

Destination Management Organizations as Meta-Governance Mechanisms in Island Tourism: The Case of Kefalonia, Greece

Evangelia Parisi¹

¹ Department of Digital Media and Communication, Ionian University, Kefalonia, Greece

Correspondence: Evangelia Parisi, Department of Digital Media and Communication, Ionian University, Kefalonia, Greece.

Received: July 27, 2026

Accepted: September 11, 2026

Online Published: September 16, 2026

doi:10.11114/bms.v12i2.9316

URL: <https://doi.org/10.11114/bms.v12i2.9316>

Abstract

Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) have increasingly moved beyond their traditional marketing functions toward broader roles in destination coordination, stakeholder collaboration, strategic planning, and sustainable tourism governance. However, the extent to which DMOs can operate as meta-governance mechanisms in small island destinations characterized by institutional fragmentation remains insufficiently understood. This study examines the potential role of a DMO as a meta-governance mechanism in Kefalonia, Greece, focusing on institutional coordination, stakeholder participation, residents' perceptions, and the adaptation of selected destination governance practices to the local context.

A mixed-methods case study design was employed, combining semi-structured interviews with institutional and tourism stakeholders, a questionnaire survey of 303 permanent residents of Kefalonia, and a comparative analysis of selected international and Greek DMO and destination governance models. Qualitative data were examined thematically, while quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. The comparative analysis was used to identify governance mechanisms and organizational principles potentially relevant to the Kefalonia context.

The findings indicate that stakeholders perceive fragmentation of responsibilities and limited strategic coordination as important challenges for destination governance. Residents recognize the economic contribution of tourism while also expressing concerns regarding infrastructure pressures, traffic congestion, environmental impacts, and the rising cost of living. The resident survey further indicates substantial support among respondents for a more coordinated destination-management mechanism, including the potential establishment of a DMO. Taken together, the findings suggest that a DMO could contribute to addressing coordination and information gaps through institutional alignment, stakeholder networking, sustainability monitoring, and evidence-based decision-making.

Building on the empirical findings, the study proposes a multi-level DMO framework comprising a regional coordination function, a Tourism Observatory, a local DMO, and a stakeholder network. The study contributes to destination governance research by conceptualizing the DMO not simply as a marketing or management organization, but as a potential meta-governance mechanism that facilitates coordination among heterogeneous actors and governance levels. Given the single-case design and non-probability sampling, the proposed framework should be understood as a context-sensitive and empirically informed model rather than as a universally generalizable solution for island destinations.

Keywords: Destination Management Organizations (DMOs), destination meta-governance, sustainable tourism policy, Kefalonia

1. Introduction

Tourism is a major contributor to economic development, employment, and territorial cohesion, particularly in destinations where tourism constitutes an important component of the local economy. However, the increasing intensity and complexity of tourism activity have created substantial governance challenges. These challenges are particularly evident in island destinations, where limited infrastructure, environmental vulnerability, seasonality, dependence on external markets, and geographical constraints can amplify the social, economic, and environmental consequences of tourism growth (Butler, 1999; Gössling et al., 2018; Sharpley, 2020). Consequently, sustainable tourism in island destinations increasingly requires governance arrangements capable of coordinating competing interests, managing

tourism pressures, and integrating economic, social, and environmental objectives.

Destination governance involves the interaction of public authorities, businesses, local communities, and other stakeholders in the formulation and implementation of policies and strategies affecting tourism destinations (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Hall, 2011a, 2011b). Rather than being controlled by a single organization, tourism destinations typically operate through complex institutional arrangements involving multiple administrative levels and heterogeneous actors. Such arrangements can generate coordination problems, overlapping responsibilities, fragmented decision-making, and conflicts over resources and development priorities. These challenges are particularly relevant in island destinations, where the concentration of tourism activity within a geographically constrained environment increases the need for institutional coordination and stakeholder collaboration.

Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) have traditionally been associated with destination marketing and the promotion of tourism demand. However, the increasing complexity of destination systems has progressively expanded their potential role toward strategic destination management, stakeholder coordination, product development, crisis management, sustainability monitoring, and evidence-based decision-making (Pike & Page, 2014; Morrison, 2019). This transformation reflects a broader shift from viewing destinations primarily as products to be marketed toward understanding them as complex socio-economic systems that require continuous coordination and governance.

This evolution raises an important theoretical question: can DMOs operate not only as destination management organizations but also as mechanisms of meta-governance? Meta-governance refers broadly to the organization and coordination of governance arrangements involving multiple actors, networks, and institutional levels (Jessop, 2002; Sørensen & Torfing, 2009; Amore & Hall, 2016).

Rather than replacing existing organizations or exercising direct hierarchical control over all participants, meta-governance seeks to establish frameworks, rules, coordination mechanisms, and strategic orientations through which heterogeneous actors can work toward shared objectives. This perspective is particularly relevant to tourism destinations, where public authorities, private businesses, local communities, and civil society organizations possess different interests, resources, responsibilities, and degrees of influence.

Although destination governance and DMO research have developed considerably, the relationship between DMOs and meta-governance remains insufficiently developed empirically, particularly in small island destinations. Existing research has examined DMOs as destination marketing organizations, network coordinators, and governance actors (Pike & Page, 2014; Pechlaner et al., 2014), while the application of meta-governance as a specific conceptual lens for understanding the role of DMOs remains comparatively underdeveloped in tourism research (Amore & Hall, 2016). This gap is particularly relevant in contexts where tourism governance involves overlapping responsibilities and limited coordination between national, regional, local, public, and private actors.

The Greek tourism context provides a relevant setting for examining these issues, given the multi-level institutional environment within which tourism planning and destination management are implemented. Tourism policy in Greece involves interactions among different actors, institutional arrangements, and administrative levels, creating important coordination challenges for destination governance (Pastras & Bramwell, 2013). Greek island destinations also face significant challenges associated with tourism seasonality, infrastructure and accessibility constraints, and the concentration of tourism activity during peak periods (Karampela et al., 2015; Ruggieri & Platania, 2024). These conditions create a need for governance mechanisms capable of connecting strategic planning with local implementation, stakeholder participation, and evidence-based destination management.

Kefalonia provides an appropriate case through which to investigate these issues. As one of the Ionian Islands, Kefalonia combines substantial tourism activity with significant natural and cultural resources, while also facing challenges associated with tourism seasonality, infrastructure capacity, environmental pressures, and the concentration of tourism activity during peak periods (Ruggieri & Platania, 2024; Parisi & Konidaris, 2025). Recent research on Kefalonia has also identified challenges related to sustainability, stakeholder cooperation, and the need for a more coordinated tourism management structure (Parisi & Konidaris, 2025). The island therefore provides an appropriate empirical setting for examining whether a DMO could contribute to overcoming existing governance fragmentation and perform broader coordination and meta-governance functions.

Against this background, this study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How is tourism governance currently perceived by institutional and tourism stakeholders in Kefalonia, and what coordination challenges characterize the existing governance system?

RQ2: What are residents' perceptions of tourism development and their attitudes toward greater stakeholder participation and the establishment of a DMO?

RQ3: Which governance functions and organizational characteristics of selected international and Greek DMO and

destination-governance models are potentially relevant and adaptable to the context of Kefalonia?

RQ4: How can the empirical findings inform the design of a DMO that functions as a meta-governance mechanism for sustainable tourism governance in Kefalonia?

The study employs a mixed-methods case study design combining semi-structured interviews with institutional and tourism stakeholders, a survey of 303 permanent residents of Kefalonia, and comparative analysis of international and Greek destination governance models. The integration of these sources enables the study to examine the issue from institutional, social, and comparative perspectives rather than relying on a single source of evidence.

The study makes three main contributions. First, it provides empirical evidence from an under-researched island destination and examines the relationship between institutional fragmentation, stakeholder coordination, and the potential establishment of a DMO. Second, it contributes to the theoretical discussion of destination governance by examining the DMO through a meta-governance perspective, emphasizing its potential role in coordinating rather than replacing existing institutions and stakeholder networks. Third, it develops a context-sensitive governance framework for Kefalonia that links empirical findings to specific organizational functions, including multi-level coordination, tourism intelligence and monitoring, local destination management, and stakeholder participation.

