

## Applying Stakeholder Theory and Social Network Analysis when studying the social capital of tourism destinations

**Ismael Manuel Rodríguez-Herrera\***  
Universidad Autónoma de Aguascalientes (México)

**Jairo Casado-Montilla\*\***  
Universidad de Jaén (España)

**Diana López-Molina\*\*\***  
Universidad de Cuenca (España)

**Juan Ignacio Pulido-Fernández\*\*\*\***  
Universidad de Jaén (España)

**Abstract:** This study integrates Stakeholder Theory and Social Network Analysis to evaluate and strengthen social capital in tourism destinations, focusing on Pátzcuaro, Mexico, a “Pueblo Mágico,” (Magic Town) and thereby revealing a complex network of relationships characterised by moderate levels of trust and collaboration, with civil servants as key bridging actors. While the Pueblos Mágicos Committee shows strong internal cohesion, challenges remain in integrating peripheral stakeholders and fostering a more inclusive governance structure. The findings highlight the importance of pre-existing social relationships in tourism planning and provide a replicable framework for enhancing stakeholder collaboration and strengthening governance in tourism destinations. By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of social network dynamics and their implications for sustainable tourism development. However, the inherent limitations of any case study must be acknowledged. Future research could explore the evolution of these networks and examine the impact of specific interventions to strengthen social capital

**Keywords:** Social capital; Stakeholders Theory; Social network analysis; tourism destination; tourism management; Pátzcuaro (Mexico).

### Aplicación de la teoría de las partes interesadas y el análisis de redes sociales al estudio del capital social de los destinos turísticos

**Resumen:** Este estudio integra la Teoría de los Stakeholders y el Análisis de Redes Sociales para evaluar y fortalecer el capital social en destinos turísticos. Centrándose en Pátzcuaro, México, un “Pueblo Mágico”, descubre una compleja red de relaciones caracterizada por niveles moderados de confianza y colaboración, con funcionarios públicos como actores puente clave. Aunque el Comité de los Pueblos Mágicos muestra una fuerte cohesión interna, sigue habiendo problemas para integrar a las partes interesadas periféricas y

\* <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5007-1323>; E-mail: ismael.rodriguez@edu.uaa.mx

\*\* <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1250-1534>; E-mail: jcasado@ujaen.es

\*\*\* <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2824-2824>; E-mail: diana.lopez@ucuenca.edu.ec

\*\*\*\* <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9019-726X>; E-mail: jipulido@ujaen.es

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fomentar una estructura de gobernanza más inclusiva. Los resultados ponen de relieve la importancia de las relaciones sociales preexistentes en la planificación turística y proporcionan un marco reproducible para mejorar la colaboración entre las partes interesadas y reforzar la gobernanza en los destinos turísticos. Al combinar métodos cuantitativos y cualitativos, este estudio contribuye a una comprensión más profunda de la dinámica de las redes sociales y sus implicaciones para el desarrollo del turismo sostenible. Sin embargo, hay que reconocer las limitaciones inherentes a cualquier estudio de caso. Futuras investigaciones podrían explorar la evolución de estas redes y examinar el impacto de intervenciones específicas para reforzar el capital social.

**Palabras clave:** Capital social; Teoría de los stakeholders; Análisis de redes sociales; Destino turístico; Gestión turística; Pátzcuaro (México).

## 1. Introduction

Tourism, by its very nature, implies the conjunction of various stakeholders who interact and relate with one another in a specific geographical area, which has been commonly denominated a tourism destination. So far, not enough work has been done to define and conceptualise this notion, even though, as Pearce (2014) establishes, it is fundamental to conceptualise the term ‘destination’, since it will determine not only the problems tackled by academia, research designs, and the methodology to be used, but also practical matters, such as the management of destinations, the identification of stakeholders (Gregory, Atkins et al., 2020), and management priorities. Similarly, Saraniemi and Kylänen (2011: 133) mention the lack of consensus regarding the conceptualisation of the notion of destination, pointing out that the term is usually seen as “the unit of action where different stakeholders, such as companies, public organizations, hosts, and guests interact through cocreation of experiences”.

From this perspective, they highlight the relations between stakeholders and the characteristics of these relations since, according to the theory of social capital, social relations are valuable as they enable the mobilisation of resources that increase growth, and the nature and scope of interactions between communities and institutions are key to understanding the development prospects of a given society (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000). Furthermore, social capital, as a concept, has brought to light the need to plan development on the basis of pre-existing social relations (Arriagada et al., 2004).

Hence, there is a clear need to broaden the analysis of social capital and explore ways to strengthen it by managing stakeholders as a tool for destination management. In this context, academia must focus on developing methodologies that operationalize the concept of social capital, thereby directly enhancing stakeholder management and improving the governance of tourism destinations (Baggio, 2017). As Fukuyama (2003) highlights, much of the research conducted thus far on social capital and its relationship with economic development has remained primarily conceptual. But more pragmatic research must be conducted, considering aspects such as the creation of social capital, the legal and institutional conditions required for it to develop, and the way in which democratic institutions are developed, among other elements.

This paper seeks to demonstrate that we can move from the theoretical analysis of social capital towards making the concept operational, thereby enabling the effects of tourist activity to be measured, whilst at the same time allowing for a series of recommendations to be made with a view to avoiding future failed interventions or negative consequences of tourism development. We present a methodological proposal for the analysis of social capital that utilises two theoretical-methodological tools: Stakeholder Theory (hereinafter ST) and Social Network Analysis (hereinafter SNA). We are using these two approaches because, as stated by Graburn and Jafari (1991: 7), “no single discipline alone can accommodate, treat, or understand tourism; it can be studied only if disciplinary boundaries are crossed and if multidisciplinary perspectives are sought and formed”.

Hence, this paper seeks to generate knowledge about the tourism phenomenon, answering the call made by Pearce (2014: 151) “to develop techniques to analyse the structure of destinations by combining functional and spatial analyses, by complementing quantitative measures of behaviour with the more qualitative approaches”. In this context, the guiding hypothesis of this research indicates that it is possible to use techniques capable of analysing the social capital of a tourism destination with a view to strengthening it, managing its stakeholders as a tool in destination management. Therefore, this paper allows to depict the structure of a tourism destination relationships among stakeholders according to their roles in the community. Also, this approach enables a detailed understanding of stakeholder

relationships and their roles within tourism destinations, ultimately aiming to strengthen social capital and improve destination management.

## 2. Literature review

Conceptual discussion about social capital has not yet been exhausted. Although the literature confirms the existence of research that had dealt with this concept previously, Bourdieu (1985), Coleman (1988, 1990) and Putnam (1993) are recognised for having coined and disseminated the concept of social capital through different disciplines. They fostered a productive debate, particularly in the 1990s and the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Putnam considers social capital to refer to the “features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated action” (Putnam, 1993: 167).

Based on the proposals set out by Putnam (1993) and Woolcock (1998), Durston (2000: 7) establishes that the term social capital “makes reference to the norms, institutions, and organisations that promote: trust, reciprocity, and cooperation”, proposing the existence of six different forms of social capital, each with its own characteristics and dynamics: Bonding social capital, which can be divided in individual, collective or community and group; bridging social capital, linking social capital and societal social capital.

Regarding community social capital, Durston (2000: 5) emphasises “the possibility of building it intentionally and on top of other aspects of a possible synergy between State and community around this construction or coproduction”. In relation to this issue, one of the most distinctive points of view in Putnam’s vision is possibly the idea of investing in networks, considering that social capital is something people can commit to, and that the solution to underdevelopment is precisely the construction of social capital (Macedo, 2009: 247). Atria (2003), on the other hand, posits that social capital is a factor that can be managed strategically, recognising that the social capital of a group or community can be constructed by means of two possible strategies: empowerment or association.

Authors such as Fukuyama (2001) highlights the difficulty or at least the lack of clarity regarding how to generate social capital. However, there are some studies that show the possibility of deliberately increasing social capital: Uphoff and Wijayaratra (2000) in Sri Lanka; Durston (2002) in Central America; Flores and Rello (2002) in Mexico and Central America; and Fox (1996) in Mexico. Specifically, Uphoff and Wijayaratra (2000) point out the need to establish more and better functions, norms, precedents and procedures, and to expand networks of contact and communication between people, in order to carry out what could be considered the four basic functions of any social organisation: decision making, mobilisation and management of resources, communication and coordination, and conflict resolution.

Many of the studies cited above about social capital focus on rural development. However, the scientific literature on tourism has also explored this issue from various perspectives (Table 1).

