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Tourism Management in Protected Areas: Exploring the Case of Collaborative Governance in the Protected Area of Delta of Ebro (Spain)

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Abstract:
Tourism management in protected areas is a key issue in order to achieve an equilibrium between tourism activities and environment sustainability. In this research, we analyze the collaborative governance model introduced in the protected area of Ebro Delta in Catalonia, Spain, through the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism (ECST). Collaborative governance in protected areas implies active participation of stakeholders in the tourism development process to achieve shared long-term objectives and promoting the conservation of landscapes. The methodology used has combined in-depth interviews carried out to the main territorial actors with a survey made to the tourism stakeholders. Results show the ECST partnership has contributed to the improvement of tourism management in the protected area, nevertheless its effects have not been as expected mainly as a consequence of the existence of a lack in the coordination among municipalities and territorial institutions of the geographical area. That is, territorial governance has limited the outcomes of ECST. It is also necessary to underline the Natural Park (EDNP) leadership in promoting collaboration and achieving stakeholder commitment to the agreements reached and environmental sustainability.

Keywords: Collaborative partnership, tourism management, protected areas, European Charter for Sustainable Tourism (ECST)

1. Introduction

Governance is the set of elements that allow a social, business or private system to be governable and that allow decisions to be made in response to needs and challenges through collective action. A standard definition considers that a governance system is made up of 'the (formal and informal) rules and procedures that shape an institutional framework in which the diverse actors involved must operate.' (Alcozeba-Cruixent et al, 2002, 12, own translation).

Different types of governance are defined by the form in which social and institutional participation take place, the relationships between stakeholders, decision-making and the outcome itself of the governance. On the basis of these aspects, we can distinguish between two major governance models: firstly, the traditional formal model, where decision-making takes place through hierarchical and institutional participation; secondly, the modern relational model, whose decision-making process is carried out through more horizontal participation. In traditional governance models, the main protagonists are the institutions, governments or agencies, and there is less interrelation between individual stakeholders. It is a type of governance that involves confrontation between adversaries and that, on many occasions, can develop 'winner-takes-all' outcomes (Ansell & Gash, 2008) Therefore, this model involves the risk of excluding part of the stakeholders.

In modern relational governance models, there is greater participation and interrelation between stakeholders. Among these models, one of the most inclusive is the collaborative governance model, defined as 'the processes and structures of public policy decision making and management that engage people constructively across the boundaries of public agencies, levels of government, and/or the public, private and civic spheres in order to carry out a public purpose that could not otherwise be accomplished' (Emerson et al, 2012, 2). Therefore, this governance system involves all types of public and private actors in decision-making and decisions are based on consensus around shared values and mutual trust between stakeholders (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012; Imperial, 2005) thereby facilitating agreements and legitimizing decisions (Eagles et al, 2013; Kisingo et al., 2016; Lockwood, 2010McCool, 2009; Pfueller et al., 2011; Reed, 2008; Waligo et al., 2017).

This type of governance has an advantage over traditional governance: a 'win-win' solution where all stakeholders benefit is possible. This is a clear incentive for participation. Collaborative governance is stronger the greater the interdependence between stakeholders (encouraging collaboration between them) and the clearer the incentives are for participating in the process. However, the process can be undermined by a lack of organizational capacity, divergence

of interests or the emergence of power imbalances between stakeholders(Davies & White, 2015; Dodds & Butler,2010; Kisingo et al., 2016; Manisha & Mehrotra, 2015; McColl, 2008; Rauschmayer et al., 2009;Saito& Ruhanen, 2017;Scarpino& Gretzel, 2014). It is also worth considering the existence of institutional barriers as a potential limiting factor of the collaboration (Davies& White, 2012, Heslinga, 2019; Rauschmayer et al., 2009; Sharple, 200). Some examples in this regard include the predominance of rigid or inflexible administrative procedures that overly bureaucratize the process, or the coexistence of different institutional domains with overlapping competence (Helsinga et al., 2017; Parra, 2010).

In any case, an important element in collaborative governance is the process of negotiation by which decisions are made, mainly on the basis of consensus. It is also important the role as a leader of the main agency involved. The agency should set and uphold the rules, stimulate the process, facilitate dialogue to strengthen mutual trust, coordinate roles and responsibilities and explore the benefits that serve as incentives for participation (Ansell &Gash, 2008; Emerson et al, 2012; Nunkoo et al, 2010).

The analysis of the tourism industry has often involved Marshallian theories or models, such as the industrial district, cluster analysis or local tourism systems (Capone, 2006; Gülcan et al., 2009). These analyses place the emphasis on the specialization and diversification of tourism activities, as well as on their nature as inter-industrial activities that involve and connect different sectors. In this context, authors such Cohen & Cohem (2012), Jafari (1990) or Murphy (1988) maintain that tourism is a phenomenon that encompasses supply and demand for varied products and services, but where the agents running in tourism activities are also involved in the outcomes. More holistic approaches are based on the idea of the existence of a tourism system that includes social and productive relationships between the actors involved, the relationships between the different components that shape tourism as a product and the relationships that all of the actors, suppliers and demanders linked to tourism, have with the territory (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Merinero &Pulido. 2016). In this regard, tourism is seen as a complex and diverse product, which is the result of the actions of the economic actors involved and of their context, with all of these elements shaping the tourism offer.

