

GIANLUCA GOFFI, PHD
Ph. D. en Economía Empresarial Università Politecnica
delle Marche-Italia. Funcionario Público Departamento de
Industria, Artesanado y Trabajo Regional Marche-Italia.
Investigador en el Observatorio Regional del Mercado
de Trabajo Marche-Italia. Doctorando en Economía y
Management. Università di Urbino-Italia
[gianluca.goffi@uniurb.it].



A MODEL OF TOURISM DESTINATION COMPETITIVENESS¹: THE CASE OF THE ITALIAN DESTINATIONS OF EXCELLENCE

UN MODELO DE DESTINO TURÍSTICO COMPETITIVO: EL CASO DE LOS DESTINOS ITALIANOS DE EXCELENCIA

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Abstract

Tourism worldwide is becoming increasingly competitive. Competitiveness has been associated in the tourism literature as a critical element for the success of tourism destinations. Particular emphasis is placed on identifying and analysing the various factors that influence the competitiveness of tourism destinations. The paper extends the Richie & Crouch (2000) model and develops a set of indicators that considers the different issues concerning tourism competitiveness. The indicators are focused on the various dimensions of sustainability. The paper offers insights into the model, each determinant has been extensively described. The aim of the paper is to test whether and to what extent the current set of indicators integrated into the present model can help explaining the competitiveness of a tourism destination. The model is tested on a unique dataset of 610 Italian Destinations of Excellence. Principal Component Analysis is applied on the responses to the items measuring destination competitiveness.

Keywords: Tourism Destination, Determinants of Destination Competitiveness, Competitiveness Model, Competitiveness Indicators.

Resumen

El turismo en todo el mundo se está volviendo cada vez más competitivo. La competitividad se ha asociado en la literatura del turismo como un elemento crítico para el éxito de los destinos turísticos. Se hace especial énfasis en la identificación y análisis de los diversos factores que influyen en la competitividad de los destinos turísticos. En el documento abarca el Modelo de Richie y Crouch (2000) y desarrolla un conjunto de indicadores que tenga en cuenta los diferentes temas relacionados con la competitividad turística. Los indicadores se centran en las diversas dimensiones de la sostenibilidad. En el documento se ofrece información sobre el modelo, cada determinante ha sido descrito ampliamente. El objetivo de este

trabajo es comprobar si –y en qué medida– el actual conjunto de indicadores integrados en el modelo actual puede ayudar a explicar la competitividad de un destino turístico. El modelo se ha probado en un conjunto de datos único de 610 destinos italianos de Excelencia. Análisis de Componentes Principales se aplica en las respuestas a los ítems que miden la competitividad del destino.

Palabras clave: Destino Turístico, Determinantes del Destino Competitivo, Modelo de Competitividad, Indicadores de Competitividad.

Introduction

Developments in international tourism have intensified competitiveness between tourism destinations. Nowadays, in the increasingly competitive world tourism market, maintaining competitiveness is a major challenge for many destinations. Many research studies have been produced to clarify the concept of destination competitiveness. Most of the studies have been limited to single aspects of destination competitiveness. Less attention has been devoted to develop a comprehensive framework of the various components determining the competitive position of a tourism destination. The most well known model on overall tourism competitiveness is that of CROUCH & RITCHIE (1999) and RITCHIE & CROUCH (2000, 2003).

The paper extends the RITCHIE & CROUCH (2000) model, adding further determinants to their original competitiveness model. The paper also develops a set of indicators that provides an integrated framework of the different issues concerning competitiveness. With respect to other empirical models (SIRŠE & MIHALIĆ, 1999; DWYER, LIVAIC, MELLOR, 2003; ENRIGHT & NEWTON, 2004; GOMEZELJ & MIHALIĆ, 2008), the present set of indicators is especially focused on sustainability.

The aim of the paper is to test whether and to what extent the current set of indicators integrated into the present model can help explaining the competitiveness of a tourism destination.

The model is tested on a unique dataset of 610 Italian destinations of excellence. To reduce the large set of variables to a smaller set the paper uses a principal component analysis (PCA). PCA is applied on the responses to the items measuring destination competitiveness. The results from the PCA provide a reduced set of variables that helps explain the groups of attributes which constitute the main determinants of destination competitiveness.

The output is reasonably similar to the corresponding elements of the model; some differences were expected because of the aggregation issue. PCA confirms the crucial role played by the key attractors and by the tourism services, and highlights the importance of tourism policy and destination management attributes.

The paper is structured as follow. Section 2 summarizes the recent empirical and theoretical models on the destination competitiveness issue. Section 3 explains the development of the present model. Section 4 offers insights into the model, illustrating the determinants and the indicators. Section 5 describes the Italian tourism system. Section 6 illustrates the research methodology and provides a discussion of the main results. Some conclusions are drawn in the last section of the paper.

1. Competitiveness of Tourism Destinations

Competitiveness has been associated in the tourism literature as a crucial factor for the success of tourist destinations. Many definitions of tourism destination competitiveness have been proposed. BUHALIS (2000) defines

competitiveness as «the effort and achievement of long-term profitability, above the average of the particular industry within which they operate as well as above alternative investment opportunities in other industries». In HASSAN'S view, competitiveness concerns «the destination's ability to create and integrate value-added products that sustain its resources while maintaining market position relative to competitors» (HASSAN, 2000: 239). According to DWYER & KIM (2003) destination competitiveness is «the ability of a destination to deliver goods and services that perform better than other destinations on those aspects of the tourism experience considered being important by tourists» (DWYER & KIM, 2003: 375). RITCHIE & CROUCH (2003) describe competitiveness as the «ability to increase tourism expenditure, to increasingly attract visitors while providing them with satisfying, memorable experiences and to do so in a profitable way, while enhancing the well-being of destination residents and preserving the natural capital of the destination for future generations».

These findings support the view that «to be competitive a destination's development of tourism must be sustainable, not just economically and not just ecologically, but socially, culturally and politically as well (...). Competitiveness is illusory without sustainability» (RITCHIE & CROUCH, 2000:5). Sustainability has become a prevailing issue in tourism literature (among others, KRIPPENDORF 1987, INSKEEP 1991, MÜLLER 1994, CLARKE 1997, MIDDLETON & HAWKINS 1998, HASSAN 2000, HALL 2000, RITCHIE & CROUCH 2003, WALL & MATHIESON 2006) and in many World reports (UNWTO 1998, 1999, 2004) or European reports (European Union 2006). Sustainability is much more than only a function of the natural environment (Global Environmental Facility, 1998). Since the 1980s sustainability has been used more in the sense of human sustainability. This has resulted in the most widely quoted definition of sustainability as

a part of the concept of sustainable development; the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, known as the "Brundtland Report" propose this definition: «sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs» (WECD, 1987).

While there seems to be a consensus in the literature about the main objectives of competitiveness, there are various ways of explaining and measuring competitiveness in tourism literature. Many models were developed to explain and/or measure destination competitiveness. Some of them are theoretical.

