

The critical success factors for tourism routes development: A systematic review

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Abstract

Tourism routes are partnerships between stakeholders to develop a common tourist product. Limited research exists on factors influencing their overall success, that is, the critical success factors (CSFs). Thus, this systematic review applies the PRISMA protocol with the aim of identifying and discussing these CSFs by addressing the question: 'Which are the CSFs for tourism routes development?'. The review encompasses 174 studies on tourism routes, published in English, Spanish, and Portuguese languages until October 2022, in the SCOPUS and Web of Science databases. Most of the studied routes are in Europe and focused on the theme of food and drinks at a regional level. Their CSFs are discussed across the categories of Resources, Governance, Activities, and Performance assessment. The results highlight the importance of networking for the long-term success of tourism routes and the need for further research, particularly on issues of governance and performance assessment. This review provides theoretical contributions by identifying CSFs of tourism routes and offers practical suggestions for their establishment and enhancement.

Keywords: Tourism routes, Networks, Public-private partnerships, Critical Success Factors (CSFs), Systematic literature review, PRISMA.

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1. Introduction

Daniel (1961) introduced the concept of success factors to identify the factors that must be performed well to ensure the success of an organisation, typically between three and six being key (Daniel, 1961; Marais *et al.*, 2017; Rockart, 1979). Later, Rockart (1979) developed the CSFs approach, in which the factors are related to the organisation's goals, as they must support their achievement, and require hard and soft measures to assess their performance.

The application of the CSFs approach within the tourism field is exemplified in various other domains, for example hospitality (Arias-Olmos *et al.*, 2022) or wine tourism (Jones *et al.*, 2015). Furthermore, Marais *et al.* (2017) reviewed research on CSFs in tourism and concluded that research in this area has a broader understanding. The aim is to identify all variables that require special attention for the success of the subject under study, such as events, individuals or organisations. This approach goes beyond the original intention of CSFs, which focused solely on the achievement of organisational goals (Daniel, 1961; Marais *et al.*, 2017; Rockart, 1979). In fact, some studies have a demand-side design perspective (Hiamey *et al.*, 2021). Taking into account the aforementioned, the view presented by Marais *et al.* (2017) is adopted in this review.

In the context of tourism, the analysis of CSFs may be of particular relevance, given that destinations and tourism products can be managed simultaneously by a range of organisations (Santos & Olleross-Rodríguez, 2023). Consequently, the success of a product or destination does not necessarily imply success for all the associated organisations. In this case, the focus is on the CSFs for tourism routes development. These routes are primarily identified based on their main touristic product. Prominent examples include wine routes and cultural routes, such as those featured in the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe (COE) program. Tourism routes play a crucial role in benefiting both the tourism industry and their respective territories. Collaborative efforts on these routes enhance destination marketing, promote tourist sites, attract visitors, and stimulate the local economy (Božić & Tomić, 2016; Brás *et al.*, 2010; Collantes, 2018; De la Torre *et al.*, 2014; Duque, 2014; Jeambey, 2016; Marschall, 2012). This cooperation also has a positive impact on related products and services (López-Guzmán *et al.*, 2009; Soares *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, it fosters knowledge sharing among participants (Brás *et al.*, 2010; Cloutier *et al.*, 2016; Del Chiappa *et al.*, 2019) and promotes greater cultural integration (Trono & Oliva, 2021), among other benefits.

Nevertheless, the concept of tourism routes has evolved over time. Taking the example of wine routes, their initial purpose was to connect wineries and other tourism elements using location maps and signposted roads (Bruwer, 2003). These organisations have evolved by incorporating diverse members, including local governments, companies from the wine and tourism sectors, as well as academia. Currently, they are engaged in a variety of tasks related to marketing and managing wine tourism destinations (Brás *et al.*, 2010; Del Chiappa *et al.*, 2019). Similarly, cultural routes are primarily associated with international cooperation projects. According to the COE's interpretation, these routes constitute tourism cooperation initiatives that aim for the development and promotion of a series of itineraries centred on transnational heritage (World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) & European Travel Commission (ETC), 2017). Nonetheless, the majority of studies concerning cultural routes concentrate on the specific itineraries associated with these routes, such as the Roman Emperors' route (Božić & Tomić, 2016) or the Way of Saint James (Somoza Medina & Lois Gonzalez, 2017).

This study examines the CSFs of tourism routes, adopting the UNWTO and ETC (2017) definition of a thematic or cultural networking initiative, which is a "partnership between destinations, local authorities, cultural sites, academic institutions or other bodies, based in several different countries. The initiatives are led by groups or associations, bringing together public and private partners (defined

as ‘members’), enabling collective decisions” (p. 68). This study focuses not only on transnational routes, but also on national, regional, and local levels.

The UNWTO and ETC (2017) identified the success factors for marketing tourism routes. Furthermore, attempts to provide a broader understanding of tourism route development in the literature, especially in the case of wine routes, were made. Cloutier *et al.* (2019) developed a concept map that outlined the action clusters of a cider and wine route in Canada. Del Chiappa *et al.* (2019) proposed a theoretical framework based on the case study of the Cannonau wine route in Italy. While these works offer a broader analysis of wine routes development, they represent a specific type of tourism route within particular contexts and with unique characteristics. Indeed, Del Chiappa *et al.* (2019) emphasised the requirement for additional research on the topic, particularly with respect to other wine routes in different cultural and socioeconomic contexts. Accordingly, further research is needed on the planning, development, performance and success factors of tourism routes (Alonso & O’Neill, 2009; Festa *et al.*, 2020; Moulin & Boniface, 2001; Pedrosa *et al.*, 2022).

To the best of our knowledge, there is currently no research that offers a comprehensive insight into the CSFs for tourism routes development. Therefore, a systematic review will be conducted to address the research question, ‘Which are the CSFs for tourism routes development?’. The main goal is to identify and discuss distinct factors, taking into account a diversity of research representing various types of routes and contexts. The analysis will present a framework to address the research question and propose potential future research directions to fill the gaps identified in the literature.

2. Materials and methods

This research applied the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) protocol to conduct a systematic review on CSFs for tourism routes development. However, it takes into account the adjustments to the protocol proposed by Pahlevan-Sharif *et al.* (2019) for tourism and hospitality studies.

2.1. Selection of sources of evidence and analysis procedure

2.1.1. Identification

This review aims to include peer-reviewed articles on tourism routes according to the aforementioned concept of thematic or cultural networking initiatives (UNWTO & ETC, 2017), published until October 2022 and written in English, Spanish, or Portuguese.

A previous search of SCOPUS using the terms ‘touris*’ and ‘route*’ returned documents covering a wide range of topics. By using VOSviewer software to cluster authors and indexed keywords from the searched documents, it was possible to identify the most appropriate keywords to narrow down the selection of studies (Figure 1). A similar keyword clustering approach has been employed by other researchers in the field of tourism, as exemplified by Merigó *et al.* (2019).

Figure 1 shows the wide range of themes returned by the search for tourism routes. Clusters containing keywords such as ‘wine route’, ‘gastronomic tourism’, ‘cultural routes’, ‘heritage’ or ‘pilgrimage’ seemed to be closer to the topic of this research. Based on this analysis, the following keywords were added to the initially chosen terms ‘Touris*’ and ‘Route*’ to focus more on the research topic: ‘Wine*’, ‘Culture*’, ‘Heritage*’, ‘Pilgrim*’ and ‘Gastronomy*’.