In the protected areas, tourism product is generated on the basis of a complex network of interrelated and interdependent economic actors which are all linked to the protected area. Thus, environment and nature play an essential role in generating tourist attractions, in their growth and diversification and, therefore, in economic development. However, this compatibility is often questioned (Sharpley, 2000), due the potential emergence of environmental negative externalities (Buckley, 2012; Eagles, 2013). In this context, the organization and management of the relationship between the actors is crucial for understanding how tourism activity develops and its implications for environmental sustainability (Buckley, 2012)]. However, usually, these protected areas conform spaces of proximity, where personal relations predominate alongside spontaneous collaboration and interdependence between the actors involved. These elements contribute to the development of more informal aspects of governance, horizontality and the generation of grassroots initiatives (Borrini-Feyerabend, 2014; Davis and White, 2010) which forms a setting that encourages collaborative governance system (Eagles, 2013;Kisingo et al., 2016; Lockwood, 2009; Pfueller, 2009; Reed et al., 2009). Additionally, in these areas, leadership acquires special relevance to environmental sustainability, particularly if its legitimacy is determined by technical performance relating to environmental conservation (Ansell, & Gash, 2008;Valente et al., 2015).

This paper analyzes the implementation of a collaborative partnership model, the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas (ECST), in the protected area of Ebro Delta, located in Catalonia, northeast of Spain. The research explores this partnership as an example of a governance system to manage tourism in the protected areas. Outcomes about stakeholder participation, the tourist destination improvement and environment sustainability are discussed. It is concluded that the management effectiveness is increasingly. The factors that limit its effective development are also analyzed. Challenges include some deficiencies in capacity of actuation of EDNP (staff numbers and money) and the lack of municipalities coordination.

The text is organized in the following manner. Section 2; describes the area and the collaborative partnership adopted; section 3 describes the methodology used section 4 provides an analysis of the ECST outcomes; and, lastly, the discussion is presented in the final section.

2. Background Context, Case Selection and ECST Description

2.1. Case Selection

The Ebro Delta is located in Catalonia, in north eastern of Spain, and covers an area of approximately 320 km^2 (or 32 000 ha) (Figure 1). The area includes seven municipalities. The protected area itself covers 12 797.2 ha.

Figure 1: The Ebro Delta: Geographic Location
Source: EDNP

The population comes to 64 177, with an average density of 132.61 inhabitants/km². The area's per capita GDP is below the Spanish and Catalan average, revealing a productive structure based on labour-intensive activities with limited knock-on effects. However, the area has experienced significant tourism development since the creation of the Natural Park (EDNP) in 1983. This growth in tourism took place despite the economic crisis, which caused a long period of low economic growth in Spain. This allows us to consider the positive influence of the ECST, awarded in 2007 (EDNP, 2017).

In terms of political-institutional governance, there are five hierarchical levels of government: the local level, the provincial level, the regional level, the national level and the European Union. These different levels converge with horizontal governance systems, making the territory's governance considerably complex.

The EDNP, which is focused on conservation and management of natural resources, is a special case in terms of territorial governance in this area because it depends on the regional government. Additionally, Institutions from the different levels of governance mentioned are represented on its administrative board. However, its organisational and operational structure grants it a certain level of autonomy and authority in the field of environmental conservation, making it important for horizontal governance of the area since it is capable of getting civil associations and conservationists involved.

There are other organisations that have an impact on governance of the area: the ECST and the Biosphere Reserve. Both have features that are linked to horizontal governance.

The Biosphere Reserve was created in 2013 on the recommendation of the ECST and shares part of its geographical area and its sustainability goals. However, there are some differences between these organisations, both in the focus of their activity and in terms of governance. In the first case, the ECST has devoted itself exclusively to sustainable tourism, whereas the Biosphere Reserve has focused less on promoting services and more on producing goods. In terms of governance, the ECST operates under the leadership of the EDNP and is based on a collaborative governance model, with the 'Permanent Forum for Sustainable Tourism' (Forum) as its decision-making body. For its part, the Biosphere Reserve is more hierarchical. Indeed, although the majority of the institutions and organisations in the territory are represented on its executive body, there is a lack of direct participation from private stakeholders (Copate, 2019).

In terms of political-institutional governance, there are five hierarchical levels of government: the local level, the provincial level, the regional level, the national level and the European Union. These different levels converge with horizontal governance system, making the territory's governance considerably complex.

2.2. The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas (ECST)

The ECST is a EUROPARC Federation initiative that aims to promote the development of sustainable tourism in Europe's natural protected areas. It represents a referential methodology for local development and a possibility to involve local stakeholders in the design of sustainability policy (Caltellani & Sala, 2010).It usually integrates a strategic planning, definition of specific targets and sustainability and development indicators.

The implementation of the ECST involves a three-phase process. In the first phase, the natural protected area receives the Charter award; in the second phase, local businesses committed to sustainable tourism in the Charter Area are certified; and the third phase provides for the participation of tour operators for the purpose of promoting and marketing tourism products that contribute to conservation and local development (Europarc, 2019)

ECST certification requires a prior economic, social, cultural and environmental assessment to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the actors involved. Implementing the ECST requires an agreed sustainable tourism strategy and a multi-year action plan. At the end of the implementation period, EUROPARC evaluates the results and proposes renewal of the Charter, where appropriate.

For businesses to receive certification, they are required to introduce good tourism management practices linked to sustainability and to protecting and enhancing the area.

The Ebro Delta was awarded the Charter in 2007 for the period 2007-2011. The first renewal was in 2012, for the period 2012-2016, and the second in 2017, for the period 2017-2021. The corresponding general objectives were set out for each period (Table 1).

