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DESTINATION MANAGMENT PLANS: USE OF LANGUAGE AS REPRESENTATION OF POWER

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ABSTRACT

The analysis of discursive practices and language is critical to understand power relationships and power struggles. In particular, control over orders of discourse by institutional and societal power-holders is one factor in the maintenance of their power. This paper analyses how Tourism Queensland used political language and symbols to legitimate and generate support for its decisions. The destination management plans, developed for the 13 Queensland regions, were analysed using an automated content analysis software combined with quantitative network theoretic measurements. These methods prove to be effective in identifying the main concepts contained within the documents and their interrelationships. Results show that the core concepts of the destination management plans relate to the social impact that tourism has on communities as well as to the importance of the marketing and promotion of tourism. On the other hand, some concepts on which academics have focused, such as sustainability and collaboration, do not appear core elements in how Tourism Queensland prescribed tourism to be managed through its official discourse.

KEYWORDS

tourism destination, power, content analysis, network analysis, marketing plan, Queensland.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to contribute to the understanding of the use of power in tourism by looking at how a destination management organisation used language as a way to legitimate and develop support for the decisions. This is an exploratory study that seeks to examine the usage of the language in official documents, without any claim of assessing them against any possible "ideal" model. The research is conducted by analysing the 13 Queensland destination management plans (DMP), all published between 2004 and 2005. The analysis has been informed by a long stream of tourism planning literature (Hall, 2000; Inskeep, 1991; Treuren & Lane, 2003) whose principles of sustainability, community involvement and stakeholders collaboration are exemplified by the World Tourism Organization (World Tourism Organization, 1998: 22) who proposed that:

> Tourism development should be planned and managed so that its socioeconomic benefits are spread as widely as possible throughout the society of the tourist destination. In this way, benefits will be maximised and residents will support tourism if they are receiving benefits from it. Community-based tourism projects are an important technique for spreading benefits to local residents. Also essential is

> that tourism be politically acceptable without compromising its sustainability. Unless there is political support and commitment to sustainable tourism, tourism plans based on sustainable principles will not be implemented.

Within this framework Tourism Queensland stated at the beginning of each destination management plan (Tourism Queensland, 2005: 2):

> drawing on available research and a broad base of knowledge, skills and experience, each DMP is tailored to meet the development and marketing needs of each destination and tuned to meet the needs of target markets […] It is intended as directional rather than a prescriptive document, to be used as a guiding tool for the development of strategies and business plans, and as a springboard for further planning and discussion between partners and stakeholders. It has been developed in the context of the Queensland Government priorities for the delivery of Government services, the Queensland Government Strategy for Growing Tourism and the Tourism Queensland Corporate Plan.

Tourism is a very complex and highly political arena (Hall, 1994). Destination management organisations (DMO) such as Tourism Queensland are able to function because they rely on the support of the State government through the provision of funding and the ability to legislate (Pike, 2004). The organic dependence of DMOs on governments implies the need for them to align both actions as well as official language and discourse to the dominant ideology (Gramsci, 1980). From this perspective, this research is about understanding how also in tourism organisational power is built through a set of meanings and symbols (Foucault, 1980). Whilst, taking a Foucauldian perspective, Cheong and Miller (2000: 372) proposed that 'power is everywhere in tourism', this research, by analysing how Tourism Queensland structured its official discourse within the DMP, aims to contribute to address a series of gaps. In particular Hall and Jenkins (1995: 65) suggested that 'the sources and aspects of power' in the study of tourism policymaking has not been fully addressed. Furthermore it has also been observed that the study of 'power, and the processes that structure its influence' is still 'relatively peripheral'(Morgan & Pritchard, 1999: 10). This research is conducted with the underlying assumption that power has to be found in an organisation while still recognising that, as Kedar (1987: 9) observed, a crucial question in any research about power is 'whether the perception of an exercise of power, of control, of domination, is always synonymous with the intent to exercise it'.