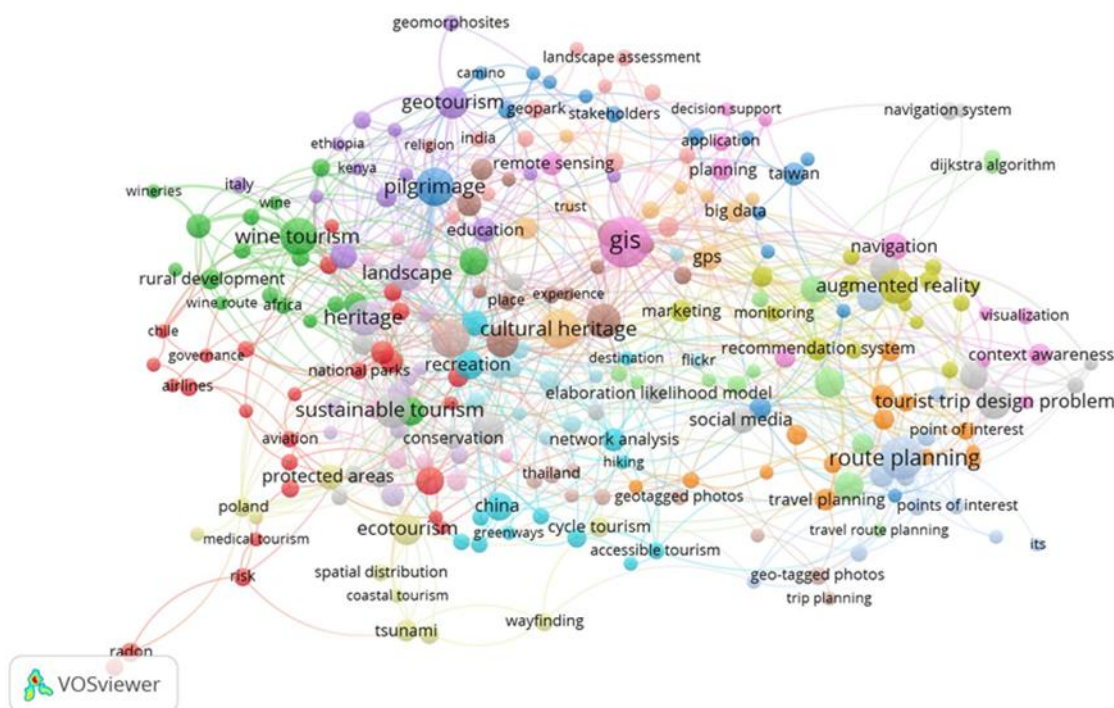


Figure 1. *Author's keywords co-occurrence map.*

In October 2022, a search of the databases SCOPUS and Web of Science (WOS) - Core Collection was conducted using the mentioned terms (Table 1).

Table 1. *Search strategy*

Database	Terms	Searched fields	Filters	Date
SCOPUS	Touris* AND Route*	Title, Abstract and Keywords	Language = English, Spanish, or Portuguese;	October 15th, 2022
WOS - Core collection	AND Wine* OR Cultur* OR Heritage OR Pilgrim* OR Gastronom*	Topic	Document type = Article or Review article	

The search results from both SCOPUS and Web of Science databases were subsequently exported to an Excel file, and duplicate records were removed. The entire subsequent analysis process was conducted using Excel.

2.1.2. Screening

The selection of studies began with an analysis of titles, abstracts, and author keywords to exclude publications not related to tourism routes, such as those related to cultural heritage sites, tourism development, or tourist travel routes. Publications that were not available for retrieval, namely those without full access through institutional or personal subscription, were also excluded.

The last step of the screening process was the article's full-text assessment for eligibility. Publications not in English, Spanish, or Portuguese or not in the required document types of article or review article were excluded, as were books. However, the research theme was the main criterion for excluding

publications at this stage. The full-text assessment resulted in the exclusion of documents that focused mainly on pilgrimage or cultural routes as mere itineraries, as well as walking and cycling tourism or the development of wine tourism. Note that this occurred when there was no allusion to a particular route, and the authors were unaware of its existence.

2.1.3. *Included*

Once the studies were selected, data was collected to identify CSFs for tourism route development by analysing the primary findings and conclusions of the included studies. Furthermore, data were also collected to characterise the routes according to their location, thematic group, e.g., 'Food and drinks' (UNWTO & ETC, 2017), and territory, i.e., local, regional, national, and transnational (UNWTO, 2015).

2.2. *CSFs categorisation*

The CSFs were initially categorised based on previous tourism literature, mainly related to Destination Management or Marketing Organisations (DMOs), due to the lack of research on the CSFs for tourism routes development and the overlapping roles of DMOs and tourism routes. DMOs play a key role in destination marketing and are responsible for activities such as destination planning and stakeholder management (Beritelli *et al.*, 2015; Bornhorst *et al.*, 2010; Pike & Page, 2014). Tourism routes are also taking on these roles, as seen in the examples such as South African War Battlefields Route (Proos & Hattingh, 2020) and the Bairrada Wine Route (Brás *et al.*, 2010).

Thus, the work of Bornhorst *et al.* (2010) on the determinants of tourism success for DMOs and tourism destinations served as the basis for categorizing the factors. Other studies complemented it, namely research on wine routes management (Cloutier *et al.*, 2019; Del Chiappa *et al.*, 2019), the success of DMOs and tourism destinations (Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014), international tourism networks (Morrison *et al.*, 2004), the CSFs for wine tourism destinations (Jones *et al.*, 2015), the CSFs for partnerships at the community level in the tourism sector (De Boer & Van Dijk, 2016), and a literature review on the CSF for place and destination marketing (Baker & Cameron, 2008). The marketing mix features presented by Pomeroy *et al.* (2011) and UNWTO and ETC's (2017) Handbook on Marketing Transnational Tourism Themes and Routes were also considered. The categorisation used in this analysis is divided into four main categories, i.e., Resources, Governance, Activities, and Performance Measurements.

3. **Results and discussion**

In this section, the results of the study selection are introduced, followed by the characterisation of the routes studied in the selected documents. Finally, the CSFs for tourism routes development are identified and discussed.

3.1. *Studies included in the review*

The search strategy returned 1,443 documents (759 from SCOPUS and 684 from WOS), with 431 duplicates removed, leaving 1,012 publications for screening. After examining titles, abstracts, and keywords, 606 documents were excluded, while 25 were unavailable. Of the 381 remaining documents, 207 were excluded because they were not in English, Spanish, or Portuguese (4), were not in article or review format (2) or did not address tourism routes (201). The final review included 174 documents (see Appendix A), as shown in the flow diagram in Figure 2.

