Management Organization	1	1	1	1
Kilometers of coast usable for bathing purposes	21	9	37	32,5
Number of hotels (number bedrooms)	102 (3,051)	504 (18,610)	560 (20,741)	2253 (75,868)
Number of camping sites	15	17	23	18
Number of youth hostels	8	12	4	9
Number of B&B	112	131	331	129
Number of theme parks	6	10	13	21
Number of restaurants	1,225	1,403	1,556	1,753
Number of bars	1,235	1,216	1,188	1,452
Number of museums	11	6	31	12
Number of discos, dancing clubs, night clubs	24	28	40	72
Number of bath resorts	96	192	400	676
<i>Tourist arrivals</i>	<i>463,341</i>	<i>976,803</i>	<i>1,281,517</i>	<i>3,147,464</i>
<i>Overnight stays</i>	<i>2,401,526</i>	<i>5,200,540</i>	<i>6,231,885</i>	<i>15,504,706</i>

Source: Authors' elaboration on primary data collected and secondary data provided by ISTAT, 2014

\*The total does not add up to 22 as two interviewees at the regional level were interviewed as well: the President of the regional DMO, and the CEO of the regional DMO sitting on the Steering Committee

**Figure 2 – Data Structure**

*Second-Order Themes*

*Aggregate Theoretical Dimensions*

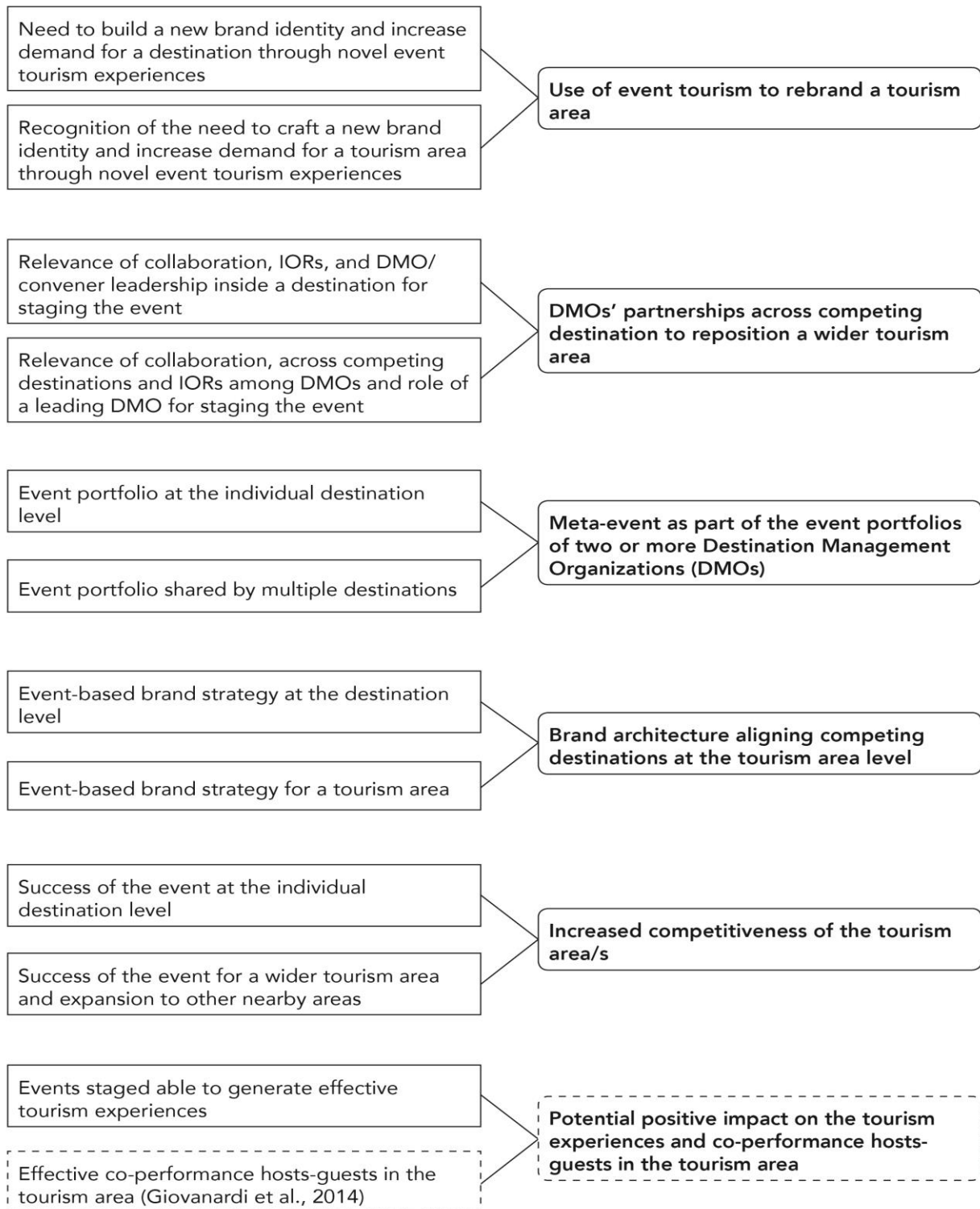


Figure 3 – The Pink Night festival extends to include both the Riviera di Romagna and the Riviera Marchigiana



