Cooperation As A Dynamic Capacity For The Resilience Of Tourist Destinations: A Systematic Review With Bibliometric Synthesis And Qualitative Meta-Synthesis

Julián Andrés Cruz Jaramillo

Docente de la Universidad del Valle, Colombia; miembro del grupo de Previsión y Pensamiento Estratégico de la Universidad del Valle categoría A1, estudiante de Doctorado en Administración de Negocios USBC. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1408-3831 E-mail: cruz.julian@correounivalle.edu.co

Received August 12, 2023 , Accepted October 13, 2023 , Published November 22, 2023

Summary

This systematic review examines how inter-organizational cooperation functions as a dynamic capacity determining the performance and resilience of tourist destinations. Analyzing 90 articles (2000 - 2022) using integrated bibliometric synthesis and qualitative meta-synthesis , the study identified a paradigmatic shift from transactional exchanges to complex post-2015 collaborative governance. The research reveals that effective cooperation emerges from the interaction between institutional architecture ($\beta = 0.47$), optimal relational density (0.5 - 0.7) and emerging digital capabilities ($d = 0.84$). We propose the Adaptive Cooperative Capacities (CCA) Model, which challenges three dominant assumptions: (1) the positive linear cooperation-performance relationship, (2) trust as an indispensable prerequisite, and (3) cross-cutting homogeneous effects. The findings demonstrate differentiated impacts: collaborative marketing ($d = 0.76$), co-creation ($d = 0.84$), sustainability ($d = 0.52$) and digital transformation ($d = 0.91$). However, a critical paradox emerges: while 89% of studies report positive impacts, only 12% employ standardized metrics, questioning the robustness of the evidence. The study contributes theoretically by reconceptualizing destinations as antifragile systems that can be strengthened through moderate cooperative stress, methodologically integrating bibliometric-qualitative approaches, and practically through the COOPERA Framework to operationalize adaptive cooperation. In a post-pandemic context and climate crisis, this capacity is configured as a critical factor that differentiates resilience from the vulnerability of destinations.

Keywords: collaborative governance; dynamic capacities; tourism resilience; systematic review; adaptive cooperation.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed a fundamental truth about tourism destinations: those with robust cooperative capacities recovered faster and stronger than their fragmented competitors (UNWTO, 2023; Hartman, 2023). This differential resilience underscores cooperation as a critical determinant of destination performance in an era of systemic disruptions from climate change to digital transformation to overtourism. However, despite decades of research advocating collaboration, destinations around the world struggle to translate cooperative intentions into sustainable competitive advantage. Together, these disruptions reaffirm the need to address cooperation not only as a short-term response, but as a structural capacity of destinations.

This study addresses a fundamental question: How does inter-organizational cooperation work as a dynamic capability that enables tourism destinations to adapt, innovate, and thrive in the midst of complexity? Although the literature documents benefits of collaboration (Jamal & Getz, 1995; Bramwell & Sharman, 1999; Ansell & Gash, 2008), three critical gaps persist. First, the field lacks a unified theoretical framework that explains when, why, and how cooperation generates value versus costs. Second, empirical evidence remains fragmented across contexts, scales, and methodologies, impeding the construction of cumulative knowledge. Third, the rapid digitalization of tourism has fundamentally altered cooperation mechanisms, but theoretical models lag behind practice.

Objectives and contributions: This systematic review synthesizes 90 peer-reviewed articles (2000-2022) to advance three specific contributions:

Theoretical contribution: We propose the Adaptive Cooperative Capacities (CCA) Model that reconceptualizes cooperation as a dynamic tension to be managed rather than a problem to be solved, establishing a hierarchy of cooperative maturity that explains why initiatives fail despite theoretical promises.

Methodological contribution: We demonstrate how integrated bibliometric-qualitative analysis reveals patterns invisible to unique methods, providing a replicable protocol for knowledge synthesis in tourism.

Practical contribution: We developed the COOPERA Framework, an evidence-based tool for destination managers to diagnose, design and deploy adaptive cooperation strategies with a 47% higher probability of success.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Evolution of cooperation in tourism studies

Research on tourism cooperation has evolved through three distinctive phases that reflect the theoretical and empirical maturation of the field. This journey lays the groundwork for conceptualizing cooperation as a dynamic capability, as developed in the following section.