Through the use of Leximancer (Smith, 2003), a data mining tool, combined with a textual analysis based on social network analysis principles, this research highlights that the language of Tourism Queensland Destination Management Plans (DMPs) can be organised around six different clusters. On one hand, the core concepts of the destination management plans relate to the social impact that tourism has on communities as well as to the importance of the marketing and promotions of tourism. On the other hand, sustainability and collaboration do not appear core concepts in how Tourism Queensland prescribed tourism to be managed through its official discourse.

Language and power

It has been observed that 'power has such a commonsense meaning that is used too often with so little seeming need for definition' (Galbraith, 1983: 2). Nonetheless, in this research, power is defined as 'the bringing about of consequences' (Lukes, 1978: 634) or, in other words, power is the ability to get things done (Pfeffer, 1992). Power exists only as intended and effective influence (Rossouw, 2002; Wrong, 1979). Along this perspective Foucault (1990: 94-95) claimed that 'power relations are both intentional and non-subjective (...). [T]hey are imbued, through and through, with calculation: there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives'. Power has been conceptualised in a variety of different ways. However, Kramarae et al.(1984: 11) emphasised, regardless the definition of

power, ‘the resources available to exert or resist influence are recurrent, similar, and –in societies at peace– chiefly verbal’. Language shall therefore be understood neither as an independent instrument nor as a tool for description but always as an intrinsic part of some particular social situation (Shapiro, 1984).

Power is not just a matter of language. Sauer (1989) observed that there is a strict relationship between discourse and social structure and that these relationships are dialectical (Fairclough, 2001). Furthermore, the analysis of discursive practices is critical to understand power relationships and power struggles. In particular, ‘control over orders of discourse by institutional and societal power-holders is one factor in the maintenance of their power’ (Fairclough, 2001: 31). As a consequence language is not only produced but can also be interpreted only in a social context where ‘social actors are schooled and corrected, […] come into pressure to take up certain roles and occupations, […] occupy specific cultural positions, negotiate particular value systems’ (Cameron, 1992: 10). Power exerted through language and symbols is ‘a vital and ubiquitous reality in organizational life’ (Cavanagh et al., 1981: 363), As Pfeffer (1981: 184) observed ‘it is helpful for social actors with power to use appropriate political language and symbols to legitimate and develop support for the decisions that are reached on the basis of power’. Moreover, discourse defined as ‘a particular way of constructing a subject-matter’ (Fairclough, 2001: 128) represent the interconnection between power and language by creating meanings and sensemaking practices that legitimate certain interests over others (Gephart, 1992).

Language is critical for the organisation and persistence of existing relations of power (Talbot et al., 2003). As Weedon (1997: 21) observed ‘language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organisation and their likely social and political consequences are defined and contested’. As a consequence, every act of signification is an expression of power. Organisations communicate through signifying acts that ‘insinuate particular set of meanings […] presented as authoritative’ (Westwood & Linstead, 2001: 11). These signifying acts manifested in the form of discourses or texts support the institutional apparatus aiming at the same time to delegitimise alternative position and possible resistance (Linstead, 1993). Texts should therefore be read not simply as structures that contain networks of interrelated meanings but as a ‘particular configurations of conventionalized practices which are available to text producers in particular social circumstances’ (Fairclough, 2001: 194).

METHODS

The search for patterns in a text has ancient origins. Indexes of the words in a text or corpus of texts, showing their contextual occurrences were produced by medieval biblical scholars with the objective of finding parallels between the Old and New Testaments (Rockwell, 2003). In the early 1950s Roberto Busa was the first to devise the possibility of using an electronic computer to study the complete writings of a philosopher. His thirty years long project eventually led to the Index Thomisticus, a complete list of the lemmas in the works of Saint Thomas Aquinas (Busa, 1980). Since then, the increasing body of results originated by automatic textual analyses have been used in a wide range of fields, from cryptography to literary studies to information science.

Today, the wide availability of powerful hardware together with sophisticated software tools makes the analysis of textual documents relatively less time consuming, therefore allowing concentrating on interpretation of the results, leaving to automated systems the performance of long and complex computational phases. Moreover, the ability of researcher to perform the analysis is also enhanced by the availability of through the Internet of significant quantities of digitalised texts. Nowadays, technological developments and advances in the understanding of human concept formation provide effective ways to map a text, showing the proximity of concepts and the strength of relationship between them.