Importantly, the study does not assume that the establishment of a DMO automatically leads to more sustainable or effective tourism governance. Instead, it examines the institutional and social conditions under which such an organization could contribute to improved coordination and identifies potential limitations associated with institutional responsibilities, stakeholder interests, political relationships, financing, and implementation. The findings are therefore interpreted primarily in relation to Kefalonia, while the potential relevance of the proposed framework for other island destinations is considered cautiously.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Sustainable Tourism and Island Destinations

Sustainable tourism development requires the integration of economic, social, and environmental objectives within the long-term management of destinations. The concept has evolved beyond the protection of natural resources to include the quality of life of host communities, social equity, stakeholder participation, destination resilience, and the long-term viability of tourism-related economic activity (WCED, 1987; Butler, 1999; Sharpley, 2020).

These dimensions are particularly important in island destinations. Islands often combine a high dependence on tourism with limited land availability, constrained infrastructure capacity, environmental vulnerability, and pronounced seasonal fluctuations in visitor demand. Such characteristics can create tensions between tourism growth and the capacity of local systems to absorb tourism-related pressures. Consequently, sustainable island tourism cannot be addressed solely through measures directed at individual businesses or visitors. It requires coordinated destination-level policies capable of connecting economic development with environmental management, infrastructure planning, community interests, and tourism demand management (Ruggieri & Platania, 2024; Sharpley, 2020).

The governance of sustainable tourism therefore becomes a central issue. Effective destination management requires the participation of multiple actors and the coordination of decisions across institutional and organizational boundaries. The challenge is not simply to determine which tourism policies should be implemented, but also to establish institutional arrangements through which different actors can cooperate, negotiate competing interests, share information, and contribute to common strategic objectives.

2.2 Destination Governance

Destination governance refers to the processes and institutional arrangements through which public authorities, businesses, communities, and other stakeholders collectively influence the development and management of tourism destinations (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Hall, 2011a, 2011b). Unlike hierarchical government, destination governance involves multiple actors whose responsibilities, resources, interests, and forms of influence may differ.

The governance perspective is particularly relevant to tourism because destinations are not normally managed by a single organization. Tourism development involves public administrations, destination organizations, accommodation providers, transport operators, cultural institutions, residents, environmental organizations, and other actors. These stakeholders may share certain objectives while simultaneously pursuing competing interests. Destination governance consequently involves processes of coordination, negotiation, participation, leadership, and institutional learning.

Research on destination governance has emphasized the importance of participation, coherence, responsibility, effectiveness, openness, and knowledge in developing functioning governance systems. Recent work also highlights the importance of assessing governance through multiple dimensions rather than treating governance as synonymous with the existence of a particular organization (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Hall, 2011; Amore & Hall, 2016)

This distinction is important for the present study. The establishment of a DMO should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of effective destination governance. Rather, the effectiveness of a DMO depends on its institutional legitimacy, authority, networking capacity, stakeholder participation, resources, and ability to coordinate actors that remain institutionally autonomous.

2.3 From Governance to Meta-Governance

The concept of meta-governance provides a further theoretical perspective for understanding governance in complex tourism destinations. Whereas governance concerns the interaction and coordination of multiple actors within a policy or institutional system, meta-governance concerns the organization, steering, and coordination of those governance arrangements themselves (Jessop, 2002; Sørensen & Torfing, 2009; Amore & Hall, 2016).

In tourism, meta-governance provides a useful perspective for understanding how political interests, institutional relationships, and stakeholder networks can be coordinated without relying exclusively on hierarchical forms of control (Amore & Hall, 2016).

Meta-governance does not necessarily imply direct hierarchical control. Instead, it can involve establishing strategic frameworks, facilitating networks, creating rules and procedures, coordinating information, setting common objectives, and enabling actors with different interests to participate in collective decision-making. This makes the concept particularly relevant to policy environments in which no single actor possesses sufficient authority or resources to manage the entire system independently (Jessop, 2002; Sørensen & Torfing, 2009).

In tourism, the concept is especially useful because destination governance frequently involves fragmented institutional structures and networks of actors with different interests and responsibilities. Amore and Hall argue that the meta-governance perspective can help tourism research move beyond a simple distinction between government and governance by incorporating questions of political authority, interests, and values into the analysis of tourism governance.

For the purposes of this study, meta-governance is therefore understood as a second-order coordination function through which institutional actors and stakeholder networks are connected, strategic priorities are aligned, information is organized, and conditions for collective action are established.

This conceptualization allows an important distinction to be made:

Governance concerns how different actors interact to make and implement decisions.

Meta-governance concerns how the conditions, structures, networks, information flows, and strategic frameworks through which those interactions occur are coordinated.

This distinction is central to the argument of the present study. A DMO can perform conventional management functions without necessarily performing meta-governance functions. A DMO becomes relevant from a meta-governance perspective when it contributes to the coordination of multiple governance actors and levels without simply replacing them.

Accordingly, the proposed DMO is conceptualized not as a new hierarchical authority that absorbs the responsibilities of existing public institutions, but as an institutional platform capable of facilitating alignment between regional and local authorities, tourism businesses, residents, community organizations, and other stakeholders.

2.4 Stakeholder and Network Governance

Stakeholder Theory provides a complementary perspective for understanding the relationships among actors within destination governance. Freeman (1984) argues that organizations need to recognize and balance the interests of groups that affect or are affected by their activities. In tourism destinations, stakeholders include public authorities, businesses, residents, employees, visitors, community organizations, and environmental and cultural actors.

The stakeholder perspective is particularly relevant to island destinations because tourism development produces benefits and costs that are distributed unevenly among local groups. Businesses may prioritize economic growth, residents may emphasize quality of life and infrastructure, and public authorities may seek employment and tax revenues, while environmental organizations may prioritize ecological protection. A governance system that ignores these differences may generate resistance, reduce legitimacy, or intensify institutional conflict (Freeman, 1984; Bramwell & Lane, 2011).

Network governance complements stakeholder theory by recognizing that destination actors frequently depend on one another and that effective destination management requires collaboration across organizational boundaries. Research on DMOs has shown that networking capability and the ability to foster collaboration among destination stakeholders are important elements of DMO effectiveness. In particular, DMO authority is related not only to formal institutional

position but also to its acceptance and capacity to operate within the destination network (Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014).

This has a direct implication for the Kefalonia case. If a future DMO is to perform a meta-governance function, its legitimacy cannot derive exclusively from its formal institutional status. It must also derive from stakeholder participation, transparency, perceived neutrality, networking capacity, and the ability to produce value for different groups.

2.5 The Evolution of Destination Management Organizations

DMOs have traditionally been associated with destination promotion, branding, image development, and the generation of tourism demand. The literature on destination marketing has consequently focused extensively on issues such as destination image, competitiveness, positioning, and marketing effectiveness (Pike & Page, 2014; Morrison, 2022).

However, the increasing complexity of destination systems has broadened the functions associated with DMOs. Contemporary destination management increasingly involves strategic planning, stakeholder coordination, sustainability, visitor management, crisis response, destination intelligence, and the coordination of public and private resources (Pike & Page, 2014; Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014; Morrison, 2019).

The transformation of the DMO from a predominantly marketing-oriented organization toward a broader governance actor does not mean that marketing functions disappear. Rather, marketing becomes one component within a wider destination management system. This is particularly relevant when destinations face problems that cannot be addressed through promotion alone, such as overtourism, infrastructure pressure, seasonality, environmental degradation, or conflicts between tourism development and residents' quality of life.

The literature therefore increasingly recognizes the importance of DMOs as organizations that facilitate cooperation and manage destination networks. Research by Volgger and Pechlaner, for example, identifies networking capability as an important determinant of DMO success and emphasizes the relationship between networking, DMO authority, and acceptance within the destination network (Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014).

This evolution provides the conceptual basis for considering DMOs in relation to meta-governance. Nevertheless, the two concepts should not be treated as synonymous. Not every DMO is necessarily a meta-governance organization. The meta-governance role depends on the functions that the DMO performs, its institutional position, its authority and legitimacy, and its capacity to coordinate actors and governance arrangements beyond its own organizational boundaries.

2.6 DMOs as Potential Meta-Governance Mechanisms

Based on the preceding discussion (Amore & Hall, 2016; Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014), this study conceptualizes a DMO as a potential meta-governance mechanism when it performs four interrelated functions.

First, institutional alignment.

The DMO can facilitate coordination between different administrative levels and reduce fragmentation between institutions with overlapping or complementary responsibilities.

Second, network facilitation.

The DMO can create and maintain structured channels through which businesses, public authorities, residents, and other stakeholders participate in destination decision-making.

Third, knowledge and information coordination.