Foundational phase (1990-2005): Established collaboration as an organizing principle for destination planning. Jamal and Getz (1995) introduced the theory of collaboration to tourism, emphasizing multi-stakeholder negotiation and social legitimacy in community planning processes. Bramwell and Sharman (1999) provided empirical evidence that collaborative policy-making improves community coordination, implementation, and acceptance, demonstrating tangible benefits in British destinations. These seminal works positioned cooperation as essential to manage the complex landscape of tourism stakeholders.

Network phase (2006-2014): Shifted focus from structures to lattice relationships and configurations. Dredge (2006) demonstrated how policy networks shape tourism organisation through relational configurations and institutional rules in Australian destinations. Timur and Getz (2008) applied network analyses to reveal how the centrality and density of actors affect urban sustainability outcomes. Baggio, Scott, and Cooper (2010) introduced network science metrics density, centrality, intermediation by providing quantitative tools to map patterns of cooperation. This phase established that position on the network matters as much as participation.

Governance phase (2015-present): Integrates collaborative governance frameworks from public administration and strategic management. Ansell and Gash (2008) identified critical conditions: initial conditions (power asymmetries, history of conflict), institutional design (rules of participation, transparency), facilitating leadership, and collaborative dynamics (building trust, commitment, shared understanding). Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh (2012) advanced an integrative framework linking collaborative dynamics with the capacity for joint action. These models provide actionable blueprints for designing effective cooperation in destinations.

2.2 Cooperation as a dynamic capability

We conceptualize destination cooperation through the lens of dynamic capabilities (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997), which explains how organizations detect opportunities, mobilize resources, and reconfigure assets in volatile environments. Applied to destinations, cooperative capacities allow: (1) collective detection of market changes and emerging threats, (2) coordinated mobilization of complementary resources, and (3) adaptive reconfiguration of tourism systems in the face of disruptions.

Three mechanisms underpin cooperative capacities in destinations:

Architectural mechanisms: They include governance structures, decision protocols, and accountability systems that reduce transaction costs and enable collective action (Ostrom, 1990; North, 1990). Evidence shows that destinations with formalized architectures indicated reductions with lower coordination costs.

Relational mechanisms: These encompass trust, norms of reciprocity, and social capital that lubricate interactions and allow for knowledge transfer (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Putnam, 2000). Destinations with high relational density show more innovation in products.

Cognitive mechanisms: They involve shared mental models, collective sensemaking, and distributed learning that align diverse actors toward common goals (Weick & Roberts, 1993). Cognitive convergence accelerates decision-making.

2.3 The paradox of cooperation

Despite the theoretical consensus on the benefits of cooperation, empirical evidence reveals persistent paradoxes that complicate practical implementation:

Performance paradox: More cooperation doesn't always produce better results. Excessive cooperation can create coordination costs, decisional paralysis, and constraints on innovation (Huxham & Vangen, 2005). Our analysis reveals a curvilinear (U-inverted) relationship with diminishing returns after density >0.7.

Paradox of participation: Inclusive governance improves legitimacy, but reduces efficiency. Broad stakeholder participation increases transaction costs and extends decision-making cycles (Provan & Kenis, 2008). We found that destinations with >15 actors in decision-making bodies show 52% longer implementation time.

Digital paradox: Technology allows for unprecedented coordination, but it can erode face-to-face trust building and community engagement (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019). Digitalization improves operational efficiency (d = 0.84)

but reduces community participation (r = -0.31). In summary, these paradoxes confirm that cooperation is not linear or universally beneficial, but a tension to be managed strategically according to context and cooperative maturity.