The analysis carried out in this work has been performed in two steps. The first step meant to discover and rank the concepts found within the DMPs examined in terms of their frequency, whereas the second one is a network analysis of the co-occurrence network formed by these concepts.

The Leximancer system (Smith, 2003) has been chosen for the first step of the analysis. Leximancer is a data-mining tool that can be used to analyse the content of collections of textual documents and to visually display the extracted information. The information is displayed by means of a conceptual map that provides a birds eye view of the material, representing the main concepts contained within the text and how they are related. Apart from viewing the conceptual structure of the information, this map allows users to perform a directed search of the documents in order to explore instances of the concepts or their interrelations. That is, Leximancer provides a means of both quantifying and displaying the conceptual structure of a document set, as well as a means of using this information to explore interesting conceptual features (Leximancer Manual, 2005). Its main strengths are in the capability to scan rapidly large quantities of documents, the flexibility to change the focus of the analysis when needed and the reliability in providing the results. The software uses Bayesian machine-learning algorithms to build a network of concepts through the analysis of the occurrence and co-occurrence of words. Leximancer can work unattended, extracting the concepts automatically, or can be directed by specific inputs by the researcher.

Leximancer works with texts in digital format. A list of stop-words, common words to be excluded from the analysis, is prepared and submitted. The automated procedure computes the distance between each of the main (most frequent and/or chosen by the user) terms and presents the results as tables or in graphic format. The conceptual map created allows visualising the key themes recognised and their relationships. The map also allows users to perform a directed search of the documents to explore specific instances of the concepts. The words automatically build a thesaurus that describes the major concepts and the strength of relationships between them.

The main concepts automatically extracted by Leximancer are then combined and a network is built. Network analysis techniques have been used to study different kinds of linguistic networks: thesaurus networks, word association networks, word co-occurrence networks (Albert & Barabási, 2002; Boccaletti et al., 2006). This kind of study is not completely new. More “traditional” statistical data about these networks have been employed, traditionally, for a number of applications, such as speech recognition, semantic, information retrieval (Dagan et al., 1995). Network models, however, may add some important insights in highlighting the relationships and the relative importance of concepts in the whole context of a corpus of documents. Moreover, the graph theoretic algorithms on which they are based provide efficient and fast ways to compute local and global characteristics of the semantic and syntactic network (Ferrer i Cancho, 2005; Motter et al., 2002).

In all these investigations, the network is considered as formed by words (the vertices or nodes) linked by some kind of relationship: semantic similarity, closeness in a sentence, association made by human respondents. A word co-occurrence network is built-up form a large collection of sentences belonging to a text or to a series of texts forming a corpus. A link connects a pair of words they appear (at least once) at a distance smaller than a certain amount D of words. D is the distance in a one-dimensional Euclidean space and, in this context, assumes the meaning of a syntactic relationship between the words. There is no common agreement on the value used as distance, values typically found in the literature are of a few (2 to 5) words. In this research, using the approach described by Leydesdorff (1991, 2001), two words are considered connected if they appear on the same line of text. After the network was

built, the topological characteristics were computed by using Pajek, a program for the analysis and the visualisation of large networks (de Nooy et al., 2005).

The *centrality* structural characteristics of the network elements (Wasserman & Faust, 1994) were used in order to detect the most important concepts present in the DMPs and the relationships that bind them. As structural attribute of nodes in a network (i.e. depending on their structural position in the network), parameters such as nodal degree, betweenness and closeness are a measure of the contribution of network position to the role of an element in a network. The degree of a node is the amount of links the node has, the betweenness is a measure of how a node is connected to other nodes that are not directly connected to each other and the closeness evaluates how short is the path connecting a node to the other nodes in the network.

In a social network, centrality measures are indices of prestige, prominence, importance, or power. The degree of an actor represents its popularity, the betweenness its capacity of controlling information flowing between others and closeness how easily a node can access what is available via the network or how quickly can this node reach all others in the network (Hannemann, 2001; Wasserman & Faust, 1994).