The DMO can facilitate the collection, integration, and dissemination of tourism data, sustainability indicators, visitor-flow information, and other evidence required for strategic decision-making.

Fourth, strategic steering.

The DMO can facilitate the development of shared destination objectives and strategic priorities without necessarily exercising direct hierarchical control over all participating organizations.

These functions provide the theoretical foundation for the empirical analysis undertaken in Kefalonia.

2.7 Conceptual Framework for the Study

The theoretical framework developed in this study conceptualizes destination governance as a multi-level and multi-actor system in which institutional fragmentation may create coordination, information, and strategic planning gaps (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Hall, 2011). Within such a context, meta-governance refers to the capacity to facilitate coordination among actors and governance levels without necessarily replacing existing institutions or imposing hierarchical control (Jessop, 2002; Sørensen & Torfing, 2009; Amore & Hall, 2016).

The conceptual relationship proposed in this study can be summarized as follows:

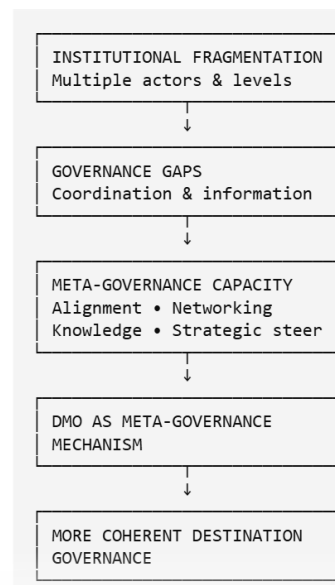


Figure 1. Conceptual framework linking destination conditions, governance challenges, meta-governance capacities, and potential DMO functions

Source: Author's own elaboration based on Bramwell and Lane (2011), Hall (2011), Sørensen and Torfing (2009), Amore and Hall (2016), and Volgger and Pechlaner (2014).

The framework does not assume that the establishment of a DMO will automatically improve destination sustainability or competitiveness. Rather, it proposes that a DMO may contribute to these outcomes when appropriate institutional and organizational conditions are present. These conditions include institutional legitimacy, stakeholder support, clearly defined responsibilities, adequate resources, access to relevant information, and sufficient networking and coordination capacity (Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014; Beritelli et al., 2007).

This distinction is particularly important for the present case study. The empirical question is therefore not simply whether stakeholders support the establishment of a DMO. Instead, the study examines whether the institutional and social conditions identified in Kefalonia are compatible with the development of a DMO capable of performing selected meta-governance functions.

The conceptual framework consequently establishes a link between the structural characteristics of the destination, the governance challenges arising from these characteristics, the meta-governance capacities required to address them, and the potential organizational functions of a DMO

In this framework, seasonality, tourism dependence, infrastructure pressures, environmental pressures, and institutional fragmentation constitute the principal destination conditions. These conditions may generate fragmented responsibilities, limited coordination, information gaps, stakeholder tensions, and difficulties in integrating strategic priorities across governance levels (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Hall, 2011; Sharpley, 2020).

Meta-governance provides the theoretical mechanism through which these challenges may be addressed. In particular, the framework identifies five relevant meta-governance capacities: institutional alignment, stakeholder network coordination, shared information and data, strategic steering, and participatory decision-making (Jessop, 2002; Sørensen & Torfing, 2009; Amore & Hall, 2016).

These capacities are subsequently translated into four potential DMO functions relevant to the Kefalonia context: regional coordination, a Tourism Observatory, local destination management, and a stakeholder network. This translation represents the authors' empirical and conceptual synthesis of the theoretical literature and the findings of the Kefalonia case study.

The framework therefore does not conceptualize the DMO as a new hierarchical authority replacing existing institutions. Instead, it conceptualizes the DMO as a coordinating and facilitating institutional mechanism operating across existing governance structures. Its potential contribution lies in connecting actors, aligning strategic priorities, facilitating information flows, supporting evidence-based decision-making, and creating structured opportunities for stakeholder participation (Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014; Amore & Hall, 2016).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods case study design to examine the potential role of a Destination Management Organization (DMO) as a meta-governance mechanism in Kefalonia, Greece. A mixed-methods approach was selected because the research questions require the examination of the phenomenon from complementary institutional and community perspectives, allowing qualitative and quantitative evidence to be integrated within a single research design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Kefalonia was selected as the case study because it represents an island tourism destination characterized by strong seasonality, significant dependence on tourism, environmental and infrastructure pressures, and the involvement of multiple stakeholders in tourism-related decision-making. The case study approach is appropriate for examining a contemporary phenomenon within its real-world institutional and geographical context (Yin, 2018).

The empirical research combines two complementary components: (a) qualitative research involving tourism stakeholders and institutional representatives, and (b) quantitative research involving permanent residents of Kefalonia. In addition, secondary sources and selected international and Greek destination governance models were examined to support the comparative and interpretative dimensions of the study. The integration of these components provides a basis for connecting stakeholder perspectives, residents' perceptions, and established destination governance practices (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The study is guided by the conceptual framework developed in Section 2.7, with particular emphasis on institutional alignment, stakeholder networking, knowledge coordination, and strategic steering as key dimensions of destination meta-governance.

3.2 Data Sources and Data Collection

The empirical research was based on two primary sources of data, complemented by secondary sources.

First, 21 semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of public and private tourism stakeholders in Kefalonia and Ithaca. Participants were purposively selected based on their institutional or professional involvement in tourism planning, destination management, tourism services, and stakeholder coordination. The sample included representatives from local government, regional authorities, tourism associations, professional organizations, tourism businesses, transport and infrastructure-related bodies, and other organizations involved in the local tourism system. The interviews explored perceptions of the existing tourism governance structure, stakeholder cooperation, destination management challenges, sustainability, crisis management, and the potential role, functions, and organizational form of a DMO.

Second, quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to permanent residents of Kefalonia. A total of 303 valid responses were obtained. The questionnaire examined residents' perceptions of tourism development, its economic, social, and environmental effects, tourism-related pressures, sustainability priorities, attitudes toward the establishment and potential functions of a DMO, and willingness to participate in destination decision-making.

Secondary data were also drawn from academic literature, policy documents, institutional reports, strategic tourism plans, and selected international and Greek destination management and governance models.

The combination of the two primary methodological approaches enabled the study to examine destination governance from both the perspective of tourism stakeholders and that of the local community, while the secondary and comparative evidence provided an additional basis for interpreting the empirical findings.

3.3 Qualitative Research and Analysis

The qualitative component consisted of 21 semi-structured interviews with tourism stakeholders and institutional representatives in Kefalonia and Ithaca. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure the inclusion of participants representing different dimensions of the local tourism system.

The interviews addressed key themes related to the study's conceptual framework, including: (1) the existing structure of tourism governance; (2) cooperation and coordination among stakeholders; (3) major challenges affecting tourism development and destination management; (4) the potential role and functions of a DMO; and (5) stakeholder participation, information sharing, sustainability, crisis management, and strategic coordination.

The interview material was analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis involved familiarization with the interview material, identification and coding of relevant statements, grouping of codes into broader thematic categories, review of emerging themes, and interpretation of relationships among the identified

themes.

The coding process focused on issues directly related to the conceptual framework, including institutional coordination, stakeholder participation, strategic planning, sustainability, information and data, crisis management, and the potential functions and governance structure of a DMO.

3.4 Quantitative Research and Analysis

The quantitative component was based on a structured questionnaire administered to permanent residents of Kefalonia. The questionnaire covered residents' perceptions of tourism development, perceived economic, social and environmental impacts, tourism-related pressures, sustainability priorities, awareness and acceptance of a DMO, and willingness to participate in destination governance.

A total of 303 valid questionnaires were included in the analysis. The study employed convenience sampling; therefore, the quantitative findings are interpreted as indicative of the views expressed by the respondents rather than as statistically representative estimates of the entire resident population.

The quantitative analysis primarily employed descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, to summarize respondents' characteristics and perceptions. Where appropriate, cross-tabulations and chi-square tests were used to examine associations between selected socio-demographic characteristics and residents' attitudes toward tourism and the proposed DMO. Statistical significance was assessed at $p < 0.05$.

3.5 Questionnaire Development, Reliability and Validity

The questionnaire was developed based on the research objectives, the theoretical framework, and relevant literature on sustainable tourism, stakeholder participation, destination governance, and DMOs. The questionnaire was designed to capture residents' perceptions of the current tourism situation as well as their attitudes toward destination governance and the potential establishment of a DMO.