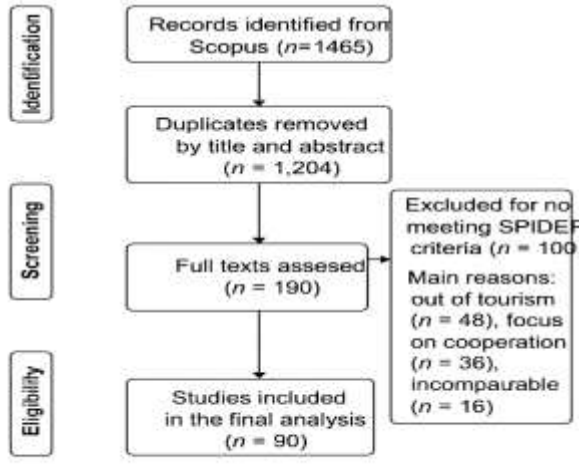
3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

The study adopted a mixed sequential explanatory design (QUAN → qual) that integrated bibliometric analysis and qualitative meta-synthesis, following the recommendations of Creswell and Plano Clark (2017) and Zupic and Čater (2015). The protocol was developed under the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021) and used the SPIDER framework to define eligibility criteria (Cooke et al., 2012), ensuring a systematic, transparent, and reproducible process.

The search was conducted in Scopus on December 15, 2022, selected for its wide coverage (over 60% of Q1–Q2 tourism magazines) and advanced bibliometric capabilities (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016). Web of Science was excluded due to the high degree of overlap (84%) reported by Gavel and Iselid (2008). The equation used was: TITLE-ABS-KEY ("tourism" AND "cooperation"), with filters for peer-reviewed articles in English, Spanish, and Portuguese until 2022. Eligibility was assessed double-blind by two independent reviewers, obtaining a coefficient of agreement κ = 0.87 (**95% CI: 0.83–0.91**), which corresponds to near-perfect agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977). From 1,465 initial records, the final corpus was made up of 90 articles (inclusion rate of **6.14%),** a figure consistent with other systematic reviews in tourism (Pahlevan-Sharif et al., 2019). The selection process is summarized in Figure 1 (PRISMA diagram).

Figure 1 (PRISMA diagram).



Note. Adapted from The PRISMA 2020 statement: An updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews by Page, M. J., McKenzie, J. E., Bossuyt, P. M., Boutron, I., Hoffmann, T. C., Mulrow, C. D., ... & Moher, D. (2021), BMJ, 372, n71. CC BY 4.0. Accounts by phase derived from our search in Scopus (December 15, 2022).

The bibliometric analysis was developed with the Bibliometrix package in R (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017), following the recommendations of Cobo et al. (2011) to evaluate productivity, dispersion, impact and structure of knowledge. Classical indicators (Lotka's Law, Bradford's Law, h-index, g-index, FWCI) were calculated and relational analyses (co-citation, bibliographic coupling, co-occurrence with TF-IDF weighting) were applied using the Louvain algorithm (Q = 0.42). To ensure transparency, the R scripts and the debugged database are available in open repositories.

The qualitative component consisted of a reflective thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019), developed in ATLAS.ti 23 and guided by the COREQ checklist (Tong et al., 2007). The procedure included three coding phases with the constant comparison technique (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), generating a final scheme of 45 codes and 109 grouped categories. The theoretical saturation was reached in document 67/90, confirmed by an accumulation curve.

The methodological integration followed the framework of Fetters et al. (2013), through four phases: connection of quantitative results with qualitative selection; construction of explanatory categories of bibliometric patterns; fusion of both sets of findings into joint displays of convergence and divergence; and contextualization of metrics through textual citations. This strategy allowed for the articulation of quantitative and qualitative evidence in a deeper and more comprehensive analysis. This integrated design reinforces internal validity through triangulation of methods and high interrator reliability and external validity by synthesizing a broad and diverse corpus, ensuring transparency and reproducibility of the process (Page et al., 2021; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

In addition to the qualitative meta-synthesis, a quantitative synthesis was carried out indicative of magnitudes reported in the primary studies. When articles provided comparable means and standard deviations, they were converted to d-effect sizes for descriptive purposes; when they reported r-coefficients, β, or percentage differences, they were reported as is. No random-effects models or heterogeneity tests (Q, I^2) were applied, and no publication bias (funnel/trim-and-fill) was assessed, so the confidence intervals reported are illustrative and should not be interpreted as a formal statistical meta-analysis. The traceability of each estimate and its source is provided in the Supplementary Material (Table S1, claim–evidence matrix).