More than the single positions, however, detecting groups of topologically related concepts can be particularly meaningful in analysing our network. Different methods to cluster similar network nodes have been proposed in the literature. Blockmodeling is one of these. The technique aims at identifying clusters of nodes with significantly similar patterns of relationships with others. A blockmodel is formed by structures in which all the units have similar connection patterns to the same neighbours (Lorrain & White, 1971). The method is quite complex from a mathematical and computational point of view, but can be applied rather easily with the software packages available (Doreian et al., 2004; Ferligoj et al., 1996).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The textual analysis performed by Leximancer yields a table (Table 1) containing the most recurrent concepts within the DMPs along with their relative occurrences.

Table 1. Queensland destinations management plans: main concepts

Concept	Absolute Count	Relative Count	Concept	Absolute Count	Relative Count
tourism	1628	100%	services	487	29.9%
region	1591	97.7%	government	483	29.6%
market	1319	81%	regional	483	29.6%
destination	1135	69.7%	strategies	464	28.5%
visitor	1123	68.9%	experience	378	23.2%
industry	1121	68.8%	local	360	22.1%
development	1087	66.7%	annual	350	21.4%
marketing	725	44.5%	community	329	20.2%
stakeholders	656	40.2%	travel	309	18.9%
international	587	36%	based	306	18.7%
sustainable	584	35.8%	natural	291	17.8%
planning	568	34.8%	nights	251	15.4%
business	555	34%	environment	245	15%
growth	535	32.8%	public	244	14.9%
Tq	521	32%	area	206	12.6%
research	509	31.2%	main	205	12.5%
domestic	500	30.7%	collaboration	47	2.8%

The list of concept words identified in the previous step has been further refined by merging words with similar meaning (e.g.: *plan* and *planning*, *strategy* and *strategies* etc.). The co-occurrence network has then been built with the aid of the software provided by Leydesdorff, (2006). The resulting network is shown in Figure 1 (by construction the network is fully connected, the figure shows only the top 50% links for the sake of visibility).