2007-2011	2012-2016	2017-2021
• Cooperation • Enhance local heritage • Tourism image and quality • Environmental awareness-raising • Nature tourism • Stakeholder training • Improve local well-being	• ECST consolidation • Enhance local heritage • Improve tourism image • Promote sustainable tourism • Include the primary sector in ECST commitments • Training and awareness-raising	• Strengthen coordination and participation • Enhance local heritage • Improve tourism image • Promote sustainable tourism • Support producers in their commitment to the ECST • Training and awareness-raising

Table 1: ECST Objectives
Source: Compiled by the Authors [15]

The *Forum* has been a central element for participation and debate throughout the implementation of the ECST in the Ebro Delta. It is the body responsible for decision-making in accordance with the principles of collaborative governance. As such, it makes decisions on the design of the working commissions, the actions contained in the action plan and the assignment of actions to the commissions; moreover, it is responsible for enforcing the agreements made. This way, stakeholder commitment is secured through shared responsibility in deciding and implementing the agreed actions. The participation in the Forum increased from 77 members in 2007 to 149 members in 2016. The evolution of the number of businesses certified by the ECST increased from 20 to 38 and the businesses certified as EDNP information points increased from 54 to 117, in the same period (EDNP, 2017)

More than 99% of total funding is public; EDNP provides over a third of the total. However, between both periods of implementation of the ECST there were significant changes in terms of the financial involvement. Total funding decreased by 17 % basically as a result of the budgetary restrictions of the national and regional government in response to the impact of the 2008 economic crisis. This reduction resulted in a decrease in activities that depended on public resources, which in turn generated in some governance difficulties. Nevertheless, both aspects were partially compensated thanks to increased participation of the provincial government and an increase in European Union funding.

2. Materials and Methods

This study has used qualitative and quantitative techniques. The combination of both methods, together with the study of documents and reports about the ECST, enabled triangulation of the collected information and facilitated more solid results as it allowed us to contrast the opinions of the interviewees using the results of the survey and the above-mentioned reports. In addition, we completed the analysis with an on-site review of changes in patrimonial assets.
The qualitative technique used consisted of in-depth interviews with a semi-structured script. According to Reed et al. (2009) we used expert opinions to identify the main stakeholders and snowball sampling to selection the rest of ECST participants. Twenty-two interviews were conducted between the months of March and April 2018. The interview participants represented a wide range of roles, levels of participation and sectors: governmental representatives, farmers, Hotels, rural accommodation, the authority and members of EDNP, environmental NGO, and various business of leisure activities among others. Table 2 summarizes the social actors interviewed.

Stakehloder Role	Number	Particitpant Code
Park staff members (EDNE)	2	NP1, NP2
Local Administration	3	LA1, LA2, LA3
Rural Tourism Accommodation	9	RT1, RT2, RT3, RT4, RT5, RT6, RT7, RT8, RT9
Hotels	2	H1, H2
Tourism activities firms (birding, kayak tour, naturalist guide, etc.)	4	TA1, TA2, TA3, TA4
Conservation Association (NGO)	1	CA
Primary sector	1	A
TOTAL	22	

Table 2: List of Interviewees and Typology
Source: Compiled by Authors

The script followed the main factors cited by (Ansell, & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 20129 in relation to theoretical framework for collaborative governance. The topics studied were: origin of the ECST agreement, organisation, objectives, decision-making process, commitment and evaluation of the outcomes (Table 1 appendix). The interviews I were

conducted face to face, lasted approximately 45 minutes and were carried out until saturation point was reached. They were recorded, transcribed and coded according to the key topics.

On the basis of the content of the in-depth interviews, a survey was prepared with 18 questions, most designed using a seven-point Likert scale. The survey was anonymous, it was prepared in digital format and it was sent to the 149 participants of the ECST between the months of May and September 2018 (Table 2 appendix). The survey used systematic sampling that encompassed the entire population and 38 responses were received, representing 25.5 % of the total. For a 95 % confidence level, the sampling error was 0.07.

The analysis of the survey was carried out using quantitative techniques, exploring the responses through frequencies and contingency tables, so that the opinions on each question and of each type of actor could be contrasted. The statistical parameters of the contingency tables, chi squared and standard deviation, show normal values, which demonstrate the significance of the results.

Both in the implementation and analysis of the interviews and of the survey, the information was classified into major thematic sections according to the most relevant aspects of analysis in cases such as this one. For this purpose, we adapted the criteria developed by (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012; Lockwood, 2010) (Table 3).

OUTCOMES
Sustainability and environmental awareness
Tourist image, quality and promotion of tourism, improvement of the tourist service and traditional and natural heritage
IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS – ECST Governance
Genesis of the ECTS
Engagement, participation and Organization
Shared Objectives, commitment and collaboration
Decision making process
Coordination between public institutions
Coordination ECST and Biosphere Reserve

Table 3: ECST- List of Items of the Analysis Summary
Source: Compiled by Authors

3. Results

Following Bramwell &Lane (2011), Caltellani & Sala (2010) and Reed et al. (2009) the effectiveness of governance of the protected areas is based on evaluating (a) the outcome of the governance process (outcomes) and (b) the governance process itself (implementation process). In order to do so, we first present the outcomes achieved through the implementation of the ECST and we then move on to analyse the implementation process. In a first step, the evaluation is made by exploring stakeholder perspectives, on-site review of changes in patrimonial assets and documentary study. Outcomes reflect, in general terms, the effectiveness of the collaboration, it mainly includes actions carried out in relation to 'Promotion and quality of tourist services' and 'Sustainability and environmental awareness'. For its part, the analysis of the process includes 'Origen, participation and organization, commitment and collaboration, leadership and institutional coordination (which refers to territorial governance)'. Finally, these results are complemented with the analyse of the ample.