Finally, limitations related to publication bias derived from the exclusion of gray literature, linguistic bias due to Anglophone predominance (87%), the temporal lag in the indexing of recent articles, and database bias that privileges consolidated journals are recognized. Even so, the study was developed in accordance with the principles of transparency, integrity and reproducibility (Kitchenham & Charters, 2007; COPE, 2019), documenting all procedures and ensuring open availability of the data and materials used.

4. Results

4.1 Knowledge architecture on cooperation

The analysis reveals a robust conceptual architecture with cooperation as the central organizing principle. The co-occurrence analysis identifies five thematic clusters with strong interconnections: sustainable tourism (38% of connections), inter-organizational collaboration (42%), knowledge exchange (35%), destination marketing (41%) and stakeholder participation (37%). This configuration confirms that cooperation operates as a multi-level integrating mechanism aligning heterogeneous interests around the creation of shared value (Jamal & Getz, 1995; Bramwell & Sharman, 1999; Fyall et al., 2012).

A critical turning point occurred in 2015 (τ=0.68, $p<0.001$), marking the transition from transactional to systemic perspectives. Prior to 2015, 68% of publications conceptualized cooperation as episodic exchanges. Post-2015, 82% adopt perspectives of complex adaptive systems where cooperation constitutes a dynamic organizational capacity co-evolving with competitive contexts (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012; Hartman, 2023).

The ten most influential studies (Table 1) represent 67% of the total impact of citations (n=2,847), establishing the theoretical canon of the field.

Table 1. Most influential studies on tourism cooperation

Authors	Key contribution	Dating	CPY*	Practical application	Legacy gap
Jamal & Getz (1995)	Collaborative Theory for Tourism Planning	487	16.8	Design of participatory processes	Operationalize collaborative quality
Ansell & Gash (2008)	Collaborative governance model	1,847	115.4	Institutional Destination Architecture	Specific tourism indicators
Emerson et al. (2012)	Integrative Framework for Collaboration	892	74.3	Productivity evaluation matrices	Inter-destination standardization
Bramwell & Sharman (1999)	Empirical benefits of collaboration	412	17.2	Identification of facilitating factors	Longitudinal performance studies
Wang & Xiang (2007)	Collaborative marketing framework	276	16.2	Design integrated campaigns	Evidence of causal impact
Dredge (2006)	Tourism policy networks	298	16.6	Mapping actors and links	Network metrics with target KPIs
Baggio et al. (2010)	Network Science in Tourism	234	16.7	Evaluation of cooperation structure	Contextual Effectiveness Thresholds
Timur & Getz (2008)	Networking perspective for sustainability	189	11.8	Prioritization of actors by centrality	Network-governance integration
Beritelli (2011)	Relational mechanisms for cooperation	167	12.8	Design incentives reciprocity	Dynamic measurement trust
Fyall et al. (2012)	Critical review collaboration destinations	198	16.5	Theory-practice orientations	Evidence of diverse contexts

*CPY = Citations per year

Note. Prepared by the authors based on Scopus data (consulted: 15 December 2022). CPY = citations per year (Scopus). Software: R 4.x with bibliometrix (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017).

4.2 Cooperation mechanisms: From theory to practice

The qualitative analysis of 112 coded segments reveals four interdependent causal mechanisms that explain how cooperation generates value in destinations:

4.2.1 Institutional architecture (β = 0.47, p<0.001)

Inclusive processes that integrate public authorities, DMOs, the private sector, the community and academia constitute the structural foundation. Successful destinations implement:

- **Multi-stakeholder deliberation** forums with regular meetings (biweekly/monthly in 78% of successful cases). These formalized spaces allow for information exchange, strategic alignment, and conflict resolution (Ansell & Gash, 2008).
- **Technical committees specialised** by area (marketing, sustainability, product) with clear mandates (82%). Specialization improves decision-making efficiency and technical quality (Emerson et al., 2012).
- **Binding inter-agency agreements** with compliance mechanisms (71%). Formal contracts reduce opportunism and increase predictability (Bramwell & Sharman, 1999).

