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TOURISM COMPANY AND INTERNATIONAL MARKETS: A METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH FOR COMPANIES IN SOUTHERN ITALY

Peppino De ROSE¹

Abstract

The aim of this study is to demonstrate the desire to communicate with international markets is the prerogative of tourism companies in the South of Italy, who are called to design new solutions and product offerings in a market that is now increasingly globalized, dynamic, multicultural and multilingual. The ability to open up to new business experiences is a necessity in order not to succumb to competition from the Mediterranean area which is often better organized and in line with the new trends in the tourism market. In light of the statistical results of the arrivals and presences of international tourists, unsatisfactory with respect to the potential of many territories, it is logical to rethink the cultural and methodological approach of the companies of the south to better face this challenge. The behavior of the tourism company on international markets should follow a well-defined training itinerary and should be organically structured. If on the one hand the construction of a global tourism product, which includes a series of elements of attraction and accessibility in the destination and in the transit areas, certainly depends on the commitment made by the various public institutions, on the other the tourism company is called to carry out specific research, experimentation and training activities aimed at creating the best business context to start an exchange of know-how with the market

¹ Prof. Dr., Università della Calabria, Italy, peppino.derose@unical.it, ORCID: 0000-0000-0000-0000

in other countries and create the right prerogatives for an effective and successful commercial relationship. These activities concern the creation of a corporate organizational model referring to a specific path, integrated with digital technologies, clearly identifying the people involved, the spaces and times set. The company's approach is to tend to create an operating model capable of creating a coherence in the conception, construction and development of the contents of a global tourism product, harmonizing corporate styles and strategies, as well as developing collaborative and cooperative planning with the local context. Despite the not always optimal context conditions, the tourism company is certainly the organization that has the characteristics, freedom and interest (profit) to contribute concretely to the development of the territories of the South.

Keywords: *International Markets, Tourism Company, Methodological Approach for Companies, Local Development, Management.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Italy is an increasingly sought-after travel destination and lends itself a lot as a destination for international tourism. In countries with tourist resources and attractors, it is certainly the sector on which to focus to face economic crises and promote development. This is an area of great importance for the economic, social and employment consequences. Italy, in 2019, is the fifth most visited in the world with 94 million foreign visitors according to ENIT, with a number of 113.4 million foreign presences in art cities alone and with 216.5 million total presences. According to the Bank of Italy's 2019 estimates, the tourism sector generates just over 5% of national GDP and represents more than 6% of the employed (Banca d'Italia, 2018).

A comforting result thanks to the immense natural, historical, cultural and food and wine heritage available and the value attributed to made-in Italy by international consumers, whose main reference sectors are those mainly linked to the fashion, food and supply sectors, which represent not only the driving force of the Italian economy abroad but also a competitive advantage for tourism in Italy. The originality, beauty and indisputable quality of Italian products, the capacity and history of Italian entrepreneurship, are a great attraction for international consumers and that always make us proud to be Italian (De Rose, 2019).

This positive trend must be taken on board by the main development actors (institutions, associations, businesses, citizens) through a constant commitment to the construction of competitive tourist destinations, in which the role of enterprises is central to offering tourist products in line with the needs of an increasingly globalised and demanding customer. In fact, a tourist destination is not to be understood as a geographical territorial area characterized only by the availability of a tourist attraction, but it is a set of activities and attractive factors that, located in a given area, are able to offer an articulated and integrated tourist offer, that is, they represent a specific and distinctive tourist hospitality system, which enhances local resources and culture.

Despite the international attention to the Mediterranean regions, the tourist offer of the Mezzogiorno is still excessively focused only on the sea product and appears quite disorganic due to the low propensity to translate into competitive offer the enormous wealth of historical and cultural heritage present in urban and naturalistic settlements.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

It is difficult to establish itself on the international market with "integrated products",

whose failure to build depends mainly on the lack of propensity and ability of the institutions to start a control room with a strategic overview and on the other hand by companies for the lack of ability to innovate their services also for lack of knowledge of the international markets available. It is difficult to talk about tourism where the conditions and strategies for networking services are lacking for the full usability of tourist places and attractors, or where the infrastructure to ensure accessibility to places and mobility in full safety is insufficient.

The complexity of tourism as a sector very sensitive to a number of elements, lead to a comparison of its development with a comparative analysis on several dimensions, taking into account on the one hand the market available on an international, national and regional scale and on the other by acting on the factors of competitiveness that affect the territory, the company, the institutions, civil society, enhancing the theme that characterizes the identity of the places.