Other authors, who have recently published papers applying the concept of social, have highlighted the need to manage the stakeholders of a territory and their importance in attaining sustainability in tourism destinations (Cacciutto and Barbini, 2012; Casado-Montilla y Pulido-Fernández, 2024; Cruz and Pulido-Fernández, 2012; Castelletti, 2013; Choi, 2013; Gan et al., 2021; Lee, 2014; Liu, et al., 2014; Mura and Tavakoli, 2014; Park, Nunkoo and Yoon, 2015; Sainaghi and Baggio, 2014; Yong-Soon, 2014; Zahra and McGrehee, 2013).

From this perspective, the committee established for the Pueblos Mágicos de México program, acting as an intermediary between government bodies and civil society, was supported by a methodological approach combining Stakeholder Theory (ST) and Social Network Analysis (SNA) to achieve this goal. This committee, composed of up to 10 representatives, is tasked with ensuring the locality performs effectively within the program (SECTUR, 2009).

Firstly, Stakeholder Theory (ST) underscores the importance of considering various related stakeholders to achieve the established goals. This approach originates from the work of Freeman (1984) and has been enriched by contributions from multiple authors. Particularly relevant to this research is the work of Mitchell et al. (1997), who propose identifying and characterizing stakeholders based on their analysis of 27 definitions of the term. Their framework classifies stakeholders according to three specific attributes—power, legitimacy, and urgency—and combines these attributes to define eight distinct groups of stakeholders.

As for Social Network Analysis (SNA), it is a valuable tool for leveraging the theoretical and methodological advancements made in recent years, particularly in connection to this study (Merinero-Rodríguez and Pulido-Fernández, 2016; Ledesma et al., 2021, 2022; Valeri and Baggio, 2021). This approach enables the identification of relationships among stakeholders and their implications for tourism

management within the destinations included in the Pueblos Mágicos de México program. As Cuevas (2007: 42) notes, “using network theory makes it possible to comprehend the behaviour of stakeholders in their environment and thus develop proposals for actions aimed at making administration more efficient and effective by leveraging the social entities constituted by the stakeholders”. This statement can be complemented by Muñoz and Fuentes (2013), whose proposal helps to understand the relevance of intangible assets as knowledge or experience along with the value of stakeholder cooperation.

**Table 1: Summary of main research contributions on Social Capital and Tourism**

Author(s)	Contribution
Grängsjö and Gummesson (2006)	Investigated the mechanics of cooperation networks in the hotel industry.
Johannesson, Skaptadóttir, and Benediktsson (2003)	Proposed a qualitative and interactionist approach to understand the shift from resource-based to cultural economies in Iceland.
Jones (2005)	Applied the concept to understanding social change in a community-based eco-tourism project in Gambia.
Kluviinkova-Oravska and Chobotova (2006)	Studied the role of social capital and governance in the rural development of national parks.
Laing et al. (2009)	Explored associations between agencies managing protected areas and the tourism industry.
Mbaiwa and Stronza (2010)	Measured the effects of tourism development on rural communities in Botswana.
McGehee et al. (2010)	Examined social capital in relation to tourism and its correlation with other forms of capital in four Virginia counties.
Minnaert et al. (2009)	Investigated the benefits of social tourism in European countries.
Okazaki (2008)	Defined a model of community-based tourism and applied it in the Philippines.
Park et al. (2012)	Identified factors influencing social capital and its impact on conflict management in small tourism communities in South Korea.
Zhao et al. (2011)	Studied the development of tourist businesses in Guangxi, China.
Czernek-Marszałek (2018)	Assessed the existence of relationships among members of a tourism organization.
Baggio (2020, 2022)	Demonstrated that tourism destinations have universal properties.
Cehan et al. (2021); Ruggieri et al. (2022); Nguyen et al. (2022)	Analyzed the different fields in which stakeholders collaborate.
McLeod (2020)	Explored how knowledge flows are influenced within a tourism destination.
López-Molina and Pulido-Fernández (2024)	Carried out a multi-level perspective analysis of tourism stakeholders' relationships.

**Source:** Authors' own.

Through its use of computing, statistics, and mathematics, SNA offers the advantage of analysing social relations between individuals using a multidisciplinary approach. Hence, this approach entails determining the degree of closeness in which “group participation is the strength it has for decision making and the influence it can exert” (Cuevas, 2007: 41). According to Arriagada *et al.* (2004: 49) the strength of this type of analysis resides in the possibility of determining the descriptive aspects of social relations, whilst also being able to ‘bring down’ individual and group relations to a more graphic level without neglecting the structure of the social space and the structures in which these networks are inserted.

As several authors have pointed out (Scott et al., 2008; Nogueira and Pinho, 2015; Pulido-Fernández and Merinero-Rodríguez, 2018), the current theoretical-methodological framework of Social Network Analysis (SNA) has significantly advanced the study of social relations, both as an explanatory element of social phenomena in general and specifically within the tourism phenomenon.

Moreover, some authors have utilized SNA to understand relationships within a given destination by analyzing variables other than stakeholders (Ballina, 2020; Éber et al., 2018; Park et al., 2019). SNA enables the analysis of relationships themselves, rather than just the factors and dimensions

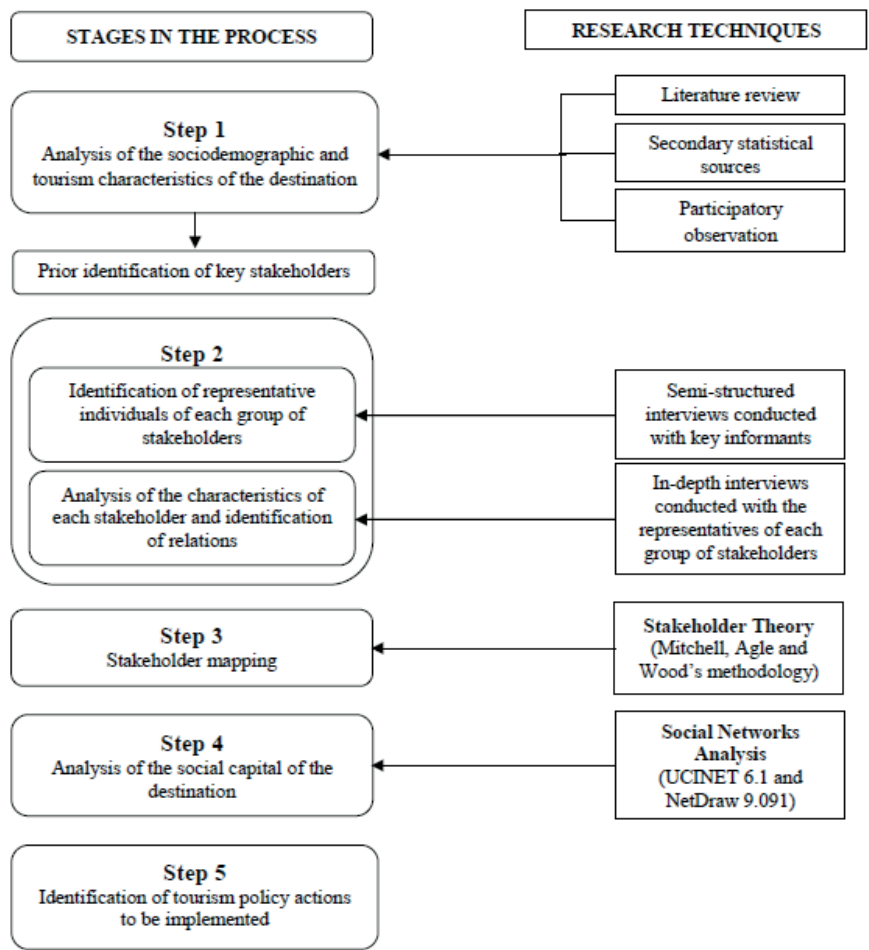
that make these relationships possible. It treats these relationships as structural components of the network of bonds formed between stakeholders (Gibson et al., 2005; Farsani et al., 2014; Hristov et al., 2018; Zee and Vanneste, 2015).

3. Methodology

After reviewing the literature, the aim of this paper is to design a methodology, which uses two theoretical-methodological tools that have proven potential in tourism research, to facilitate analysis of the social capital of a tourism destination, as a prior step to taking measures aimed at strengthening it. Dimensions of relationships that are not situated at the level of the stakeholders are incorporated in the analysis carried out. Thus, this strengthening will contribute, in turn, to improving the management of that destination.

This paper aims to combine the analytical potential of ST and SNA in order, as shown in Figure 1, to create firstly a map of stakeholders, and then study the relational dynamic that exists between them and define the types of social capital that exist within the destination.