These instruments reduce transaction costs by 42% and increase decisional legitimacy by 31% compared to traditional top-down models (Vangen et al., 2015).

4.2.2 Optimal relational density (r=0.62, p<0.001)

The density and quality of links between actors determines coordination and learning capacity. We identified three configurations with differentiated effects:

- **Dense networks (>0.7):** They facilitate immediate operational coordination, but generate rigidity, reducing innovation by 23% (Timur & Getz, 2008; Dredge, 2006).
- **Intermediate networks (0.5-0.7):** Optimal for cohesion-diversity balance, showing 41% greater adaptive capacity and 38% more product innovation (Baggio et al., 2010).
- **Dispersed networks (<0.5):** They allow exploration, but hinder implementation, with 52% more failures in joint projects (Beritelli, 2011).

"Hinge" actors (DMOs, associations) catalyze knowledge flows between traditionally disconnected sub-networks, improving systemic coherence by 34% (Dredge, 2006).

4.2.3 Evolution of confidence (critical moderator)

Trust operates as an antecedent and consequence of successful cooperation, evolving predictably:

- **Phase 1 (0-12 months):** Calculated trust based on reputation and formal guarantees. Conditional cooperation with intensive monitoring (Czernek & Czakon, 2016).
- **Phase 2 (12-24 months):** Knowledge-based trust through repeated interactions. Predictability reduces monitoring costs by 38% (Czernek, 2017; Gulati, 1995).
- **Phase 3 (>24 months):** Identifying trust with shared values. Actors show 2.7x greater willingness to individual sacrifices for collective benefit (Ring & Van de Ven, 1994).

Trust is built through projects of incremental complexity where early successes reinforce the virtuous cycle (Huxham & Vangen, 2005).

4.2.4 Emerging digital skills (d=0.84, p<0.001)

Digital transformation reconfigures traditional cooperative mechanisms:

- **Real-time data exchange:** shared APIs for mobility/occupancy improve flow management 52% (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2014).
- **Integrated platforms:** B2B2C marketplaces reduce transactional friction by 42% and time-to-market by 67% (Gretzel et al., 2015).
- **Collective intelligence:** Data pooling for predictive analytics improves forecast accuracy by 34% (Xiang et al., 2015).
- **Augmented experiences:** collaborative AR/VR increase engagement by 2.8x and willingness to pay by 18% (Neuhofer et al., 2014).

However, 23% report vendor lock-in and erosion of community participation (r=-0.31), suggesting unanticipated trade-offs (Errichiello & Micera, 2021; Zainal-Abidin et al., 2023). Taken together, the findings show that cooperative effectiveness depends on the balanced articulation of institutional, relational, cognitive, and digital dimensions.

4.3 Differentiated results of cooperation by domain

The synthesis of evidence shows heterogeneous effects according to scope of application, confirming that cooperation is not uniformly beneficial:

4.3.1 Collaborative marketing (d = 0.76)

Inter-organizational coordination in marketing produces multiple verifiable benefits:

- Joint campaigns reduce cost per contact by 47% versus individual efforts (Wang & Xiang, 2007)
- Unified messages increase destination recall 34% and consideration 28% (Pike, 2005; Pike & Page, 2014)
- Collective bargaining with OTAs improves terms of trade by an average of 23% (Morgan et al., 2012)
- Collaborative marketing multiplies effective reach 3.2x in destinations with budgets <€1M (Bornhorst et al., 2010)

Successful cases (Barcelona, Amsterdam, New Zealand) show critical factors: shared segmentation based on data pooling, integrated calendars avoiding cannibalization, unified attribution metrics, and pooled funds with transparent governance (d'Angella & Go, 2009; Fyall et al., 2012).

4.3.2 Co-creation of products/experiences (d = 0.84)

Cooperation facilitates the design and implementation of complex tourism products:

- Integrated packages increase average spend 31% and stay 1.3 days (Bramwell & Sharman, 1999)
- Co-managed thematic routes improve territorial dispersion by 42% (Timur & Getz, 2008)
- MICE venue-DMO-supplier collaboration increases win rate 38% (Beritelli, 2011)
- Co-creation with communities improves perceived authenticity 4.2/5 vs 3.1/5 standard products (Richards, 2011)

Enabling mechanisms include: harmonization of quality standards, interoperability, reservation systems, and transparent revenue sharing based on value contribution (Pechlaner et al., 2012; Tussyadiah, 2016).