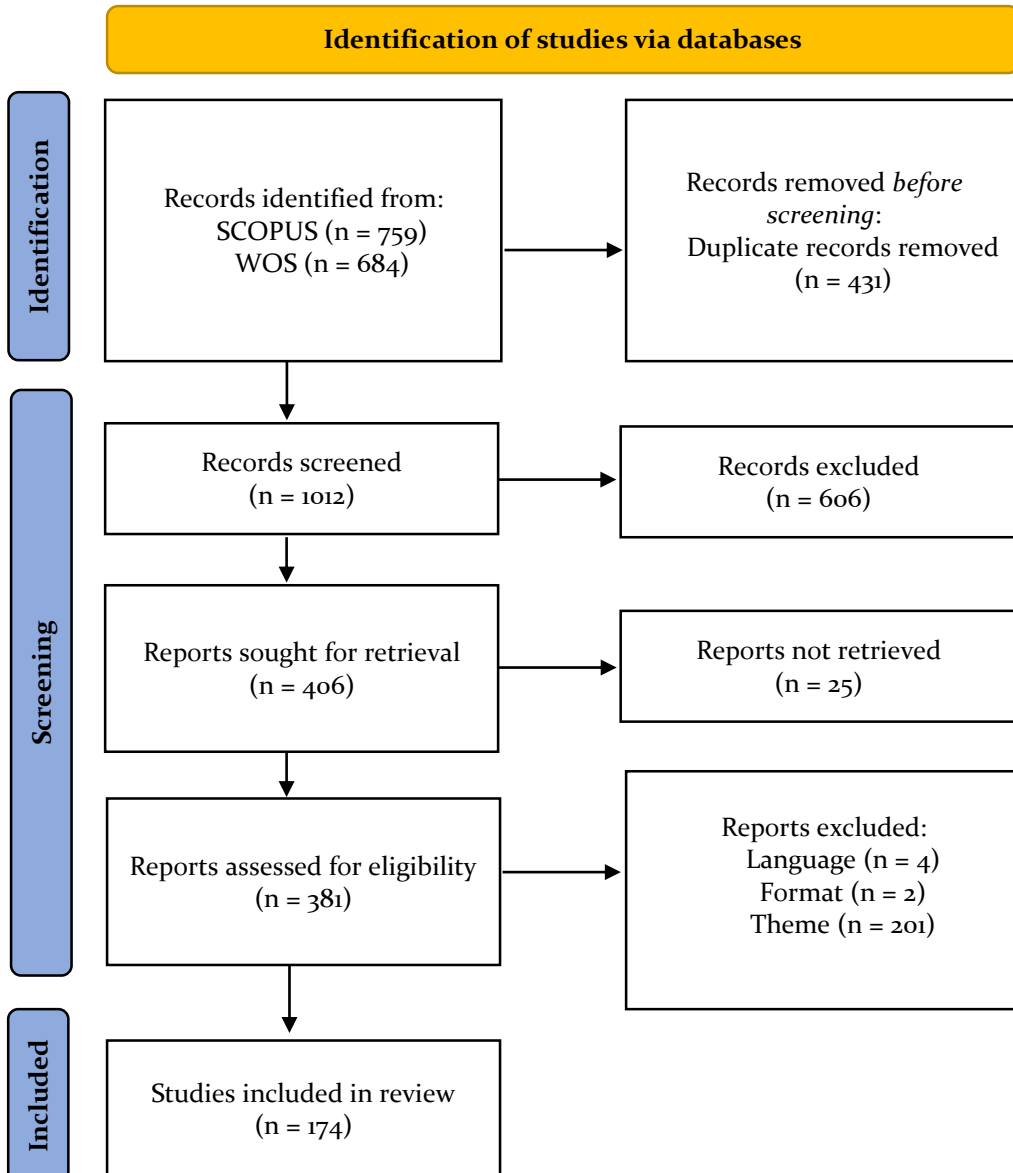


Figure 2. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram

Source: Adapted from Page et al. (2021)

3.2. Route characterisation

Considering the 174 selected studies, the routes under study are characterised according to their location, thematic group, and territorial scope. The results show that the most studied routes are in Europe, followed by America and Africa, particularly South Africa (Figure 3). On the other hand, there are only a few studies in Asia and none in Oceania. This geographical distribution indicates a greater focus on this research topic or a greater use of the selected keywords in this geographical area. Besides, the most common route typologies are food and drink routes at the regional level (51%), such as wine routes, and pilgrimage routes at the transnational level (22%), such as the Saint James Way.

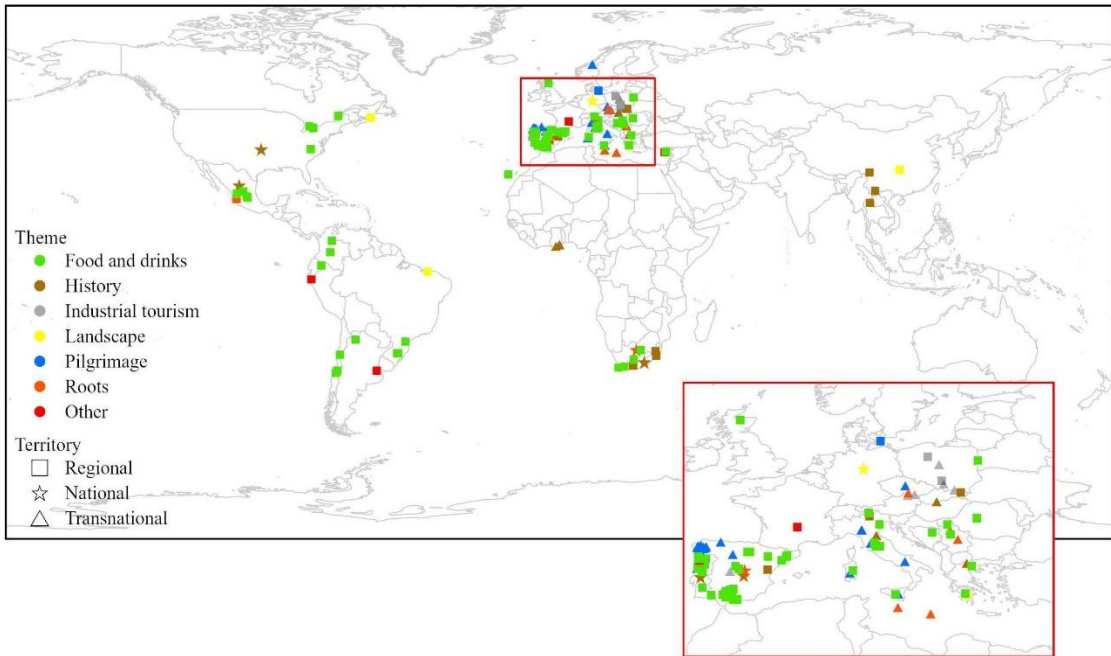


Figure 3. Route location, thematic group, and territory of implementation

3.3. The CSFs for tourism routes development

Based on the analysis of the selected sources of evidence, a framework model for tourism route development is proposed. As mentioned in the section 2.2, the analysis is presented in four sections (Table 2): Resources (including Funding and Personnel characteristics), Governance, Activities (both Operational and Marketing), and Performance Assessment. The Activities are subdivided into operational and marketing activities, emphasizing the significance of marketing activities in the literature and within the context of tourism routes.

Table 2. CSFs categorisation

Main category	Subcategory	CSF
Resources	Funding	Government Funding; Self- Funding
	Personnel characteristics	Trust; Commitment; Open-minded approach; Mutual benefits perception; Clear communication
Governance		Diversity of stakeholders; Dynamic stakeholders; Common vision, mission and goals; Coordinating body; Clear roles and responsibilities
Activities	Operational	Involve all members; Promote knowledge sharing; Represent members interests; Additional funding; Lobbyist; Strategic planning; Innovativeness; External stakeholders
	Marketing	Product; Promotion; Partnerships; Participants
Performance Measurements		Consumer behaviour; Economic impact; Members satisfaction; Members performance

3.3.1. Funding

Funding is frequently mentioned as a CSF for a tourism route, enabling activities to be carried out and ensuring the long-term viability of a route (Antić *et al.*, 2021; Chountala *et al.*, 2019; Plummer *et al.*, 2006; Puche & Yago, 2016; Trono & Oliva, 2017).

Funding for tourism routes can be obtained from various sources, primarily from public and private sector members, but also external public institutions from local to international levels, often through grants, such as EU grants, or sponsorship (see Figure 4) (Antić *et al.*, 2021; Chiodo *et al.*, 2020; Kruczek & Kruczek, 2016; Puche & Yago, 2016; Telfer, 2001a; Van Der Merwe, 2014). Public sources play a crucial role in this context, as the funding for tourism routes heavily depends on them (Chiodo *et al.*, 2020; Dolci *et al.*, 2021; Hashimoto & Telfer, 2003; Kruczek & Kruczek, 2016; Kunc, 2010; Telfer, 2001a; Van Der Merwe, 2014).