Figure 1: Empirical study. Stages in the process and research techniques used



Source: Authors' own.

**Step 1. Analysis of the sociodemographic and tourism characteristics of the destination**

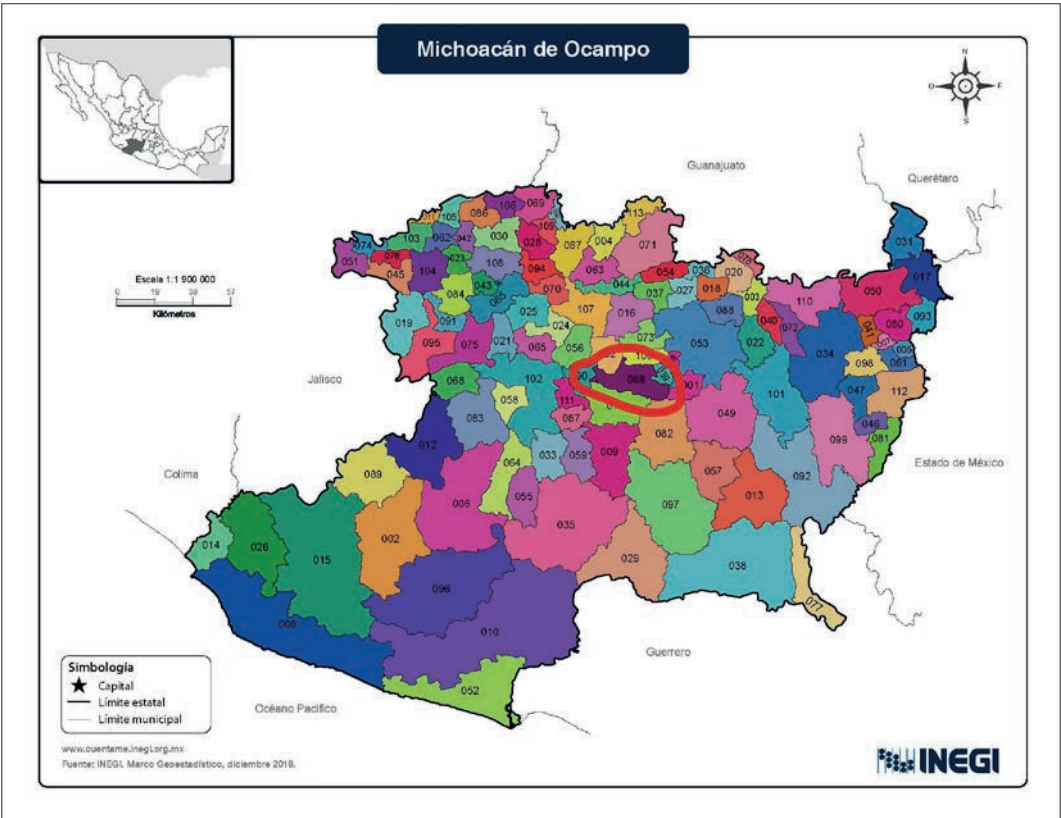
The first step when studying the social capital of the destination selected was to conduct a detailed analysis of the general characteristics of the locality, focusing on socioeconomic aspects, although without ignoring other elements such as location, accessibility, supply and tourist demand, among others. This allowed us, among other things, to conduct a prior identification of the stakeholders linked to tourism.

Pátzcuaro is the chosen tourism destination where the proposed methodology is applied. It is one of the first towns that joined to the Pueblos Mágicos Program, program whose objective is to strength the social capital of the member municipalities, among others. It is located in western Mexico in the center of Michoacán's state at 64 km. from the capital (Figure 2). A deep analysis was carried out to depict this city which, being aware of this paper extension, is not included. Its enough to point out that its area is 438.54 km., with a population of 93,265 inhabitants (INEGI, 2016).

Its tourism importance resides in an ancient indigenous tradition heritage and, among the most important tourism attractions, the colonial old town stands out which was declared “Monumental Conglomerate” by “Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH)” in 1990. Furthermore, the island Janitzio is located in the Pátzcuaro lake where traditional fishing is still being performed. Among Pátzcuaro's main celebrations, the Day of the Dead (2<sup>nd</sup> November) has been declared Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by the UNESCO in 2003. Its local supply is composed by art, crafts and gastronomy.

As of January, 2019, Pátzcuaro has 66 accommodation establishments and 21 food and drink establishments. According to the last available data from 2015, the working population was of the 33.68%. From this amount, 9.38% works in the primary sector, 24.78% in the secondary sector and 40.73% in service sector (INEGI, 2016).

**Figure 2: Geographical position of Pátzcuaro**



Source: INEGI (2020).

## Step 2. Questionnaire of key stakeholders

The key stakeholders were determined using a non-probabilistic chain or network sampling technique (snowball). Fieldwork began with a semi-structured interview conducted with the head of the Pueblos Mágicos de México programme, obtaining an initial approach to the development of tourism in the locality, as well as a preliminary list of stakeholders. Subsequently, the information compiled was corroborated and expanded upon with the help of key informants from the destination itself. Then, the selected stakeholders were asked to complete the questionnaire designed which enabled us to draw up a map of tourism stakeholders.

Therefore, we prioritised quality over quantity in the sample, and in this respect, we sought stakeholders who would help us to understand the phenomenon being studied. The criteria for applying the instruments were membership of the Pueblos Mágicos Committee (hereinafter, CPM) and/or the importance of the stakeholder in the development of tourism in the destination.

In addition to interviews, we administered a questionnaire that aimed to provide an approximate measure of the destination's social capital (Annex 1). The questionnaire was designed on the basis of analysis of two existing instruments: the first was the *Cuestionario de diagnóstico de redes de capital social en el nivel local*, proposed by Arriagada et al. (2004) who advanced the operationalisation of the concept of social capital at a local level, and the second was the *Integrated Questionnaire for the Measurement of Social Capital (SC-IQ)*, published by the World Bank (Grootaert et al., 2004). Prior to selecting this questionnaire, we analysed other alternatives proposed by international institutions or by expert researchers and academics in this field (Bunge-Vivier, 2008; Grootaert and van Bastelaer, 2002; Jones, 2005; Krishna and Shrader, 2000).

The final questionnaire designed for this research is based on Social Network Analysis (SNA) and allows us to capture useful and accessible information about the linking, bridging, and bonding social capital of stakeholders in a locality's social and information networks. This data can then be summarized and analyzed to evaluate the results. Additionally, the questionnaire was enhanced by incorporating elements from Social Theory (ST) to provide greater depth in studying the relationships and interactions between stakeholders (Table 2).

## Step 3. Stakeholder mapping

The third task involved a process known as stakeholder mapping (hereinafter SM), which aims to identify and characterise the stakeholders of the tourism destination selected, which in turn allows us to know which aspects from the sphere of tourism policy must be reinforced in each case to assure the participation of stakeholders in the management of that destination, and even to generate greater relational dynamics if required.

As Mehrizi et al., (2009) state, SM aims to determine the bonds between different agents, their objectives, their actions or responsibilities, and the institutions that regulate interactions between these stakeholders.

For the purposes of this research, we are particularly interested in the analytical methodology proposed by Mitchell et al. (1997: 874), who propose a stakeholders' classification based on three specific attributes: power, legitimacy, and urgency, which results in eight different groups: dormant stakeholder, demanding stakeholder, discretionary stakeholder, dangerous stakeholder, dominant stakeholder, dependent stakeholder, definitive stakeholder and nonstakeholder.

As established by Mitchell et al., (1997), the combination of the three attributes allows for the identification of different groups of stakeholders: those who only possess a single attribute (known as *latent*), those with two attributes (known as *expectant*) and those who have all three attributes (known as *definitive*). There is also an eighth type who does not possess any of the attributes and is therefore not stakeholder.

Each of the types defined presents different characteristics, which have different repercussions in terms of the management, in this case, of a tourism destination when seeking to understand the social dynamic of a specific destination, facilitating the identification and analysis of social capital present there. This methodology has already been successfully applied to identify and analyse stakeholders within the sphere of tourism destinations (Currie et al., 2009; Montanari and Staniscia, 2010; Pulido-Fernández, 2010).

For the purposes of this study, a variation was incorporated into the analysis of stakeholder attributes proposed by Mitchell et al. (1997). Analysis was approached from two perspectives: an initial approach in which members of the CPM were asked about their self-perceptions with regard to each of the three

attributes proposed by the theory (power, legitimacy, and urgency); and a second approach in which the stakeholders interviewed (not only the members of the CPM) were asked to give an assessment of those same attributes for the stakeholders with whom they were in contact apropos of managing the tourism destination in question.