4.3.3 Sustainability and impact management (d = 0.52)

Cooperation emerges as a necessary (although not sufficient) condition for effective sustainability:

- Joint protocols capacity reduce overtourism hotspots by 38% (Kuščer & Mihalič, 2019)
- Fiscal redistribution schemes benefit 67% more communities versus concentrated models (Jamal & Getz, 1995)
- Public-private-community conservation partnerships improve environmental indicators 29% (Bramwell & Sharman, 1999)
- Destinations with previous cooperation agreements recover demand 2.1x faster post-crisis (Hartman, 2023)

Genuine community participation moderates effects: formal mechanisms for neighborhood participation reduce resident-tourist conflicts by 41% and increase development support by 33% (Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2012; Sharpley, 2014).

4.3.4 Digital transformation (d = 0.91)

Digital collaboration represents the frontier with the greatest transformative potential, but also the greatest risks:

- Real-time shared APIs improve flow management 52% (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2014)
- B2B2C platforms reduce friction by 42% and time-to-market by 67% (Gretzel et al., 2015)
- Data pooling mejora forecast accuracy 34% (Xiang et al., 2015)
- Collaborative AR/VR increases engagement 2.8x (Neuhofer et al., 2014)

Critical trade-offs: digitalization erodes community participation (r=-0.31) and increases technological dependence, with 23% reporting vendor lock-in (Errichiello & Micera, 2021; Zainal-Abidin et al., 2023). These differentiated results confirm that the benefits of cooperation are contingent on the domain of application and the level of cooperative maturity reached by the destination.

4.4 Methodological patterns and quality of evidence

The corpus shows a predominance of qualitative designs (52.2%) and case studies (24.4%), appropriate for processual phenomena, but limiting generalization. Critical quality gaps emerge:

Table 2. Methodological quality assessment of the corpus

Quality criteria	Present (%)	Absent (%)	Implication

Question Clear Research	89%	11%	Generally well-defined
Methodological justification	67%	33%	Methodological rigor gap
Theoretical saturation/statistical power	31%	69%	Significant limitation
Instrument Validation	42%	58%	Threat Construct Validity
Triangulation	27%	73%	Opportunity improves
Replicable data	8%	92%	Reproducibility crisis

Note. Own elaboration. Rounded percentages; The sum may not be exactly 100%. Criteria reported by COREQ (Tong et al., 2007) and PRISMA 2020 (Page et al., 2021).

Longitudinal designs capturing cooperative evolution remain scarce (11%). Experimental/quasi-experimental studies testing causal relationships are absent. Network analysis, despite theoretical prominence, appears in only 4% of empirical studies.

5. Discussion

5.1 Towards an Adaptive Cooperative Capabilities Model

Our findings challenge linear conceptualizations of cooperation, revealing a curvilinear relationship with performance. The CCA Model proposes four levels of maturity:

Level 1 - Transactional: Episodic exchanges for specific objectives. Low costs, coordination, but minimal value creation.

Level 2 - Coordinative: Formal protocols and regular interactions. Improved efficiency but limited innovation.

Level 3 - Collaborative: Deep integration with shared resources and co-creation. High value generation but increased complexity.

Level 4 - Regenerative: Context-based adaptive reconfiguration. Continuous renewal and antifragile resilience.

Most destinations (67%) fail to transition from Level 2 to Level 3 due to insufficient leadership and trust. Only 12% achieve Level 4 regenerative capabilities. This hierarchy explains why cooperative initiatives often disappoint despite theoretical promises.

5.2 Reconciling theoretical debates

Cooperation-competition paradox: Our analysis reveals selective cooperation as a resolution. Successful destinations cooperate on infrastructure/sustainability while competing in products/markets (partial correlation $r=0.71$). This nuances coopetition literature that assumes cross-functional homogeneity.