The model of RITCHIE & CROUCH (2000, 2003), is the most well-known conceptual model of destination competitiveness in tourism literature and has been the starting point for many other research studies about destination competitiveness. The model distinguishes 36 attributes of competitiveness classified into five key factors. DWYER & KIM (2003) translate the model of RITCHIE & CROUCH (2000) into specific indicators. The model explicitly identifies new key factors as demand condition and situational conditions to contribute to determine destination competitiveness.

De KEYSER & VANHOVE (1994) develop a theoretical model underlining the macroeconomics factors influencing tourism industry, along with other factors as supply, transport, demand and tourism policy. HASSAN'S model (2000) highlights the importance of environmental sustainability, as one of the four determinants of tourism competitiveness. Heath's model (2002) presents an integrated consideration of the several issues involving the concept of competitiveness.

Other models of destination competitiveness are empirical. They were applied with the aim of analyzing the competitive position of par-

ticular destinations (SIRŠE & MIHALIČ, 1999; DWYER, LIVAIC, MELLOR, 2003; ENRIGHT & NEWTON, 2004; GOMEZELJ & MIHALIČ, 2008). Each one of these empirical models provides very useful insights into destination competitiveness. They focus on several issues and they consist of different determinants and various indicators.

HOWEVER, it is argued that none of the models above provides a comprehensive treatment of the various issues that regards each determinant of destination competitiveness.

Different approaches for explaining and measuring competitiveness of tourism destinations can be distinguished from the literature. Indicators of destination competitiveness can be classified in objectively or subjectively measured variables.

For what concerns the first category, studies such as GOOROOCHURN & SUGIYARTO (2005), CRACOLICI & NIJKAMP (2006), MAZANEC, WOBBER, ZINS (2007), CRACOLICI, NIJKAMP, RIETVELD (2008), CROES (2010), ZHANG et al. (2011) make use of published secondary data as indicators of competitiveness. Quantitative data have often been applied because these were seen as more precise and accurate. HOWEVER, CROUCH (2010) points out that using quantitative data is “quite doubtful” for several reasons. First, the volume of indicators could be massive and discouraging. Second, finding available data for each measure of destination competitiveness would be very problematic. Third, many of the feature measures are multidimensional, abstract or inaccurate. Fourth, many indicators are not always quantifiable and may be necessary subjective.

Concerning the second category – qualitative data or “soft measures” – two approaches could be found in tourism literature. In the first approach, competitiveness is measured using survey data of tourists’ opinions and

perceptions (HAAHTI and YAVAS, 1983; KOZAC & RIMMINGTON, 1998, 1999; BAHAR & KOZAC, 2007; CRACOLICI & NIJKAMP, 2008). ENRIGHT & NEWTON (2004) claim that tourists could quite easily evaluate the standard components of destination attractiveness, but are less able to know the various factors that influence and determine the competitive position of a tourism destination.

Thus, a second approach is based on the empirical evaluation of a number of subjective indicators of tourism competitiveness, surveyed on key tourism stakeholders (SIRŠE & MIHALIČ, 1999; FAULKNER, OPPERMANN, FREDLINE, 1999; DWYER, LIVAIC, MELLOR, 2003; DWYER et al., 2004; ENRIGHT & NEWTON, 2004, 2005; KAYNAK & MARANDU, 2007; GOMEZELJ & MIHALIČ, 2008; BORNHORST, J. R. B. RITCHIE, SHEEHAN, 2010; CROUCH, 2010). GOMEZELJ & MIHALIČ (2008) assert that the understanding of people who have some significant knowledge of what makes a tourism destination competitive can supply a helpful point of departure for analyses such as this. This last approach has been followed in the paper.

2. A Model of Destination Competitiveness

The paper extends the RICHIE & CROUCH model (2000) and groups some of the elementary determinants of destination competitiveness differently than does the RITCHIE & CROUCH model (2000). The model identifies seven key determinants of destination competitiveness, as shown in fig. 1: core resources and key attractors; tourism services; general infrastructures; conditioning and supporting factors; tourism policy, planning and development; destination management; demand. As can be seen in the fig. 1, there is a separation between resources and services that transfer the value directly to the tourist and activities supporting or conditioning their performan-

ces. This is based on the “value fan” configuration by FLAGESTAD & HOPE (2001), which takes as a reference PORTER’S (1985) value chain model and STABELL & FJELSTAD (1996, 1998) studies.

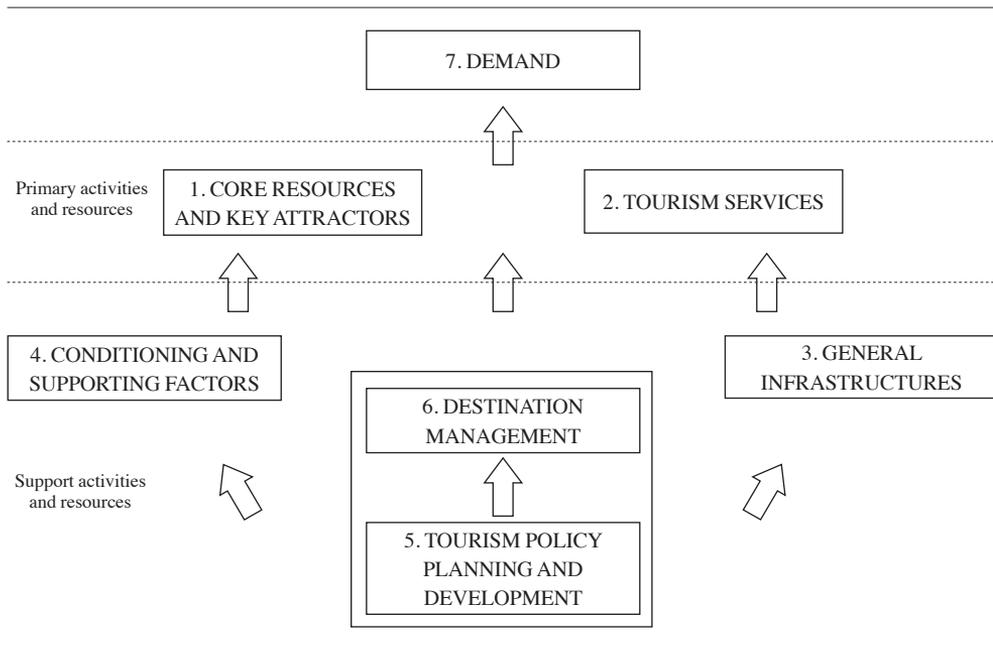
The boxes “tourism policy, planning and development” and “destination management” are grouped within a larger box; moreover “tourism policy, planning and development” is linked forwards to the box “destination management”. This indicates that while tourism policy set a framework within which a competitive destination can be developed on the long term, destination management deals with its various factors in a short time horizon, in order to ensure economic profitability, and avoiding degradation of the elements that forms the competitive position of a destination. The one-directional arrows from this larger box indicates that it can influence both the conditioning and supporting factors and the availability and quality of general infrastructures; it can play an important role

in the management of the core resources and also influence the availability and quality of tourism services.