Source: <http://www.lanotterosa.it>

Figure 5 – Links between our aggregate theoretical dimensions

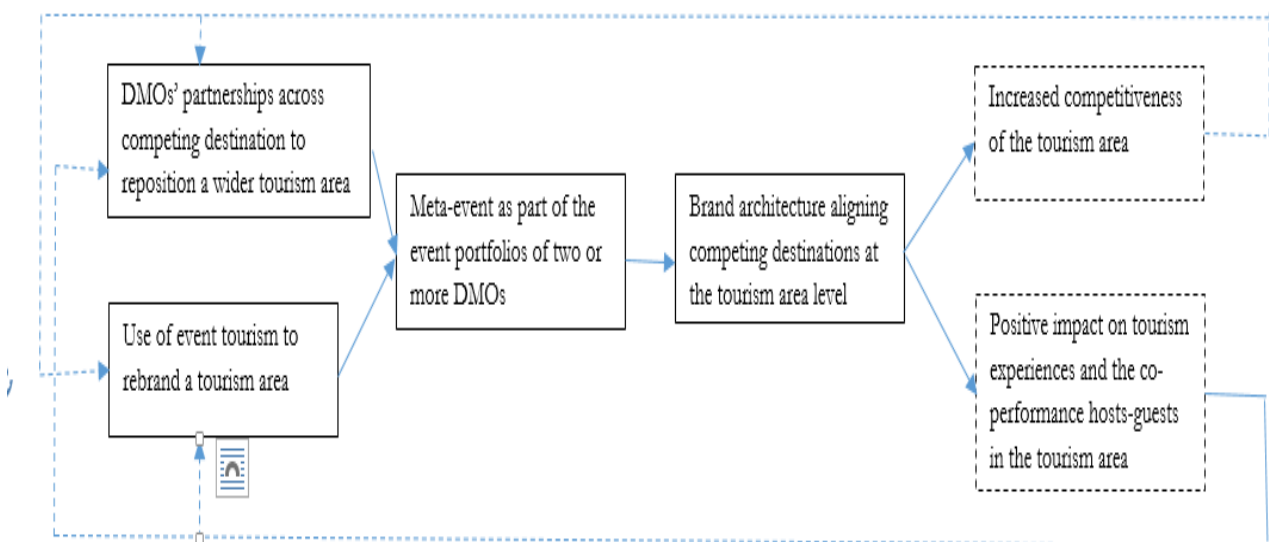
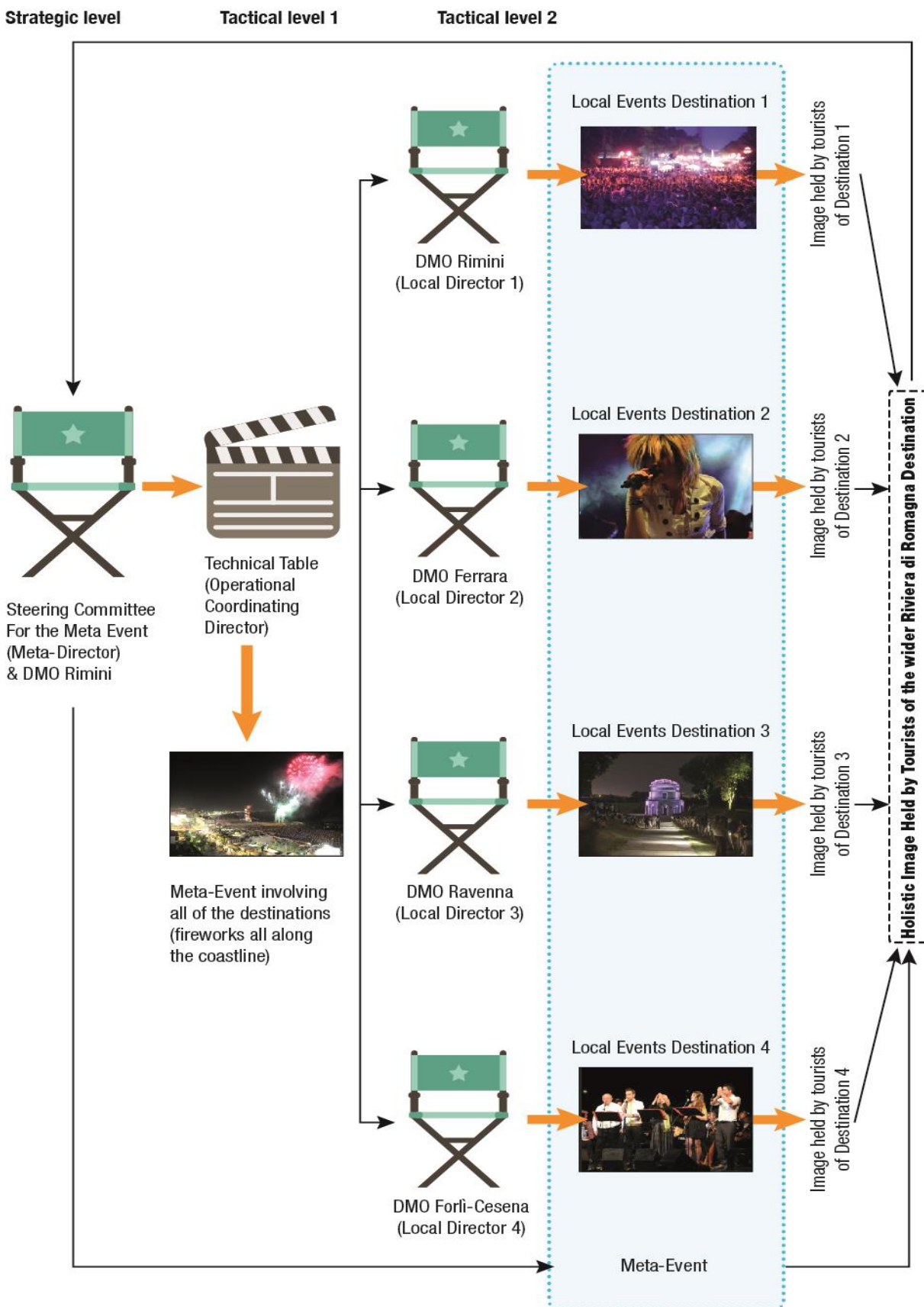


Figure 4 – The “Pink Night” Festival: Meta and Local Stage Directors



Sources of images: Archivio Fotografico della Provincia di Rimini and official website of the Pink Night (<http://www.lanotterosa.it/>)