Chapter 21

Intelligent Tourist Destinations and Their Application to Public Policies: The Spanish Case

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ABSTRACT

The chapter is divided into two differentiated parts. The first includes a brief technical review of the concepts of Territorial Intelligence and Intelligent Tourist Destination, situating them in the context of the new tourist destination planning paradigms. This part ends with a first approach to the Spanish case and the progress of its public tourism policies towards these concepts. The second part goes deeper into the Intelligent Tourist Destination model applied in Spain, driven by the public administration, paying special attention to its official standardisation process, and the indicators adopted to that end. Finally, the chapter ends with some brief conclusions.

INTRODUCTION

Spain is one of the world’s major tourist destinations, featuring the hallmarks of a mature destination within the current tourism industry. It therefore presents high prices compared to newly emerging destinations. Given this situation and the inability to compete by means of low prices, Spanish tourism policies have been seeking new formulas to enhance competitiveness by boosting quality.

With this in mind, Spanish authorities have adopted a strategy of promoting smart tourism destinations. This strategy aims to try new destination management formulas ensuring an emphasis on innovation, technological development and competitiveness without disregarding the respective sustainability and good governance.

The aim of the chapter is to specify and undertake a critical review of the concepts of territorial intelligence and their application to tourism areas such as smart destinations. It also supplies a more applied view, analysing public policies based on the smart destination concept in Spain, one of the countries which has endowed it with more administrative content, with numerous real cases whose results can be assessed and compared. In this regard, the Spanish case stands out owing to the establishment of an official methodology to achieve the smart destination qualification, with systems of measurable indicators that will likewise be appraised in the chapter. Finally, the internationalisation process of this Spanish methodology, which has already been exported to several destinations in Mexico, will be examined.

BACKGROUND

The concept of Territorial Intelligence (TI) is being increasingly used by scientists as the new 21st century progresses. Although TI has been subject to several definitions such as those coined by Dumas (2004) or Bertacchini (2012), possibly the most widely disseminated and accepted is Jean-Jacques Girardot’s definition. A scientific coordinator of the ENTI (European Network for Territorial Intelligence), his definition states that TI is a means for researchers, actors and territorial communities to acquire a better knowledge (of the territory) to better control its development. The appropriation of technologies of information and communication and of information itself is an essential step for the actors to accede to a training process, which will allow them to act in a pertinent and efficient way. TI is particularly useful in helping local actors to plan, define, animate and evaluate the policies and the actions of sustainable territorial development (Girardot, 2000).

One of the basic principles of the new approach is not to consider the territory as an enterprise or a market, but essentially as a cooperation space (Masselot, 2008), where the generation and transmission of information and knowledge take on a key role (Bozzano, 2013). The territory is considered an organisational reality with learning capacity (Devillet & Breuer, 2008). This interrelation between the concepts of territory, society and knowledge can be summed up in the following expression: TI aspires to be the multidisciplinary science the object of which is the sustainable development of territories in the knowledge society and the subject the territorial community (Girardot, 2008).

The TI approach is perceived suitable to deal with the problems of tourist destinations, as its integrating nature (territorial, institutional, social, economic, technological, etc.) corresponds to the holistic approach that tourist destination planning, and management must adopt. This management of the destination cannot be limited to an economic, infrastructural, urbanistic or environmental type sectoral practice, but rather