The elements “core resources and key attractors”, “tourism policy, planning and development” and “destination management” derive from the RICHIE & CROUCH model (2000). They lump together under the label “supporting factors and resources” two sub-components as “hospitality” and “infrastructure”. In this model they are regarded as separate factors from “conditioning and supporting factors”. Many authors (PEARCE, 1981; MURPHY, 1985; INSKEEP, 1991; GUNN, 2002) underline the importance of these components, regarding them as separate primary elements. Moreover, respect to RITCHIE & CROUCH (2000), the model explicitly recognizes the demand factor as a fundamental determinant, as illustrated by DWYER & KIM (2003).

It is proposed a set of indicators that is considered useful for analyzing the competi-

FIG. 1 Competitiveness and sustainability of a tourism destination: a model of evaluation



Source: adapted from Ritchie & Crouch (2000)

veness of a tourism destination, as shown in tab. 1. The indicators derive from the major empirical models of destination competitiveness, further enriched with indicators that are inferred from the conceptual models of destination competitiveness and from the wider literature in tourism policy, planning and management. The choice is made considering the ability of each variable to identify the most important aspects that contribute to the competitiveness of a destination. The most important criterion for the selection of the indicators is that they are policy relevant, as suggested by MILLER (2001).

The majority of the indicators proposed refer to sustainability issues. From a sustainability perspective, the indicators comprised by the current empirical models of destination competitiveness (SIRŠE & MIHALIČ, 1999; DWYER, LIVAIC, MELLOR, 2003; ENRIGHT & NEWTON, 2004; GOMEZELJ & MIHALIČ, 2008) do not appear to be entirely relevant. The key reason is that they do not seem to provide an integrated treatment of the various issues surrounding the concept of tourism sustainability. In particular, they do not place enough emphasis on the social, cultural and economic dimensions of sustainability, and on collaboration issues. Since the 1990s sustainability has been the focus of discussion and studies. Thus, the main elements of sustainability in their economic, social and environmental dimension (SWARBROOKE, 1999) are translated into specific indicators. A major frame of reference for the choice of the indicators, is represented by the “Tourism Development’s Magic Pentagon” (MÜLLER, 1994).

TAB. 1 Selected Indicators of Destination Competitiveness

<i>Determinants and indicators</i>	<i>PCA solution</i>
1) CORE RESOURCES AND KEY ATTRACTORS	
Natural resources	7
Historical and archaeological sites	9

<i>Determinants and indicators</i>	<i>PCA solution</i>
Artistic and architectural features	9
Green areas	
Cultural attractors	9
Events	3
Leisure activities	3
Evening entertainment and nightlife	3
Gastronomy ant typical products	8
Shopping opportunities	3
2) TOURISM SERVICES	
Quality of accommodations	12
Quantity of accommodations	12
Environmental friendliness of accommodations	12
Food services quality	8
Tourist oriented services	
3) GENERAL INFRASTRUCTURES	
Environmental friendliness and quality of transportation services	2
Quality of road system	2
Communication system	2
Accessibility of facilities by disabled persons	2
Medical care facilities	2
Sanitation, sewage and solid waste disposal	2
4) CONDITIONING AND SUPPORTING FACTORS	
Accessibility of destination	2
Proximity to other tourist destinations	2
Destination links with major origin markets	10
Value for money in destination tourism experience	10
Value for money in accommodations	10
Presence of local businesses	5

<i>Determinants and indicators</i>	<i>PCA solution</i>
Management capabilities of tourism firms	5
Use of IT by tourism firms	5
Local supply of goods and services to tourists and tourism businesses	8
Level of professional skills in tourism	5
Hospitality of residents towards tourists	
Environmental quality	7
Safety	7
5) TOURISM POLICY, PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT	
Political commitment to tourism	1
Integrated approach to tourism planning	1
Environmentally compatible approach to tourism development planning	1
Public sector commitment to minimizing negative environmental impacts of tourism	1
Public sector commitment to minimizing negative social impacts of tourism on local community	1
Public sector commitment to maximizing economic impacts of tourism on local community	13
Clear policies in creating formal employment opportunities	13
Emphasis on community empowerment	13
Public sector commitment to tourism/hospitality education and training	1
Collaboration among public sector units for local tourism development	1
Cooperation between public and private sector for local tourism development	1
Emphasis on community participatory process in tourism planning	1
6) DESTINATION MANAGEMENT	
Effectiveness of destination positioning	6

<i>Determinants and indicators</i>	<i>PCA solution</i>
Effective market segmentation	6
Effectiveness in crafting tourism experiences	1
Tourist destination communication	1
Visitor satisfaction management	11
Tourist guidance and information	1
Stewardship of the natural environment	1
Tourism impacts management and monitoring	1
Effectiveness of destination management structure	1
Promotion of partnerships between public and private stakeholders	1
Promotion of partnerships among tourist businesses	1
7) DEMAND FACTOR	
Tourists' interests in natural and cultural local heritage	4
Tourists' respect for local traditions and values	4
Tourists' environmental awareness	4
Awareness of destination	6
(Non) seasonality in tourist flows	
Level of repeat visitors	11
"Fit" between destination products and visitor preferences	

3. Insights into the model: Determinants and Indicators

3.1 Core resources and Key Attractors

Core resources and key attractors are the fundamental reasons why visitors choose one particular destination over another. There are various types of attractors (natural, cultural, events, activities, etc.); they provide the foundation for a memorable experience.

Natural resources can be considered among the most important resources for a tourism destination. A natural resource is something that exists in nature which can be used by humans, also for tourism purposes, at current economic, social, cultural, and institutional conditions. In recent years, increasing awareness among tourism researchers of the relations between tourism and natural resource management has resulted in a significant body of academic literature examining this issue. MIHALIČ (2000) points out that a well-managed destination environment is the best destination advertiser. «A destination needs to protect the integrity and the attraction of its own product, plus guard against the action and rivalry of competitors» (MURPHY 1995: 166).

Cultural resources are represented by three indicators: “historical and archaeological sites”, “artistic and architectural features”, “cultural attractors”. «Culture, broadly defined, is a second very powerful dimension of destination attractiveness» (RITCHIE & CROUCH, 2003:115). In the last two decades, many texts were published about this subject of rising interest (RICHARDS, 1996, 2007; RICHARDS & MUNSTERS, 2010; BONIFACE, 1995; WALLE, 1998; MCKERCHER & DU CROS, 2002; SIGALA & LESLIE, 2005; SMITH, 2003, 2009; SMITH & ROBINSON, 2006). A high proportion of international travellers are now considered cultural tourists (RICHARDS, 1996). The culture and heritage attractors of a destination provide a significant force for the potential visitor (RITCHIE & ZINS, 1978; COHEN, 1988; PRENTICE, 1993; MURPHY, et al., 2000).

