

A TERRITORIAL INTEGRATION APPROACH FOR THE QUALITY OF THE TOURISM OFFER: THE SLOT MODEL

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Abstract

The tourist market represents an economic sector of great interest at present, because of its exceptional growth and development and its latent potentialities that must still be exploited and valued in a global competition point of view.

Therefore, it becomes necessary to identify a new model of tourist offer, that on one hand provides the appropriate tools for intercepting the variety and variability of demand; on the other hand, it must allow the aggregation process of offer players through shared purposes and actions, in order to develop a successful strategy of valorisation of local resources.

In particular, the present paper propose the model named "Local System of Tourism Offer (SLOT)".

Riassunto

Il mercato turistico rappresenta un settore dell'economia di forte interesse in questi anni, in virtù dell'eccezionale crescita e sviluppo che lo hanno caratterizzato e delle potenzialità latenti da sfruttare e valorizzare in un'ottica di competizione globale. Tuttavia, il settore si presenta estremamente complesso in ragione della particolare natura del prodotto turistico, inteso come un'insieme di servizi, beni, esperienze e valori offerti al consumatore, e in virtù della numerosità e varietà dei soggetti che compongono l'offerta.

Si pone, pertanto, la necessità di individuare un modello di organizzazione dell'offerta che, da una parte, fornisca appropriati strumenti per intercettare la varietà e la variabilità della domanda; dall'altra, consenta di aggregare, in una condivisa finalità di intenti ed azioni, i vari soggetti dell'offerta per una strategia vincente di valorizzazione delle risorse locale.

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Il presente articolo, in particolare, propone il modello denominato "Local System of Tourism Offer (SLOT)".

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to analyze the subsequent factors contributing to the quality of the tourism offer, quality intended as the synthesis of the main aspects of the tourism products directly linked to the territory in which the social, cultural and environment aspects are of concern.

Particularly, we shall analyze the complexity of tourism sector from a demand point of view, passing through the evolution and articulation of the customers' needs and expectations. Similarly, we shall identify the main protagonists who take part in determining the product; public and private subjects, internal and external with respect to the place where the tourism product is used, who - knowingly or unconsciously - take part in determining the quality of the offer.

The analysis of tourist demand and offer sets an important question both on the perception process by consumers and the creation process by suppliers, as regards the tourism quality.

The quality perceived by the consumers is corresponding to the overall satisfaction obtained by the consumption experience that, although it is the result of several circumstances and events, it is "remembered" by the consumer as a unique product. From the offer point of view, however, it is not possible to find a protagonist able to conceive, realize and supply the quality on the market in relation to the global tourism product; in other words, a subject able to manage and control the entire creation process of quality simply does not exist. The various subjects taking part to the creation of the tourism offer are all involved according to their specific competences, but nobody is autonomously able to state a predetermined quality level.

In order that the quality may be defined in an organic and structured manner and so controlled by all who have the power of influencing the offer, it's necessary that they cooperate to be a "system", establishing relationships among themselves and creating interactions. In this way, the system can have an active role in the quality production process and so achieve the goal to fully utilize the potentialities of tourism and to attend to the global competition.

A conscious behaviour of the several participants to the product creation process, that hold the need to control quality in their organizational structure and processes, will necessarily bring on positive results with regards to the overall image of the tourism product offered by the territory. For this end, every operator can use specific tools to provide the quality by supplied goods and services, that are well-known and commonly used in the industrial and service sector. These tools can produce a cost for the organization, but - if correctly implemented - can generate outstanding economic and financial benefits. Although the application of them positively influences the quality of the global tourism product, these tools are not able to affect in a decisive way on the competitiveness of the overall tourism destination, under a global competition point of view.

A single operator does not have all the competences, responsibility and possibilities to completely control all the variables involved in the development of the tourism product: the consequence is that the possible benefits obtainable by using the proper instruments for quality would be reduced compared to the potential benefits that can be obtained in a context where the organization has the full control over the offer factors. In order to enhance the individual efforts of the operators towards the search of a quality product, it is necessary that they are the result of a thorough strategy for the presiding over the territory, with regard to all aspects that are able to determine the quality of a tourism destination. This means that the competitiveness of the global tourism product must originate from a common action determined by the different operators involved in the offer: only through a systemic approach it is possible to plan, manage, realize and improve the quality of a tourism destination.