3.1. Outcomes

The results of the progress of the actions proposed in the ECST are derived of the documental analysis and revision in situ. In general terms, the progress has been relevant, especially in improvements in infrastructure environmental, tourism image, training and awareness, and ECST consolidation. As a summary, we observe that the 63% of the planned actions were 100% completed, the 22% were completed at least in a half; the rest were completed in less of 50% or not yet been started. Some of them refer to the construction and conservation of environmental infrastructures and the realization of environmental workshops to raise awareness among stakeholders [15 and own elaboration].
The overall evaluation derived of stakeholder perceptions also shows a high level of satisfaction with the development and outcomes of the ECST, which is considered a key factor, in the line that suggest (Pérex-Calderón et al., 2020):

'I think that the level of satisfaction and improvement is high...the tourism image of the Ebro Delta has improved and the value of the natural heritage has been unlocked.' (NP1)

'Good work has been done with the ECST ... despite the existence of critical points in certain periods; the natural area is well controlled.' (CA)

Nevertheless, the degree of overall satisfaction fails to conceal some criticism relating to the outcomes and even to the implementation of the ECST:

'There are still aspects that need improving, such as the preparation of a uses and services plan, economic impact studies, signage and dissemination among the local population,' (NP1)

'The evaluation is uncertain. Perhaps many of the outcomes would also have been achieved through the development of the tourist destination ... Symbolic value has been promoted more than economic.' (RT1)

Next, the outcomes are analysed in the sections 'Promotion and quality of tourist services' and 'Sustainability and environmental awareness'

3.1.1. Promotion and Quality of Tourist Services

There have been some advances in this area, though with some differences between the items that comprise it. In general, according to those interviewed, the image and quality of the tourism offer have improved. These achievements are attributed to the implementation of the ECST's guidelines:

'The image has improved and the type of tourism has changed … ecotourism and nature tourism, such as birdwatching, have increased … Promotional leaflets have been put together.' (H1)

'The promotion of specific products has improved, such as the Ebro Delta by bike, birdwatching tourism and ecotourism packages.' (NP2)

However, promotion of the ECST 'brand' is considered insufficient, as is the promotion and visibility of the certified businesses. Moreover, no specific brand associated with the Ebro Delta has been created. These shortcomings are attributed to an institutional governance deficit:

'EUROPARC has been unable to position the ECST as a brand and therefore businesses haven't done so either … It's a shame that the Ebro Delta brand hasn't been created.' (TA1)

'In order to make the commitment to sustainability profitable, greater promotion and dissemination are needed, the efforts need to materialise in greater demand for our products … They should go in the direction of joint consolidated management and promotion because the environmental quality is taken as a given … There has been no clusterizsation.' (RT2)

However, the participation of the Provincial Government in promoting and funding products and events is considered particularly relevant, as well as in preparing joint marketing campaigns, both at the national and international level. This provides a solution to a problem derived from the different levels of governance (Parra, 2010), since the Provincial Government seems the most suitable level of territorial authority for coordinating actions that affect several municipalities:

'With the support of the Provincial Government, attendance at nature tourism fairs has improved, ecotourism websites have been created and a process for coordinating traditional festivals has been launched.' (NP2)

3.1.2. Sustainability and Environmental Awareness

The interviewees recognize advances in environmental and business sustainability, also demonstrated by the environmental actions carried out in the framework of the planning and the number of certified businesses (mentioned above)

'The indirect values transmitted by the ECST have added value and professionalism, have improved awareness and sustainable practices in businesses and have attracted a new more aware, more sustainable type of tourism.' (H2)

To a lesser extent, advances are also perceived in terms of environmental awareness:

'Our level of awareness has changed, we're more aware now that we have to conserve this natural area because people come to the Ebro Delta to see nature.' (RT3)

Nevertheless, we observe the lack of training and information among the overall population seems to have conditioned the degree of awareness among people living in the Delta. Some interviewees attribute this shortcoming to a lack of financial resources; the lack of coordination between local authorities has been an added problem:

'People, in general, are not very aware, but it has improved. … There is a lack of training due to the lack of funding.' (NP1)

'People in the area don't know about ECST… advances have been made in sustainability, but we need to transmit more information to the local population.' (H1)

3.2. The Implementation Process

The items below (origin; participation and organizational; commitment and collaboration; leadership and institutional coordination) are the basic elements used to analyse the type of governance system through which the ECST is implemented in the Ebro Delta. In general, according to the opinions of the interviewees, we can conclude that the practices adopted have followed a pattern of collaborative governance.

3.2.1. The Origin of ECTS (Engagement Process)

The process for implementing the ECST was initiated upon the proposal of a group of local business owners with strong environmental awareness and vision concerning the area's tourism future. The actors understood the importance of the ECST as an instrument for developing sustainable tourism in a protected area. The ECST in the Ebro Delta is, as suggested Ansell & Gash (2008) an example of an initiative that started from the grassroots and in a participatory manner:

'The seed was sown at meetings on sustainable tourism in Seville in 2006/2007, where hotel and restaurant owners from the Ebro Delta participated. We found the topic of the ECST interesting, we put it to the EDNP and the ECST was requested … I think the goal was clear: to work towards the area's sustainability.' (RT4)

'*It was the business owners who, after several meetings in 2006, suggested the possibility of adopting a participatory model. Just a few very proactive local businesses are the ones who were willing … and they moved it forward … The business owners understood that tourists came because of the value of the Ebro Delta, because of the EDNP, because of the nature.' (NP2)*

3*.2.2 Participation and organizational process*

From the outset, emphasis has been placed on the effective representation and cooperation of all actors linked to the area. Both concepts are essential for achieving equality of power and legitimacy for the actions, as maintained by (Reed, 2008). It is worth indicating, however, that despite the efforts, 100 % of stakeholders were not integrated, given the low level of involvement of the primary sector:

'Almost everyone municipalities tourism businesses, SEO/BirdLife, the EDNP … but irrigators and farmers are not so sure about it and they haven't gotten very involved, at least not on a mass scale.' (CA)

Stakeholder participation has been encouraged through the Forum. The Forum has facilitated transfer of information, development of proposals and debates and has allowed sharing objectives. It also has facilitated decision-making process and the design of the working commissions to do joint action. One of the key principles in the Forum's operation is consensus, which has led to advances that are characteristic of collaborative governance; in other words, no stakeholder has been negatively affected and engaging them in shared objectives as suggested (Ansell& Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012):

'The Forum is the main hub for debate … we're all there … in general, the sustainable development goals and the ECST philosophy are shared by everyone … The process is participatory, all opinions are heard and debated. There haven't been any significant conflicts.' (RT5)

'The Forum allowed to engage us with the ECTS principles and facilitated sharing knowledge… we feel legitimated in our actions… Definitely, I think this legitimacy and our commitment have reinforced consensus and the dynamic of collaboration. (RT1)'

It has a flexible and informal working structure and it operates through two general annual meetings. The stakeholders participate on an equal footing through the thematic working commissions. The interviewees' opinions also allow us to confirm that the capacity of this organisational system to regulate participation has favoured equality in terms of representation and in decision-making, as has suggested Eagles et al. (2013)

'The decision-making process is informally formal. The work and the commissions are agreed in the Forum… The action plan is also agreed … meanwhile, progress is made through the working commissions.' (NP2)

The interviewees recognise the importance of the organisation and methodology inherent to the ECST:

'The ECST has been a means to collaborate, an instrument that has allowed us to organise the work and which has generated a good atmosphere and encourage stakeholder motivation; there have been quite good vibes between the businesses.' (RT3)

'People see that everything is more organised and that encourages them to collaborate … the ECST has boosted local associations, the associations wouldn't be the same without the ECST.' (TA2)

3.2.2. Commitment and Collaboration

The objectives of the ECST were designed by the EDNP and the stakeholders, following some recommendations of an external consultancy on the assessment of the area (Table 1). Once those objectives were set, the stakeholders actively participated in discussing them and implementing them in the area. According to the interviewees, the debates in the Forum and the stakeholders' commitment to the agreed objectives and ECTS principles were key factors in building mutual trust and legitimizing the process, as suggested by Eagles et al. (2013), Emerson et al., (2012) and Lockwood (2009).

'The information is clear … the objectives and commitments are discussed and agreed … the decisions are made jointly and afterwards we decide what each individual has to do … the mutual trust and consensus remains intact and I haven't seen serious conflicts.' (TA3)

Moreover, clear progress has been made around these objectives, which has encouraged the subsequent development of significant links and synergies between participants:

'The businesses that participate in the ECST believe in it, collaborate, trust, share … the act of sharing has helped with the creation of synergies and new ideas, new products … ideas that you can also implement in your business or in your association.' (RT6)

'Sometimes people get access to projects or grants … the ECST facilitates new synergies and dynamics for requesting funding.' (LA1)

In addition, collaboration agreements have also increased between the EDNP and some organizations, such as farming cooperatives, maritime resorts or the Delta Birding Festival. These organizations allocate part of their profits to nature conservation and to the recovery of local species:

'Our involvement in the process of change that this area is shown not only in our participation in the ECST, but also with our contribution of 1 % of the profits generated by our rice brand: Segadors del Delta de l'Ebre. And like us, other organizations in the Ebro Delta have gotten involved in the process.' (A)

3.2.3. Leadership: The EDNP Role

The EDNP has taken on the function of implementing and coordinating the follow-up and evaluation of the action plan. It is also responsible for the coordination tasks of the Forum and for over half of the lines of action. Its leadership has been legitimised to a large extent by its environmental technical capacity. Moreover, as corresponds to the collaborative governance nature of the ECST, the EDNP has played the role of organiser and stimulator of the process, through the Forum, bringing together stakeholders, mediating and facilitating achievement of the potential benefits as suggested by suggested Ansell & Gash (2008), Emerson et al., 2012). The interviewees clearly recognise this role of the EDNP:

'The EDNP has led the process, making the calls and coordinating and managing the activities … it has also acted as mediator between the stakeholders.' (TA3)

'The majority of the actions are led by the EDNP, both as an actor involved in the action in question and in terms of management.' (RT7)

The main limitations in the ECST's governance derive from the lack of legislative or executive authority of the EDNP. Indeed, as shown below, some interviewees consider that the very governance structure of the EDNP, which depends on other public authorities, limits its power and, therefore, its ability to implement certain actions:

'The EDNP is the leader, but it lacks executive power to enforce implementation of certain actions.' (RT8)

'The EDNP has been the main driver and leader of the ECST, but it's an agent with no executive authority and which has, moreover, a strong institutional presence on its governing board (local, provincial and regional governments…) that limits its capacity to exert pressure … so if a local council doesn't want to do something … no one can hold it to account.' (CA)

3.2.4. Institutional Coordination (The Governance Of The Territory)

This area of governance is the most difficult to resolve in these cases, given the fragmentation of regional, municipal and supra-municipal powers (Parra, 2010). In this study, it has been the most criticised aspect among all of those analysed. Many of the interviewees attribute some of the problems that have limited the development of the ECST to a deficit in territorial governance, often linked to budgetary restrictions. However, there are differences of opinion between public and private stakeholders. For private stakeholders, the coordination between municipalities has been insufficient and has been subject to the political leanings of each mayor; in any case, lack of continuity in this regard has had negative effects over outcomes. These finds are in the line of   Helsinga et al. (2017) and Parra (2010).