Events, leisure activities, nightlife and shopping are also primary motivations to visit a destination (RITCHIE & CROUCH, 2003). Events could extend the seasonal life, especially in tourism destinations with an inbuilt seasonality (GETZ, 1989, 1991; HALL, 1987; FAULKNER, 2003). Hallmark events can generate high levels of interest in visitors and several advantages (HALL, 1992). The

capacity of events to attract high number of tourists and generate tourism expenditures making an important economic contribution to tourist destinations is well documented (GETZ, 1997; SHONE & PARRY, 2001; VAN DER WAGEN, 2002; YEOMAN et al., 2003; RAJ et al., 2008; ALLEN et al., 2008; BOWDIN et al., 2010; ROBINSON, 2010). The assortment of activities is of rising significance as the visitors ever increasing seek experiences that overtake the more inactive tourism of the past (POON, 1993). Entertainment, also, can be a key supplier to the tourism sector (HUGHES, 2000). It may occupy a major position in the destination competitive strategy, depending on its perceived uniqueness rather than on its quantity (DWYER & KIM 2003).

Shopping is for many tourists one of the most popular activities. Shopping tourism can also be seen as a vehicle to revitalize traditional urban centres, deteriorating resorts and even rural areas (JANSEN-VERBEKE, 1991). Timothy (2005) provides a comprehensive examination of the relationships between tourism, leisure and shopping.

“Gastronomy and typical products” is also included among the key attractors. Systematic research on gastronomy and tourism has been neglected until recently. Gastronomy is one of the most important elements affecting the authenticity of a tourism destination (SEDMAK & MIHALIČ, 2008). HJALAGER & RICHARDS (2002) explore the role of gastronomy as a source of regional identity, and also a source of economic development related to tourism.

3.2 Tourism Services

«Under the pressure of increasing arrivals the business sector responds with the development of specialised services for visitors and so the area begins to take on the familiar characteristics of a tourist destination» (LAWS, 1995: 9). This determinant includes “quality”, “quantity” and “environmental friendliness”

of tourist accommodations, “food service quality” and “tourist oriented services”.

Hospitality has been defined as “the very essence” of tourism (PAGE, 2003: 254) and has a very important role in the generation of economic benefits for the community (COOPER et. AL, 1998). A crucial issue related to hospitality is quality (QU, RYAN & CHU, 2000); this question has been examined in a number of studies (among others, SARGEANT & MOHAMAD, 1999; TSANG & QU, 2000; BRIGGS, SUTHERLAND, DRUMMOND, 2007). Among the various forms of tourist accommodations, for many nations hotels are the more significant in terms of number of tourists and revenues (PAGE, 2003). According to GO, PINE, & YU (1994), there is a mutual influence between destination’s economic growth and hotels performance. Nevertheless, many approaches in literature refer only to a limited number of elements of the hotel industry competitiveness; much less attention has been devoted to develop a comprehensive framework (TSAI, SONG & WONG, 2009).

Like the lodging industry, the food services are fundamental in order to guarantee the best possible experience to visitors. The food services consist of traditional restaurants, fast-food restaurants, cafeterias, travel food services (in hotels, motels, airports). Over the past two decades the food business has grown at a exceptional rate, especially the fast-food segment. Although the fast food segment is the most rapidly growing segment, the high-quality segment and the local and traditional restaurants must not be overlooked; much of tourism business is based on customer seeking a special and authentic experience (SEDMAK & MIHALIČ, 2008).

3.3 General Infrastructures

General infrastructures provide the foundation upon which a tourism destination can be built and can be a particularly critical factor

in less developed countries or regions, which often have limited infrastructures (HERATY, 1989). Even if a destination may possess a great quantity of resources and attractors, it is required the support of other elements in order to be adequate to receive tourists (GUNN, 2002). «The natural resources of tourism have no economic value in themselves. That is, for example, a scenic valley has no economic value in itself if the only creatures able to experience the scenery are the local fauna. Building a road into the valley, thus providing access to tourists does however provide value» (CROUCH & RITCHIE, 1999: 143).

This determinant covers the road system and transportation, the communication system, the medical care facilities, sanitation and sewage. KAUL (1985), PRIDEAUX (2000), KHADAROO & SEETANAH (2007) shed light on the relevance of transport infrastructure as a critical component of successful tourism development. Passenger transportation relevance has been extensively recognized both in the tourism planning literature (GUNN, 2002; HALL, 2000; INSKEEP, 2001), and in the wider tourism literature (GOELDNER & RITCHIE, 2003; COOPER et al., 1998; PAGE, 2003). Telecommunications are also fundamental for tourism, both for the operation of accommodation and touring services and for tourists, especially business travellers.

This determinant is also composed by further attributes related to general infrastructures not-specific to tourism (medical care facilities, sanitation, etc.). Maintaining minimum sanitation and hygiene standards is a prerequisite for tourism development: adequate medical care facilities are essential in any area, including tourism areas (INSKEEP, 1991).

3.4 Conditioning and Supporting Factors

Conditioning and supporting factors can strengthen or weaken the impact of all other

determinants of destination competitiveness. This determinant incorporates measures related to the accessibility of a destination and to the links with other tourist areas. The “accessibility of destination” and the “proximity to other tourist destinations” are strictly connected to the infrastructure issue. Accessibility is concerned with the easiness to enter the destination, in part influenced by spatial issues, in part conditioned by transportation services. Proximity to other tourist areas can have an important role in the tourist development of a destination (GUNN, 2002); it is also influenced by transportation facilities. “Destination links with major origin markets” depend on the professional, organizational and personal ties that stimulate people to visit the destination; the challenge facing destination manager is to determine how to use these bonds to stimulate and facilitate travel to the area (RITCHIE & CROUCH, 2003).

“Value for money in accommodation” and “value for money in destination tourist experience” are two more variables included in this determinant. A major element of attractiveness for a tourism destination is the cost of using tourist facilities and services within the destination compared to the costs within similar destinations (INSKEEP, 1991). The price tourists pay to visit and enjoy a destination experience plays a key role in determining the choice travellers make (CROUCH, 1992). Price competitiveness has been defined as the destination price differentials coupled with exchange rate movements, productivity levels of various components of the tourist industry and qualitative factors affecting the attractiveness of a destination (Dwyer Forsyth, RAO, 2000).

Various indicators refer to the conditions of the local businesses. WALL & MATHIESON (2006: 138) claim that «it is essential that the tourist industry is serviced, as far as possible, by local producers if its full potential contribution to the local economy is to be

realized». PAGE (2005) examines the questions affecting the management of the very fragmented nature of the businesses which may refer to tourism (accommodation and hospitality services, tour agencies, retailers, visitor attractions, transportation services, etc.). MOUTINHO (2000) widely analyzes the various aspects of the management of the tourism firms.