A systemic organizational model, that is able to perform an efficient and synergic integration of all the operators involved in the offer and so develop the potentialities of a tourism destination, is recognizable in the SLOT model (Local System of Tourism Offer), whose the present paper intends to outline the main characteristics.

The reference context

In the tertiary sector, tourism undoubtedly represents one of the most interesting scenarios of the last few years, not just for the sustained growth trend that characterized it, but also for the strong potentiality of the market for what concerns the capacity to generate revenues, employment

and investments, prefiguring tourism as a driving force of an economic and social model, based on the development of services.

Despite tourism has experienced an exceptional growth in the past twenty years, the market is still far from saturation. The prospect for the sector global trend, assumed by the most influent bodies dealing with tourism matters¹, forecasts a so further development in the next ten years as to justify the attention of more evolved economies and to consider tourism as a strategic leverage for the global competition².

For what concerns the Italian economy, national tourism followed the global market trend. The tendency, however, has not been as sharp as the rest of the world for two main reasons: on the one hand, Italy is one of countries considered to have “mature tourism” (typically the western countries), where tourism is constantly increasing and developing, but whose market share steadily decreases because of the so called “newcomers” countries (typically those of the Pacific-Eastern Asia), capable of attracting an important part of the international tourism flows³.

On the other hand, Italy registered - in the last ten years - a steady loss of competitiveness with respect to its European competitors: looking at the principal benchmarks, it became less appealing, despite the obvious advantage deriving from the available tourist resources. According to the report published by the World Economic Forum (WEF)⁴ in the 2007, Italy is penalized by the tendency of the governing bodies to underestimate the strategic value of tourism. This is confirmed by the low priority it gets when political decisions are being made: on the one hand, Italy doesn't seem to have a strong political support in promoting and developing the local resources and in attracting relevant investments in tourist areas; on the other hand, Italy is lacking in coordination of the many entities (private

¹ According to the UNWTO (United Nations World Tourism Organization), right after the second world war, international tourism amounted to just 25 millions of arrivals; in 2004, it reached 700 millions of arrivals.

² According to the WTTC's (World Travel & Tourism Council) 2006 Report, 10.3% of the world GDP comes from tourism and about 8.2% of the World's workers are employed in the tourism industry; this data is based on the overall contribution of the related economic activities – either directly or indirectly- of the tourism sector (1).

³ See Unioncamere, “L'Italia Competitiva 2007. Imprese e sviluppo economico”, Roma, 2007. Unioncamere, “Impresa turismo”, Roma, 2007. Unioncamere, “Rapporto Unioncamere 2007”, Roma, 2007.

⁴ The report “The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2007”, published by WEF, (2) relegates Italy to the 33rd place of a world ranking based on an index of competitiveness (TTCI - Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index) considering several variables, referable to three main categories: 1) The industry ruling structure; 2) The infrastructures and the economic conditions of the tourism division; 3) Human, natural and cultural resources.

and public) that contribute to the growth and the “controlled” development of the sector, in a directly or indirectly way. As a result, the preservation and the protection of tourism potentialities are not achieved and an important chance for upgrading the tourism offer to an upper quality level (that could define the “Italian product”) is lost.

Nevertheless, the tourism sector could still represent a real source of competitive advantage for Italy. Certainly, the Italian economy doesn’t have supplies of raw materials and energetic resources at its disposal for the global competition; neither it is an “innovating” country with an intensive high-tech industry. However, Italy owns an extraordinary artistic, cultural and natural heritage (which can not be imitated or reproduced) and good tourism infrastructures: they could represent a competitive advantage on which it is possible to build a strategy aiming to achieve a leadership position in the European market⁵.

The complexity of tourism

The strong dynamism of tourism does not just include important development opportunities, but it also consists of risks related to a strong complexity resulting from a continuous evolution of the sector both in qualitative and quantitative terms; in order for tourism to show its full potentialities, this complexity has necessary to be managed.