In general, the great crisis that has affected the world economy since 2008 has also had particularly serious effects in southern Italy. In addition to a major loss of income and employment, it has had a negative impact on the productive capacity of the system and its prospects for future growth. Of course, the situation in southern Italy is complex and needs to be analysed in various macroeconomic aspects. During the four-year period 2015-2018 the recovery was widespread in the Italian regions: all show a cumulative rate of positive growth in the period, although with different trends and intensities.

While in 2018 the regions of the Centre-North continue to grow, although with some slowdown, the degree of heterogeneity of the recovery in the South was very high, and in regions with a growth greater than the Italian average (Abruzzo, Puglia and Sardinia, respectively +1.7%, +1.3% and + 1.2%), Calabria, the only region in Italy that recorded a negative growth rate (-0.3%) was opposed (Svimez, 2019).

The coming years will also be a test case for the many companies that offer tourist services, with technology opening up new markets. Deregulation, especially in air transport, financial services and telecommunications, which have broken down the barriers of competition, has brought new rivals to the markets and with them an excess of operational capacity and increased price-based competition.

Global competition has made the classic business model obsolete. In a scenario of development of the services sector, the competitive environment in the coming years will be

significantly different from that of the past. Competition in some segments has been global for some time. Technology and quality will play a decisive role (Pellicelli, 2010).

3. RESEARCH METHOD

Tourism is now characterized by a new way of travel, enriched by the technological methods of booking and interactive visit of places, but above all by new ways of thinking and approaching places to visit. The modern traveler wants to observe, stop, taste, appropriate history, perfumes, the uses of the populations of the places to explore, listening to nature, with the utmost respect for the environment and traditions. A different approach defined by the acronym "slow tourism", that is, that tourism made by sustainable itineraries to discover the Belpaese in slow mode, to discover the places at a slow pace, as well represented by the new portal of the Mibact.

Among other things, every year the Mibact encourages activities for the promotion of some specific themes. 2016 was the national year of walking, 2017 the national year of the villages and 2018 the year of Italian food, 2019 was the year of slow tourism and 2020 is the year of the tourist train. Every year it is possible for many tourist companies to take advantage of showcases and initiatives to help be known and relaunch them in a sustainable way, provided that they manage to create structured tourist offer proposals, improving the quality of services and accommodation, with innovative travel experiences and rich in positive stimuli. The Mibact, through the web platform, has managed to bring together, for example, 6,600 kilometers and 147 mapped beaches of paths dedicated to saints, such as franciscan, Lauretani and Benedictine paths, to those in the footsteps of brigands through the Aspromonte in Calabria. On the portal it is also possible to retrace 41 paths, each with a different theme and surveyed because they meet a series of standard requirements, from safety to catering services to reachability with transport and geo-referentiality. A path in line with the world trends of the new traveler and that facilitates the search for information and the orientation to buy the holiday. In the coming years international tourism in Italy will grow enormously and already to date some Italian cities are suffering problems of overcrowding. Millions of new travellers around the world will try to reach Italy and the territories must govern this request. This trend will not stop even in the light of international demographic trends that foresee a population increasingly capable of availability of average income and therefore requires quality services and goods, as well as a tending urbanization of people.

4. ANALYSIS

In this context, internationalization for the tourist enterprise in the Mezzogiorno is a necessary process for the survival of the company itself and also of many territories. Opening up to new foreign markets, establishing relationships with other companies (agencies and tour operators) and in general with consumers (tourists) so-called foreigners, in order to sell their products, is a process that does not require improvisation but transversal skills and a strong knowledge of the markets. Understanding who potential customers are, recognizing them and triggering a communicative relationship with them is the winning move that can change the fortunes of the company and a territory.

In the light of the various conditions of the environment, the tourist enterprise in the Mezzogiorno should, as is normal, have a strong motivation for its international opening up, linked precisely to the achievement of revenues and profits and, above all, to the possibility of long-term growth of the company.

One of the critical issues found in the tourism sector is precisely the so-called seasonality, which leads many companies in the Mezzogiorno to suffer the concentration of tourist flows only at certain times of the year and with a low incidence of foreign presences. This is a problem for the tourist destination and for the company itself, also generating uncertainty in the labour market, since the unemployment of workers in low season is a fairly well-known situation in seaside destinations whose lives depend almost exclusively on climatic factors. The choice to open up to international markets is an obligatory choice both to reduce costs since the national or regional market does not generate economies of scale than the risks of operating exclusively with the internal market.