On the question of the skill levels, CHOY (1995) observes that the prevalence of hotels, restaurants and bars in tourism may induce to think that tourism industry is relatively low skilled. The great changes which have happened in tourism have made organizations more competitive and customers more demanding. BAUM (1995) argues that skill levels and human resource management can play a strategic role in the challenge to improve the quality of the tourism product and enhance the market position of tourism destinations.

Concerning the “use of IT by tourism firms”, Rimmington & Kozak in 1997 stated that IT could have created first and second class tourism destinations/organizations. BUHALIS & COOPER in 1998 noted that the future competitiveness of tourism industry would have mostly depended on the range of telecommunication technology used. The forecasts have become reality: evidences show that operators and destinations with undeveloped telecommunication system are less suitable to reach potential tourists and to manage customers.

This determinant is also associated with three more variables: “hospitality of residents towards tourists”, “quality of the environment” and “safety”. Hospitality of residents is an important element of the overall travel experience. «The limit of tolerance for tourism may be described as a social carrying capacity because exceeding this limit, will have negative effects on the industry, since an unfriendly atmosphere will reduce destination attractiveness» (MURPHY, 1985:127).

The “quality of the environment” is related to the attractiveness of the destination: tourism and environment are in a very complex relationship (BUTLER, 2000). In a progressively more competitive business situation, the environmental quality of the tourist destinations represents a vital ingredient.

The attribute “safety” is also included in this determinant. During the vacation there is a possible risk of violence against tourists. Security problems are higher in particular destinations which are facing rapid development. Supposed risks and safety concerns were found to be stronger predictors of not choosing regions for vacation (SONMEZ & GRAEFE, 1998).

3.5 Tourism Policy, Planning and Development

There is an extensive literature on tourism planning with various emphases, including GUNN’S concentration on spatial planning (GUNN, 2002), MURPHY’S work on a community approach (MURPHY, 1985), HALL’S emphasis on the various levels of planning (HALL, 2000) and Inskeep’s comprehensive approach (INSKEEP, 1991). «Tourism policy can be defined as a set of regulations, rules, guidelines, directives and development/promotion objectives and strategies that provide a framework within which the collective and individual decisions directly affecting long-term tourism development and daily activities within a destination are taken» (GOELDNER & RITCHIE, 2003: 413).

HALL (2000) states that tourism planning needs a comprehensive and integrated approach, which recognizes that resources, services, facilities and infrastructures are inter-related with one another and with the social, cultural and natural environment. Planning for tourism is rarely exclusively devoted only to tourism and takes place in many forms (e. g. development, infrastructure, land and re-

source use, organization, human resource); structures (e.g. government, quasi-government, and non-governmental organizations); scales (international, transnational, national, regional, local, site) and over different times scale (HALL, 2000). GETZ (1986) reviews 150 models of tourism planning and classifies them into several categories. GETZ (1987) identifies four broad traditions in tourism planning, not mutually exclusive: boosterism, an economic/industry-oriented approach, a physical/spatial approach, and a community oriented approach.

An important objective of tourism planning is to combine the tourism development with the social and economic life of a community (GUNN, 2002). Destination areas need to be planned with sensitivity to social, environmental, and economic impacts in order to minimize user conflicts and environmental stress. Insufficient attention to factors determining economic, social and environmental sustainability, have the potential to lead to undesirable consequences (HALL, 2000). That is the reason why various indicators comprised by this determinant refer to environment protection and minimization of negative social and cultural impacts.

This determinant also refers to variables concerning the public sector commitment to maximizing economic impact of tourism on local community. Any tourism strategy must be able of meeting the economic needs of the residents over the long terms (RITCHIE & CROUCH, 2003). In many authors’ view, economic benefits from tourism should be distributing among the population (among others, MÜLLER, 1994; RITCHIE & CROUCH, 2003; WALL & MATHIESON, 2006). Tourism industry must concentrate the efforts on increasing the utilization of local labour; this also depends on the public sector commitment to tourism and to hospitality education. The emphasis on community empowerment is also essential in order to increase the capacity

and capability of the people working in the tourism industry: «it is an important way of affecting impacts in ways that are benign to destination communities» (WALL & MATHIESON, 2006: 307).

“Collaboration among public sector units”, “cooperation between public and private sector” and “emphasis on community participatory process” are three more indicators comprised by this determinant. WALL & MATHIESON (2006) claim that organizations at all levels should try to coordinate development and planning initiatives. GUNN (2002) points out that an important planning effort would be greater collaboration among public sector units: fragmentation of policy regulations and managerial practices tends to reduce greatly the competitiveness of a tourism destination. There has been increasing attention given to the role that cooperation between the public and private sectors can play in supporting the growth of a tourist destination. According to a UNWTO research, public-private sector cooperation is growing quite rapidly in all parts of the world, in emerging economies as well as in developed countries: more and more participants and special-interest groups are becoming involved in this cooperation, not only those directly involved in tourism. The study shows that cooperation between the public and private sectors is considered critical to enhancing tourism destination competitiveness (UNWTO, 2000). HALL (2000) argues that a destination needs to develop a series of positive inter-organisational relationships in which common goals should be established. Tourism generates changes which have serious consequences for residents in tourism areas. Because tourism affects the entire community, participatory planning is essential (MURPHY, 1985). Since the publication of Murphy’s text on this issue, community-based tourism has become an area of extensive research in recent years.

3.6 Destination Management

The success of tourism relies on a coordinated approach to the planning, development, management and marketing of the destination (RITCHIE & CROUCH, 2003). While tourism policy set a framework within which a competitive destination can be developed on the long term, destination management deals with its various factors in a short time horizon, in order to ensure economic profitability while avoiding degradation of the elements that forms the competitive position of a destination (CROUCH & RITCHIE, 1999). Swarbrooke (1999: 346) claims that «no one type of tourism is inherently more sustainable, or better than any other. Managed well, probably any kind of tourism can be highly sustainable, while managed badly all tourism is, perhaps, unsustainable». Destination management has become a prevailing issue in tourism literature and many academic books were published (among others, LAWS, 1995; RITCHIE & CROUCH, 2003; WEAVER & LAWTON, 2006; BUHALIS & COSTA, 2006; WANG & PIZAM, 2011).

This determinant incorporates various indicators related to the destination marketing. Destination marketing is a fundamental component of destination management. BUHALIS (2000) asserts that destination marketing “facilitates the achievement of tourism policy”. KOZAC & BALOGLU (2010) point out that destination marketing is more challenging than other goods and services. A growing number of academic conferences featuring this theme have emerged; there have also been a number of papers related to destination marketing published in academic journals.