Prior to the main data collection, the questionnaire was pilot tested to identify potential problems concerning wording, comprehension, response options, and questionnaire structure. The final version incorporated the observations arising from the pilot process.

Where multi-item scales were used, internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with values of approximately 0.70 or above considered indicative of acceptable internal consistency (Hair et al., 2019). Content validity was supported through the alignment of questionnaire items with the conceptual framework and the relevant literature.

3.6 Comparative Analysis and Methodological Integration

The comparative component examined selected international and Greek DMO and destination governance models in order to identify organizational and governance mechanisms potentially relevant to Kefalonia.

The comparison focused on institutional structure, governance arrangements, stakeholder participation, destination intelligence and data, sustainability, and visitor management. The purpose was not to identify a single model for direct replication, but rather to identify transferable governance principles while taking into account the specific institutional and geographical context of Kefalonia.

The findings from the qualitative and quantitative components were integrated during the interpretation stage. The 21 stakeholder interviews provided evidence regarding institutional structures, stakeholder perspectives and governance needs, while the 303 resident responses provided evidence regarding community perceptions, attitudes and acceptance of destination governance mechanisms. The comparative analysis complemented these findings by identifying alternative governance practices.

This methodological integration enabled the study to identify areas of convergence and divergence between stakeholder and resident perspectives and to link the empirical findings to the theoretical dimensions of meta-governance established in Section 2.7. The proposed DMO model was subsequently developed on the basis of identified governance needs, empirical findings, and relevant comparative practices.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Participation in the research was voluntary. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the use of the information collected. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained, and no personally identifying information was included in the presentation of the findings. Informed consent was obtained prior to participation.

4. Results

4.1 Qualitative Findings: Tourism Stakeholder Interviews

The thematic analysis of the 21 semi-structured interviews revealed strong support for the establishment of a Destination Management Organization (DMO) in Kefalonia. All interviewed stakeholders expressed identified a need for a dedicated mechanism for coordinated destination management. Stakeholders also identified the systematic monitoring of tourism indicators as an important governance function, with 81.0% considering it very important and 14.3% fairly important. These findings indicate that improved coordination, monitoring, and strategic planning were widely identified as key governance needs.

The perceived role of the DMO extended beyond destination promotion. Its potential contribution to managing overtourism was rated very highly, with 61.9% of participants assessing it as “very much” and 19.0% as “much”. Similarly, 47.6% and 38.1% considered its contribution to the protection of local traditions very high and high, respectively, while 42.9% and 38.1% expressed similarly positive views regarding crisis management. The development of tourism products and services and the management of tourism resources were also considered important functions.

Stakeholders emphasized the importance of active participation and collaboration. Communication with the local community was identified as the main potential form of stakeholder involvement (61.9%), followed by the use of social media and cooperation with tourism agencies (52.4%), the creation of business networks (33.3%), and the provision of expertise (28.6%). Furthermore, 66.7% considered active resident participation in destination decision-making important. The main incentives for stakeholder participation were destination promotion (90.5%), strengthening the tourism brand and accessing new markets, upgrading the tourism product (71.4%), and developing partnerships (42.9%).

Regarding governance and financing, 90.5% supported equal participation of the public and private sectors in decision-making. Stakeholders identified state funding (81.0%), sponsorships (76.2%), European programs (71.4%), and membership contributions (42.9%) as potential funding sources, while 81.0% indicated willingness to contribute financially. The preferred organizational form was mainly a development organization (52.4%), followed by a public–private partnership (33.3%) and a non-profit organization (23.8%).

Finally, stakeholders demonstrated a relatively coherent perception of Kefalonia’s destination identity. Natural beauty was unanimously identified as a key competitive advantage (100%), followed by history and culture (71.4%), safety (52.4%), local gastronomy (42.9%), and neighboring destinations (33.3%). At the same time, infrastructure, accessibility, visitor-flow management, and broader coordination were identified as areas requiring further attention.

Table 1. Key themes and findings from the stakeholder interviews (N = 21)

Need for a DMO	Support for the establishment of a dedicated DMO
Tourism monitoring	Systematic monitoring of tourism indicators considered very important
Overtourism management	DMO perceived as having a strong role in preventing/managing overt
Protection of local traditions	DMO perceived as having an important role in protecting local traditio
Crisis management	DMO perceived as having an important role in crisis management
Resident participation	Active resident participation considered important
Public–private participation	Equal participation of public and private sectors in decision-making
Financial contribution	Stakeholders willing to contribute financially to a future DMO
Destination identity	Natural beauty identified as a key competitive advantage
History and culture	History and culture identified as important destination assets
Infrastructure and coordination	Identified as areas requiring further improvement

Overall, the stakeholder interviews indicate strong support for a coordinated destination-management mechanism in Kefalonia. The findings highlight the importance of institutional coordination, systematic tourism monitoring, stakeholder participation, sustainability, crisis management and financial viability. These themes provide the qualitative foundation for examining residents' perceptions and expectations in the quantitative survey presented in Section 4.2.

4.2 Results of the Quantitative Survey

This section presents the empirical findings from the questionnaire survey conducted among 303 permanent residents of Kefalonia. The analysis focuses on residents' perceptions of tourism development and its impacts, their priorities for future tourism management, their awareness and acceptance of a potential Destination Management Organization (DMO), and their expectations regarding DMO functions and stakeholder participation.

The quantitative findings are interpreted in relation to the study's conceptual framework of destination governance and meta-governance. Particular attention is given to residents' perceptions of tourism-related pressures, their expectations regarding future destination management, and the extent to which they support a more coordinated and participatory governance structure.

The results are organized around the following analytical dimensions: (1) respondents' profile, (2) residents' perceptions of tourism impacts and overtourism, (3) priorities for future tourism development, (4) awareness and perceived need for a DMO, (5) expected DMO functions, (6) residents' participation and stakeholder involvement, and (7) differences in perceptions according to tourism experience and age.

4.2.1 Respondents' Profile

The sample presented a relatively diverse demographic and professional profile. Women accounted for 50.2% of respondents and men for 45.8%. The largest age group was 45–54 years (25.2%), followed by respondents aged 35–44 years (19.9%) and 55–64 years (16.6%). Geographically, 40.1% of respondents were residents of Argostoli, while 12.0% lived in Livathos and 10.3% in Lixouri.

In terms of occupation, 23.8% were self-employed, while 15.9% were employed in the private or public sector and 12.6% were business owners. Regarding educational attainment, 43.7% held a higher-education degree and 20.9% a postgraduate degree.

A substantial proportion of the sample had a direct or indirect professional relationship with tourism. In particular, respondents were involved in short-term rental accommodation, room rentals, food and beverage services, or tourism businesses. Nevertheless, 26.9% reported no professional relationship with tourism, allowing the study to capture the views of residents who are not directly economically dependent on tourism.

4.2.2 Residents' Assessment of Tourism Impacts

The findings indicate a dual perception of tourism development in Kefalonia. On the one hand, residents perceive tourism as having strongly positive effects on the local economy, entrepreneurship and employment, as well as on cultural activities, destination identity and social interaction between residents and visitors.

On the other hand, significant negative impacts are associated with environmental pollution, cleanliness, housing costs, price increases, traffic congestion, parking and land-use pressures. The impact on residents' everyday life and public services was perceived as moderate.

This duality suggests that tourism is widely recognized as an essential economic driver, while its increasing intensity generates pressures that require more effective destination management.

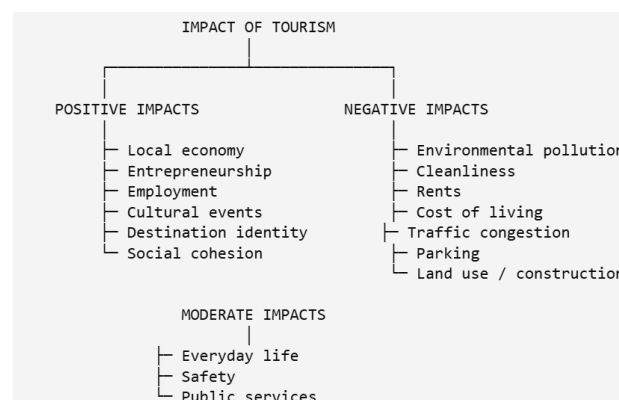


Figure 2. Residents' perceptions of the positive and negative impacts of tourism in Kefalonia

4.2.3 Perceptions of Overtourism and Tourism Priorities

The findings also indicate growing awareness of tourism concentration. 27.7% of respondents considered that overtourism occurs in specific areas, while 28.4% associated it mainly with specific months of the year. A further 12.9% considered overtourism a serious problem, whereas 16.2% believed that the situation remains manageable.

