THE ROLE OF THE REGIONAL TOURIST BOARDS IN THE DESTINATION MARKETING POLICIES. THE CASE OF THE DOLOMITES

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ABSTRACT:

In recent years the scientific community has focused on the study of tourist destinations from a strategic-managerial perspective. Questions remain, however, regarding who can manage the destination as a system and facilitate coordination among local operators. In the light of a research conducted in the Dolomites (an Italian alpine region) this paper seeks to define some possible strategies for destination marketing by Regional Tourist Boards (RTBs) with a view to identifying the characteristics associated with an integrated tourist destination.

Key Words: Regional Tourist Boards; destination marketing policies.
1. INTRODUCTION:

Since the mid-1990s the scientific community has shown interest in the study of tourist destinations from a strategie-managerial perspective, thus spurring growth at an international level in the study of destination management (Keller, 1998; Bieger, 2000; Manente and Cerato, 2000; Pechlaner and Weiermair, 2000). Despite the numerous contributions to the literature on the topic, uniformity among researchers regarding the defining aspects and content of a destination has been sorely missing. From a conceptual perspective the most thorough approach considers the multiplicity of viewpoints when defining a destination and attempts to combine in a systematic vision the geographic boundaries, product offerings, and the prospectives for the demand and offering (Manente and Cerato, 2000; Matzler and Pechlaner, 2000; Pechlaner and Weiermair, 2000; Franch, 2002). An issue yet to be resolved is the identification of possible coordination mechanisms that make it possible to define an integrated tourist offering that is able to satisfy the needs and desires of diverse segments of the demand. The problem translates into the identification of management tools that can facilitate shared decision-making. This choice becomes even more complex when considering tourist destinations that are characterized by the presence of small- and medium-sized tourism enterprises (SMTEs). The search for a possible solution to the management of the destination should, in fact, consider the multiplicity of actors involved in the entire tourist offering, including the single operator (hotelkeeper, restaurant owner, shopkeeper, artisan, farmer, etc.), public tourist organizations, commercial operators, regional institutions and other enterprises operating in the region. The systemic approach to destination management should also consider the users of the destination: tourists as well as the resident population, that is those who are the living expression of the history, values and cultural traditions of the location. From a managerial point of view issues to be resolved have to do with the coordination among single operators within the destination.

The contribution of Rispoli and Tamma (1995) puts forth three different configurations (point-to-point, network, package) through which the offering can be provided: the configurations differ in terms of the system of relationships developed between the offering and the demand. Looking at the generally active role of the user and the often high level of control and regulation of the business environment, it is possible to identify different approaches to management. It is not possible to establish a priori which is the best approach without considering the territorial characteristics, type of business, the system of relationships among actors present and the specific market segments targeted and served. In any case, whenever we depart from the logic of the package holiday and large tour operators it becomes harder to identify an entity that can coordinate the activities of a system of businesses and therefore establish a more integrated tourist offering. In a context of SMTEs, in fact, the tour operator has a minor role in organizing all-inclusive packages and in channelling tourist flows toward specific destinations. In order to go beyond a development phase based on spontaneous entrepreneurship with weaker links among actors, it is necessary to identify an alternative development model. In places where SMTEs and do-it-yourself tourists come together it becomes particularly important to have a person or entity that coordinates the activities of the multiplicity of stakeholders who are directly or indirectly involved in the tourist sector; these coordination activities would be aimed at defining, promoting and selling an integrated tourist offering.