Table 2: Social Network Analysis variables

Name	Description
Social Network	Set of actors and their relationships
Nodes	Graphically represent the actors or agents of a particular social network.
Actors/agents	Individuals and collective social units (organizations and groups).
Unit of analysis	Egocentric network: information is obtained about the social relationships of the person (ego) with other actors. Group networks: data can be collected on the relationships between individuals in a particular group, the relationship between one subgroup and another subgroup of the network.
Social ties	Links established between actors. In a social network, agents are connected to each other through social ties.
Types of links	Refers to the multiplicity of links and the type of relationship that defines them. E.g., business, family, friendship, neighborhood, and other relationships.
Strength of ties	Intensity or frequency of social ties: – Weak ties: are important for transmitting information, producing coordination and joint action, and connecting different actors. – Strong ties: strong ties are more associated with control and hierarchy.
Size	Number of links of all individuals in the network of the unit of analysis. The size defines the complexity of the networks. Simple networks have few links, while more complex ones have a large number of social ties.
Flow	Indicates the direction of the link through arrows that can be unidirectional and bidirectional.
Connectivity	Proportion of existing links within a social network and the number of all possible connections that can be established between all the nodes in the network.
Distance	Steps needed to traverse the length between one actor and another. The more links a node needs to reach another actor, the more distant it is.
Cohesion	Related to social ties concentrated within a group, of strong, direct, and frequent character compared to the ties established with non-members of the group.
Density	Description of the overall level of linkage between the agents of a network. The more actors are connected to each other, the denser the network will be. Density is a measure expressed as a percentage of the ratio between the number of existing relationships and the possible ones.
Centrality (Degree)	Measuring centrality within a network allows identifying the prominence of an actor or group embedded within it. Centrality measures vary according to its definition
Out-degree	It is the sum of the relationships that actors claim to have with the rest
In-degree	It is the sum of the relationships referred to an actor by another
Centralization	Special condition in which an actor plays a clearly central role by being highly connected in the network.
Betweenness	The ability of a node to mediate communications between pairs of nodes. These nodes are also known as bridge actors.
Closeness	The ability of an actor to reach all the nodes in the network.

Source: Arriagada et al. (2004) y Velázquez y Aguilar (2005).

Step 4. Analysis of the social capital of the destination

The next stage of the research process involved processing and analysing the data compiled, which was fundamental in order to reach the proposals and conclusions established as the goal of this research.

To this end, specific software for SNA was used, UCINET 6, as this statistical package is easy to use and offers “greater variety of statistics that cover the fundamental theoretical concepts of SNA and graphs, positional analysis as well as multidimensional scaling. It also contains general multivariable techniques and tools to transform and handle matrices” (Rodríguez, 2005: 73).

The data obtained from the questionnaires were transferred to a *Microsoft Office Excel* spreadsheet, in order to concentrate them and work with them using dynamic tables, and also to obtain a matrix of binary data, which was exported to the UCINET 6 programme, where the attributes of each stakeholder were aggregated, obtaining statistical indices for analysis, as well as graphs with the complementary software programme NetDraw 9.091. Furthermore, for each stakeholder interviewed, a summary table was generated, which includes the main objectives of their participation in tourism management, interrelations with other stakeholders, attributes, and associations.

**Step 5. Identification of areas of tourism policy to be reinforced**

The analysis conducted offered a very clear view of the repercussions of this tourism programme from a relational perspective, and the role played by each of the stakeholders, particularly the members of the CPM, in relation to tourism management. This allows very specific recommendations to be made regarding actions that should be taken in order to improve relational dynamics in each of the destinations.

**4. Results**

**4.1. Stakeholder mapping**

As mentioned previously, stakeholder attributes for the destination studied here were analysed from two perspectives. The roles of the interviewee stakeholders are shown in Table 3. To preserve their identity, only their positions in the community are provided.

**Table 3: Assigned number and role in the destination**

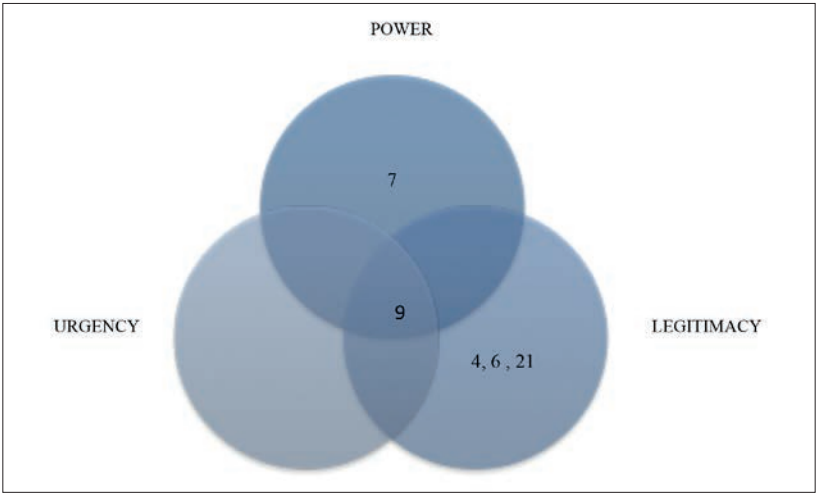
Role	Number assigned
Public sector stakeholder	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14
Private / particular stakeholder	15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22,23,24,25,26,27,28,29,30
Educational / cultural sector stakeholder	31,32,33
Organizations and local groups	34,35,36,37,38,39,40,41,42,43,44

**Source:** Authors’ own.

The results of the first approach, which is related with the perceptions that members of the CPM for Pátzcuaro interviewed have of themselves, are presented in summary form in Figure 3. Only one stakeholder (the representative of the hotel sector) actually considers himself to be a definitive stakeholder. In other words, he considers that he possesses all three attributes and, therefore, feels he plays a decisive role in the management of Pátzcuaro.

Stakeholder number 7 (artisan) considers himself to be a dormant stakeholder, since he also assigned himself the attribute of power and, as mentioned in the section on methodology, it would be relatively easy for him to acquire any other attribute in a short space of time. Furthermore, three of the stakeholders (the representative of the INAH, the director of the Library, and the councillor for Tourism) define themselves as discretionary stakeholders, meaning that they only feel they have legitimacy and, ostensibly, they do not exercise any pressure in relation to destination management. Finally, stakeholder 1 did not feel he possessed any of the attributes and did not see himself as a stakeholder, which is particularly striking since he has just been appointed the chair of the CPM for Pátzcuaro. The possible reasons which explain this fact could include insufficient communication about the role, a gap in the onboarding process, or personal factors such as modesty or imposter syndrome.

**Figure 3: Types of stakeholder members of the CPM for Pátzcuaro (according to their self-assigned attributes)**



Source: Authors’ own.

The analysis conducted was complemented and enriched with Figure 4, which represents the results of the attributes that the interviewees assigned to stakeholders with whom they have some kind of a relationship. A first group is identified, made up of 13 stakeholders, who are considered definitive stakeholders through their possession of all three attributes. It is particularly noteworthy that the chairman of the CPM has been classified in this group, even though previously he did not even consider himself to be a stakeholder. Furthermore, this group also encompasses the former chairwoman of the CPM, the representatives of the State Department for Tourism and the Council’s Department of Tourism, the representative of hotel owners, the municipal director of culture, and the federal departments for tourism. All these stakeholders are felt to be decisive forces in the management of tourism within this destination.

A second group, which is clearly identifiable as being the most numerous, is that of the dependent stakeholders, made up of 19 agents, who were assigned the attributes of urgency and legitimacy. This group includes several members of the CPM, in addition to associations of restaurants, artisans, cultural groups, groups from civil society, and some government departments, both federal and municipal. According to the theory, these stakeholders are characterised by seeking out the support of other stakeholders who hold the power they lack in order to participate in management.