Regarding the forms of tourism that should be strengthened, the highest priorities were nature-based and hiking tourism (48.8%), agritourism (43.6%), and cultural/archaeological tourism (26.4%), followed by wine tourism (23.1%).

Residents also placed strong emphasis on improving infrastructure (66.3%), strengthening cooperation between local government, residents and businesses (49.2%), promoting alternative forms of tourism (41.9%), extending the tourism season (37.3%) and managing overtourism in specific areas (36.0%).

Table 2. Residents' priorities for future tourism development in Kefalonia

Infrastructure investment	66.3%
Cooperation among stakeholders	49.2%
Alternative forms of tourism	41.9%
Extension of tourist season	37.3%
Limiting overtourism	36.0%
Promotion of local businesses	26.4%
Limiting short-term rentals	22.8%

4.2.4 Awareness and Perceived Need for a DMO

Awareness of the DMO concept was relatively limited. Only 47.9% of respondents reported being familiar with the term, indicating a considerable need for greater information and awareness within the local community.

Despite this limited awareness, attitudes towards the establishment of a DMO were strongly positive. 44.9% of respondents considered that Kefalonia absolutely needs a DMO, while a further 53.6% considered that the island needs a DMO to some extent. Only 1.5% did not consider a DMO necessary.

The most important characteristics identified for an effective DMO were the participation of municipalities, tourism organizations, professionals and residents (69.7%), transparency and good governance (56.7%), professional expertise (47.8%), and long-term strategic planning (47.2%).

Table 3. Residents' perceptions of the need for a DMO in Kefalonia

Yes, absolutely	44.9%
Yes, to some extent	53.6%
No, not at all	1.5%

Note: Percentages represent the distribution of respondents' answers.

4.2.5 Expected Functions of the DMO

Residents identified several priority areas for DMO intervention. The most frequently mentioned were improved destination promotion (32.6%), improvement of the destination's image and identity (31.5%), diversification of the tourism product (30.3%), and promotion of alternative forms of tourism (25.8%).

At the same time, residents emphasised more management-oriented functions, including tourism-flow management, crisis management and coordination among tourism stakeholders. This indicates that residents do not perceive the DMO merely as a marketing organisation, but rather as a broader destination governance mechanism.

Table 4. Priority functions expected from a DMO

Better tourism promotion	32.6%
Improving the island's image and identity	31.5%
Enriching the tourism product	30.3%
Promoting alternative forms of tourism	25.8%
Creating a tourism identity/brand for Kefalonia	21.9%
Promoting local products and culture	19.7%
Managing tourist flows	18.5%
Crisis management	16.9%
Coordination of stakeholders and tourism professionals	16.9%

4.2.6 Residents' Participation and Stakeholder Involvement

The findings further demonstrate considerable support for participatory destination governance. 55.1% of respondents expressed an interest in actively participating in a future DMO through public consultations, ideas or volunteering, while an additional 29.2% preferred to remain informed about its activities.

This finding is particularly important because it suggests that local residents are not simply passive recipients of tourism policies but may constitute an important stakeholder group in the governance of the destination.

4.2.7 Differences According to Tourism Experience and Age

The analysis also examined whether attitudes towards the establishment of a DMO differed according to respondents' professional experience in tourism. A statistically significant association was identified between professional tourism experience and attitudes towards the establishment of a DMO ($\chi^2(12) = 21.48$, $p = .044$; Table 5).

Table 5. Association between Professional Tourism Experience and Attitudes towards the Establishment of a Destination Management Organization (DMO)

Statistical analysis	Value	df	p-value	Interpretation
Pearson's Chi-square (χ^2)	21.48	12	.044	Statistically significant association

More experienced respondents tended to express stronger support for the establishment of a DMO, while the proportion selecting the "perhaps, depending on how it operates" option tended to decline with increasing tourism experience.

Significant differences were also identified in residents' priorities regarding specific DMO functions across age groups (Table 6). These differences concerned crisis management ($p < .001$), destination identity/branding ($p = .003$), tourism-flow management ($p = .014$), and local products and culture ($p < .001$).

Table 6. Differences in residents' priorities for DMO functions across age groups

Crisis management	Significant	< .001	Priorities differ significantly across
Destination identity / branding	Significant	.003	Priorities differ significantly across
Tourism-flow management	Significant	.014	Priorities differ significantly across
Local products and culture	Significant	< .001	Priorities differ significantly across

The findings indicate that residents of different age groups attach different levels of importance to specific DMO functions. This suggests that a future DMO should adopt a multidimensional and participatory governance model capable of accommodating diverse resident priorities rather than focusing exclusively on destination marketing.

4.2.8 Perceptions among Residents without a Professional Relationship with Tourism

A separate analysis was conducted for the 26.9% of respondents who reported no professional relationship with tourism.

The results are particularly relevant because this group does not directly depend on tourism for its professional income. Among these residents, 45.1% considered a DMO absolutely necessary, while 43.6% answered that its necessity depends on how it would operate. Only 6.3% considered it unnecessary and 5.0% reported having no opinion.

Thus, 88.7% of residents without a professional relationship with tourism expressed either a clearly positive or potentially positive attitude towards the establishment of a DMO. Moreover, 44.7% expressed interest in active participation, while 31.5% preferred to be informed about its activities.

This finding indicates that support for a potential DMO was also observed among residents without a professional relationship with tourism.

4.3 Synthesis of Empirical Findings and Implications for DMO Functions

The integration of the qualitative and quantitative findings identifies a set of governance needs that are directly relevant to the potential establishment of a DMO in Kefalonia. The stakeholder interviews highlight the need for stronger institutional coordination, systematic tourism monitoring, stakeholder participation, sustainability management and crisis preparedness. These findings are reinforced by the resident survey, which identifies infrastructure and environmental pressures, tourism concentration, the need for diversification, and strong support for a more coordinated approach to destination management.

Taken together, the findings suggest that a potential DMO should extend beyond traditional destination promotion. Its functions could include multi-level coordination, destination intelligence and tourism monitoring, sustainability and visitor-flow management, stakeholder networking, tourism diversification, and crisis coordination.

The empirical evidence therefore provides the basis for the four interconnected functions proposed in Section 5: (1) regional coordination, (2) destination intelligence through a Tourism Observatory, (3) local destination management, and (4) stakeholder networking. These functions are derived from the identified governance needs rather than being assumed to constitute an appropriate model independently of the empirical findings.

Table 7. Empirical Governance Needs and Potential DMO Functions in Kefalonia

Empirical finding / governance need	Potential DMO function
Fragmented institutional responsibilities	Institutional and stakeholder coordination
Limited strategic coordination	Long-term destination strategy and policy alignment
Lack of systematic destination information	Tourism Observatory and destination intelligence
Environmental and infrastructure pressures	Sustainability and visitor-flow monitoring
Strong seasonality	Tourism product diversification and year-round planning
Crisis and peak-period pressures	Crisis coordination and destination-pressure management
Need for greater local participation	Stakeholder and resident participation mechanisms

The table illustrates how the proposed DMO functions are derived from the empirical evidence. Institutional fragmentation and limited strategic coordination point to the need for stronger coordination and long-term destination planning, while the lack of systematic destination information supports the establishment of a Tourism Observatory. Environmental and infrastructure pressures justify sustainability and visitor-flow monitoring, whereas seasonality and peak-period pressures highlight the need for tourism diversification and crisis coordination. Finally, the emphasis placed on local participation supports the development of structured stakeholder and resident participation mechanisms.

Taken together, the qualitative, quantitative and comparative findings provide empirical support for examining a DMO as a potential meta-governance mechanism for Kefalonia. The findings do not demonstrate that the establishment of a DMO would automatically lead to greater sustainability, competitiveness or resilience. Rather, they indicate that a DMO could contribute to these objectives if appropriate institutional conditions are established, including clearly defined responsibilities, stakeholder legitimacy, adequate financial and human resources, reliable destination intelligence, effective networking capacity, and meaningful stakeholder participation (Amore & Hall, 2016; Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014).

These findings provide the empirical foundation for the proposed DMO model presented in Section 5. The model

translates the governance needs identified through the empirical research into four interconnected functions: (1) regional coordination, (2) destination intelligence through a Tourism Observatory, (3) local destination management, and (4) stakeholder networking. Together, these functions aim to provide a more integrated and participatory framework for the long-term governance and management of tourism in Kefalonia.