In a highly competitive tourism market, segmentation, positioning and communication strategies are crucial to places aiming at develop or consolidate visitor interest and expenditure. Market segmentation has been defined as the process of dividing a potential

market into different groups, and selecting one or more segments as a target to be reached with a distinct marketing mix (WILKIE, 1986). For what concerns destination positioning, many definitions exist in literature. HEATH and WALL (1992:136) assert that positioning regards the development and the communication of significant differences between the offer of a region compared to competitors' offer which address to the same market segment. AHMED (1991) and GRABLER (1997) also recognize that an accurate positioning strategy for a destination requires a comparison with the competitors. RICHIE & CROUCH (2003: 200) define the destination's position in the market «how a destination is perceived by potential and actual visitors in terms of the experience (and associated benefits) that it provides relative to competing destinations». PIKE & RYAN (2004) list the key constructs to be considered to enhance destination position effectiveness.

Many other variables are included in this determinant. "The effectiveness in crafting tourism experiences" is of rising significance as the visitor ever increasing seeks experiences that overtake the more inactive tourism of the past (POON, 1993). A progressively more important factor of the tourism system is the "traveller guidance and information"; nevertheless, GUNN (2002) notes that many public tourism agencies still confuse information with promotion. The "visitor satisfaction management" is also a fundamental issue. Evidence has shown that visitor satisfaction relates to product development and quality issues that can only be met through both improved training and cooperation between the public sector and the tourism industry (BAUM, 1995).

"Stewardship of the natural environment" and "tourism impacts monitoring" are also considered in this determinant. The management of the natural environment is one of the most important issues facing the world at the

moment. MIHALIC (2000) asserts that a well-managed destination environment is the best destination advertiser. RICHIE & CROUCH (2000) use the word "stewardship" to give special emphasis on caring for the long-term well being of the natural resources. In order to protect the integrity of the attractions of a destination, it is fundamental to monitor tourism impacts. Monitoring tourism impacts implies systematic investigation of the changing effects of tourism (LAWS, 1995).

Tourism is a composite sector, including a network of interconnected stakeholders and organisations, both public and private, working together. Private-public sector configuration through partnership is difficult to achieve but would be highly desirable (GO & GOVERS, 2000). Tourism is a very fragmented and heterogeneous industry with many small businesses. A DMO (destination management organization) serves as a coordinating body for the many organizations involved in tourism. A primary aim of the DMOS is to promote partnerships among the various operators. DMOS, whose jurisdictions may cover a country, state/province, region, or a specific city/town, are a critical component of the tourism industry. DMOS can take various forms, may have low/high level of formalization, can have various juridical status and type of organizations. DMO members may include governmental bodies, business associations, individuals or firms that directly or indirectly support tourism (hotels, restaurants, tour operators). The effectiveness of the DMO can play a critical role, helping local firms to build sustainable competitive advantage and to create competitive advantage for the entire destination (SAINAGHI, 2006).

3.7 Demand

While the centre of the focus of the RICHIE & CROUCH competitiveness model is the supply-side, DWYER & KIM (2003) emphasize that focusing only on the supply-side factors

gives an incomplete picture of destination competitiveness. The nature of demand for the industry's product is regarded to have a significant influence also in the wider competitiveness literature (PORTER, 1990). According to DWYER & KIM (2003), this seems to be similar in the tourism contest. Three indicators - "tourists' interest in local heritage", "tourists' respect for local culture" and "environmental awareness" - are connected with the concept of responsible tourist behaviour. Frequently, tourists forget many social norms that control their social life in their place of origin and «feel relatively free to indulge in a relaxed dress code, loose sexual morals, or heavy drinking, or over eating» (LAWS, 1995: 74). Problems of crime, prostitution, drugs or alcohol may be aggravated by "non responsible" tourism. SHARPLEY (1994: 84) gives a description of the responsible tourist as the person who «seeks quality rather than value, is more adventurous, more flexible, more sensitive to the environment and searches for greater authenticity than the traditional, mass tourist». SWARBROOKE (1999) lists the responsibilities of the tourists: obeying local laws, not offending cultural norms of behaviour, not harming physical environment, minimize the use of scarce resources. Tourist codes of behaviour have also been developed to minimize negative impacts of tourists on the social and physical environment (e.g. MASON & MOWFORTH, 1996).

Demand also involves seasonality. Seasonality is one of the main distinctive features of the tourism phenomenon. Strong seasonality causes difficulties for businesses and for destination managers, as facilities to meet peak demand has to be established, and at other time of the year reduced tourism activity cannot sustain the peak level of business (LAWS, 1995). The special 1999 issue of *Tourism Economics* on this topic made an important contribution to the understanding of the problems related to seasonality; BAUM (1999) summarizes the implications of sea-

sonality in a destination by listing various disadvantages.

The "awareness of a destination" is another important element of the demand factor. The effectiveness of the marketing effort depends on an understanding of potential visitors' interests and attitudes toward the destination. Also the "fit between destination products and visitor preferences" is recognized to have a crucial role in satisfying visitor expectations (DWYER, LIVAIC, MELLOR, 2003). It is one of the main factors affecting the intentions to revisit a tourist destination.

4. The Italian Case

The Italian tourism system can be considered an interesting case study for many reasons. Italy is one of the world's leading tourism destinations, with outstanding resources, historical exhibits and unique characteristics. Italy's natural beauty offer magnificent beaches with 7,458 km of coastlines, 6,701 km of ski runs in the Alps and in the Apennine mountains. Moreover, it has an abundance of high quality cultural and natural heritage. Italy also has the most World Heritage sites (47) than any other country on the planet. In terms of its performance, Italy ranks 5th worldwide by the number of international tourist arrivals (after France, USA, China and Spain) and also 5th by the amount of international tourism receipts (UNWTO, 2012). Adding the number of domestic tourists to foreigners, each year almost 95.5 million people travel around Italy (ISTAT, 2011).

Tourism is one of Italy's most significant economic sectors. While the direct contribution of tourism is 3.3% of GDP in 2011 (51.4 bn euros), the direct and indirect impacts are around 8.6% of GDP (136.1 bn euros) (WTTC, 2012). Italy has the highest share (5.1%) of people employed in the HORECA sector (hotels, restaurants, catering) in Europe after

Spain (EUROSTAT, 2008). Tourism generates 868,500 jobs directly in 2011 (3.8% of total employment), but the total contribution of tourism to employment is estimated at 2,176,000 jobs (10.4% of total employment) (WTTC, 2012).

Nonetheless, Italian tourism faces many problems, including areas of management (specifically marketing and promotion), policy and regulation, infrastructures, quality of accommodation facilities. Italy is the 26th ranked country in the World Economic Forum's Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index (compared to France's 7th, USA 6th and Spain's 4th position) and is ranked 18th in Europe (WEF, 2013).