Nevertheless, Chiodo *et al.* (2020) found that, as opposed to interventions thoroughly funded by public resources, “interventions based on co-financing including private resources (...) within a framework of a shared project and multilevel governance, have seemed to reach a greater level of efficacy” (p. 15). They also emphasised that companies were more likely to invest again if they were satisfied with the performance of the route.

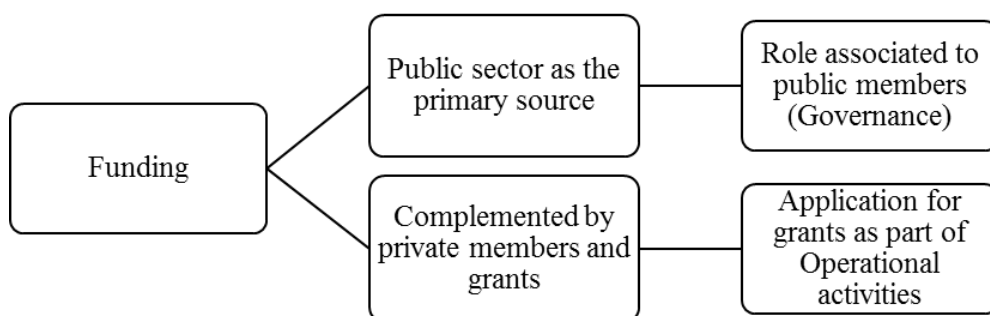


Figure 4. Tourism routes funding in the literature

The reliance of tourism routes on public funding, particularly from public sector entities, may hinder their development, especially when public institutions lack interest in the initiative. Therefore, it is recommended to conduct further research to explore alternative funding options.

3.3.2. Resources - Personnel characteristics

The literature emphasises the significance of personnel characteristics in fostering networking among members. The literature comprehensively documents networking issues arising from the absence of these factors and suggests strategies to address or minimise them (see Figure 5).

Networking among members requires trust (Bogacz-Wojtanowska *et al.*, 2019; Bregoli *et al.*, 2016; Plummer *et al.*, 2006; Underberg-Goode, 2014), commitment (Brás *et al.*, 2010; Camprubí & Galí, 2015; Dolci *et al.*, 2021; Puche & Yago, 2016), and an open-minded approach (Russo & Romagosa, 2010). In addition, the perception of mutual benefits (Cloutier *et al.*, 2016; Dolci *et al.*, 2021; Plummer *et al.*, 2006) and a clear communication (Moulin & Boniface, 2001; Telfer, 2001a; Valdez & Fontecha, 2018) also contribute to keeping members working together. Furthermore, Trono *et al.* (2017) state that “... not less important in the route creation and promotion, is law compliance, the respect of ethical and moral values, and intellectual honesty. This obligatory and complicated path implies the accountability of all institutional stakeholders, and the seriousness, reliability and honesty of local operators in respecting history, local traditions and quality” (p. 38).

The literature highlights that the absence of these attributes can lead to potential constraints on the tourism route. Bogacz-Wojtanowska *et al.* (2019) argue that trust levels among group members may vary depending on the frequency of their interactions. This can result in the fragmentation of the route or the formation of smaller groups within the route. Besides, a lack of commitment may cause members to abandon the route, potentially resulting in its discontinuation (Moulin & Boniface, 2001; Plummer *et al.*, 2006). For instance, the private sector may not be fully committed to sharing knowledge with its direct competitors (Cloutier *et al.*, 2016; Moulin & Boniface, 2001; Plummer *et al.*, 2006). However, lack of commitment is not solely limited to the private sector alone. According to Larios *et al.* (2021) the development of a tourism route has been hindered by the managers' focus, in both the private and public sectors, on short-term economic and political benefits rather than on the value of the tourism product.

It is important to address potential conflicts, such as producers perceiving tourism activities as an intrusion into their business rather than being regarded as a profitable activity (Dancausa-Millan *et al.*, 2022) or viewing the route as a means to increase their sales rather than a way to promote a destination (Bregoli *et al.*, 2016). To overcome these problems, there are governance and operational activities factors that could be implemented. In terms of governance, Plummer *et al.* (2006) suggested involving local authorities or residents' representatives as they have broader concerns than the private sector. Additionally, aligning shared visions, missions, and/or goals, and an effective leadership could contribute to networking (Cloutier *et al.*, 2016; Del Chiappa *et al.*, 2019; Dolci *et al.*, 2021; Plummer *et al.*, 2006). In terms of operational activities, networking among members is facilitated by tourism route's ability to promote knowledge sharing (Bregoli *et al.*, 2016), to represent the interests of all members (Cloutier *et al.*, 2016; Del Chiappa *et al.*, 2019; Dolci *et al.*, 2021; Plummer *et al.*, 2006) and to involve all members (Chountala *et al.*, 2019; Nowers *et al.*, 2002; Telfer, 2001a).

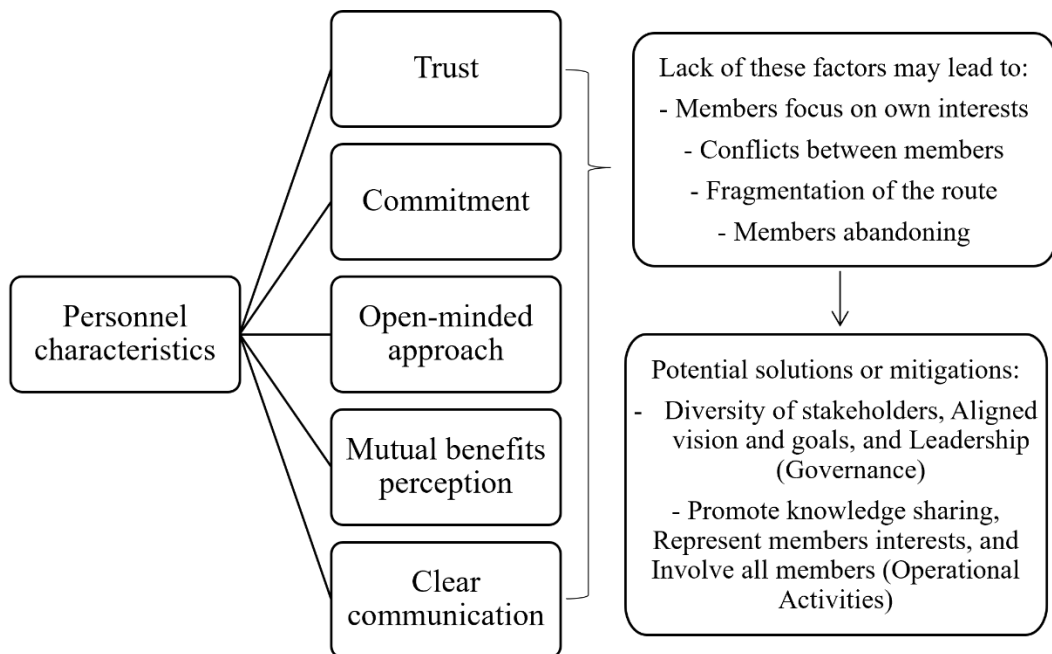


Figure 5. *Tourism routes personnel characteristics in the literature*

The networking among stakeholders has a central role in tourism routes, as demonstrated by Cloutier *et al.* (2019) and Del Chiappa *et al.* (2019). The literature discusses personnel characteristics that contribute to networking among members and outlines the consequences of the absence of these

factors. It also suggests potential strategies to address these issues. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct further research to evaluate the efficacy of these potential strategies and to determine the extent to which Governance and Activities can effectively address networking issues.