The expectations of a real growth of national economies are heavily affected by the capability of the countries to recreate the proper conditions so that the potentialities of tourism can fully express themselves through an integrated local offer.

The complexity of tourist market depends mainly on continuous changes of demand, combined with the effect of several factors that took place in the last few years.

The gradual opening and liberalization of markets to the international exchanges of goods and services, achieved by overcoming political, economic and socio-cultural barriers among countries, allowed a greater mobility in space and time of people and organizations. Advances in the organization of travel sector permitted substantial reductions in geographical areas distances, costs and travelling times: more and more tourists

⁵ Italy is the country with the greatest number (43) of sites declared by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) as Human Heritage (3).

decide to travel more than once during the year, choosing shorter and more frequent trips, and using air transports as the principal means of transport, frequently supplied by the so called “low cost companies”.

The increasing per capita income and the consequent reconsideration of the value of free time stimulate notable increases of global tourism demand - and of the supply as a consequence - both from a quantitative and qualitative point of view. Consumer behaviour in tourism progressively evolved in consequence to the development of the information and media technologies, that allowed a reduction of the cost in acquiring the information and an easier accessibility to them. Particularly, the diffusion of ICT and the development of e-commerce contributed to a progressive disintermediation in the tourism market, resulting both in concrete costs decreasing and in a greater consumers’ disposition to the so called “self-organized” or “self-directed” tourism.

The new cultural models, the gradual increase of the average education level, the changing of the social and economic context, the new consuming habits, are all factors that generated a greater complexity of the consumers’ needs. More and more frequently, tourism is not only a means of leisure or entertainment, but it is considered a “whole product” that includes culture, environment and typical local traditions. With the passing of time, a change occurred from a “mass tourism” (typically represented by bathing and mountain tourism) to the so called “niche tourism” (for example, wine and food tourism, rural tourism, “beauty farm – spa” tourism, etc.), in order to satisfy needs increasingly more sophisticated and refined. As it happened in industrial production, tourists showed a growing ability in selecting the offer, a greater awareness of their own needs and expectations, and a consequent demand for more flexible and personalized way of using the tourism product(4). This can assume several configurations: it is the consumer who - by choosing among several alternatives - is able to create his own product, assembling the various elements that will constitute it (the type of locality, the trip, the stay, the leisure and the entertainment) (5).

Quality of tourism offer

A such articulate demand must meet an equally complex offer, determined by several operators. Regarding to the place where the product will be enjoyed, these operators can be internal or external, operating in distinct areas: it means that they could or couldn’t be in direct competition

among each other. Moreover, they present several levels of responsibility and different degrees of involvement in the public policies.

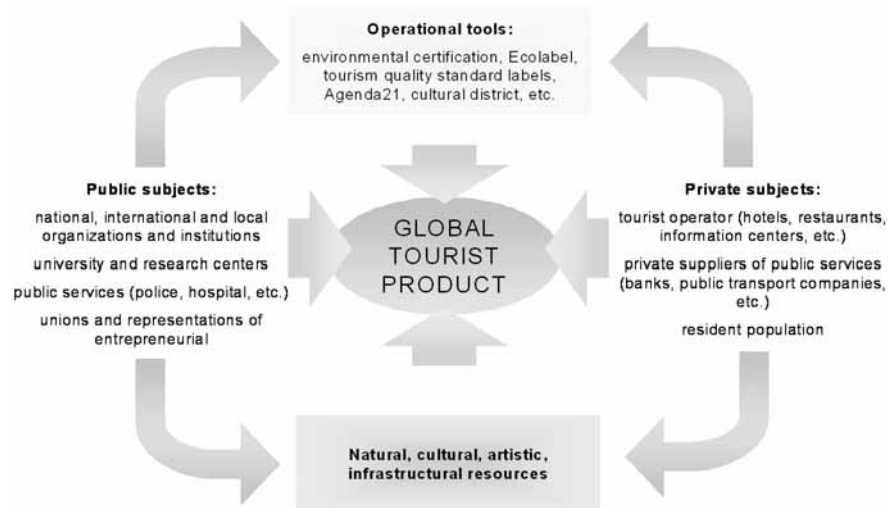


Fig. 1- The creation process of quality in tourist market.