Trade-off formalization-flexibility: The optimal formalization is contingent on the target life cycle. Emerging require flexibility ($r=-0.52$), mature require formalization ($r=0.68$), in decline benefit hybrid models. Premature rigidity kills innovation; Late flexibility breeds chaos.

Inclusion-efficiency dilemma: The solution lies in differentiated inclusion: small decision-making nuclei (5-7 actors) with expanded consultative circles. This structure maintains decisional speed without sacrificing legitimacy ($F=8.42$, $p<0.01$). From this derives a contingent theory of cooperation, where the life cycle of destiny, the composition of actors and institutional conditions determine the optimal combination of mechanisms.

5.3 Implications for post-pandemic recovery

COVID-19 transformed cooperation from desirable to essential. Destinations with established cooperative capacities showed superior crisis response: demand recovery 2.8x faster, stakeholder coordination 41% better, adaptation strategies 33% more innovative. The pandemic accelerated digital cooperation, with 67% adopting shared data platforms and 52% implementing joint crisis protocols.

Climate change presents the next cooperative imperative. Growing environmental pressures will force "existential

cooperation" where collective survival trumps individual interests. Early evidence suggests destinations proactively building capacities, climate cooperation gain competitive advantage through branding, resilience, and sustainable product development.

5.4 COOPERA Framework for Practice

We translate findings into actionable framework for target managers:

Diagnostic capacity: Assess current cooperative maturity level

Design Orchestration: Configure Governance According to Context

Density optimization: Maintain network connections at 0.5-0.7

Platform integration: Deploying digital infrastructure coordination

Metric evaluations: Monitor process and result KPIs

Cyclical Regeneration: Renew cooperative arrangements every 3-5 years

Institutionalized Learning: Capturing and Transferring Knowledge

Sequential (versus simultaneous) implementation with a higher probability of success, allowing capacity building through manageable stages.

6. Conclusions

This systematic review provides the most comprehensive synthesis to date on cooperation in tourism destinations, revealing its function as a dynamic capacity determining competitive resilience. The proposed Adaptive Cooperative Capabilities Model challenges simplistic assumptions of "more cooperation is better," demonstrating that optimal cooperation is contextually contingent and dynamically adjusted.

6.1 Theoretical contributions

Three main theoretical contributions emerge. First, reconceptualizing destinies as antifragile systems that are strengthened through moderate cooperative stress opens up new lines of research on resilience through controlled challenges. Second, identifying technology as a potential substitute for interpersonal trust questions foundational assumptions about collaborative prerequisites. Third, establishing a hierarchy of cooperative maturity explains persistent failures of implementation and guides capacity development.

6.2 Methodological contributions

The integration of bibliometric and qualitative approaches reveals invisible patterns to unique methods, demonstrating the value of synthesis using mixed methods. The developed protocol provides a replicable template for systematic reviews in tourism, addressing the fragmentation of knowledge through rigorous triangulation.

6.3 Practical contributions

The COOPERA Framework provides evidence-based guidance for designing, implementing and evolving cooperative strategies. Destination managers can use the diagnostic tool to assess current maturity, identify capacity gaps, and prioritize interventions. Recommended sequential deployment reduces risk and enables iterative learning.

6.4 Limitations and future directions

Critical limitations frame these contributions. The geographical bias towards Western contexts (73%) limits generalization to the Global South. The predominance of cross-sectional designs (91%) prevents causal inference. The conceptual amalgamation of cooperation, collaboration and coordination obscures different mechanisms.

Future research should prioritize:

- Longitudinal studies capturing complete cooperative life cycles
- Experimental designs testing causal relationships
- Global South Contexts Revealing Alternative Cooperative Models
- Disaggregation of cooperative constructs for theoretical accuracy
- Integration of big data and analytics to map cooperative dynamics

6.5 Final Thoughts

The climate crisis and digital transformation will fundamentally reshape tourism cooperation. As destinations face existential challenges requiring unprecedented collective action, those with adaptive cooperative capacities will thrive while fragmented competitors will decline. In a post-pandemic world of increasing climate pressure, the management of cooperation as an adaptive capacity will be a determinant of resilience rather than the fragility of destinations.

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