3.3.3. Governance

This section explores the factors that have influenced the governance of tourism routes (see Figure 6). First, a tourism route should comprise a diversity of stakeholders from public organisations, such as local authorities or governmental agencies; tourism companies; the academia, the industry associated with a specific product (e.g. wine producers); or local communities (Efsthios *et al.*, 2009; Gonzalo *et al.*, 2012; Horák *et al.*, 2015; Kruczek & Kruczek, 2016). Brás *et al.* (2010) argued that a wine route “should involve all regional partners, public and private, because tourism sector is composed of a diversity of services and resources and all of which contribute to the visitor’s experience (p. 1639)”.

The characteristics of those involved in the governance of tourism routes are also mentioned. It is important to have a group of dynamic stakeholders with the working capacity to create and develop a route (Collantes, 2018), as well as possessing experience (Lemky, 2017) and leadership skills (Bregoli *et al.*, 2016; Plummer *et al.*, 2006).

Moreover, members must align their common visions, missions, and/or goals (Cloutier *et al.*, 2016; Del Chiappa *et al.*, 2019; Dolci *et al.*, 2021; Plummer *et al.*, 2006) and continually adapt to the changing direction of the route (Plummer *et al.*, 2006). In order to define goals, it is important to follow a bottom-up decision-making process (Del Chiappa *et al.*, 2019). The primary goal is mostly the promotion of a product or destination but also may include meeting the needs of tourists, creating jobs, or generating profit (Antić *et al.*, 2021).

Difficulties in aligning the goals and visions of members have been observed, as demonstrated by the conflicts between agricultural producers and tourism agents due to their divergent visions of wine tourism. Additionally, in the case of a pilgrimage route falling under the different jurisdictions of regional, national, or transnational authorities, different interpretations and visions for its development could arise, potentially leading to conflicts in its management (Somoza Medina & Lois Gonzalez, 2017). A possible solution for this constraint, particularly important for tourism routes under different jurisdictions, could be the establishment of a coordinating body (Chiodo *et al.*, 2020). The coordinating body should manage the network, not just promote it (Lemky, 2017) and should have technical and financial resources (Brás *et al.*, 2010); professional management of a route can improve its efficiency (Kunc, 2010).

Furthermore, members need to have clear roles and responsibilities within the route (Cloutier *et al.*, 2016; Figueroa & Rotarou, 2018; Jeambey, 2016). Public institutions are expected to coordinate the route, foster collaboration between all members, and guide them towards their common goals (Bregoli *et al.*, 2016; Collantes, 2018; Del Chiappa *et al.*, 2019; Forga & Valiente, 2014). Besides, there is also the aforementioned contribution to the funding of these initiatives. Nevertheless, the role of the public authorities should gradually diminish with the development of the tourism routes (Bregoli *et al.*, 2016; Del Chiappa *et al.*, 2019; Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2016). Private companies, on the other hand, are responsible for the operationalisation and commercialisation of the route (Jeambey, 2016), as well as the payment of fees based on their size. This means that larger members must pay higher fees (Plummer *et al.*, 2006). They are also required to participate in meetings and other route events and activities (Plummer *et al.*, 2006). According to Brás *et al.* (2010), the public sector should “assume a leading role and involve all regional stakeholders to create a strategic and political basis in order to enable private initiative competitiveness to promote regional development (p.1639)”. However, public and private roles

cannot be effectively separated. In order to promote the route successfully, it is essential that all actors work together to create synergies (De la Torre et al., 2014).

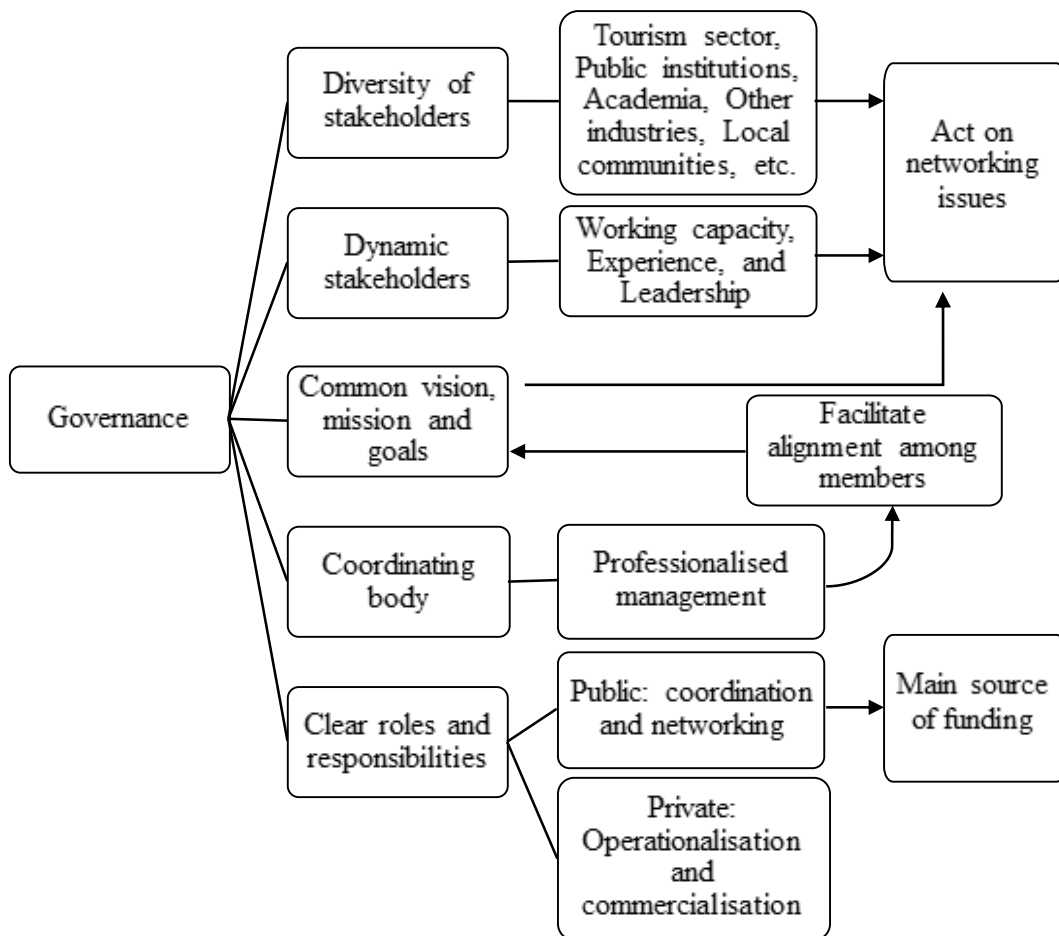


Figure 6. *Tourism routes governance in the literature*

While there is agreement on CSFs related to the governance of tourism routes, there is a notable absence of attention to other concerns, such as the structure and organisation of the route. According to Cloutier et al. (2019), members of a route do not consider governance and route organisation as important or challenging. Likewise, the literature also tends to overlook this issue, except for Plummer et al. (2006), who provides insights into the internal organisation of an ale trail. Plummer et al. (2006) details that the voting structure involves each brewery having one representative in the organisation, holding one vote. Additionally, federal government institutions with a significant funding contribution have voting rights. However, there are other members, such as tourism boards or private tourism agents, without voting rights. Furthermore, Plummer et al. (2006) highlight the presence of a chairperson responsible for leading meetings, establishing agendas, and acting as a signing authority, along with a general manager who oversees day-to-day activities, public relations, and marketing. Further research is required to investigate the governance of tourism routes. This should focus on examining variations between different types of organisational structures and how these variations influence route performance.