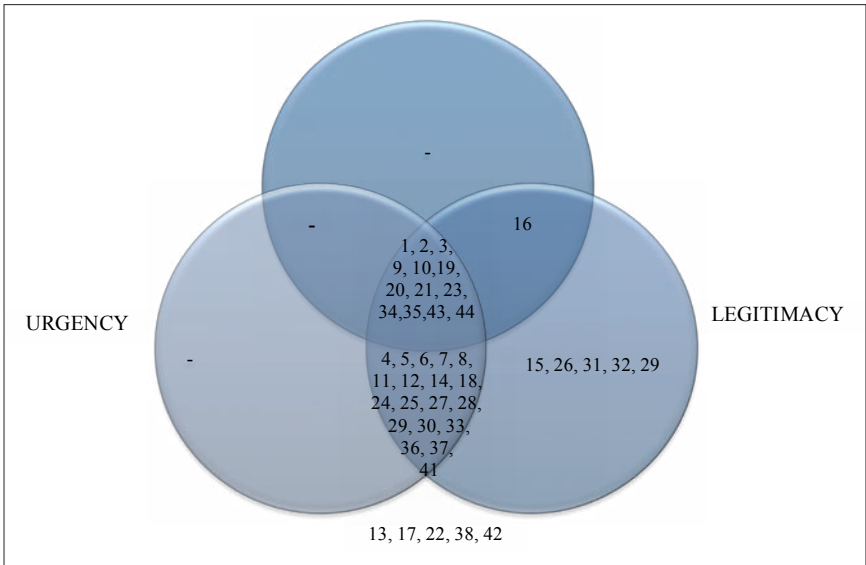
There is also a smaller group of stakeholders who are only assigned the attribute of legitimacy. It encompasses five stakeholders, classified as discretionary stakeholders, who, according to the analytical model used, do not exert any type of pressure with regard to the management of the destination. This group is made up of an engineer who belongs to ICOMOS, the Rotary Club, the Pátzcuaro Centre for Languages and Ecotourism, and groups of travelling salespeople and transporters.

Only one person is considered a dominant stakeholder, possessing the attributes of legitimacy and power. He is the director of the Cultural Centre that was formerly a Jesuit College that, in theory at least, usually receives a great deal of attention.

Finally, there is one group of five agents that are not assigned any attributes, meaning that they could not be considered stakeholders. The group is made up of the head teacher of a school, a shopkeeper, the municipality’s Department of Ecology, the Chamber of Commerce, and a theatre group.

This destination has a relatively complex relational dynamic, since it has a certain degree of tourism development. The methodology utilised here, on the basis of the diagnosis conducted, allows a series of proposals to be made regarding tourism policies, which in this case involve the need to include, or at least consider, the different agents involved in tourist activity, given that they are not all members of the CPM.

**Figure 4: Types of stakeholders in Pátzcuaro**



Source: Authors' own.

**4.2. Analysis of social capital**

This section presents the results of the work carried out, structuring the analysis on the basis of the classification of social capital suggested by Durston (2000). Hence, bonding social capital, bridging social capital and linking social capital shall be analysed.

**4.2.1. Bonding social capital**

Durston (2000) defines bonding social capital as an extension of ego-centred networks; in other words, the intersection of many bonds within a group that, by interacting face to face, allows for a high degree of closure and densification of relations and, therefore, facilitates functioning as a team or business. Hence, it is important to analyse the extent to which this bonding is present in the CPM for Pátzcuaro. This will be done by analysing the characterisation of the CPM, but above all by analysing the variable 'cohesion'.

**4.2.1.1. Characterisation of the CPM**

The CPM for Pátzcuaro emerged when the destination was integrated into this programme, and it was even constituted as a national example of how civil society and government could be linked in the management of such a destination. The structure of this CPM was the basis for establishing the model suggested in the programme's rules of operation for the whole of the country.

Membership of the CPM has changed over the years, which could explain the lack of clarity with regard to aspects such as the length of time the organisation has existed. The same happens with the number of members: although officially it should only be made up of ten people, some claim that there are twenty or more members. What is certainly true is that more than ten stakeholders participate in this CPM, even though, in accordance with the programme's rules of operation, certain stakeholders do not have voting rights.

With regard to the type of organisation, half of those interviewed identify it as a civil group, but others consider it a public or a mixed body. Furthermore, as for interest in participating in the CPM, the stakeholders expressed their belief that this committee should be act as a link with society.

**4.2.1.2. Cohesion**

The variable considered when analysing bonding social capital is cohesion. To this end, five indicators were established: intra-group similarity, intra-group relations, intra-group closeness, access to the group, and leadership.

**Intra-group similarity.** When analysing the answers given by the members of the CPM in their interviews, clear differences emerged between them. Except in the case of the aspect “neighbourhood”, which created a division of opinions, for the other concepts analysed the majority of responses were negative, with gender, kinship, economic activity, and age being the salient aspects that are not shared by the members of the committee.

The above, in conjunction with the lack of agreement regarding political preference and the unanimous assertion that the CPM is made up of a combination of rich and poor, gives cause to state that intra-group similarity in the CPM for Pátzcuaro is low, given that its members possess different characteristics from one another and, therefore, there is enriching diversity, as well as the possibility for contacts.

**Intra-group relations.** Analysis of the strengths and weaknesses identified by members of the CPM highlights that the strengths of the group are internal union, a sense of solidarity, and the ability to relate with others, but contradictorily, a lack of trust and isolation are identified unanimously as a weakness by those interviewed. Differences of opinion exist with regard to collective action and the ability to discuss and analyse critically. Trust issues may stem from past conflicts, individual experiences, competition, or insufficient transparency. The sense of isolation might be due to cliques or communication barriers within the group. This suggests that while the group feels united and capable of external relations, internal trust issues and isolation persist.

**Intra-group closeness.** Intra-group closeness in the CPM for Pátzcuaro could be deemed to be average, since although 50% of those interviewed feels that the relationship between its members is direct, since there is fluid communication between them, it was also detected that 33% of the members consider that the group closest to the leader coordinates and plans activities, and the remaining 17% even stated that the leader directly coordinates activities. The above means that some contacts are conducted directly, whereas others require intermediation, especially with more powerful individuals and leaders. Therefore, this organisation presents certain difficulties in terms of communication and internal coordination.

As for the selection of the group's leaders, interviewees all agreed that this decision is made based on the votes of all members.

**Access to the group.** The responses of the interviewees regarding the way in which a stakeholder can become a member of the CPM for Pátzcuaro were not as clear cut as in the previous cases, since 33.33% stated that you would need to be invited by someone in the group or organisation, and a similar percentage said that all you needed was the desire to join. 16.66% stated that you would have to meet both criteria, and the remaining 16.66% did not respond. However, as in the previous two cases, access to the group could be considered to be closed, since, as mentioned previously, there are limitations imposed by the rules of operation. In addition, in the specific case of Pátzcuaro, there is a certain reticence to bringing on board some stakeholders for fear that they would hinder the committee's work as they do not share the same interests (this is the specific case of groups of travelling salespeople and transporters).

**Leadership.** Evaluation of the effectiveness of leadership within the CPM reveals a critical and demanding attitude among the members, since 83% of those interviewed deemed it to be fairly effective and only 17% considered it very effective. There is a generally positive but cautious perception of leadership effectiveness.

This finding is particularly striking, considering that the CPM for Pátzcuaro has a long track record and that it also provided an example when laying the foundations for the model that would subsequently be considered in the programme's rules of operation for the whole country. The long track record of the CPM may have set high standards. Additionally, there may be specific areas where leadership is perceived to need improvement.

#### **4.2.2. Bridging social capital**

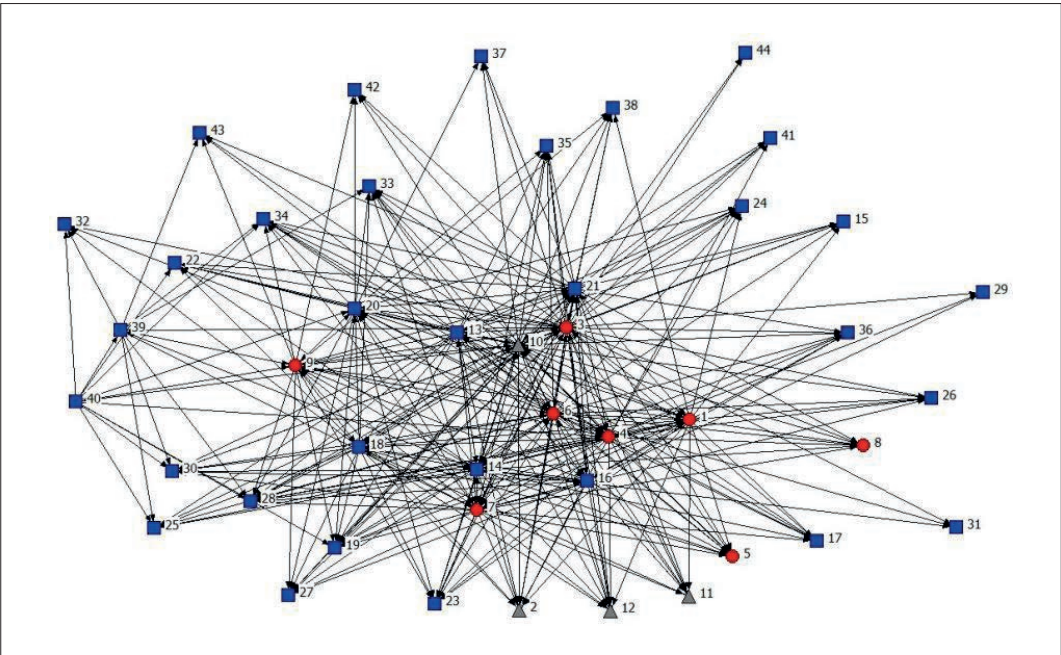
Following the proposal of Durston (2003), bridging social capital consists of horizontal alliances within the territory. As *Microsoft Excel* was used in order subsequently to create binary, squared, and identical matrices (same names in rows and columns), they were considered asymmetrical, given that

the relationship between one stakeholder and another is not necessarily reciprocal and, furthermore, the values of the diagonal were not considered (matching of the same stakeholder in a row and column).