The main players in the tourism market, directly or indirectly contributing to the quality of the offer, operate in different levels of territorial aggregation (international, national, regional and local), with different specific competences.

Starting from the international level, the operators implicated in the creation of the tourism product are:

- the international organizations⁶, which are mainly involved in the initiatives of formation/information, promotion and enhancement of tourist resources and in mediation of the relationships between tourism operators and public organisations;
- the national and international institutions, which have a role in the direction and regulation of the sector;
- the national, regional and local organizations, that are involved in the coordination of the private subjects operating in the sector and in the promotion and realization of projects and activities for the territorial tourist development;

⁶ In international circles, organizations that play a prominent role in the tourism industry are the UNEP (United Nations Environment Program), UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization), ICCROM (International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property), ECPAT (End Children Prostitution Pornography and Trafficking).

- the private and public institutions and associations, such as universities, research centres and other professional bodies, that supply knowledge, guidance and consulting for all the operators in the tourism sector;
- the unions and the representations of the entrepreneurial;
- the private operators, both directly involved in the tourism sector, such as hotels, travel agencies, tour operators, receptive agencies, restaurants, guides, renting companies, information centres, leisure companies (gardens, theatres, sport facilities, entertainment structures, etc.), wellness centre and indirectly involved, such as banks and insurance companies, commercial enterprises, craftsmen, etc;
- the public and private supplier of public services (urban and extra-urban transport, health, waste collection, public spaces maintenance, law and order, etc.);
- the local population and the tourists themselves, which obviously affect the environment.

In order to simplify the analysis, it could be useful to divide the concept of tourism quality in three main logical categories each related to the specific elements constituting the offer:

- the environmental quality, linked to the tourism potentialities expressed by local resources, in terms of natural attractiveness and environment quality where the product is consumed;
- the infrastructural quality, associated to the accommodation and restorative facilities and the public services, which affects the economic and social organization of the tourist destination and, consequently, the resident people's quality of life;
- the cultural quality, resulting from several factors such as local community history and traditions; typical local production; museums, archaeological areas and historical buildings; artistic, literary and musical productions; life styles; hospitality by the population.

With regard to each prospective of analysis, it is possible to identify a kit of several tools (both tools for the business organization, such as the environmental certification and the Ecolabel or the tourism quality standard label, and tools for the territorial organization, like the Agenda 21, the Cultural District, etc.). These instruments are available to the market operators and they are characterized by specific purposes and different scopes of application, according to the nature, the role and the responsibilities of the players involved (6). The joint use of such tools allows a sin-

gle operator to offer the quality of his/her own product, but hardly let to achieve a higher quality standard of the tourist product, conceived as an “evolved” tourist global product.

A systemic approach to rule the complexity in the tourism sector

Several subjects in charge of the tourism quality configuration on one side, and a product that assumes changing configurations on the other side, imply an important consequence: differently to what happens in the industrial sector, where enterprises are able to plan, realize and offer the quality of the product on the market, in the tourism industry none of them is able to autonomously determine it.

The industrial companies and the majority of the service companies are able to establish an excellent quality level with respect to their strategies, goals and resources. Usually, the “quality circle” begin with the analysis of customer needs and expectations and the planning of the business idea. It crosses the whole organization, through the communication and the diffusion of the project to the personnel and the production of the goods and services. Then, it meets the market where the product is valued by satisfying the customer needs and desires. At the end, it goes back to the organization as profit and as information feedback.

In the tourism market, however, none of the operators determining the offer is able to control the “quality circle”, and so the quality creation process, starting from the planning up to the final supply of the product; this happens because none of them is able to control the various factors constituting it.

From the customer’s point of view, the tourism product is an unique experience: it is the combined effect of numerous factors of attractiveness⁶. Tourists evaluate the consumer experience not just in relation to one single aspect of the offer, but as the overall performance of the operators supplying the product/service. Tourist satisfaction, therefore, depends on several overlapping perceptions and not just on one single experience.