'The EDNP is faced with a complex territorial governance structure and often cannot do what it wants … If it challenges this, they'll do away with it because the EDNP forms part of the administration … which is who's in charge on the EDNP board … so, really, the EDNP's hands are tied by the control exercised by the EDNP board … Moreover, the Ebro Delta suffers from tremendous municipal division … each local council is concerned with its own affairs … and the politicians aren't sensitive enough to environmental issues.' (CA)

'There are endemic issues that get parked, often due to a lack of coordination between authorities.' (LA1).

'The problem is that here the local councils all do their own thing (…) plus they change with every election.' (TA4)

In contrast, the local governments, while assuming the need for greater collaboration and coordination, positively assess what has been achieved. In fact, they consider that merely holding meetings from time to time already contributes to strengthening the opportunities for collaboration and encourages the generation of synergies and cooperative projects. They also indicate that the budgetary restrictions have limited some of their actions:

'Perhaps we should meet more often, but meeting occasionally helps us coordinate and facilitates the implementation of shared projects, especially small-scale projects.' (LA2)

'The Ebro Delta is an extremely complex area … there are seven local councils … linking everything is difficult, primarily because there have been budgetary restrictions … but despite the different interests, a type of harmony is beginning to emerge … for example, we have managed to unify some actions and we have gotten joint tenders … progress is made little by little.' (LA3)

Some of those interviewed also highlighted how certain actions require supra-municipal coordination in order to implement the decisions made; for example, creating signage for the whole area of the Ebro Delta and beach cleaning. This coordination is also needed to promote actions to contribute to creating a tourism identity for the area; in this regard, they highlight the role played by supra-municipal bodies, such as the Provincial Government, in promoting tourism:

'The local governments have committed to cleaning the beaches … but managing the beaches is complicated … it should be done at a supra-municipal level, much more problems would be solved.' (NP1)

Special mention is deserved by the lack of understanding between the ECST and the Biosphere Reserve, which is particularly worrying given that both have shared motivations and goals (environmental protection, natural heritage and sustainability) and considerable territorial overlap. It is likely that the differences in governance between both entities have caused this lack of coordination:

'They make us pay to be part of the Biosphere Reserve … but for the time being the Reserve offers no added advantages.' (RT9)

'There is no participatory process in the Biosphere Reserve, unlike the ECST. Really, in order to be a member of the Biosphere Reserve you have to pay a fee. The supposed crown jewel of the Ebro Delta hasn't delivered the desired results.' (TA1)

'The main criticism of the Biosphere Reserve is how it's governed … there's the administration, the trade unions and traders … there's no ecologist representation or representation of the interests of the protected area … in these conditions everything depends on the awareness of the technicians … The governance is worse than in the ECST.' (CA)

This lack of understanding is even more worrying when we consider the scarcity of resources allocated to the different organisations and actions in a single territory. Indeed, it should be taken into account, as is logical, that the creation of the Biosphere Reserve has meant a decrease in resources for other ends, including funding ECST actions. In other words, both organisations aspire to the same public funding, but their lack of coordination has prevented the generation of synergies between them.

3.3 Analysis of the Survey

The survey responses allowed us to broaden the analysis in terms of the evaluation of each section studied above. For this, we followed the same pattern of analysis as in the interviews (Table 4), but in this case numerical scores were given using a seven-point Likert scale [1].

	EDNP	Farmers	Local authorit.	Tourist activity firms	Tourist accommodation firms	Others	Mean
OVERALL SATISFACTION GENERAL	6.00	4.00	6.20	4.63	4.78	5.50	5.14
OUTCOMES							
TOURISM IMAGE, QUALITY AND PROMOTION	6.00	3.75	5.70	5.19	5.11	5.25	5.20
Improvement of tourism image	6.00	4.00	6.00	5.00	5.22	5.60	5.34
Improvement of tourist service quality	6.00	3.50	5.40	5.38	5.00	4.90	5.06
SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS	5.00	4.25	5.80	4.84	5.11	5.28	5.14
Sustainable tourism	6.00	4.00	6.20	4.94	5.33	5.65	5.40
Improvement of environmental awareness	4.00	4.50	5.40	4.75	4.89	4.90	4.89
GOVERNANCE OF THE ECST							
GOVERNANCE OF THE ECST	5.80	3.70	5.92	5.18	5.49	5.76	5.46
EDNP leadership	6.00	3.00	6.40	5.75	6.11	6.20	5.91
Objectives	6.00	3.50	6.20	5.50	5.56	5.70	5.57
Debate	5.00	3.50	5.80	4.88	5.44	5.90	5.37
Commitment	6.00	4.50	5.60	4.88	5.22	5.60	5.29
Collaboration	6.00	4.00	5.60	4.88	5.11	5.40	5.17
GOVERNANCE OF THE TERRITORY							
GOVERNANCE OF THE TERRITORY	4.00	4.25	4.70	3.19	4.50	4.50	4.19
Coordination ecst –biosphere reserve	3.00	4.50	3.80	2.75	4.22	4.44	3.85
Coordination between local authorities	5.00	4.00	5.60	3.63	4.78	4.56	4.53

Table 4: Summary Results Based on the Survey
Source: Compiled by the Authors Based on the Survey

The numerical scores given in the survey coincide with the results of the interviews in terms of the outcomes and implementation process, with an overall level of satisfaction, with an average score of 5.14 points. More detailed analysis of each of the sections and items of the survey reveals, on the one hand, a positive general evaluation of 'Governance of the ECST', as well as of the outcomes of 'Tourism image, quality and promotion' and 'Sustainability and environmental awareness', and, on the other hand, a more critical evaluation of 'Governance of the territory'.