4.4 Comparative Evidence from International and Greek DMO and Destination-Governance Models

The comparative review of selected international and Greek DMO models indicates that contemporary destination management extends beyond traditional destination promotion. Across different contexts, Destination Management Organizations increasingly perform functions related to multi-level coordination, stakeholder networking, destination intelligence, strategic planning, sustainability monitoring, visitor management, crisis response, and participatory governance (Pike & Page, 2014; Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014; Morrison, 2019). In particular, the capacity of DMOs to act as network managers and facilitate collaboration among heterogeneous destination stakeholders has been identified as an important dimension of DMO effectiveness (Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014).

The comparative evidence also demonstrates considerable variation in DMO institutional structures, responsibilities, financing mechanisms, and relationships with public authorities. Consequently, no single international model can be transferred directly to Kefalonia. Destination governance needs to be understood in relation to the institutional and political context within which different actors operate (Amore & Hall, 2016; Bramwell & Lane, 2011).

Instead, the relevant governance principles and functions need to be adapted to the island's specific institutional, economic, social and geographical context. From the comparative evidence, six principles appear particularly relevant to the Kefalonian case:

Multi-level coordination between local, regional and national authorities;

Stakeholder networking involving tourism businesses, local communities, public institutions and other relevant actors;

Destination intelligence and shared information to support evidence-based decision-making;

Strategic destination planning based on long-term objectives rather than short-term promotional priorities;

Sustainability and visitor-flow monitoring to address environmental, social and tourism-related pressures; and

Participatory governance to strengthen stakeholder engagement, transparency and institutional legitimacy (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014; Amore & Hall, 2016).

These principles are consistent with the empirical findings presented in Sections 4.1–4.3 and provide additional support for the design of the proposed DMO model presented in Section 5. Importantly, the comparative analysis supports the adaptation of governance principles rather than the direct transplantation of an existing institutional model. This approach is consistent with the meta-governance perspective adopted in this study, according to which destination governance involves the coordination and steering of multiple actors, interests and institutional arrangements rather than simply the creation of a new organization (Amore & Hall, 2016).

5. Proposed DMO Model for Kefalonia: Operational Pillars and Meta-Governance Role

The proposed DMO model is derived from the empirical findings and the conceptual framework developed in this study. Rather than assuming that the establishment of a DMO would automatically improve destination governance, the model identifies specific governance needs emerging from the research and translates them into potential organizational functions (Hall, 2011a; Amore & Hall, 2016; Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014).

The empirical findings indicate four interrelated governance needs: stronger coordination among institutions and stakeholders, improved collection and use of destination information, more integrated destination-level planning, and greater stakeholder participation. These needs provide the empirical basis for conceptualizing a DMO as a potential meta-governance mechanism rather than exclusively as a destination marketing organization.

From a meta-governance perspective, the proposed DMO would not replace existing public authorities, tourism businesses, or community organizations. Instead, it would provide a coordinating and facilitating structure through which different actors could align strategic priorities, exchange information, participate in decision-making, and cooperate on destination-level challenges. This interpretation is consistent with the understanding of meta-governance as the coordination and steering of governance arrangements involving multiple autonomous actors (Amore & Hall, 2016; Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Hall, 2011).

The proposed model consists of four interconnected functional components:

1. Regional Coordination Function (Ionian Islands)

The regional coordination function would provide a framework for aligning tourism strategies, development priorities,

and destination policies across the Ionian Islands. Its role would be primarily strategic and coordinating rather than operational. It could facilitate communication between regional and local authorities and support the alignment of island-level priorities with wider regional tourism policies.

This function reflects the importance of multi-level coordination identified both in the empirical findings and in the broader destination-governance literature (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Hall, 2011).

2. Tourism Observatory

The Tourism Observatory would constitute the destination-intelligence component of the proposed system. Its principal function would be the systematic collection, integration, and analysis of tourism-related information, including visitor flows, seasonality, infrastructure pressures, sustainability indicators, accommodation trends, and other relevant destination-performance measures.

The empirical findings concerning the need for more systematic information provide a direct rationale for this component. The Observatory could therefore support evidence-based decision-making and provide a common information base for public authorities, tourism stakeholders, and the proposed DMO. The importance of destination intelligence and evidence-based planning is also consistent with contemporary approaches to DMO management (Morrison, 2019; Pike & Page, 2014).

3. Kefalonia Local DMO

At the destination level, the Kefalonia Local DMO would translate strategic priorities into local destination-management activities. Its functions could include strategic destination planning, destination branding, tourism-product development, stakeholder coordination, visitor management, sustainability initiatives, and crisis coordination.

Importantly, the Local DMO would not assume the statutory responsibilities of existing public institutions. Its role would instead be to facilitate coordination and implementation across organizational boundaries and to connect strategic planning with local destination needs. Such a coordinating and networking role is consistent with the literature emphasizing the importance of stakeholder coordination and network capability in DMO effectiveness (Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014).

4. Stakeholder Network

The stakeholder network would constitute the participatory dimension of the proposed model. It would provide a structured mechanism for involving tourism businesses, local government, residents, community organizations, cultural institutions, environmental actors, and other relevant stakeholders in destination-related consultation and decision-making (Freeman, 1984; Byrd, 2007).

This component responds directly to the empirical finding that stakeholder participation is considered important for the legitimacy and effectiveness of destination management. It also reflects the network-based character of contemporary destination governance, in which no single organization possesses all the resources or authority required to manage the destination independently (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014).

The four components should not be interpreted as four independent administrative organizations. Rather, they represent interconnected functions within a multi-level governance architecture. The Regional Coordination Function provides strategic coordination, the Tourism Observatory provides destination intelligence, the Local DMO supports destination-level implementation, and the Stakeholder Network provides participation and collaborative governance.

The model therefore combines destination-management functions with meta-governance functions. Destination-management functions concern the organization and implementation of tourism-related activities, whereas meta-governance concerns the creation of conditions for coordination among actors, institutions, and governance levels. In this sense, the proposed DMO is conceptualized as a coordinating platform rather than as a new hierarchical authority (Amore & Hall, 2016; Hall, 2011).

The proposed framework should be understood as a context-sensitive model for Kefalonia, rather than as a universally applicable organizational structure. Its implementation would depend on institutional arrangements, political support, and stakeholder legitimacy, financing, human resources, and clearly defined responsibilities. These conditions are particularly important because the existence of a DMO alone does not guarantee effective or sustainable destination governance (Morrison, 2019; Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014).

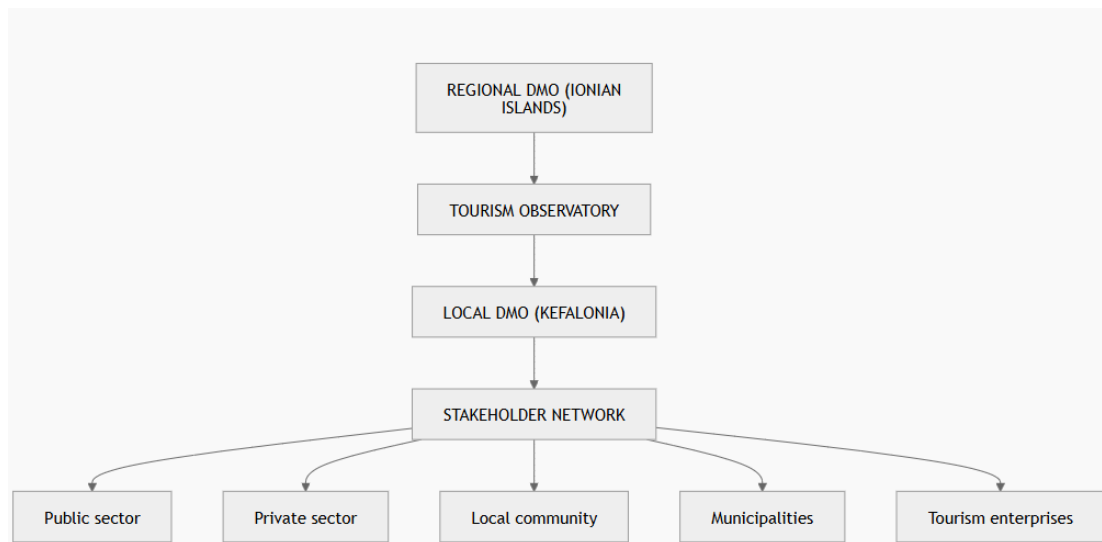


Figure 3. Structure and operational pillars of the proposed DMO for Kefalonia

6. Discussion

This study examined the potential role of a Destination Management Organization (DMO) in Kefalonia through a meta-governance perspective. The empirical findings indicate that institutional fragmentation and limited coordination constitute important challenges for tourism governance in the island context. At the same time, the resident survey demonstrates a high level of support among the surveyed respondents for a more coordinated approach to destination management, including the potential establishment of a DMO.