From the demand point of view, the customer satisfaction originates from the comparison of expectations (expected quality) and percep-

⁶ According to the authors Rispoli M. and Tamma M. (1995), the global tourism product must be considered as «a specific and well determined set of all appealing factors on which the user directs his/her specific demand through his/her motivations, culture, values, personality, socio-economic conditions and behaviour».

tions (perceived quality). Expectations arise before the product is consumed, when the customer considers the specific characteristics of the product/service he expects to receive, as a result of his needs, values and conditioning of the context. Perceptions, on the other hand, originate from customers' emotions, sensations and impressions, that take place when the product is consumed. So, the customer satisfaction occurs when all expectations are satisfied and it increases in relation to the benefits and the delightment he feels when unexpected and pleasant characteristics are found in the product.

From the offer point of view, quality is planned in relation to the needs - expressed, implicit or latent - identified by the organization by listening and analyzing the customer's voice. Quality is communicated to the personnel to create an unitary vision and shared goals for the customer satisfaction among employees and, finally, it ends with the product and it is transferred to the client through market valorization (7).

Usually, top management uses a set of instruments allowing the organization to match the offered quality with the one really wanted by the market, reaching, in this way, the customer satisfaction. However, being tourism a complex market, a lot of problems arise when we try to select the specific elements contributing to create perceived quality and to identify a subject able to coordinate the quality creation process.

So, the suppliers can develop organizational and productive solutions in order to guarantee the quality of their product, but they are not able to save themselves from the negative effects produced by the "bad quality" coming from other participants determining the "global" tourism product as we defined.

The expansion of the so called "mass tourism" encouraged the development and the diffusion of vertical aggregation models of the offer. Strong subjects conquered the market (usually assemblers or tour operators) to control and manage the tourist product; they, however, have been able to achieve just partially the goal of the offer coordination (1).

More appropriate to quality control, in fact, seem to be the organizational configurations based on a systemic approach. In accordance with it, the players of the offer get together in a networking logic, in order to create a competitive advantage from the integration and the synergies among the several parts composing the system. This approach allows greater benefits connected to shared management of the resources and products, resulting in greater competitiveness based on costs: the exchange of information and the sharing of knowledge and competences, the higher special-

ization in specific activities, the easier access to financing, the greater bargaining clout and market penetration and a superior ability to differentiate the offer (8-9). Therefore, the systemic organization of the offer strengthens the current capacity of survival in a global competition (10).

In the vital systemic approach, the system is considered a set of factors relating to each other, whose common objective is to survive in the market place. As such, a vital system network will be characterized by:

- a centre (the “governing body”) addressing and guiding the system and determining the evolutionary dynamics;
- a set of rules developing relationships/interactions among them;
- the objectives representing the aggregating force and the factor of internal cohesion (11).

In literature, far back in the past a conceptual model defined SLOT (Local System of Tourism Offer) has been theorized as a «set of appealing activities and factors that, situated in a defined space (site, location, area), are able to propose an articulated and integrated tourism offer, and so to represent a specific and distinctive tourism hospitality system, improving local resources and culture» (5).

The Local System of Tourism Offer shows all the typical characteristics of a vital system network.

The SLOT is characterized by a complex of interacting resources, that are the several offer players, public and private, mainly belonging to the same territory, who share common interests, objectives and territorial identity: this is, in fact, the vital condition in order to recreate the sense of belonging to the system.

As such, the SLOT represents a system or, more precisely, an “open system”, whose «structure has been planned in relation to the single components and to the entire complexity in order to allow - through the exchange acts with the external context - the entry of energy, matter and information (input), and the emission of output resulting from the internal processes, in consideration of the achievement of its final goal» (12).

Leaders in the tourism offer become part of a strongly interconnected system by developing relationships and by activating both internal and external interactions. The established relationships can be of horizontal type - if they are referred to connections among the elements of the system and among the external environment and the system itself; the relationships can be of vertical type too, when they develop among the system and the related suprasystems and subsystems (political, economic, cultural

and environmental systems)⁸. In order that the interconnected aggregate to represent a system, it is also necessary that the relationships characterizing it have a certain stability over time (11).

