Tourism Development and the ‘Hidden’ Phenomenon

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Abstract. This paper focus on ‘hidden’ tourism phenomenon, that is the tourist demand that in many destinations eludes the official survey system. Estimation of hidden tourism requires information drawn from tourism demand and supply, using different indicators. The critical points are: the availability and validity of data, the data collection time and the application of the analysis models to different non-homogeneous areas. Economic value of the phenomenon relies on an estimate of consumption.

Keywords: hidden tourism, carrying capacity, tourism consumption, indicators, estimation

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1. Introduction

One of the main topics concerning tourism policy is what regards the connection between local development and tourist economic impacts. By considering that those impacts depend on the tourist demand, studying the demand is the basis of the tourism statistic-economic analysis, in order to identify different market segments and plan action of destination management. Nevertheless, in many cases official data of tourist demand do not allow to identify really the tourist dimension. In fact in calculating the presence of large number of the tourists should be consider a statistical estimations of what should be called ‘hidden’ tourism. Hidden tourism is the tourist demand that in many tourism destinations eludes the official survey system. Although the level of this phenomenon varies from a place to another, it is generally acknowledged that the lack of exhaustive information concerning tourist flows can distort the tourism accounts of a destination and seriously affect its tourism development policy. This paper focus on hidden tourism phenomenon and the need of drawing economic-statistical indicators for its estimations.

2. Market Demand and Tourism Policy

The heterogeneous groups of individuals that make up the tourist demand vary from one to another. The socio-economical position (age, income, nationality/region of origin, occupation, composition of the family nucleus/group) and the other variables relating to foreign travel (duration, motivation, means of transport, typology of lodging, expenditure) are considered the basics for economic statistical analysis for identify all possible tourist market segments. Identification of one the more segments that involves the tourist/consumers demand to a particular territory is strategic for setting up the efficient organisation and management of a tourist destination. Segmentation is a strategic way to approach the market, assuming that the consumers behaviour will help to identify homogeneous groups. In this way all available resources allocated, accomplishing the market’s objectives (Hsieh, et al., 1992).

The end result of such an analysis reveals at clear indication of the competitiveness of the territory, the choice factors that kind adopt for marketing the product, all the necessary
information for quality destination management activities (Della Corte, 1999). An overall study of the tourist market is imperative for setting up in all its different phases’ process covering all structural and organisational elements of a supply and instruction for the correct management of the tourist flows. In other words, a planning project for tourist development of a territory (Scoatariu, 1994).

Should the demand constitute an improve factor of a competitive of a destination other factors must also be taken into account (variable macro-economies, transport, attractions, tourism supply policy, etc.), for possible alternative marketing condition (Dolnicar, Weber, 1999). The market supply promotion and various economic enterprises are an instrumental and valid support to all those persons relating systematically to the territory to increase the tourist potential and competitiveness (stakeholders, large interest holders, policy makers, governments and administrations) (Anclarani, 1999). Good results brought about through strategic marketing activities, including territorial marketing and co-marketing, will become a shared opinion; it is not only an instrument of promotion for the economic growth of a territory but also a means of sustainable and endogenous development.

This approach requires the constant attention of the market and its evolution, an increasing awareness on the part by both the public and private market enterprises for future decision making, such as the WTO Business Council opinion on this matter emphasising the fact that cooperation between the private and public sectors is crucial on an international, national and local level to create tourist competitiveness. Cooperation is most effective in areas leading to the upgrading of the tourist district capacity to attract tourists to the destination, efficient marketing and management of the entire tourist system (WTOBC, 2000). The analysis of the demand is a key element to discover the tourist consumer behaviour towards a specific destination while all information gathered offers support in terms of policy and governance to the local tourism industry. However, it appears evident the difficulty in calculating the presence of large numbers of tourists, the possible solution lies in considering both official data and statistical estimations.

3. Carrying Capacity and Hidden Tourism

Surveying the carrying capacity of a territory from the physical, social and cultural aspect as well as gauging the maximum endurance levels is important for the planning and management of tourist traffic. It is a well known fact that reaching the limit could cause severe damage to the territory and environment and social conflict transforming tourism from an economic activity generating income through direct or indirect consumption of resources into a compromised activity caused by uncontrolled mass tourism damaging the territory. Tourism theory has recognized the key importance of environmental quality for ensuring the competitiveness of most types of tourist destinations (Inskeep, 1991; Mihalic, 2000). The aim of leisure management is to make positive provision for recreation, while protecting and enhancing the resource (Glyptis, 1991). In this sense, most destinations recognize that competitiveness is illusory without sustainability (Ritchie and Crouch, 2000).