This finding is consistent with the international tourism governance literature, which emphasizes the difficulties associated with achieving effective coordination in polycentric and institutionally fragmented governance environments (Hall, 2011a; Bramwell & Lane, 2011). The findings from Kefalonia also indicate substantial support among both surveyed residents and interviewed stakeholders for a more integrated approach to destination governance. However, this support should be interpreted within the methodological limitations of the resident survey and should not be taken to imply that institutional agreement on the precise design of a DMO has already been established.

At the theoretical level, the findings support the broader evolution of DMOs from organizations primarily concerned with destination promotion and marketing towards more comprehensive destination governance structures (Pike & Page, 2014; Morrison, 2019). In the Kefalonia context, the DMO can therefore be conceptualized as a potential mechanism for institutional integration and strategic coordination, capable of connecting destination planning, stakeholder collaboration, impact management, information systems, and sustainability objectives.

The study conceptualizes the DMO as a meta-governance mechanism: a coordinating and network-oriented governance structure that would not replace existing institutions, but rather seek to align their actions, facilitate collaboration, and strengthen the coherence of multilevel tourism governance. This approach is particularly relevant to island destinations, where institutional and financial resources may be limited and where local economies can be highly dependent on tourism (Amore & Hall, 2016). The resident findings further reveal a dual perception of tourism. Respondents recognize its economic importance while simultaneously expressing concerns regarding environmental pressures, infrastructure, traffic, housing, and the cost of living. This combination suggests that Kefalonia faces an increasing need to balance tourism-related economic benefits with the management of its social and environmental impacts.

Nevertheless, the establishment of a DMO should not be regarded as a conflict-free governance solution. Creating a new coordinating structure may itself generate institutional tensions concerning authority, responsibilities, financing, political influence, and stakeholder representation. Existing public institutions may perceive a DMO as an encroachment on their existing responsibilities, while private-sector stakeholders may have different expectations concerning the distribution of costs, responsibilities, and benefits. Moreover, stakeholder participation does not necessarily lead to consensus. Tourism businesses, residents, public authorities, and environmental organizations may have competing interests and different priorities regarding destination development.

Consequently, the effectiveness of the proposed DMO model would depend not only on its formal institutional design but also on the development of legitimacy, transparency, clearly defined responsibilities, accountability, and mechanisms for managing disagreement. This reinforces the relevance of the meta-governance perspective, which

focuses on coordinating diverse interests and governance relationships rather than attempting to eliminate differences between stakeholders (Amore & Hall, 2016).

The reported willingness of residents to participate in destination-related decision-making is also consistent with the stakeholder perspective, which emphasizes the importance of identifying and incorporating the interests of groups affected by organizational and destination-level decisions (Freeman, 1984; Byrd, 2007). In the case of Kefalonia, meaningful stakeholder participation could therefore contribute to the legitimacy of the proposed DMO and help ensure that destination-management priorities reflect not only the interests of tourism businesses and public authorities but also those of the local community.

Another important implication concerns the role of data and destination intelligence. International experience demonstrates the growing importance of evidence-based destination governance supported by reliable data, monitoring systems, and sustainability indicators (Pike & Page, 2014; Morrison, 2019). In Kefalonia, the interview findings indicate a need for more systematic destination information to support evidence-based decision-making. A future DMO could therefore incorporate a Tourism Observatory or equivalent destination-intelligence function, responsible for collecting, integrating, and analyzing information on tourism flows, seasonality, environmental pressures, infrastructure capacity, visitor behavior, and socioeconomic impacts. The integration of digital monitoring and sustainability indicators could strengthen the capacity of destination stakeholders to identify emerging pressures and evaluate the effectiveness of tourism policies.

Overall, the study contributes to the theory of destination governance by proposing a meta-governance framework specifically adapted to the characteristics of an island destination. Within this framework, the DMO operates as a hub for institutional alignment, stakeholder networking, information sharing, and strategic coordination, rather than as a conventional destination-marketing organization. From a practical perspective, such a structure could contribute to addressing challenges associated with seasonality, stakeholder fragmentation, destination pressures, and tourism-product diversification, provided that institutional responsibilities are clearly defined, stable funding is secured, and stakeholders are meaningfully involved in decision-making.

6.1 Limitations and Future Research

The study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the resident survey relied on convenience sampling and therefore cannot provide statistically representative estimates for the entire population of Kefalonia. The findings should consequently be interpreted as indicative of the views of the surveyed respondents rather than as fully generalizable evidence of resident attitudes across the island.

Second, the qualitative component was based on 21 semi-structured interviews with relevant tourism stakeholders in Kefalonia. Although the interviews provided valuable insights into institutional coordination, destination-management challenges, stakeholder participation, and the potential role of a DMO, the qualitative findings reflect the perspectives of the stakeholders included in the study and should not be interpreted as representing all tourism actors on the island. Future research could further broaden the range of perspectives by incorporating additional tourism businesses, residents' associations, environmental organizations, professional bodies, and regional or national authorities.

Third, the study focuses on a single island destination, which limits the external generalizability of the proposed governance model. Kefalonia has specific institutional, geographical, economic, and tourism characteristics that may not be directly comparable with those of other island destinations. The proposed model should therefore be understood as context-sensitive rather than universally applicable.

Finally, the proposed DMO architecture represents an empirically informed governance framework rather than an evaluation of an already operational DMO. The study therefore cannot establish whether the proposed model would produce measurable improvements in sustainability, competitiveness, resilience, or stakeholder satisfaction once implemented.

Future research could address these limitations through comparative studies of different island destinations, allowing researchers to identify which elements of the proposed governance model are context-specific and which may be transferable. Longitudinal research could also examine the implementation, evolution, and effectiveness of different DMO governance arrangements over time. Such research would provide stronger evidence regarding whether and under what institutional conditions a DMO can effectively operate as a meta-governance mechanism for sustainable and resilient island tourism.

7. Conclusions and Policy Implications

This study examined the potential role of a Destination Management Organization (DMO) in Kefalonia from a meta-governance perspective. The empirical findings indicate that institutional fragmentation, limited coordination, and increasing tourism-related pressures create a need for a more integrated approach to destination management. The 21

stakeholder interviews and the survey of 303 permanent residents both indicate substantial support for stronger coordination and for exploring the potential establishment of a DMO. This provides an important empirical basis for considering institutional reform, although the findings should be interpreted within the methodological limitations of the study.

The findings further demonstrate that the contemporary role of a DMO extends beyond traditional destination marketing and promotion. A modern DMO can perform broader governance functions, including strategic planning, multi-level coordination, stakeholder networking, destination intelligence, sustainability monitoring, and evidence-based decision-making. This broader understanding of the DMO is particularly relevant to Kefalonia, where strong seasonality, infrastructure pressures, environmental concerns, and the importance of tourism to the local economy require coordinated and long-term destination management.

An important finding is the convergence between the perspectives expressed by tourism stakeholders and the views of the local community regarding the need for improved destination coordination. This convergence may strengthen the legitimacy of a participatory governance approach, provided that stakeholder participation is institutionalized through transparent and meaningful decision-making processes. The proposed governance model should therefore ensure representation not only of public authorities and tourism businesses but also of local residents and other relevant community, cultural, and environmental stakeholders.

From a policy perspective, the findings suggest that the establishment of a DMO should be accompanied by clearly defined institutional responsibilities and formal mechanisms for cooperation between relevant administrative levels. The DMO should complement rather than duplicate the functions of existing institutions. Its role should focus on coordination, strategic alignment, information sharing, stakeholder networking, and monitoring, thereby reducing fragmentation and improving policy coherence.

A second important policy implication concerns the development of a destination-intelligence and monitoring system, potentially through a Tourism Observatory. Such a system could collect and analyze data relating to visitor numbers, seasonality, infrastructure capacity, environmental pressures, accommodation, mobility, housing, and local socioeconomic impacts. The systematic use of such information would enable tourism policies to move from reactive decision-making towards a more evidence-based and anticipatory approach.