Although various limitations have been identified by CROUCH (2007) in the reliability and validity of this index, it can give a starting point in order to identify the main problems and weaknesses of the Italian tourism system. These include policy rules and regulations, where Italy ranks 100th out of 140 countries, government prioritization of the tourism industry (79th) and effectiveness of marketing and branding (116th). There is also insufficient focus on developing the sector in an environmentally sustainable way (Italy ranks 119th in the sustainability of tourism industry development). The country continues to suffer from a lack of price competitiveness (134th). In addition, WEF ranks its quality of air transport infrastructure 67th; Italy is ranked 81st in terms of international air transport network and 110th in terms of ground transportation network. The country, compared to some of the main competitors in Europe is lagging behind in terms of recent transport infrastructure development (OECD, 2011). OECD (2011) study on Italian tourism seems to confirm many of the indications emerging from the WEF report.

Italy ranks 2nd worldwide for accommodation capacity after the United States, and 1st among European countries. The general pic-

ture regarding the number of accommodation facilities shows that Italy has 145,358 accommodation facilities and 4.598 million bed spaces (total accommodation). It can count on 33,967 hotels (from five-star luxury to one star) and 2.227 million bed spaces (ISTAT, 2011). The Italian hotel market is the second biggest in the world; nevertheless it appears extremely fragmented and relatively low quality: 32% of the hotels are one or two stars (ISTAT, 2011). The accommodation supply is constituted by 23.4% hotels and 76.6% of other accommodation facilities. However, other accommodation facilities account for 51.6% of total beds, suggesting that they are on average smaller in size than hotels. Chain penetration is minimal in Italy accounting for 6% of the room stock (MINTEL, 2004). The Italian tourism supply is dominated by companies which are family-owned. Italy's company structure in this industry has one of the highest proportion of micro (one to nine employees) and small companies (<50 employees) in the EU: 62.3% under 20 employees, compared to the 54.8% of France, to the 24.7% of Spain, and 20.4% of the UK (OECD, 2010). There are advantages to such an industry structure as market niche advantages, flexibility, personalized services, but on the negative side, small family-owned and managed hotels often suffer from limited marketing skills, lack of planning, gaps in human resource management and difficulties in financing (BUHALIS, 1994; BUHALIS & MAIN, 1998; WEIERMAIR, 2000).

Most of the tourism activity in Italy is generated by the domestic demand which weights, on average, 57% for arrivals during the period 1998-2007 (MASSIDDA & ETZO, 2012). Domestic travel spending generates 67.5% of direct tourism GDP in 2011 (WTTC, 2012). Short domestic trips in Italy represented 46% of total holiday trips (Eurostat, 2010).

Italy can count on thousands of touristic sites, 4,739 museums, 393 archaeological sites,

hundreds of medieval villages and historic churches, which are distributed all over the national territory (FareAmbiente 2011). Nevertheless, tourist arrivals, especially international tourists, are concentrated in big cities, in the coastal areas, or in ski resort destinations. This is also due to the fact that many Italian regions have identified tourism as a major industry for their economic development, but «regional structures for developing and promoting tourism products are often too dispersed and they sometimes lack the capacity to operate effectively on foreign markets. (...) Evidence indicates that there is a lack of clarity and co-ordination on promotion activities between the government, regions, provinces and municipalities» (OECD, 2011: 17).

Due to the problems and weakness described above, combined with the increasing competition of new destinations, Italy lost the top position in the ranking of the most visited countries in the world that it held in 1970. FORMICA & UYSAL in 1996 stated that «the life-cycle analysis reveals one important trend that can lead Italy out of decline, a movement towards a ‘high-qualitative learning’ type of tourism. The tendency toward this type of tourism is demonstrated by the growing interest in green, rural and historically appealing places. Italy’s landscapes and cultural places are in an excellent position to benefit from this trend» (FORMICA & UYSAL, 1996). Many small destinations located on the mainland still have high growth potentials in Italy. Similar considerations can be extended to many small and medium seaside destinations rich in history and culture, where tourism is well developed but highly seasonal.

These above are the main reasons why 610 Italian small and medium destinations of excellence were chosen as case study. Specifically, destinations of excellence that have been awarded with important International and National Certifications were selected:

- Blue Flag, awarded by Foundation for Environmental Education – FEE (117 municipalities in the sample);
- Blue Sail, awarded by Legambiente/ League for the environment (295 municipalities);
- Orange Flag, awarded by Italian Touring Club (181 municipalities);
- The Most Beautiful Villages in Italy, awarded by National Association of Italian Municipalities – ANCI (199 municipalities).

The main aim of these awards is the promotion of the diversity, value and authenticity of Italian destinations of excellence, both coastal (“Blue Flags” and “Blue Sails”) and non coastal (“The Most Beautiful Villages” and “Orange Flags”). They are also aimed at establishing a platform for encouraging tourism excellence in various forms.

“Blue Flag” is an internationally recognized voluntary eco-label run by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) that is awarded to beaches and marinas that satisfy stringent environmental quality standards and management (FEE, 2006); approximately 3850 beaches and marinas in 46 countries were awarded. In Italy, a roughly similar award, namely the “Blue Sail”, was introduced by Legambiente, the main environmental organization in the country.

The awards “The Most Beautiful Villages” and “Orange Flags” are directed to small towns and villages on the mainland not exceeding 15,000 inhabitants. Admission to the Club of “The most beautiful villages in Italy” requires the meeting of a number of prerequisites, both structural, such as the quality of the public and private building heritage, and general, regarding the quality of life in the villages in terms of activities and services

for the people. The “Orange Flag” is an Italian recognized voluntary label that is awarded by Italian Touring Club to municipalities satisfying similar criteria to the above.

5. Research methodology and results

In order to generate the desired empirical data, a survey instrument was created itemising the elements that were supposed to influence destination competitiveness. The data was collected with a web survey. The web survey required respondents to rate their own tourism destination’s performance, on a 5-point Likert scale, on each of the 64 competitiveness indicators, against a reference group of destinations. «It would be meaningless to ask respondents to give absolute ratings for any destination on any given attribute of competitiveness» (Dwyer, Livaic, Mellor, 2003). This is motivated by the fact that a given location is not competitive in a vacuum, but against competing destinations (Kozac & Rimmington, 1999, Enright et. al., 1997; Enright & Newton, 2005; Bahar & Kozac, 2007; Gomezelj & Mihalić, 2008). As a consequence, the web survey began by asking respondents the identification of the main competitive locations (maximum 5).

The questionnaire was pretested on five hotel managers, on five tourism researchers and on five head of tourism public offices. On the basis of the pre-test, some indicators were simplified and/or rewritten. The final draft of the model was screened by a panel of both academics and practitioners.

A total of 1.220 key tourist stakeholders from 610 Italian municipalities were contacted in the period from April to July 2011. For each destination two stakeholders, one from the public sector and one from the private sector, were chosen: the head of the tourism office and the head of the local hotel association (in small tourism destinations, in the absence of

a hotel association, a hotel director was contacted). They were first contacted by phone to explain the objective of the study. A link to the web-survey was sent them after the first contact.