It is important to conceptualize carrying capacity, in order to facilitate tourism planning (Saveriades, 2000). The World Tourism Organization defines it as ‘the level of visitors use an area can accommodate’ (Buckley, 1999), while Mathienson and Wall (1982) consider carrying capacity as the maximum number of people who can use a place without an unacceptable alteration in the physical environment and an unacceptable decline in the quality of the recreational experience. However, at a theoretical level, there are many difficulties in defining and measuring it, but almost all definitions incorporate two central aspects: the biophysical component and the behavioural component. The territories resources are the tourist trades main attraction therefore tourist development also depends on an even tourist traffic flow whose quantitative growth should be limited to avoid an excessive exploitation of the territory. This will prejudice the market demand and cause damage to the environment and resources making the territory as an area not worth visiting. If so it is, the growth of the touristic phenomenon
more than representing ‘a passport for the development’, could be understood as really ‘misfortune’ (de Kadt, 1979).

Significant at this point is the of hidden tourism of the territory. The physical presence of other persons besides the residents and registered tourists are also consumer/tourists. They are a good source of information for the decision makers on matters concerning the organisation of activities connected with tourism. The correct meaning of hidden tourism can be identified if one considers the economic characteristics of this particular market.

4. The Demand and Supply Indicators

Estimation of hidden tourism must take into consideration all information concerning both tourist demand and supply. Information deductible from indicators put together for a detailed analysis of the phenomenon.

Considering the kind of information, estimation can be based on direct, indirect and mixed methods. Direct methods make use information usually collected from statistical surveys or from administrative sources. Indirect methods draw on "tracks" left by tourists. Usually, tourists go from a place to another and leave different tracks of their presence in consuming and/or visiting tourist places. Therefore, there is a difference between the tourism official data, that are gathered in the official tourism accommodation facilities, and all the tourist really arrived, that also include both people visiting a tourist site, but usually stay in another place, and non-observed tourists. Then, in case of lack of official data, the tracks above mentioned could be use to identify the tourist presence in an area.

Therefore, an estimation of hidden phenomenon can be made through a calculation of the consumption generated on the territory (Gambassi, 1997). In fact, this type of tourism determines an increase in consumption (electricity, water, refuse matter and cash withdrawal). The result gives an idea of the hidden tourism considered to be the surplus demand as opposed to the officially declared demand and of course the local residents. On the other hand, tourists do not take into account this phenomenon because they have no interest in self manifestation until they perceive and except as satisfactory both the level of prices and the quality of services. Moreover, hidden tourism may stimulate the tourist trade to better qualify the supply but not necessarily making it emerge. It is therefore evident that the economic impact of hidden tourism is relies on the consumption level and subsequently the increase in income, revenues, the use of the territory indicated also by non residents’ indication.

As regards tourist supply, it can be calculated through the number of accommodation and sleeping facilities. In this case, ranting private houses could offer an indication of the territory’s potential hidden tourism, but not always correspond to the tourist demand. Therefore, relying only on an estimate of the hidden tourism by calculating the ‘not official’ accommodation facilities the result would only be an estimate of the potential phenomenon. Consequently, the information gathered in terms of a tourist development policy would give a negative impression and economic inefficient determining excessive tourist services offered by the territory. Then, an estimate of the demand and consumption help calculate the amount of hidden tourism rather than a valuation on the volume of the accommodation supply.

An additional consideration is the use of holiday homes rented out to tourist, the owner being resident elsewhere. In this case, in fact, the income generated will produce benefits in other territories (Bos, 1995). Other elements of hidden tourism (sailing, caravanning, and camping) do not permit accommodation estimates of the territory. An idea of the demand is entrusted to specially setup indicators. Again economic value of the phenomenon relies on an estimate of consumption, such as boat berths and moorings, parking space, food and refuse water, etc.

5. Final remarks

The quantitative determination of hidden tourism phenomenon requires the formalization of a methodological approach suitable for the measurement and estimate of the tourism dimension
that is not identified by the official data. This approach have to be supported by information that consider the different characteristics of tourism supply and demand. The estimate of the phenomenon must resort to information specifying demand and supply, which is deductible from both these two sources.

Theoretically, a large quantity could be used as basic elements for the construction of indicators, however the margin between useful or useless information could be quite wide. If, on the one hand, the use of full scale information premises the construction of direct or indirect indicators aimed at estimating the quota of hidden tourism, on the other hand it is first necessary to verify the authenticity, validity, utility and availability relating to the phenomenon under observation. In this sense, literature shows that serious problems occur in the use of indirect indicators, because of the restrictive hypotheses adopted to which results are highly sensitive. This method seems to give useful indications only when applied to small areas with specific characteristics. Then, the risk is to penalise the end results of the estimate and eventually reduce the correct information regarding the hidden phenomenon in terms of tourist development and territorial opportunity for the planning and setting up of the tourist supply in answer to the requirements of the demand.

References