4.2.2.1. *Social bonds with other community stakeholders (partial size of the network)*

In the case of Pátzcuaro, questionnaires were administered to the fifteen most representative stakeholders, out of the forty-four who were mentioned by the stakeholders. The graph obtained from processing the information is presented as Figure 5. It shows the 375 relationships identified during the administration of the questionnaire and, considering that the maximum number of relationships possible is 1,892, a density of 19.82% is obtained for the network of stakeholders in Pátzcuaro.

Figure 5: Social bonds in Pátzcuaro



**Note:** For this case, in addition to the red circles, which symbolise the members of the CPM, and the blue squares, which correspond to the other stakeholders identified, there are grey triangles, which represent stakeholders with ties to the CPM but who do not have a recognised place in the committee's structure.

**Source:** Authors' own.

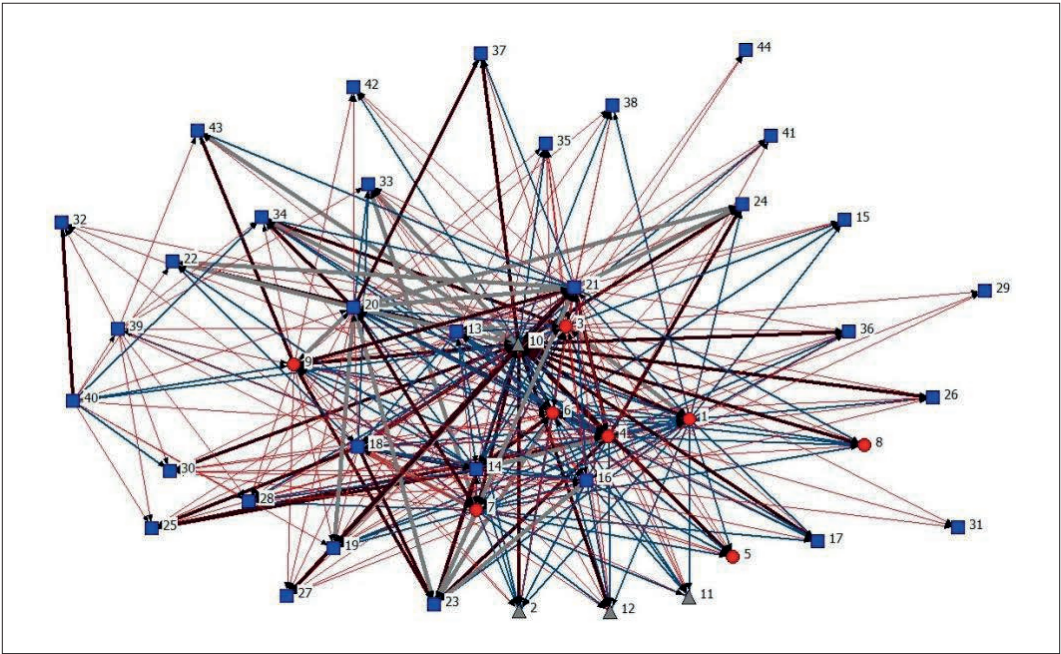
4.2.2.2. *Strength of the bonds (frequency of contact)*

In relation to the strength of the bonds between stakeholders in Pátzcuaro, Figure 6 shows how, in practical terms, frequency of contact in most relations is sporadic (45.60%) or at least once a month (35.47%). A very low percentage (6.40%) meets every week to deal with matters related with tourism, and only the remaining 12.53% meet practically every day.

This shows how the members of the CPM are the ones who, in the majority, have relationships represented by the grey and black lines, and this could be considered normal, bearing in mind that several of them are civil servants, or people committed to delivering the working agenda proposed by the CPM itself, in accordance with the programme's rules of operation. On the other hand, stakeholders located on the periphery maintain relations represented by the red lines, in other words, sporadically.

In any case, and in general terms, the strength of bonds between stakeholders in this destination could be classified as occasional.

Figure 6: Frequency of contact between stakeholders in Pátzcuaro



**Grey line:** every day; **black line:** once a week; **blue line:** at least once a month; **red line:** sporadically.  
**Source:** Authors' own.

4.2.2.3. *Connectedness*

Within the variable connectedness, the first indicator to observe pertains to the proportion of connected pairs, which is analysed through three of the measures of centrality used in SNA. These indicators are: the degree of centrality, which in turn considers the in degree and out degree; the degree of betweenness; and the degree of closeness.

Proportion of connected pairs. In the case of Pátzcuaro, four stakeholders display high out-degree centrality. Firstly, stakeholder 3, who mentioned a total of 41 relations (g.n. 95.349), followed by stakeholder 10, who identified 35 bonds with other stakeholders (g.n. 81.395). Stakeholders 6 and 21 had 33 and 32 mentions, respectively (g.n. 76.744 and 74.419).

As for in-degree centrality, the maximum number of mentions was 14 (g.n. 32.558), which was achieved by stakeholders 9, 19 and 28, who could be considered as the best-connected stakeholders in this destination. Also, of note were stakeholders 10, 7 and 20, who obtained 13 mentions each (g.n. 30.233), as well as stakeholders 6, 21, 2 and 23, each with 12 recognised links (g.n. 27.907). At the opposite end of the spectrum, stakeholders 29, 31 and 44 achieved the lowest in-degree centrality, with 3, 3 and 2 mentions, respectively (g.n. 6.977; 6.977; and 4.651, respectively).

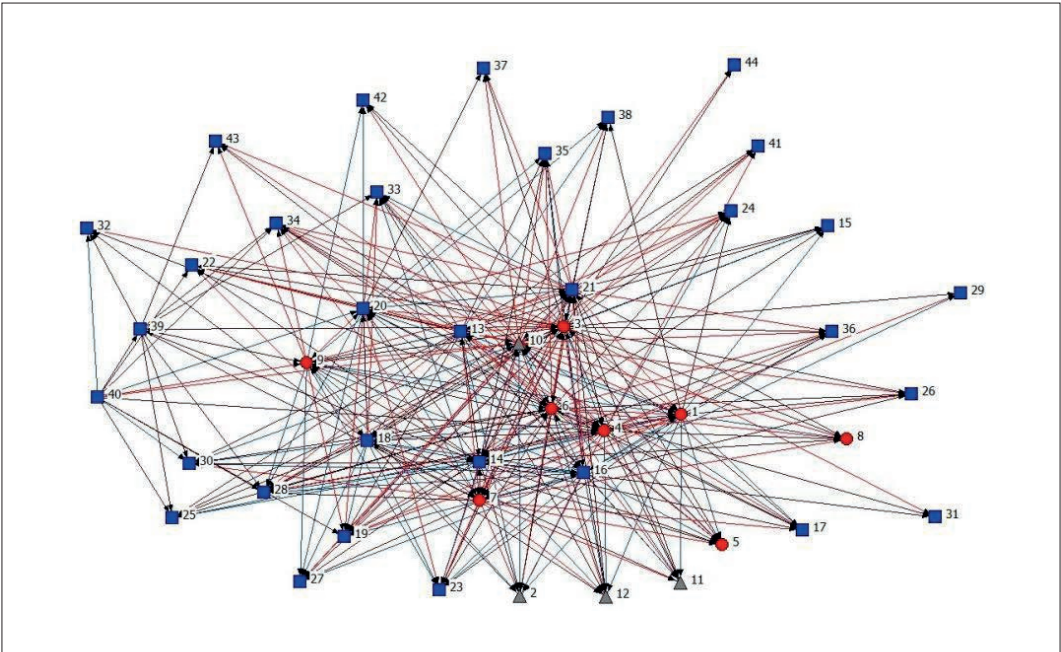
The average obtained for the destination was 8,523 mentions per stakeholder, for both in-degree and out-degree centrality (g.n. 19.820), whereas the out-degree index for the network was 77.285% and the in-degree index reached 13.034%.