With respect to the industrial sector, in which it is possible to observe several forms of “vital aggregation”, the tourism system has the advantage to have internalized external systems and, particularly, the referring territorial context by adapting itself and the others to the environment (8). The systemic strength, determined by the relationships among the several parts involved, allows to produce a surplus value for the entire aggregate with respect to the value obtained just by adding the single parts. The relationship existing with the territorial context makes stronger the internal cohesion, influencing the overall system competitiveness: it acts as a « selector and decoder of the stimuli coming from the external environment but also as a system gatherer and coder for internal potentialities»(8).

The presence of a network of relationships and interactions is a necessary condition but it is not sufficient in order to have a vital system; it is essential, in fact, that all the operators are orientated towards the same goal.

In other words, the definitions of the mission (who we are), of the vision (where we are heading) and of the subsequent strategies (what we do to realize mission and vision) must be in sync. It is also necessary that the elements of the system are in accordance to define the goals to be reached in the long and short time, allowing the increase of the system competitiveness and warranting the accomplishment of the final goal.

All the players belonging to the network define the directions of the new systemic entity, the perspectives and the planning, realized also through the sharing and, when possible, the joint management of resources, knowledge, competences and information.

The attention, therefore, moves from the single factor to the system, in order to manage dynamism and complexity of the referring context. Collaboration and partnership among the system operators consent to manage the negative and positive impacts produced by the unstable markets and the discontinuity of the processes of evolution affecting the single subjects of the system, in a competitive scenario where expertise, quick

⁸ The vital systematic approach derives directly from the systems theory based on some fundamental theorems: 1. every system belongs to a bigger system; 2. every system includes other systems belonging to it; 3. the value of the system is greater than the sum of the values of the single parts and the difference is the intrinsic synergy, the vital strength of the system.

responses and adaptation to the market have a strategic relevance for survival.

It is possible to evince, therefore, that the organization of the subjects taking part to the tourism network, more frequently can occur through the process of aggregation following a bottom-up direction rather than a top-down one. According to this logic, the system shapes by the spontaneous integration of the local operators having in common a sense of belonging to the territory, shared values, culture and objectives. It is necessary, therefore, that cooperation and involvement in the decision-making process of the system (local empowerment) are realized by means of a “participated planning process”.

A bottom-up aggregation process, based on participation of all the subjects to the decision-making process, does not exclude, however, the coordination among them, realized through the governing body, that supplies and acquires addresses, rules and resources (13).

The governing body does not have necessarily to be a public entity: the network could also develop from the initiative of a private subject, who decides to become a promoter of the system. The idea is that the SLOT must not create a superstructure to the systems that already operate in the tourism, but it has to integrate and improve the existing forms of aggregation.

Moreover, the tourism network, being a vital system, must be able to organize, regulate and reproduce itself, reacting to the stimuli coming from outside: it is possible to take advantage from the turbulence of the external environment, forecasting and anticipating changes instead of suffering the dynamics of the economic, social and cultural context.

How can the system be located?

What are its boundaries?

It is not appropriate to identify them in the administrative boundaries: a geographical correspondence with a defined territorial entity is possible, but not necessary.

Territorial contiguity and homogeneity can facilitate the development of the integration process; so, it is possible that areas with a different administrative government, but characterized by a cultural and natural common tradition, can develop a system.

The filter that should be used to discriminate internal and external elements to the system could be identified by the network of relationships and the strategic partnerships taking place among the participants to the offer process, determining a new planned, managed and finalized entity.

Conclusions

The Local System of Tourism Offer model can represent an excellent instrument to manage and reassemble the tourism offer, usually fragmentary, bringing it back to the same unique dimension used by customers in the perception and evaluation process.

The SLOT is proposed as a model for the territorial governance, that offers several advantages.

The first positive aspect is the higher capacity to properly manage the demand complexity through the integration of the players offer and, at the same time, to take benefit from the cross nature of the sector, in order to get a greater territorial competitiveness. This can be obtained through the “evolved” cooperation among the subjects involved responsible for the tourism offer quality. The government body, that supplies addresses, the coordination and the guidance of the “finalized” system, represents a kind of “facilitator” for the implementation of the relationships among the offer players, the local community and, generally, the territory.