In general, at a global level, there is a growing propensity to travel of the world's population and the various analyses carried out show that the artistic, cultural and landscape heritage of the country plays a role of primary attraction for both non-European and European travelers arriving in Italy for the first time. This heritage also takes on a growing role in completing the travel experiences of tourists returning to Italy for a rural or beach holiday. The great Italian cities of art constitute an important lever of loyalty of the international traveler who, deciding to return to Italy, also visits the smaller centers more frequently. In this sense there seems to be complementarity between the visit to the major cities of art and the tourist development of the smaller cultural centers (Banca d'Italia, 2019).

The internationalization and related adaptation of tourist products to the target markets, therefore represent a clear business choice and should be placed as the main investment strategy of the company in order to have a certain economic return, in the light of international trends, both as a customer, as on average the foreign tourist has a higher spending capacity, remains more days and contributes to lengthening the tourist season. The Mezzogiorno enjoys all year round a temperate climate typical of the Mediterranean that facilitates the visit of places and participation in events of different nature at any time of the year. Too often the company chooses investment policies (real estate renovation, replacement of furnishings and equipment, purchases of other goods, etc.) without any analysis of the needs of customers available on international markets and consequently without any strategic marketing planning and adequate communication for the conquest of new customers from abroad, leaving room for improvisation that does not guarantee at all the remuneration of the capital invested or even a maximization of the profit of the company. The "skills" of the tourist entrepreneur must be oriented towards a systematic and critical study and characterized by an open mind of the marketing manager.

5. DISCUSSION

While the tourism development of a territory must be part of a broader spatial planning process, providing for legislative and government actions to ensure coherence and coherence between the different activities for a positive impact, it is necessary to initiate a process of strategic planning and territorial marketing, defined by the literature as a set of operations , born from the consultation of all the stakeholders present in a given territory, aimed, in the medium-long term, at the promotion and development of both activities present in the territory and opportunities that are triggered thanks to the context and endogenous variables that characterize the territorial environment in question.

The tourism planning activity is linked to the implementation of a bidding strategy, which takes into account precisely the characteristics of the territory, the degree of infrastructure, the socio-economic context, the available resources and the governance capacity of the actors involved.

At national level, the Strategic Tourism Plan (PST) drawn up by the Standing Committee for the Promotion of Tourism has been drawn up, with the coordination of the Directorate General for Tourism of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism.

Pst represents an opportunity to fully operational the national strategic direction and to

provide Italy with a unified vision of tourism and culture, responding to the need to place the tourism sector at the center of the country's development policies (De Rose, 2019).

MiBACT, as part of the national and Community strategic programming 2014-2020 and in line with the indications of the Strategic Tourism Plan 2017-2022, promotes the enhancement of cultural heritage also for the purpose of qualification of the tourist offer. In particular, the aim is to enhance destinations with high potential but not yet fully recognized as "tourist destinations" that can benefit from action aimed at generating a better distribution of visitor flows through the expansion of supply and a tourist experience closer to new trends in demand (Beniculturali, n.d.).

Europe is certainly an area in which it is easier to operate because there is no risk of unfavourable fluctuations in the exchange rates or policies of unfavourable national governments, guaranteeing the single market that people, services, goods and capital can move freely.

Companies that decide to start an internationalisation process need to know that the competitive arena of the market is much wider than the one in which they are used to operating. The competitor of the tourist resort is not primarily the company operating in the same territory, but those companies that offer similar products located in the same latitudes in the Mediterranean, such as Greece, Malta, Spain, Albania, which are better organized thanks probably to a push by governments that have planned and invested better and in line with the demands and expectations of international markets.

6. CONCLUSION

Customer product and innovation, represent the triad of successful carriers for companies that wish to internationalize and win on international markets. Tourist products must be characterized by the quality and style of Italian management, characterized by creativity, aesthetic sensitivity, ability to transmit the cultural and humanistic dimension of places and services.

The survival of enterprises in the Mezzogiorno depends precisely on their degree of evolution from the point of view of processes and design, combining local and global and opening up continuously to network aggregations, which guarantee a continuous exchange of know-how and the strengthening of the tourist destination.

Internationalization cannot be a spot choice, but it must be supported by planning activities to which financial and work resources must be attributed, in the knowledge that this process will certainly have repercussions on all business areas, which is why it becomes necessary to share the culture of internationalization with the entire organization that will orient the reference market with the appropriate international marketing tools.