A total of 550 usable surveys were returned from 370 different municipalities. The response rate was very high, 45,1%, in line with the average response rates of similar studies (Baruch & Holtom, 2008). A principal component analysis (PCA) was performed using STATA version 11.0 on the responses to the 64 questionnaire items measuring destination competitiveness. The most common approach is the Kaiser criterion that recommends to retain only components with a latent root or eigenvalue greater than 1. The final structure was based on the Varimax rotation method. Finally, reliability coefficients (Cronbach’s Alpha) were also computed for the items that formed each component. The reliability coefficients exceeded the minimum standard of 0.70 suggested by Nunnally (1978), Kline (1993) and Pallant (2001). Thus, the results indicate that these multiple measures are highly reliable for measuring each construct.

Principal Component Analysis produced 13 components which significantly explain the variation in responses. They explain 69.66% of the total variance, which is reasonable for a dataset of this kind. Dwyer et al. (2004) obtained similar results after applying a PCA to a similar set of indicators. First, it has to be taken into account the heterogeneity of the 64 variables that constitute the model. Second, it has to be considered that the dataset is made up of a mixed group of different destinations: from small villages on the mainland, to well known coastal resort destinations with tens of hotels and thousands of tourist arrivals every year.

The 13 components produced by the PCA are discussed one by one below. The amount of the variance explained by each component is

specified in parentheses. The indicators included in each component can be seen in the column “PCA solution” of the Tab.1.

Component 1: Sustainable Tourism Policy and Destination Management (35.94%). The first component consists of 17 variables, accounting by itself for a high percentage of the total variance. All these variables are included in the 5th and 6th determinants of the model. It includes indicators regarding an integrated and sustainable approach to tourism planning. They refer to the collaboration in the decision-making process of tourism development and to the emphasis on minimizing negative impacts of tourism on natural, cultural and social resources. It also involves some destination management variables related to the stewardship of the natural environment and to the monitoring of the tourism impacts.

Component 2: General Infrastructures (5.06%). The second component comprises 8 items, six of which lend themselves to the infrastructure label (3rd determinant). This component covers the road system and transportation, the communication system and the medical care facilities and sanitation. It is also composed by further attributes related to general infrastructures: “accessibility of destination” and “proximity to other tourist destinations”.

Component 3: Events and Activities (3.56%). The third component contains 4 items: events, leisure activities, nightlife and shopping. They are often the primary motivations to visit a destination. This element can be significantly influenced by the destination management.

Component 4: Responsible Tourist Behaviour (3.56%). The three indicators referring to this component are: “tourists’ interest in local heritage”, “tourists’ respect for local culture” and “environmental awareness”. These three

characteristics are connected with the concept of responsible tourist behaviour.

Component 5: Managerial Competencies of Local Tourism Firms (3.28%). This component is associated with 4 variables comprising the management capabilities and professional skills of the business operators, the use of IT and the presence of local tourism firms.

Component 6: Destination Marketing (2.99%). “Effectiveness of destination positioning”, “market segmentation” and “awareness of the destination” are the three variables comprised by this component.

Component 7: Quality of natural resources (2.73%). “Natural resources” and “environmental quality” are two of the three indicators included in this component; the attribute “safety” is also included. A possible explanation is that this element is probably interpreted as the absence of natural calamities. This is most likely related to the fact that security is not a problem in most of the destinations surveyed.

Component 8: Gastronomy (2.29%). “Gastronomy and typical products” and “food services quality” are two of the three variables incorporated in this component. The third variable, “local supply of goods” highlights the association between authenticity of a tourism destination and local products and producers.

Component 9: Historical and Artistic Features (1.93%). This component is represented by 3 variables: “historical and archaeological sites”, “artistic and architectural features”, “cultural attractors”.

Component 10: Price Competitiveness (1.88%). This component has been named “price competitiveness” and is represented by three variables; two of them regard the value for money of the tourism experience.

Component 11: Visitor Satisfaction Management (1.83%). It is interesting to note that the two variables “visitor satisfaction management” and “level of repeat visitors” make up this component. It seems to confirm that the first element can influence the decision to revisit a destination.

Component 12: Tourist Accommodations (1.69%). This component refers to “quality”, “quantity” and “environmental friendliness” of tourist accommodations.

Component 13: Emphasis on maximising local economic development (1.65%). This component includes three variables regarding the public sector commitment to maximizing economic impact of tourism on local community.

Conclusions

The paper has displayed a model of destination competitiveness and discussed the results of a survey, based on indicators associated with the model. The results of the principal component analysis show a coherent structure of the interrelations among the competitiveness indicators. It seems to confirm the validity of the model.

The results show that 13 components can be extracted from the variables defined above. Their structure is reasonably similar to the 7 determinants of the model. It was not expected that the PCA would precisely reproduce the same aggregation of the assumed model.

As is common in PCA, the first component comprises a large number of variables and is fairly general. However, it strongly encompasses the tourism policy and destination management variables. This denotes that respondents display a distinction between tourism policy/management variables and other measures of destination competitiveness. It

is interesting to notice that respondents do not clearly distinguish between destination management activities and tourism policy issues. They associate in their minds those elements related to sustainability which are affecting tourism policy-making and management processes.

They distinguish them from attributes closely linked to the marketing and to the visitor satisfaction management: these dimensions are included under two separate headings. The “emphasis on maximising local economic development” is regarded as a distinct component from other tourism policy issues. This supports the view that public sector commitment on generating economic benefits for locals is fundamental in order to increase the well-being of the residents. It implies that both the optimal satisfaction of visitor needs and economic wealth of the community have great importance. These determinants are those over which public sector has a high degree of control.

Four components – “quality of natural resources”, “historical and artistic features”, “gastronomy” and “events and activities” – refer to the first determinant of the model: “core resources and key attractors”. Even if some relationship may exist between these elements, this signifies that in the respondents’ minds there is a clear distinction of the types of primary resources. It could imply that not only they need to be separately characterized and promoted, but that different marketing strategies may also be implemented to reach each target consumer group.

The demand factor (7th determinant of the model) is represented by the component “responsible tourist behaviour”. It implies that respondents clearly distinguish demand condition, along with other components, as a crucial determinant of strategic decision making.

The respondents also recognize the key role played by “tourist accommodations” and “general infrastructures”. They correspond to the 2nd and 3rd determinants of the model. “Tourist accommodation” is a primary factor concerning the transferring of the value to the tourists, while general infrastructures provide the foundations upon which a successful tourism industry can be built. This last component is one of the essential prerequisites for a successful tourism destination. It is a supporting resource, along with the “managerial competencies of local tourism firms” and the “price competitiveness” of the destination. They are also seen as distinctive components.

PCA seems to confirm many of the considerations emerged in previous tourism literature. The model developed here can constitute the starting point for additional empirical research.

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