Another important aspect can be found in the opportunity of increasing the value of local tourism resources through a model based on cohesion and territorial identity: they carry an important advantage to the local territory, that consists of a stronger and more competitive image of the tourism product, by which the system is able to face the global market challenges. Through the planning, the program and the system management, it is possible to elaborate a common and shared vision on the evolutionary and innovative dynamics in order to develop the territorial heritage, intended as the synthesis of social, cultural, economic and environmental resources.

In the activity concerned with strategic planning, the offer players also determine policies for quality management that should be considered not just a competitive leverage, but also as a value in which the systemic entity recognizes itself. Cooperation among the parts feeds a quality culture that permeates the single organizations of the system, their processes and activities: the philosophy of the system management realizes itself through the continuous improvement, the process efficiency, the respect of the environment, the attention to the social requests, the customer and personnel satisfaction, the cooperation and the partnership with the main suppliers, the top management responsibility and leadership, the information and knowledge management, etc.

The research of the best practices, suggested by the Total Quality Management principles, is not limited to the initiative of single subjects, but it is the result, as well, of a coordinated and planned action. The choice of the supporting tools for quality management is the result of a structured and coherent approach, that allows to amplify the benefits deriving from its application to the organizations.

The SLOT, finally, perfectly mixes with the concept of social, economic and environmental sustainability of a territory⁹. Tourism can contribute to the development and to the valorisation of the interested areas when its activities are balanced and integrated with the territory, through cautious policies for the planning and the system management, which are respectful of the peculiarity of localities and of their natural equilibrium. The SLOT, through the coordination and cooperation of all the players, allows an easier and more careful analysis of the social, environmental and economic requests, and lets to reach a deeper evaluation of the negative outcomes that the activities connected to the tourism can produce on the referring social-environmental system.

However, despite literature theorized this model and despite the need of a territorial integration has been strongly perceived also by public subjects¹⁰, the SLOT model has been rarely applied, at least on a national scale (15).

Major difficulties linked to the implementation of the model have reference to the several players involved in the integration process, who carry into the network their values, interests and specific objectives not always can converge (fit) with the system final goal. This represents a risk factor when subjects develop individual and opportunistic behaviours that tend to stop the aggregation forces, undermining both the agreement of the purposes in which the system expresses itself and the internal cohesion necessary to its reinforcement (11). The convergence of the objectives can be managed through a government body that guides the network and supplies addresses and rules. The several elements of the system must recognize its authority and role.

⁹ Tourism can be defined sustainable when «tourism activities develop in such a way to remain vital in a particular area for an unlimited time, without modifying the environment (natural, social, and cultural) and without obstructing other economic and social activities development». «Sviluppo sostenibile e competitività del settore turistico», I libri bianchi del Touring Club Italiano, n°13/2005 (15).

¹⁰ A new organization and integration logic of the tourism offer is introduced by the L. 135/2001 instituting Local Tourism Systems (STL), intended as «homogeneous or integrated tourism contexts, including territorial areas even in different Regions, characterized by the integrated offer of cultural heritage, environmental assets and tourist attraction, included agriculture and local typical artisan products, or by the widespread presence of single or associated tourism companies».

The government body must provide the planning of the systemic project, the economic and financial resources necessary to carry out them, the coordination to the forces operating in the system and the supervision of the undertaken actions. A governing body perceived by the operators as a weak and not enough incisive ring of the system, can slow down or halt the decision making processes, harming to the competitive ability of the entire system (16).

The governing body must be able to solve the potential contrasts that can arise internally to the system, but also the potential duties conflict with external subjects, who share the same interests on the development of the territory. In this sense, the decision making body must prove excellent mediation qualities when dealing with external parties.

The SLOT model represents, therefore, an important opportunity in order to manage the territory and the tourism offer, allowing to control the quality creation process; however, it needs substantial managerial abilities as well as a conscious and mature approach to the systemic management, reinforcing the existing relationships and improving the relational heritage of the tourism destination.

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