The findings also highlight the importance of integrating sustainability indicators and destination-pressure monitoring into destination planning. Tourism growth should not be assessed solely through visitor numbers or economic performance. A more comprehensive monitoring framework should consider environmental quality, infrastructure capacity, resident perceptions, housing pressures, traffic, resource consumption, and the distribution of tourism benefits. Such indicators could provide an evidence base for identifying emerging pressures and adjusting destination-management policies accordingly.

At the theoretical level, the study reinforces the usefulness of the meta-governance approach for understanding destination management in complex island environments. Rather than viewing governance as the responsibility of a single institution, the meta-governance perspective emphasizes coordination, network management, institutional alignment, and stakeholder participation. The findings also reinforce the relevance of stakeholder-based governance, particularly where tourism development affects multiple groups with potentially different interests and priorities.

At the applied level, the study proposes an adapted DMO governance model for Kefalonia, structured around four interconnected functions: (1) regional coordination, (2) destination intelligence through a Tourism Observatory, (3) local destination management, and (4) stakeholder networking. The effectiveness of this model, however, would depend on several enabling conditions, including clear institutional mandates, stable and adequate funding, professional expertise, reliable data systems, transparency, accountability, and meaningful stakeholder participation.

The study has important limitations. The use of convenience sampling limits the statistical representativeness of the resident survey, while the single-case design restricts the generalizability of the findings to other destinations. In addition, the proposed DMO has not yet been implemented and therefore its actual effectiveness cannot be empirically assessed. The findings should consequently be understood as providing an empirically informed governance proposal rather than evidence of the demonstrated performance of an operational DMO.

Future research should therefore adopt comparative multi-case approaches involving other island destinations with different institutional and tourism-governance arrangements. Longitudinal research would also be valuable for assessing how a DMO evolves over time and whether specific governance arrangements produce measurable improvements in sustainability, resilience, stakeholder collaboration, and destination performance.

Overall, the establishment of a DMO in Kefalonia should not be understood simply as the creation of another tourism organization. Rather, it represents a potential mechanism of institutional transformation, capable of strengthening

coordination among existing actors and creating a more coherent framework for destination governance. If supported by appropriate institutional arrangements, stable resources, reliable data, professional capacity, and meaningful participation, a Kefalonia DMO could act as a catalyst for more resilient, sustainable, participatory, and institutionally coherent tourism development.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to express her sincere gratitude to the residents of Kefalonia who participated in this study and generously contributed their time and perspectives. Special thanks are also extended to the tourism stakeholders and professionals on the island who contributed valuable insights to the research. The author would also like to thank her colleague, Dr. Agisilao Konidari, for his valuable scientific contribution and constructive support.

Author contributions

Evangelia Parisi was responsible for the conception and design of the study, data collection, analysis and interpretation of the findings, and preparation of the manuscript. The research was conducted within the framework of her postdoctoral research. Dr. Agisilao Konidari contributed to the study through scientific advice and constructive input. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Funding

Not applicable. This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Competing interests

The author declares that she has no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Informed consent was not applicable to this study. Participation was voluntary, and the anonymity and confidentiality of all participants were maintained throughout the research process. No personally identifiable information is reported in this article.

Ethics approval

Formal ethics approval was not obtained for this study. Nevertheless, the research was conducted in accordance with principles of confidentiality and anonymity, and the identities of all participants were protected throughout the research process.

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are not publicly available due to privacy and confidentiality considerations. The research data are securely retained by the author and may be available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to applicable privacy, confidentiality, and ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

Open access

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0).

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author, with first publication rights granted to the journal.

References

- Amore, A., & Hall, C. M. (2016). From governance to meta-governance in tourism? Re-incorporating politics, interests and values in the analysis of tourism governance. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 41(2), 109-122.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2016.1151162>
- Beritelli, P., Bieger, T., & Laesser, C. (2007). Destination governance: Using corporate governance theories as a foundation for effective destination management. *Journal of Travel Research*, 46(1), 96-107.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287507302385>

- Bramwell, B., & Lane, B. (2011). Critical research on the governance of tourism and sustainability. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 19(4-5), 411-421. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2011.580586>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Butler, R. W. (1999). Sustainable tourism: A state-of-the-art review. *Tourism Geographies*, 1(1), 7-25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616689908721291>
- Byrd, E. T. (2007). Stakeholders in sustainable tourism development and their roles: Applying stakeholder theory to sustainable tourism development. *Tourism Review*, 62(2), 6-13. <https://doi.org/10.1108/16605370780000309>
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Dredge, D., & Jenkins, J. (2007). *Tourism planning and policy*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Freeman, R. E. (1984). *Strategic management: A stakeholder approach*. Pitman.
- Freeman, R. E., Harrison, J. S., Wicks, A. C., Parmar, B. L., & de Colle, S. (2010). *Stakeholder theory: The state of the art*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511815768>
- Goodwin, H. (2017). *The challenge of overtourism*. Responsible Tourism Partnership. <https://doi.org/10.23912/978-1-910158-84-5-3101>
- Gössling, S., Scott, D., & Hall, C. M. (2018). Global trends in tourism and climate change. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 26(1), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2017.1347903>
- Gössling, S., Scott, D., & Hall, C. M. (2021). Pandemics, tourism and global change: A rapid assessment of COVID-19. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 29(1), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1758708>
- Gretzel, U., Sigala, M., Xiang, Z., & Koo, C. (2015). Smart tourism: Foundations and developments. *Electronic Markets*, 25(3), 179-188. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12525-015-0196-8>
- Hair, J. F., Black, W. C., Babin, B. J., & Anderson, R. E. (2019). *Multivariate data analysis* (8th ed.). Cengage.
- Hall, C. M. (2011a). A typology of governance and its implications for tourism policy analysis. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 19(4-5), 437-457. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2011.570346>
- Hall, C. M. (2011b). Policy learning and policy failure in sustainable tourism governance: From first- and second-order to third-order change? *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 19(4-5), 649-671. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2011.555555>
- Jessop, B. (2002). *The future of the capitalist state*. Polity.
- Karampela, S., Kizos, T., & Papatheodorou, A. (2015). Patterns of transportation for tourists and residents in the Aegean archipelago, Greece. In G. Baldacchino (Ed.), *Archipelago tourism: Policies and practices* (pp. 35-50). Ashgate.
- Morrison, A. M. (2019). *Marketing and managing tourism destinations* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315178929>
- Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2022). *OECD tourism trends and policies 2022*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/a8dd3019-en>
- Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2024). *OECD tourism trends and policies 2024*. OECD Publishing.
- Parisi, E., & Konidakis, A. (2025). The perceptions of stakeholders on the necessity of creating a DMO in a Greek tourist destination. In V. Katsoni & C. Costa (Eds.), *Innovation and creativity in tourism, business and social sciences* (pp. 1071-1081). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-78471-2_48
- Pastras, P., & Bramwell, B. (2013). A strategic-relational approach to tourism policy. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 43, 390-414. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2013.06.009>
- Pechlaner, H., Bachinger, M., Volgger, M., & Anzengruber-Fischer, E. (2014). Cooperative core competencies in tourism: Combining resource-based and relational approaches in destination governance. *European Journal of Tourism Research*, 8, 5-19. <https://doi.org/10.54055/ejtr.v8i.148>
- Pike, S., & Page, S. J. (2014). Destination marketing organizations and destination marketing: A narrative analysis of the literature. *Tourism Management*, 41, 202-227. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2013.09.009>

- Ruggieri, G., & Platania, M. (2024). Islands' tourism seasonality: A data analysis of Mediterranean islands' tourism comparing seasonality indicators (2008–2018). *Sustainability*, 16(9), Article 3674. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16093674>
- Sharpley, R. (2020). Tourism, sustainable development and the theoretical divide: 20 years on. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 28(11), 1932-1946. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1779732>
- Sørensen, E., & Torfing, J. (2009). Making governance networks effective and democratic through metagovernance. *Public Administration*, 87(2), 234-258. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9299.2009.01753.x>
- Timur, S., & Getz, D. (2008). A network perspective on managing stakeholders in sustainable urban tourism. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 20(4), 445-461. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09596110810873543>
- Volgger, M., & Pechlaner, H. (2014). Requirements for destination management organizations in destination governance: Understanding DMO success. *Tourism Management*, 41, 64-75. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2013.09.001>
- World Commission on Environment and Development. (1987). *Our common future*. Oxford University Press.
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.