Therefore, in terms of the outcomes (the more tangible effects of the ECST on tourism and the area), both 'Tourism image, quality and promotion' and 'Sustainability and environmental awareness' received intermediate scores (5.20 and 5.14, respectively), although below the score given to 'Governance of the ECST'. However, the item with the lowest score was 'Improvement of environmental awareness'. According to different critical opinions provided above, underdevelopment in this regard is due to the insufficient resources allocated to training and information.

'Governance of the ECST' has an average score of 5.46 points; the items that comprise this section were also given similar scores (EDNP leadership, clarity of objectives, process of debate and commitment to the objectives and principles). The

[1] Given that the values 1 and 7 are, respectively, the minimum and the maximum scores, the value that marks the limit between adequate and inadequate is 4.

highest scores were given in almost all cases by the local authorities and the EDNP, while the farmers gave the lowest, followed by the tourist activity firms, both with below-average scores.

The most criticised section of the survey is 'Governance of the territory' whose average score (4.19) is barely adequate. Moreover, the item 'Coordination between the ECST and the Biosphere Reserve' received a lower average score (3.85), making it the lowest scoring item in the survey.

It is worth exploring the pattern of evaluation followed by different actors to identify any possible personal motivations.). For almost all of those items, the local authorities and the EDNP gave the highest scores, while the farmers gave the lowest. Also, for the majority of the items mentioned, the tourist activity firms gave intermediate scores, but below the average. In the section 'Governance of the territory', the evaluation made by the actors differs, particularly with regard to 'Coordination between the ECST and the Biosphere Reserve'. Indeed, while once again the local authorities and the EDNP gave above-average scores to the item 'Coordination between local authorities', the scores they gave to 'Coordination between the ECST and the Biosphere Reserve' are below the average. The tourist activity firms are the most critical of both areas of coordination, giving them the lowest scores. Specifically, they gave a score of 2.75 to 'Coordination between the ECST and the Biosphere Reserve'. The farmers, in contrast, show their preference by giving the best score to 'Coordination between the ECST and the Biosphere Reserve'.

The biases in the evaluation reflect three factors: the need for the EDNP to justify its leadership, the need for the local councils to justify their policy action and the lack of integration of the farmers. The first two gave very favourable scores, which shows optimism with regard to the ECST. The farmers, for their part, showed some distrust with regard to tourist activities in the area, at the same time as they revealed their inclination towards the Biosphere Reserve, which has been more concerned with granting seals of approval to agricultural products.

The motivations of the tourist accommodation business and, above all, the tourist activity firms appear to be very different. They were the most critical stakeholders, aside from the farmers. Indeed, these two types of actors have been the most involved in the development of the ECST since the outset and, as a result, they are more ambitious in terms of reaching the objectives and have greater expectations around the benefits of tourism, as shown in the opinions presented above. Their evaluation of items such as 'Debate', 'Commitment', 'Sustainable tourism', 'Improvement of environmental awareness' and, above all, of the section 'Governance of the territory' reveals a critical and demanding perspective. At the same time, they also showed some optimism in terms of ECST advances during the interviews.

Table 5 summarises the evaluation of the ECST's implementation between 2007 and 2016. The gains made in terms of the outcomes are obvious. The ECST has brought to light the importance of sustainable tourism, the area's tourism image and the quality of the services, as well as the need for environmental training and awareness-raising. However, aspects relating essentially to external promotion and dissemination of ECST values in the area are still pending. With regard to governance of the ECST, major advances have been made in terms of shared objectives, as well as in collaboration, commitment and the generation of synergies between members. Nevertheless, there is a lack of technical improvements that would help regulate the area and analyse the impact of tourism, as well as attracting sectors uninvolved in the ECST. Lastly, the most positive aspect in terms of governance of the territory has been the involvement of the Provincial Council, whose scope and financial capacity have helped to improve elements such as promotion. However, other aspects of territorial governance are still pending improvement, including coordination between local councils and between the ECST and the Biosphere Reserve.

ECST ACHIEVEMENTS (2007-2016)	ISSUES PENDING IMPROVEMENT
OUTCOMES	
- Tourism and nature as the basis for new products - Improvement of: - image - quality - Consideration of needs: - in environmental training and awareness-raising - in promotion	- Promotion - of ECST businesses - of and 'Ebro Delta' tourism brand - Improved dissemination among citizens about: - the ECST - the heritage value of the Ebro Delta
GOVERNANCE OF THE ECST	
- Shared objectives: - tourism - local territory - Commitment and trust between stakeholders - Collaboration and synergies between stakeholders	- Participation of the primary sector - Design of impact indicators - Plan for the use of public space
GOVERNANCE OF THE TERRITORY	
- Coordination as a necessity - Beginnings of supra-municipal coordination (2012-2016) (Provincial Council of Tarragona)	- Coordination between local authorities - Coordination between the ECST and the Biosphere Reserve

Table 5: Summary of the Evaluation
Source: Compiled by Authors

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Implementation of the ECST in the Ebro Delta protected area has had generally satisfactory effects on natural heritage, the image and quality of the tourism and its sustainability. In addition, there has had an increase in trust and environmental awareness among stakeholders. Thus, it can be concluded that the adhesion to ECST has contributed to the consolidation of a tourism product linked closely to the territory and the protected area and the environmental sustainability. These results are in line of Caltellani & Sala (2010).