3.3.4. Operational activities

While the concept of thematic or cultural networking initiatives emphasises collaboration between route members, it is essential to involve all of them (Chountala *et al.*, 2019; Nowers *et al.*, 2002; Telfer, 2001a) by listening to them, motivating their active participation, and defining strategies to foster cooperation among all members (Dolci *et al.*, 2021; Trono *et al.*, 2017). Similarly, knowledge sharing among stakeholders should be promoted too (Brás *et al.*, 2010; Cloutier *et al.*, 2016; Del Chiappa *et al.*, 2019). For example, on a wine route, small wineries can benefit from sharing knowledge with larger wineries or other businesses (Telfer, 2001b). Moreover, tourism routes must represent the members interests (Coros *et al.*, 2019; Dolci *et al.*, 2021). Dolci *et al.* (2021) argued that the lack of involvement of wine route members and the decision by new producers and other tourism operators not to join the route was due to the growth in the number of members and the consequent distancing from their initial expectations and objectives and that wine production was at the centre of the discussion.

These routes are also expected to secure additional funding, often by applying for public grants, including from the European Union, to support their initiatives (Brás *et al.*, 2010; Del Chiappa *et al.*, 2019; Kruczek & Kruczek, 2016), in addition to selling their own products (Brás *et al.*, 2010).

The role of tourism routes as lobbying for government policy issues is also highlighted as a CSF. Being part of a route can also give members a sense of importance, political power, and voice that stakeholders in these areas usually lack (Collantes, 2018; Lois González *et al.*, 2016; Marques & Marques, 2017).

Furthermore, tourism routes require proper strategic planning according to their own goals (Abellán & Sebastián, 2017; Cloutier *et al.*, 2019; Dolci *et al.*, 2021; Duque, 2014; Jeambey, 2016; Larios *et al.*, 2021; Ledo *et al.*, 2007; Van Der Merwe, 2014). This can be expressed in strategies to guiding (Van Der Merwe, 2014), networking (Forga & Valiente, 2014), or marketing the route (Dancausa-Millan *et al.*, 2022; Figueroa & Rotarou, 2018; Hashimoto & Telfer, 2003; Ledo *et al.*, 2007). Strategies could also be applied to address specific contexts, such as COVID-19 (Kastenholz *et al.*, 2022). However, the literature tends to focus more on the infrastructures and heritage conservation than the organisation itself (Carbone *et al.*, 2016; Serenelli *et al.*, 2017; Somoza Medina & Lois Gonzalez, 2017). In addition, adequate financial planning should also be considered to determine sources of revenue and expenditure size (Antić *et al.*, 2021).

Innovativeness is another characteristic tourism routes should possess. An innovation process occurs, for example, in the creation or development of tourism products (Brás *et al.*, 2010; Ferreira & Hunter, 2017), in marketing (Van Der Merwe, 2014), in site management (Naramski *et al.*, 2022), or even in social innovation through the acceptance and openness of the agricultural sector to new businesses (Dancausa-Millan *et al.*, 2022).

The CSFs for tourism routes development are not limited solely to the networking among members. Collaboration with external stakeholders should also be encouraged, including tourism private companies, public institutions such as governments and tourism authorities, civil society organisations, and the academia, among others (Cloutier *et al.*, 2016; Kruczek & Kruczek, 2016; Puche & Yago, 2016; Somoza Medina & Lois Gonzalez, 2017). Some examples of collaboration with non-members are the participation of civil society in the design and management of the route (Serenelli *et al.*, 2017), the cooperation and exchange of knowledge with other tourism routes (Abellán & Sebastián, 2017; Efstathios *et al.*, 2009; Kunc, 2010; Lemky, 2017; Puche & Yago, 2016), or the collaboration with government authorities (Kruczek & Kruczek, 2016).

Involving the local community in the decision-making process is a determining factor in the success of tourism routes because they are the ones most impacted by tourism activities (Jeambey, 2016).

Moreover, their participation could maximise the positive impacts and minimise the negative impacts of tourism and improve attitudes towards it (Soares *et al.*, 2021), while contributing to “increase the sense of ownership and opportunities for material gains and poverty alleviation (Marschall, 2012, p.721)”. The success of the Saint James Way was partly explained by the involvement of experts, voluntary organisations, and public bodies (Lois González *et al.*, 2016). In contrast, the failure of other tourism routes was attributed, among other factors, to the absence of local community involvement (Larios *et al.*, 2021; Plummer *et al.*, 2006). Nevertheless, akin to the engagement of all members, involving the local community is a process that also requires trust, time, and commitment (Underberg-Goode, 2014). Raising awareness of the positive impacts of tourism is essential for involving local people in route development (Xu *et al.*, 2016). Strategies such as training and educating residents about the potential of tourist sites (Auttarat *et al.*, 2021), encouraging visits to these sites (Marschall, 2012), and consulting the local community to determine infrastructure location (Lemky, 2017) can address any lack of awareness. Information and communication technologies could also be used to encourage citizen participation by sharing information and connecting communities (Soares *et al.*, 2021). Similarly, Lois González *et al.* (2016) highlighted the power given to the Saint James Way by the convening of different stakeholders, while Dolci *et al.* (2021) mentioned the lack of governmental support and public funding to signpost a route and to build a cycling path as an external constraint for route development. Besides governmental support can be also important to access EU funds (Kruczek & Kruczek, 2016).

The diagram in Figure 7 illustrates how operational activities are addressed in the literature on tourism routes according to the documents reviewed.

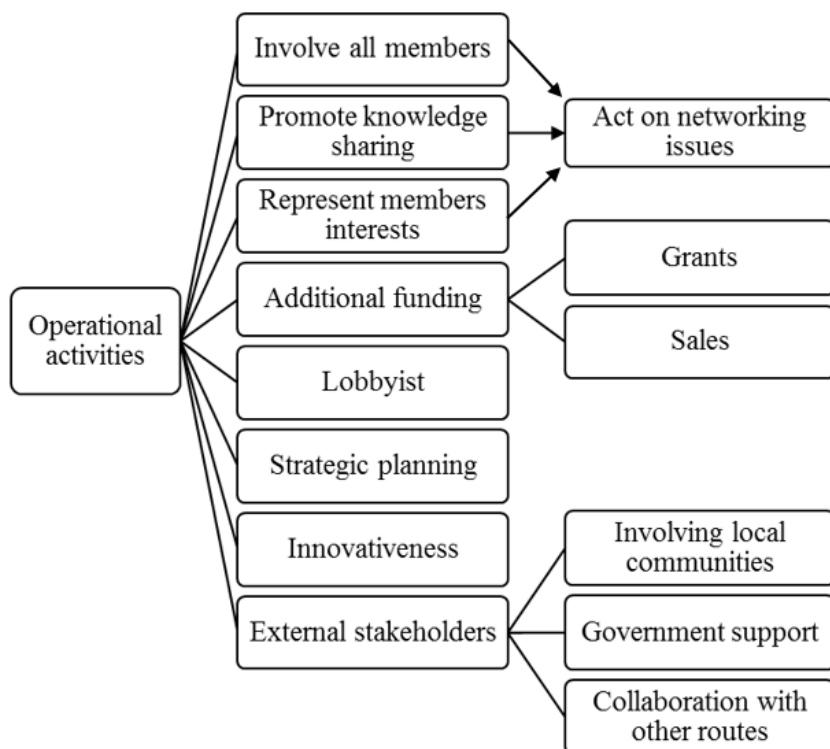


Figure 7. Tourism routes operational activities in the literature

The literature appears to have insufficiently studied the matter of strategic planning, and, similar to governance, route members do not give it enough importance (Cloutier *et al.*, 2019). Further research should be conducted to investigate how this factor could significantly affect route sustainability and how to encourage greater interest in these matters by members.