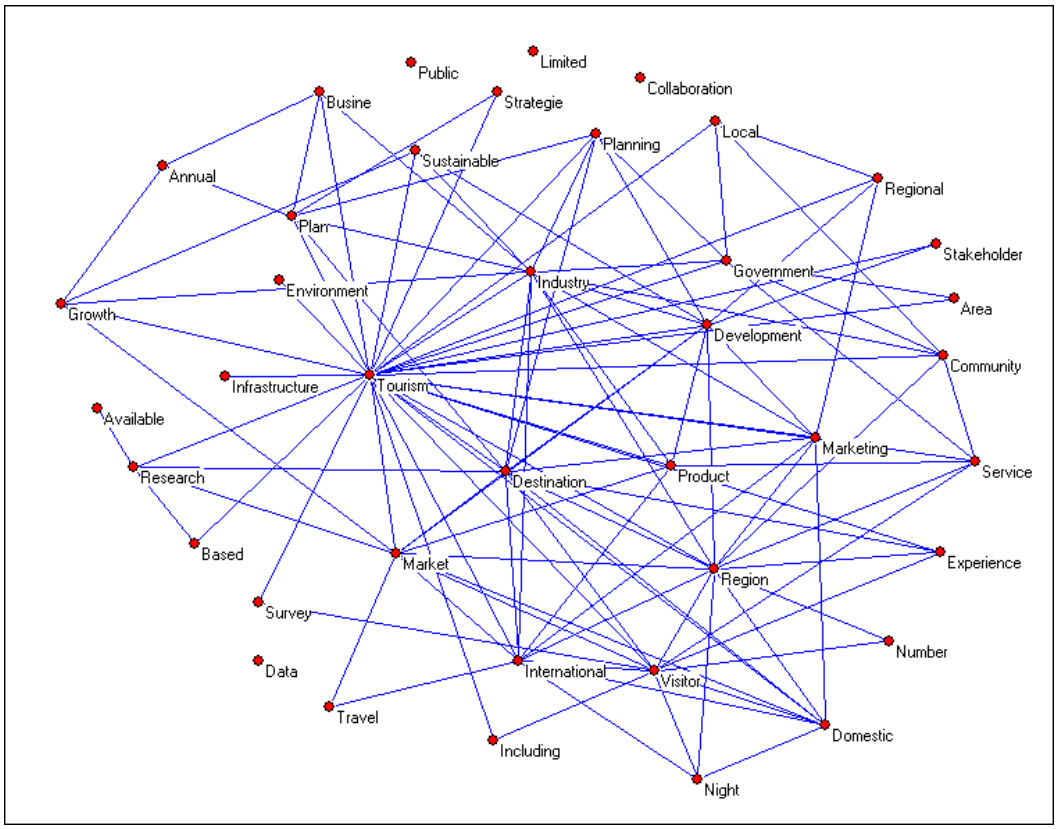

Figure 1. The co-occurrence network for the Queensland DMPs (only the top 50% links are shown to ease the visualisation)

The frequency distributions of the main topological characteristics of the network nodes (degrees, betweenness, closeness and the mean of the three values) are depicted in Figure 2. All values for the different quantities have been normalised with respect to the network size. The arithmetic mean can assume, in this context, the meaning of general centrality index.

Both the network graph and the distributions show clearly that the network has a definite structure and that the connections among the vertices are not distributed randomly, but following some kind of association mechanism. Moreover, the values are grouped in a relatively small interval, denoting a strong connectedness of the whole set of concepts. The distribution of nodal degrees, in particular, is commonly considered to be key parameter which characterises the structure of a complex network (Albert & Barabási, 2002). The one calculated for our network is far from being the result of a random distribution of the links.

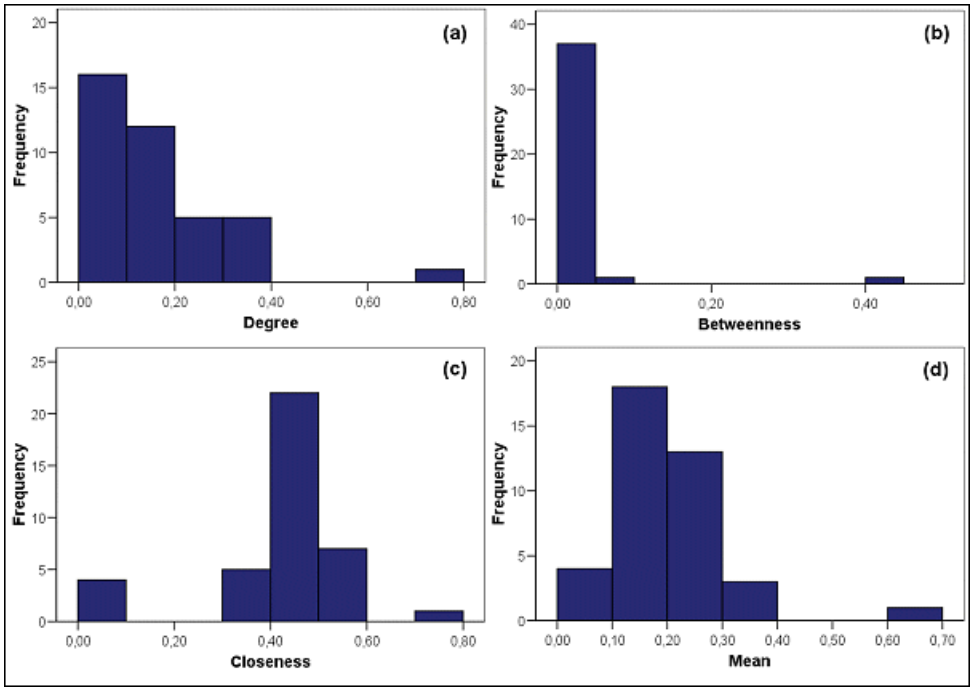

Figure 2. Normalised frequency distributions of nodal characteristics (a = degrees, b = betweenness, c = closeness, d = arithmetic mean)

The degree distribution is shown also in Figure 3, where the cumulative distribution is depicted. Here, on a log-log scale, the scale-free topology (Albert & Barabási, 2002) of the network is absolutely clear (the initial and final bends are due to finite size effects). The central part of the distribution scales as a power law: $P(degree) \sim degree^{-\gamma}$ with an estimated value for the exponent $\gamma = 2.03$, which is consistent, although somewhat smaller, with those the literature attributes to similar networks.