As for the level of betweenness, the three stakeholders with the highest scores are stakeholder 10 (with 39.843), stakeholder 3 (with 35.984) and stakeholder 21 (with 31.562). It is of particular note that these three stakeholders are civil servants, two at a state level and one at a municipal level; hence their position as bridging stakeholders shows the need for intermediation and betweenness in the CPM of Pátzcuaro, and it could even be termed dependence on the part of the other stakeholders. The mean achieved for this indicator was 6.023 and the centralisation index of the network only reached 1.92%.

And, finally, with regard to the degree of in-closeness centrality, the mean obtained was 3.369. Only stakeholders 19 and 28 achieved a slightly higher level of in-closeness centrality, with 3.466, along with 2 and 23, who obtained 3.440, which situates these four stakeholders as being in the best position to access members of the network linked with tourism management in Pátzcuaro.

**Purpose of the relationship.** With regard to the purpose for establishing relations between stakeholders, there was a slight dominance of relationships that are only established as a channel of communication (37.8%), followed by relationships linked with the task of management (32.80%), and, in third place, 29.33% of the links established between stakeholders are to do with operational tasks (Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Types of stakeholder relationships in Pátzcuaro**



**Red line:** management work; **blue line:** operational work; **black line:** communication.  
**Source:** Authors' own.

The predominance of links established purely as a channel of communication ties in directly with the size of the network, which is linked in turn with the size of the population. In other words, it is more difficult to establish links in populations with a larger number of residents and, even when stakeholders are found, close relations are not formed unless common interests are shared. This means that stakeholders are generally not interested in establishing communication links unless they share a common interest in tourism development or reaching a specific goal (promotion initiatives, branding campaigns, funds application, etc.).

#### **4.2.3. Linking social capital**

This third mode of social capital proposed by Durston (2003) refers to relationships that, although they are reciprocal, take place within a context of asymmetrical control, hence they could act to connect stakeholders with different levels of power and benefit those located at a lower echelon; hence their name. Therefore, it is important to analyse this form of social capital and, when doing

this, the aim is to identify whether the social bonds of stakeholders allow them to access resources or benefits.

#### **4.2.3.1. Access to resources and benefits through social bonds**

Linking social capital refers to the opportunities open to members of a group to access resources or benefits through the social links they possess. For this reason, the questionnaire considers two indicators: associative quality, and out-group closeness.

Associative quality. The benefits obtained by the CPM for Pátzcuaro through the affiliations or contacts it maintains with other groups and individuals, and which were identified by 100% of the members interviewed, are: training, technical advice, collaboration to carry out productive social projects, and the conservation of cultural and/or heritage resources. Another salient benefit is fun, with mentioned 80% of interviewees, and loans or finance along with prestige, each mentioned by 67% of interviewees. Whereas the benefit that has not been obtained is employment, according to 83% of interviewees.

The stakeholders interviewed consider that some of the affiliations or contacts maintained by the CPM could be useful to them to promote the development of tourism in Pátzcuaro, owing principally to the social prestige of said individuals or groups (67%), the wealth of social contacts they possess (67%), and the importance they have in the development of the community (60%). Whereas political importance (100%), economic position, and wealth (67%) are not characteristics that can be capitalised on by members of the CPM.

The above indicates that the associative quality of the CPM for Pátzcuaro is high, given that its members obtain more than one benefit or service through their relations with other stakeholders, and also because this group is linked or affiliated with stakeholders it considers to be relevant to its goals, objectives, or strategies.

Out-group closeness. With regard to this aspect, all the stakeholders interviewed agreed that, in order to access an organisation or an individual that they feel to be important for achieving their goals, they establish contact directly. Therefore, it could be said that out-group closeness of the CPM for Pátzcuaro is high, since they establish direct relations with important groups, organisations, and individuals for their goals, objectives, or strategies.

#### **4.2.4. Characteristics of capital social**

The definition of social capital proposed by Durston (2000) is clear with regard to the fact that social capital is manifested in social relations with content of trust and reciprocity. For that reason, it is important to identify the presence and intensity of these elements in the relationships claimed by stakeholders linked to tourism management in the destinations analysed.

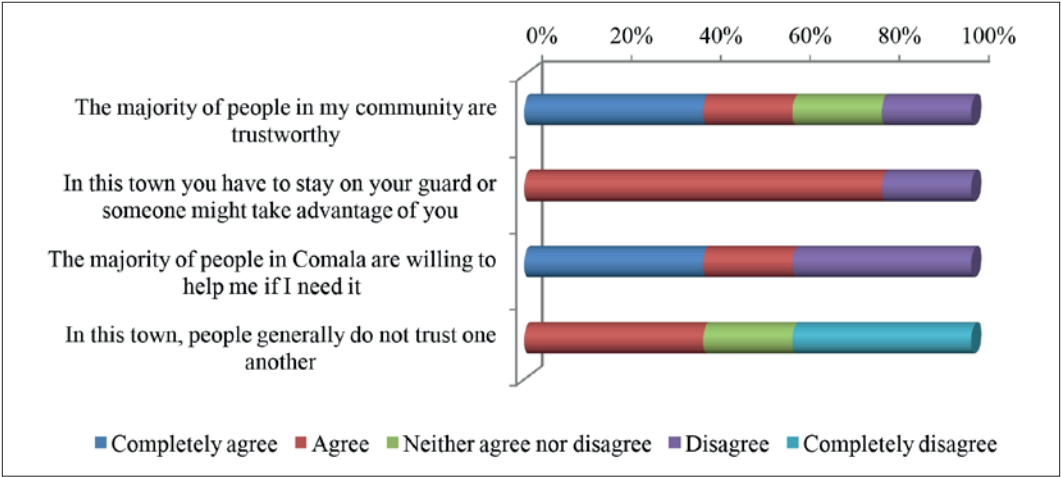
##### **4.2.4.1. Trust**

When the stakeholder members of the CPM were asked their opinion regarding how trustworthy people are in general, 83.33% judged that the majority of people are trustworthy, whereas only 16.67% claimed the need to exercise caution with others (Figure 8).

A similar trend was observed when asking about trust in the destination, since 66.67% of those agreed, to a greater or lesser extent, that the majority of people in the community were trustworthy and that they would be willing to help if necessary (Figure 8). Responses to negative statements were particularly striking and somewhat contradicted the position of those interviewed, since 83.33% said they agreed that in this destination you had to be on your guard and that someone might take advantage of you, and half the stakeholders said they completely disagreed with the statement that in Pátzcuaro people generally did not trust one another. So, there is a complex perception of trust within the community, indicating a mix of trust and caution. This could reflect the reality of human interactions where general trust exists, but past experiences or anecdotes of exploitation create a layer of caution.

With regard to changes in levels of trust within the CPM for Pátzcuaro since it was formed, 66.67% of those interviewed said that they had improved, whereas the remaining 33.33% said they had remained the same.

Figure 8: Trust in Pátzcuaro

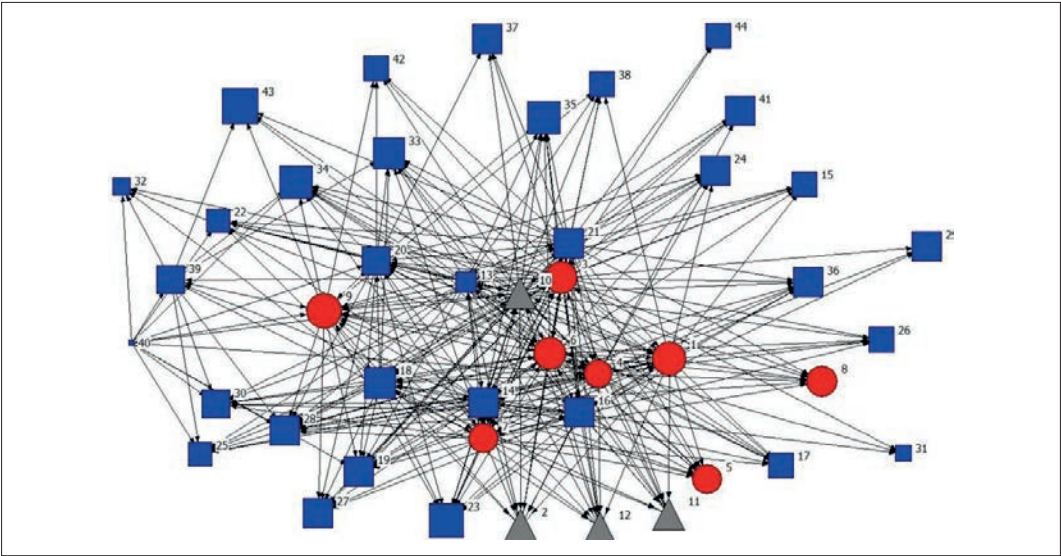


Source: Authors' own.