Moreover, the importance of involving local communities and the benefits derived from it are well documented. In practice, however, residents are often excluded from the process, despite the identification of strategies to promote their involvement. The question remains: How can a tourism route effectively engage with residents?

Finally, some cases have highlighted the lack of government support as a critical factor, particularly in relation to the mentioned roles, such as funding. Therefore, it is important to explore potential strategies to address the deficiency in support from public institutions, in order to obtain that support or to find alternatives to develop these initiatives based on private resources.

3.3.5. Marketing activities

The literature extensively discusses marketing activities in tourism routes, which include various applications in terms of partnerships, products, promotion, or participants (see Figure 8).

Marketing partnerships refer alliances formed within a route or between a route and other stakeholders (Brás *et al.*, 2010; Cloutier *et al.*, 2016; Del Chiappa *et al.*, 2019; Kunc, 2010; Telfer, 2001b). Telfer (2001b) studied strategic alliances and found examples of horizontal alliances, including formal organisations such as a wine route or wine festivals, and vertical alliances, such as partnerships with tour operators to attract visitors and with the food sector in culinary events. Furthermore, Dancausa-Millan *et al.* (2022) suggested combining an olive oil route with other gastronomic products, such as oil-cheese, and creating tourist packages with tourism operators that link culture and gastronomic products. Other studies have highlighted the importance of agreements with tour operators and travel agents to commercialise tourism route products (Brás *et al.*, 2010; Galletto, 2018; Horák *et al.*, 2015; Jóźwiak & Sieg, 2021; Kruczek & Kruczek, 2016; Puche & Yago, 2016).

Tourism routes also require a shared tourist product, and many studies focus on wine or pilgrimage routes. The literature highlights clear differences between these products and the importance of tangible elements in both cases.

Pilgrimage routes require infrastructure and services such as signposting, path maintenance, and rest areas as well as quality of tourist services, such as accommodation and restaurants (Duque, 2014; Gonzalo *et al.*, 2012). Notably, the network of “albergues” is an essential element as it shapes the pilgrim's perception of authenticity, which they consider to be the main value of the Saint James Way (Carbone *et al.*, 2016; Duque, 2014). Research on other pilgrim routes has in general produced similar results (Horák *et al.*, 2015; Serenelli *et al.*, 2017).

Regarding wine routes, they should provide appropriate infrastructure and tourism services (Abellán & Sebastián, 2017; Collantes, 2018; Efstathios *et al.*, 2009; Figueroa & Rotarou, 2018; Forga & Valiente, 2014; Marques & Marques, 2017; Nowers *et al.*, 2002), including well-trained staff (Efstathios *et al.*, 2009; Puche & Yago, 2016), wineries open for visitation (Nowers *et al.*, 2002), and good-quality local wines, with standardisation of quality control and certification, such as the European Protected Designation of Origin label (Collantes, 2018; Efstathios *et al.*, 2009; Figueroa & Rotarou, 2018). Other attractions include landscape, architecture, gastronomy experiences, wine festivals, and cultural events such as music concerts (Figueroa & Rotarou, 2018; Marques & Marques, 2017; Puche & Yago, 2016). Pikkemaat *et al.* (2009) have shown that wine does not determine the tourist's experience in wine tourism; instead,

it is the landscape, the information about wines or wine production, and the events that significantly shape the experience. Signposting and maps (Efsthathios *et al.*, 2009; Forga & Valiente, 2014), accommodation (Marques & Marques, 2017; Puche & Yago, 2016), and good accessibility and location near urban or tourist centres are also important elements to consider (Collantes, 2018; Figueroa & Rotarou, 2018).

Additionally, Božić and Tomić (2016) proposed a model to assess cultural routes and identified the most relevant attributes as the availability of tour guide services, possibilities for interpretation, and the attractiveness of the sites.

Tourism routes need effective promotion of the destination, the member's sites, or endogenous products in order to inform and attract visitors and generate economic benefits (Božić & Tomić, 2016; Brás *et al.*, 2010; Collantes, 2018; De la Torre *et al.*, 2014; Duque, 2014; Jeambey, 2016; Marschall, 2012). Promotion should be carried out by public authorities and private companies, including tour operators, travel agencies, and tourism boards (De la Torre *et al.*, 2014; Galletto, 2018; Jóźwiak & Sieg, 2021). Although potential conflicts might arise if local communities and regional or national authorities have different promotion strategies (Hemme, 2005), or if route members feel that there is a lack of participation in fairs and a lack of advertising (Chiodo *et al.*, 2020).

Currently, online promotion seems to be an opportunity for the tourism routes (Galletto, 2018; Gonzalo *et al.*, 2012; Jóźwiak & Sieg, 2021). For example, Jóźwiak and Sieg (2021) proposed developing an information system for an industrial tourism route that would allow visitors to create an itinerary according to their preferences. Nevertheless, research into the online promotion of tourism routes has revealed mistakes to be avoided, such as a lack of standardisation, systematisation, and detailed information (Calderon-Puerta *et al.*, 2018; Camprubí & Galí, 2015), or promotions that are outdated or only available in the local language (Abellán & Sebastián, 2017). Similarly, an analysis of wine routes in Italy found that web channels were underused and that the internet and GPS were important tools for visitors due to the poor quality of road signage and the high concentration of wineries in the area (Colombini, 2015). However, Camprubí and Galí (2015) noted an increase in the use of social networks, which should be continuously improved.

Participants in the tourism route encompass, but are not limited to, route members, tourists, and local communities. Many of these aspects were previously addressed, such as involvement with local communities and partnerships with other stakeholders. Concerning tourists, it is essential to implement a segmented and innovative marketing approach to attract them (Van Der Merwe, 2014) and to have an insight into their behaviour on a continuous basis (Antić *et al.*, 2021; Hashimoto & Telfer, 2003). For example, Hashimoto and Telfer (2003) showed that different winery locations attract different tourist profiles, while Bruwer and Alant (2009) found that first-time visitors are more attracted by the natural environment, while the wine attracts more repeat visitors.

Tourism route marketing has been extensively studied in the literature, with clear identification of CSFs. Future research should emphasise continuous use of online channels, particularly social media, and monitoring of consumer behaviour, consistent with existing recommendations. There is a gap in the literature regarding a comparative analysis of different tourism products, which are distinguished by their themes, structure, or scale. Additionally, it would be interesting to explore the value recognised by stakeholders for these products and their potential impact on dynamics within tourism routes. Furthermore, future research could investigate partnerships between members and external stakeholders from the perspective of the latter. In addition, there is a need for in-depth knowledge on lateral relationships, particularly with other sectors, which tend to occur in the mature stages of the route (Del Chiappa *et al.*, 2019).