Examining the various hypotheses formulated by different marketing experts, the starting point is the construction of an information framework to orient itself on the choice of targets of customers and target countries. Companies in the global context are facilitated in developing new capabilities, thanks to web technology and access to a myriad of transnational information, thus building a real information system through internal surveys and actions of the so-called customer intelligence.

Many studies on foreign markets and countries with which it is useful to establish an economic relationship, are also available, among the different national journals or the published guidelines of the Regions on internationalization that already identify the strategic countries with which the tourism and production system in general is useful to compare. The enterprise of the Mezzogiorno is called upon to become a research laboratory with activities that allow to study, understand and intercept the needs, tastes, consumption and purchase of millions of people who tend to be interested in quality tourist products. The cultural, demographic, market and income characteristics of the population are changing according to the country under consideration and here the first dilemma for the company takes over, namely to build a standardized product with characteristics common to potential international consumers or a localized product, adapted to the tastes and preferences of targets of international customers. Each activity carried out for the enterprise generates a cost which the enterprise must take into account and must be proportionate to the ability to produce value. The company generates value for its customers and consequently also lost itself, since customer satisfaction turns into economic value (Porter, 1985). On a global scale it depends not only on how each individual activity of the company operates, but on how all activities will cooperate with each other, as in an orchestra.

In summary, all activities should be coordinated according to 4 main guidelines (Ancarani, 2016):

- Market detection: orienting activities towards the acquisition of the most data and

information useful to the reference market, taking care to create a critical environment in which information is first processed or then included in the decision-making processes;

- Creation of new offers: to promote the research and development of new offers according to the limits of budget and time imposed;

- Acquisition of new customers: promote the definition of new target markets and develop a customer oriented corporate culture;

- Order management: develop a corporate culture oriented to the effectiveness and optimization of production times in compliance with the deadlines and terms guaranteed to the customer.

This approach is shareable and is called a value chain, representing the reference model, together with the network of values represented by partnerships, to which the company refers to develop its business. In this direction, the company bases the creation of the competitive advantage on international markets, planning a medium-long-term strategy capable precisely of offering value to customers. In view of the trends in the tourist market, it is clear that all four basic competitive strategies identified are valid and applicable to the tourism sector (Porter, 1996):

- Cost leadership: the tourist company is committed to reducing costs as much as possible in order to charge competitive prices in relation to the competition;

- "niche" specialization: it is realized in the company's efforts to define a better tourism product for a limited number of segments;

- Differentiated: a different and innovative tourist product line is established with different marketing strategies than the competition;

- Mix of previous strategies: an attempt is being made to outline a tourist product at a competitive price, specialized on some market niches and above all differentiated.

This approach is the basis for supporting a strategy of building a winning tourism product and make the best use of effective marketing techniques and communication tools.

For the company it is a matter of contributing to the support of a strategic planning process, defined by the literature as a set of operations, born from the consultation of all the stakeholders present in a given territory, aimed, in the medium-long term, at the promotion and

development of both activities present in the territory and opportunities that are triggered thanks to the context and endogenous variables that characterize the territorial environment in question.

The alignment for the company with the sector policies also identified by European strategies must be substantial and not so formal, since the massive availability of Community funds available for the regions of the Mezzogiorno certainly helps to support the strategy and action of the company.

Faced with this series of challenges and opportunities, it is not always possible to adapt quickly to the changes taking place and to develop a project for the creation and development of a tourist destination due to the lack of strategic planning, adequate skills together with the inability to intercept important European resources, the main causes of the lack of development of areas suitable for tourism.

To improve the territories and make them attractive, an effort and commitment is needed at all levels, region, local authority, associations, businesses and citizens, supporting and encouraging a participatory and voluntarist policy aimed at ensuring the economic and social survival of the territory and improving the power of tourist attraction to compete internationally. Each with its own tasks and competences better defined if there is a very legally binding agreement.

The ability to attract a territory with the construction of a tourist product is mainly due to the degree of importance that tourists are given in the construction of the tourist offer, in terms of services and experience that it can acquire.

That of the traveler's experience is a concept of vital importance that stimulates the emotional, personal and motivational sphere of the traveler and represents a value connected to the expectations and perceptions of the tourist, to his emotional, intellectual, cultural, physical and spiritual involvement and that the company in its functional complexity can grasp.

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