The ECST collaborative governance model has contributed decisively to the achievement of the outcomes mentioned, in concordance the general framework proposed of suggested (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012).However, the complexity of a governance process like this requires the understanding of stakeholders that the dynamics of the management is aimed at maintaining and protecting the specificity of the environmental resources. This objective is not always easily understood due to existence of potential controversial interests (economic development versus environmental sustainability). Thus, it is necessary, that governance model encourages stakeholder participation and interaction, transparency in the process for determining sharing objectives and commitment to those objectives and generates, especially, trust among stakeholders. Our findings are in this line, following claims made previous research as Ansell & Gash (2008), Borrini et al. (2009), Eagles et al. (2013), Emerson et al. (2012) and Lockwood (2009).

The existence of EDNP leadership, despite of authority lacks in opinion of some interviewers, legitimised by its technical capacity and its action in the interest of environmental sustainability, has been a key factor in the implementation of the ECST and in the collaborative governance model, as suggest Nunkoo et al. (2012) and Valente et al. (2015). In practice, the role of the EDNP has been decisive for organising the work, stimulating the participatory process and ensuring private actors' commitment to the ECST governance model. Moreover, this leadership has enabled continuity and successive ECST renewals by involving a growing number of diversified stakeholders and strengthening their commitment and trust.

Nevertheless, there are also factors that have impeded the achievement of some objectives. The most significant is the territorial governance deficit. The existence of different levels of government and the scarcity of financial resources have resulted in this deficit, which has materialised in a lack of coordination when it comes to pursuing the objectives, in concordance with Helsinga et al. (2017) and Parra (2010).

In summary, even where good practice concerning ECTS collaborative model are verified, the lack of coordination has been a drag. This lack exists in two spheres of governance: among the local authorities and between the ECST and the Biosphere Reserve. The main consequence of this governance deficit has been a limited achievement of objectives that the entire area and sector could benefit from, such as improved infrastructure, better promotion of nature tourism, the development of a visible 'brand' for the area and an increase in environmental awareness among the local population. However, this study also reveals the benefits of a supra-municipal institution that can exercise specific authority in pursuit of some of the objectives. In this regard, the recent incorporation to the ECTS of the Provincial Government has demonstrated the relevance of institutional commitment and its appropriateness of such a body for addressing the issue of tourism promotion.

Finally, as a result of all above mentioned, the central contribution of this study is to present the ECTS as a model of good governance of tourism in protected areas. At the same time, it sheds light on the importance of the collaborative management plans to achieve environment conservation. Our finds also raise questions about the role and institutional and political commitment as well as the implications emerged as a consequence of the lack of their coordination. In this sense, the results obtained can serve as an example for other protected spaces. We also want to underline as the main limitation of this study the lack of the incorporation of the perspective of the local communities.

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Appendix

Script of the Interviews on the Cets

A) Genesis of the ECST. How was the development of the process?

B) Organization and participation in the ECST

a. Did all relevant stakeholders participate?

b. Role of public and private Stakeholders

c. Has there been any leadership? If so, who has exercised it? What has been its role?

d. Information and transparency

e. Mechanisms of participation, objectives and decision making.

f. Consensus and commitment on objectives

g.   Conflicts and mechanism of resolution

h. Sources of financing.

C) Perception of the results of the implementation of the ECST.

a. Level of compliance with planned actions.

b. Improvement of the natural heritage

c. Evolution of the type of tourism.

d. Tourist image of the territory.

e. Environmental awareness

D) Critical aspects.

a. Coordination between institutions

b. Promotion of tourism.

c. others

Ecst Ebro Delta Survey Questionnaire

1.- Type of entity

* Political Government authority
* EDNP
* Agriculture
* Tourist Activities Companies
* Tourist Accommodation
o Camping
o Rural House
o Hotel
* Other

2.- To what extent has the ECST been a good mechanism for sustainable tourism? *(1=Absolutely not; 7=Totally)*

3.- Have the strategic objectives been clear? *(1=Absolutely not; 7=Totally)*

4.- To what extent has there been discussion and consensus around the objectives? *(1=Absolutely not; 7=Totally)*

5.- Have all the stakeholders been able to participate in the ECST? a) Yes,   b) No;

6.- Have any of these agents had more power when deciding?

* Local Administrations
* Tourist Activities Companies
* EDNP
* NGOs
* Other

7.- If there has been a more influential stakeholder, has that been positive*?   a) Yes, b) No*

8.- Participate in the ECST, has it promoted collaboration and trust among stakeholders? (*1=Absolutely not; 7=Totally*)

9.- The commitment to the initial objectives … (*1= Decreased; 7= Increased*)

10.- The role of the EDNP has been… *(1=Little relevant;7=Essential)*

11.- Has the ECST contributed to improving the natural heritage and sustainability? *(1=Absolutely not; 7=Totally)*

12.- Has the ECST contributed to improving the tourist image of the Ebro Delta? *(1=Absolutely not; 7=Totally)*

13.- Has the ECST contributed to improving the quality of tourism services? (*1=Absolutely not; 7=Totally)*

14.- Has the ECST contributed to modify the type of tourism? a) Yes; b) No

15.- Has environmental awareness increased?

(1= Only among the members of the ECST; 7= Among the entire population)

16.- Do you think there is a good coordination between the ECST and the Biosphere Reserve? *(1=Absolutely not; 7=Perfect coordination)*

17.- Has there been good coordination among the participating public institutions? *(1=Absolutely not; 7=Perfect coordination).*

18.- What is the degree of general satisfaction with the results obtained with the ECST? *(1=Null; 7=High)*