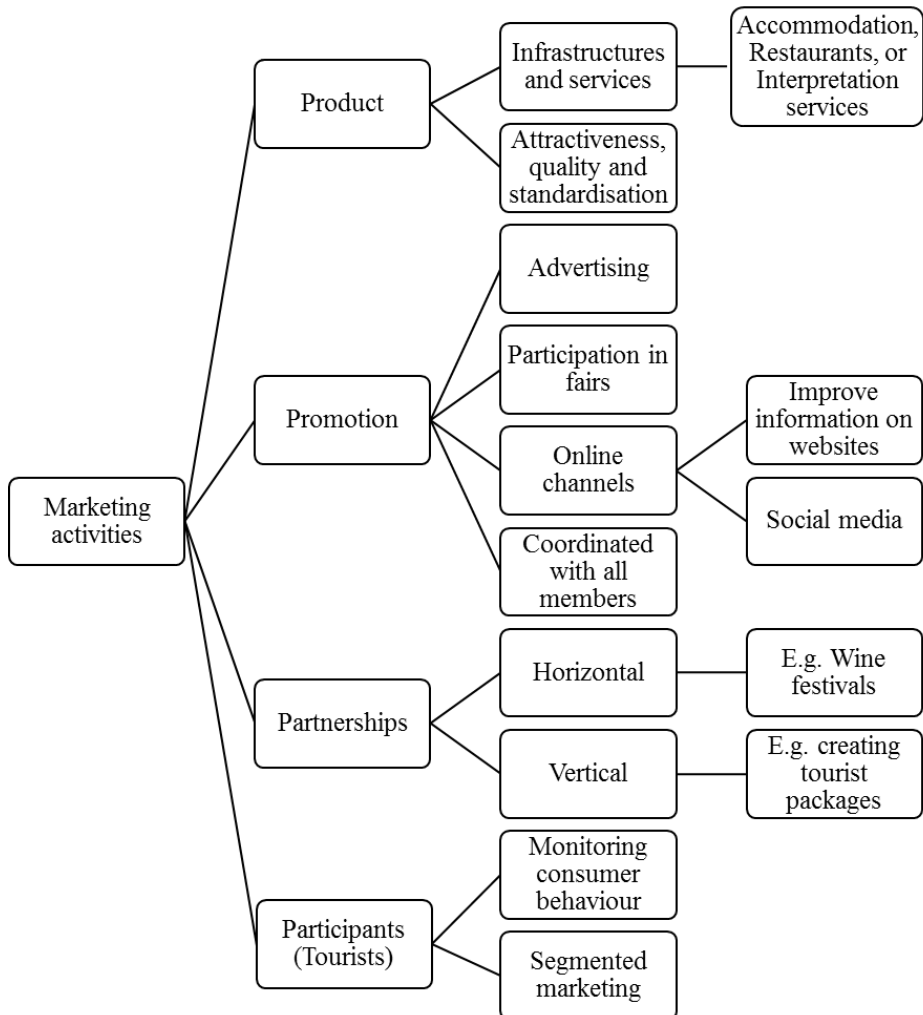


Figure 8. *Tourism routes marketing activities in the literature*

3.3.6. Performance assessment

This section examines the performance assessment of tourism routes through the aforementioned categories and CSFs (see Figure 9). The literature emphasises a strict approach in analysing route performance solely through the lens of ‘number of visitors’ and other consumer behaviour issues, such as visitor satisfaction. It proposes an alternative assessment based on member satisfaction and economic impacts, despite a lack of research in this area (Abellán & Sebastián, 2017; Cloutier *et al.*, 2016; Telfer, 2001b). Additionally the monitoring of members performance is also mentioned (Brás *et al.*, 2010).

In addition, the results suggest that the satisfaction of the members can be influenced by the above-mentioned categories, namely funding, personnel characteristics, governance, and operational and marketing activities. The literature identifies issues arising from the absence of these factors, as well as potential strategies for their resolution or mitigation. For instance, the lack of public funding and government support (Dolci *et al.*, 2021), the marketing promotion not aligned by all members (Hemme, 2005), or the lack of activities related to participation in fair or advertising (Chiodo *et al.*, 2020).

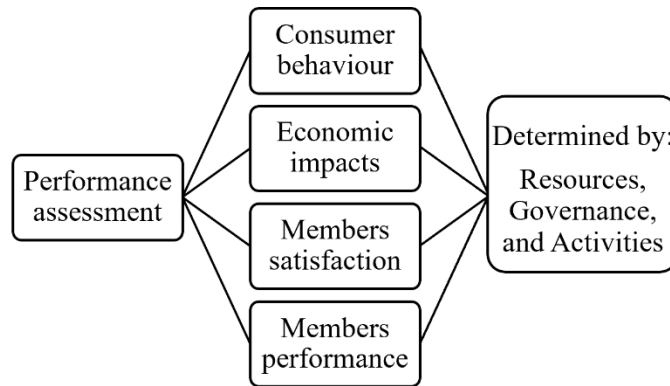


Figure 9. *Tourism routes performance assessment in the literature*

Nevertheless, there is a lack of measures to analyse route performance in both the literature and in practice. At present, the evaluation is heavily dependent on subjective assessments of other CSFs. Additional research is required, with a particular emphasis on factors such as visitor numbers, economic impact, and the performance of route members. The research could involve evaluating the return on investment for both public and private route members. Special attention should be paid to the allocation of public funds.

4. Conclusion

The research question, "Which are the CSFs for tourism route development?", is answered through the identification and discussion of CSFs categorised into four main sections, i.e., Resources, Governance, Activities and Performance. These categories include the factors that positively or negatively influence tourism routes development. Among the most discussed CSFs are the networking issues among members, the funding particularly from public sources, or the marketing activities developed in the context of tourism routes. Conversely, the existing literature on governance and performance assessment shows a lack of depth.

This research provides both theoretical and practical contributions. Regarding theoretical contributions, this review has enabled the systematic organisation of success factors discussed in the literature on tourism routes and highlighted the significance of networking factors as foundational elements in the development of tourism routes. Accordingly, the relationship dynamics among members play a central role in prior research, exemplified by Cloutier *et al.* (2019) and Del Chiappa *et al.* (2019).

In practical terms, this review provides valuable insights for managers and decision-makers involved in establishing or improving tourism routes. The findings highlight the significance of promoting collaboration among all stakeholders, both internal and external, and identify the most common sources of financing for tourism routes. The study proposes strategies to address potential issues in stakeholders' relationships and examines governance issues, specifically the organisational structures of the routes. It describes the main activities carried out in this context, as outlined in the literature, with particular emphasis on marketing activities. Finally, it emphasises the significance of systematically evaluating the performance and impact of tourism routes. This topic is still relatively underdeveloped in both academic literature and practical applications, yet it is of paramount importance in understanding not only the effectiveness of the route but also the contributions of its members.

There are two main limitations to this review. The applied keywords filter based on certain tourist products may have resulted in a focus on food and drinks routes and pilgrimage routes, while excluding other touristic products. Finally, the article is presented as a systematic review using the PRISMA protocol, although some modifications were made to the protocol to adapt it to the tourism field (Pahlevan-Sharif *et al.*, 2019) and to the journal guidelines.

Further research could be conducted on the CSFs for tourism route development, in addition to the specific lines of research already mentioned. Although the CSFs have been discussed in this systematic review, there is a lack of an integrated approach and methodologies for route planning and management (Pedrosa *et al.*, 2022). To address this, a conceptual model for tourism routes could be defined based on their performance and success factors. Additionally, it would be helpful to assess the importance of each factor in the development of tourism routes. Finally, although wine routes are widely discussed in the literature, other typologies such as the cultural routes of the Council of Europe programme are still lacking. Therefore, it is important to compare the CSFs between different types of tourism routes, based on their size, theme, and type of members, whether public, private, or both. According to the purpose of the tourism route, these differences could also be noticeable, as networks in tourism may serve various purposes ranging from destination branding or promotion to wielding lobbying power in negotiations with governments or other stakeholders (Aureli & Forlani, 2015).

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