As for the level of trust obtained specifically by each of the stakeholders identified, the results show that, on average, trust in Pátzcuaro receives a score of 3.7. Stakeholders 43 and 9 received the highest scores (4.5 and 4.4, respectively), whereas other stakeholders received very low scores, even lower than 2, including stakeholders 31 and 32, who obtained 1.5 and 1.7, respectively. Other stakeholders with very low scores were 13 (with a score of 2.3), 25 (with 2.7) and 22 (with 2.8). One of the stakeholders identified (40) was not evaluated by any of the others.

The Figure 9 shows the centrality of some of the stakeholders, but also just how complex relationships are and how imbalanced the issue of trust is between stakeholders linked with tourism management in the destination, a situation that could be related with the size of the network and, therefore, the interests created.

Figure 9: Social bonds and levels of trust in Pátzcuaro



**Note:** the size of the node signifies the level of trust.

Source: Authors' own.

In conclusion, the level of trust between the stakeholders of Pátzcuaro linked with tourism management is medium to low since, although the stakeholders declare a certain degree of trust, which is reflected particularly towards certain members of the group, in other cases trust is non-existent.

#### **4.2.4.2. Solidarity/reciprocity**

Regarding the question of solidarity or reciprocity within the CPM for Pátzcuaro, the perception of the committee members is good since, when asked about the extent to which people in the group helped one another, 83.33% said always and the remaining 16.67% said the majority of times.

This perception is complemented with the responses given to the following question, which asked: if a project in their community did not benefit them directly, but would bring benefits to the majority of the inhabitants, would they be willing to contribute time or money to the project? 100% said they would be willing to give their time, and 66.67% said they would also contribute financially.

Therefore, solidarity and reciprocity in the CPM for Pátzcuaro could be said to be high, since there is a clear commitment among stakeholders to help the other members of the CPM and to collaborate on community projects.

#### **4.2.4.3. Collective action and cooperation**

The third of the characteristics of social capital in relationships is undoubtedly present in the CPM for Pátzcuaro since, in the responses given in the interviews, a resounding 100% stated that, over the past 12 months, all members had worked with others in the group on actions that would benefit the community. Furthermore, it was detected that all the participants were voluntary and that 83.33% of the activities developed were linked with operational matters, whereas the remaining 16.67% were related with management activities. Some of the activities mentioned were: integrating files, supervising works, carrying out cultural activities, awareness and training, attending the National Meeting of Pueblos Mágicos, developing tourist routes, or running promotional campaigns.

The commitment of CPM members is ratified with the responses given to the following question, which asked about the likelihood that someone who did not participate in community activities would be criticised or penalised, to which 83.33% of interviewees responded that this is fairly or completely unlikely, and only 16.67% said that there is a chance this could happen.

Furthermore, the proportion of people in the CPM who contribute their time or money to achieve common goals of the association is high, since 50% of those interviewed mentioned that everyone participates, 33.33% said that over half do, and the remaining 16.67% stated that approximately half the people participate, which undoubtedly corroborates the commitment of the people involved with this group.

Another of the items included in the questionnaire to try and identify the factor 'collective action and cooperation' was a question that asked about the frequency with which members of the CPM had jointly petitioned government authorities or political leaders about matters related with tourism over the past 12 months, to which only 33.33% responded that they had often done this, whereas 50% said they had done this a few times, and the remaining 16.67% stated they had only done it once.

Of these petitions, according to the 83.33% of stakeholders who responded, the majority were successful, although, contradictorily, 16.67% said that they were not at all successful.

Given all of the above, the degree of collective action and cooperation within the CPM for Pátzcuaro would seem to be high, since there is evident community work which in the majority of cases is high and which involves practically all the committee members.

## **5. Discussion and Conclusions**

The methodological proposal presented in this paper integrates ideas about social capital from Woolcock and Narayan (2000), and particularly emphasizes Arriagada et al. (2004)'s argument for planning development around existing social relationships. This approach addresses Fukuyama (2003)'s challenge to create methodologies that operationalize the concept of social capital, allowing for a deeper examination of its formation and identification of the necessary legal and institutional conditions for its development.

In this respect, empirical combined use of ST and SNA to study social capital has not previously been proposed for the analysis of issues linked with tourism, there exist conceptual frameworks which

combine them, though (Nguyen et al., 2019). Furthermore, this proposal answers with the methodology applied the evident necessity of using combined both qualitative and quantitative methodologies in order to reach a better understanding of networks configuration and its implications for tourism managers (Heidari et al., 2018; Mariani and Baggio, 2020).

The implementation of this approach revealed a complex social organization in Pátzcuaro, rooted in associationism. This structure was initially managed at the destination to build a CPM with public and private participation, serving as a model for establishing national program rules. This CPM represents the collective social capital mentioned by Durston (2000), which can arise from individual decisions or be induced by external agencies.

However, the major challenge identified by interviewees is achieving greater integration, bonding, and communication with the community, along with better coordination with the authorities. This is necessary for the CPM to become a true nexus between the authorities and society (citizens). Stakeholders also highlighted the need to strengthen the CPM to give it more decision-making power or at least greater influence, linking this strength to the support provided by government bodies. This aligns with Atria's (2003) strategies for building and strategically managing social capital. Additionally, surveys detected a lack of coordination between different levels of governance.

Specifically, SNA identified in Pátzcuaro a network in which bonds are not particularly close or frequent, in which communication predominates over operational or management work. This could be normal, considering that it is a broad network, made up of a large quantity of stakeholders, each with their own interests. Similar results were obtained in similarly sized towns by López-Molina and Pulido-Fernández (2024). In this case, this means that certain stakeholders stand out as being directly linked with management of the destination (Shang et al., 2023). Furthermore, considering the degree of out-centrality, it was observed that civil servants are thought to be interlinked, but the link they believe to have is not always reciprocal. The links they claim to have also positions them as bridging stakeholders of this network, since they possess a higher degree of betweenness, which denotes the dependence of the network on civil servants, so that these are the individuals who mobilise and connect it.

Regarding linking social capital, it is particularly striking that over half the members of the CPM (67%) consider that social prestige and wealth of contacts are aspects that can help them to access benefits and promote the development of tourism in their locality. This highlights the value of social relations, above economic or political aspects. In the interviews conducted, it was identified that some of the members have a great many contacts, in the locality and also in the state capital, and it would seem that these contacts have been harnessed for the benefit of the destination. This finding is related to the fact that a greater willingness to collaborate is found among those stakeholders who pursue a common goal: tourism development (Damayanti et al., 2021).

Implementation of the methodology suggested for the analysis of social capital shows that, whereas SNA provides a broader and more integral analysis of the concept, since it allows the social structure to be viewed as a whole (Scott et al., 2008), ST reports on the role played by each of the stakeholders related with tourism in the destination. When applied together, these two tools enable interactions to be identified between stakeholders, a process that is crucial to making the management of tourism more efficient.

The above indicates that the methodological proposal suggested here has demonstrated that it is possible to make the concept of social capital operational from the perspective of tourism destination management, opening up a major possibility for analysing destinations on the basis of interactions between the stakeholders involved. This sort of approaches has shown to be useful in destination management strategies as they offer a complex analysis of the stakeholders and their goals (Muñoz, 2012).

Hence, the results corroborate the hypothesis of this paper, since they show that it is possible to use techniques to identify the stakeholders of a destination and to analyse the relational dynamics found between them, as a previous step to implementing policies aimed at strengthening the social capital of a destination, which in turn improves the management of that destination.

The work underscores the need for future research to deepen the analysis of social capital in tourist destinations, particularly within Mexico's Pueblos Mágicos program. Other destinations might be object of analysis using this approach. Emphasis is placed on developing adaptive management models to address tourism system changes and strengthen social capital. Future studies should focus on stakeholder participation, continuous review processes, and impact indicators to enhance tourism management (Casado-Montilla and Pulido-Fernández, 2024). This research aims to foster continuous learning, adaptation, and improvement in Social Network Analysis (SNA), which can be leveraged to

enhance resilience and adaptive capacity in tourism communities, particularly in response to increasing environmental and economic uncertainties (Valeri and Baggio, 2021).

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