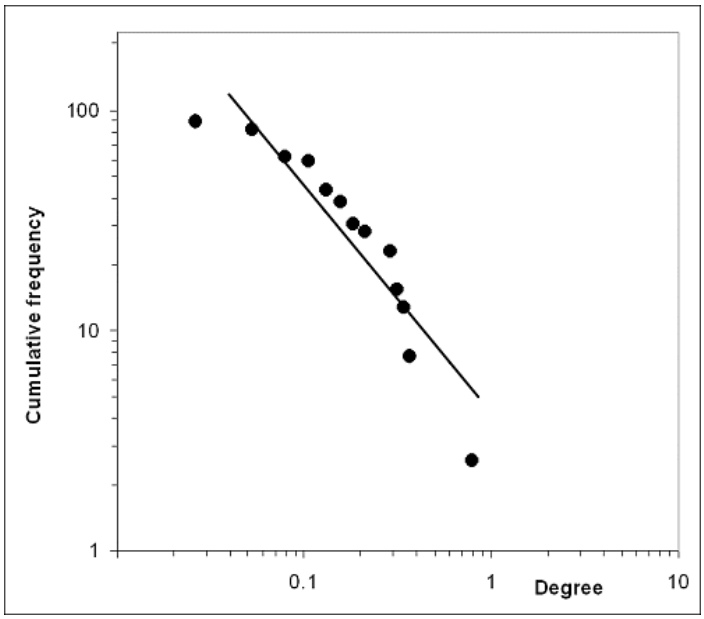

Figure 3. Cumulative degree distribution for the co-occurrence network (solid line is a power law best fit)

Connectedness and inhomogeneity can lead to think of some kind of hierarchical structure in the network. The blockmodeling technique described above has been used, yielding the configuration shown in Figure 4. Six clusters are identified, with a fast convergence of the optimisation algorithm.

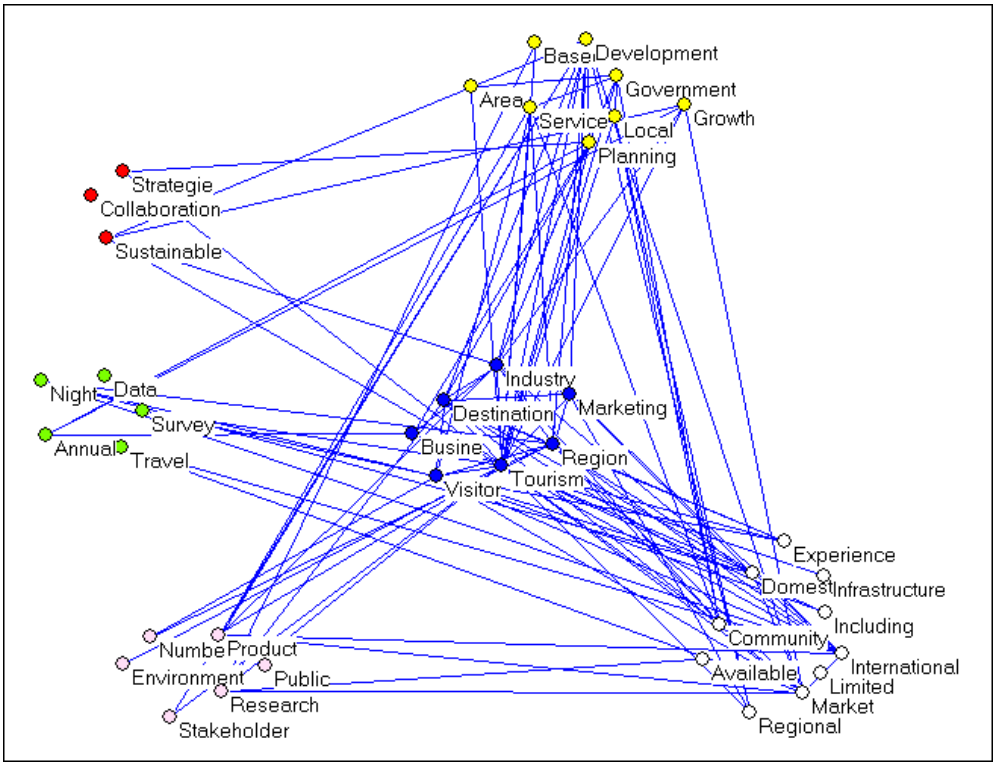

Figure 4. Configuration of the co-occurrence network after the blockmodeling process

Looking at the results of the blockmodeling process, it is possible to recognise a certain level of semantic relatedness in the words belonging to each group. Therefore, these can be interpreted as representing families of concepts to which, for the convenience of the analysis (and somehow arbitrarily), the following labels have been assigned: strategy, public policy, market, impacts, knowledge, sustainability.

The mean values of nodal parameters calculated for the six groups are shown in Table 2, where the last column reports the arithmetic mean of the three values. Given the meaning of the three parameters, as discussed above, this can be seen as a global index of "importance" of the concept group within the network.

Table 2. Mean values of nodal characteristics for the different concept classes

Group	*Degree*	*Betweenness*	*Closeness*	*Mean*
Strategy	0.357	0.089	0.555	0.334
Public policy	0.164	0.010	0.464	0.213
Market	0.126	0.009	0.409	0.181
Impacts	0.070	0.009	0.357	0.145
Knowledge	0.058	0.000	0.301	0.120
Sustainability	0.053	0.000	0.295	0.116

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The configuration of the co-occurrence network after the blockmodeling process shows that central to the language used by Tourism Queensland is the understanding of tourism as a business and that destinations are the core of both the administrative as well as the marketing structure of tourism in the State of Queensland. The set of concepts denominated as 'strategy' are strongly linked with the clusters denominated as 'market' and 'public policy'. Figure 5 also reveals that, although present, both the concepts of collaboration as well as the concept of sustainability appear to be marginal and do not strongly link with the strategic discourse of Tourism Queensland. The reality of the Tourism Queensland DMPs appear to contradict the current theoretical debate on tourism planning in which sustainability and collaboration appear as core concepts that, from a normative perspective, should guide how tourism is planned.

As a consequence, these results suggest that, following Fairclough's (2001) conceptualisation of language as a way of constructing a subject-matter, the language used by Tourism Queensland in the construction of the destination management plans and the way concepts are organised within then can be interpreted as a formal expression of the political agenda of Tourism Queensland. In particular, from the application of social network analysis techniques to the textual analysis of the DMPs it emerged that core concerns of Tourism Queensland is the promotion of tourism as a means for development of local communities. Tourism Queensland is a quasi-governmental body who draws its legitimate authority from the Tourism Queensland Act (1979). Therefore, DMPs can also be read as one of the different way in which Queensland current political establishment pushes its agenda. From this perspective, according to Pfeffer (1981), the text of destination management plans can be interpreted on two different layers. Whilst DMPs provide the strategic direction for Queensland tourism destination, they are also a material expression of meaning and symbols that create and legitimise, trough official language and discourse, what Gramsci (1980) referred to as the dominant ideology.

The implementation of the provisions and strategies included within the destination management plans requires the direct involvement of Regional Tourism Organisations which are directly funded by local councils. Based on that, the high degree of closeness between strategy and public policy was expected. Results also show that the cluster denominated 'sustainability' scores very low in all parameters used for the analysis. This reveals that, although academic tourism literature has lately used collaboration and sustainability as core topics in the theoretical elaborations of tourism (Bramwell & Lane, 2000; Hall, 1999; Pavlovich & Kearins, 2004), the same concepts do not have the same degree of importance in the reality of the activities and discursive practices of Tourism Queensland. Future qualitative research might help understanding the motives that underpin the power drivers behind the use and the exclusion of certain language from the destination management plans. Comparison between destination management plans and other Queensland government planning documents would help understanding if a consistent use language throughout government text can be linked to the linguistic representation of the dominant ideology.

A final consideration relates to the methodology employed in this work, which has proved quite efficient and effective. The combination of automated content analysis tools (Leximancer, in our case) with quantitative network measures has given the possibility to derive a useful and meaningful representation of the language used in the DMPs, avoiding many of the pitfalls connected with pure subjective interpretations of the documents considered.

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