

PERCEPTION OF THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS AS AN INSTRUMENT OF TOURISM POLICY AT A REGIONAL SCALE

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I. INTRODUCTION

An accurate analysis of the tourism policy as a knowledge tool for the public administration bodies is required, aiming to identify the facts and determine the consequences of the actions put in place in those administration bodies. Hence, the tourism policy subscribed in any public administration framework within this study theoretical frame must be identified. Specially in the autonomous region, since this area of action at regional level is the administrative level of intervention that counts with greater power of action and greater consensus with other sectoral policies.. Similarly, tourism policy should not be considered as a chapter whitening the economic policy, due to the limits imposed that would imply when it comes down to its analysis. However, it is important taking economic policy in account. (Velasco, 2011). We can define tourism policy as the set of actions carried out by certain public administration sectors driven by the interest of developing strategies which are translated into actions, and have as a purpose not only to attract tourism, but also looking after tourists' staying. All of that with the consensus of the different tourist parties; that is, private sector, as well as the local society, and always attending to the scope action territorial competences.

From this point of view, each one of the targets selected by the tourism sectoral policy, would imply an operational decision, as well as an instrumental policy. Therefore, tourism policy targets require some sort of tools which are responsible for achieving the carrying out of the action proposals. These tools must be thoroughly planned beforehand, and they should reflect their content, as well as their main and specific targets in everyone of them. Also, it should show quantified human and material resourcess for the carrying out of the required actions, funding sources, strategies and participants in the managerial intervertion. (Bote y Marchena, 1996). On this note, Velasco (2004: 85) establishes another classification where he distinguishes six instrumental cathegories: organization tools, which comprises traditional administration structures, executive structures and cooperation structures.. Secondly, we find

instruments referring to the General Plannings, defined by the autor as “ *The basic instrument which comprises the set of actions which ultimate target is not other than intervening in the whole of the turism sector*”. The Programs contain precise and highly detailed targets equipped with the required resources for them to be met.. Thereby, the General Plannings are configured as strategical planning tools acquiring great importance due to fact that their programs and strategics identify and order the action to be executed by the rest of the turism policy instruments.

Accordingly, the strategic planning, being a concept developped in the business field, has gained an important weight in public managerial processes, due to the need for establishing managerial channels that can take in account competitiveness, surroundings and social needs. Strategic planning pursue a desirable future, and the establishment of real resources to achieve it, specifying processes oriented to the start up of actions under a comprehensive, global and participative project aimed to achieve specific targets that it is structured under specific targets (Gómez, López, Cors, 2004). The strategical planning derive to the strategic plan as a document contemplating over future action taking, which according to Antón y González (2005: 43) “*it is trying to foresee the future so that some of the future events that might happen can be understood*”. The strategy is the resulting action from the global plan, which originates from certain targets that show a successful outcome. Consequently, the action plan must be thoroughly designed, as it was mentioned previously, so that the results obtained can reach the highest competitiveness levels possible. Accordingly, amongst the turism policy instruments, it is crucial analysing the importance of strategic planning for the development of a turism destination at a regional level and also, how it is perceived by the different agents that intervene in it.

II. METHODOLOGY

The framework for this research intends to find out what perception is taken in by public and private agents with regards to the strategic process planning as a tourism policy organism in the Autonomus Community of the Region of Murcia.

For this particular purpose there is a wide range of research methods which provide information about forecasts. They are also adding up information about future scenarios and analysing current or passed matters. In this study a qualitative research technique has been selected. Such technique has been used traditionally in social science, specifically, the Delphi method.

III. METHOD APPLICATION TO THE TOURISM STRATEGIC PLANNING STUDY IN THE REGION OF MURCIA

III.1. Research approach and targets

This research presents the analysis of the definition and relevance of the strategic planning as part of the tourism policy in the Region of Murcia. In this context, Delphi method is applied to the regional planning strategy study, establishing the following targets:

- Acknowledgement of a critic assessment about the tourism policy instruments in the Region of Murcia.

- Efficiency degree assessment in tourism plannings as a tool for the tourism policy in the Region of Murcia.
- Analysing key processes of the tourism plannings in the Region of Murcia.
- Identify fundamental questions of the tourism regional planning, as well as its tracking down indicators.

The choice of the Delphi method for achieving the mentioned targets is based on the high number of experts available with the required data and intuition for the contribution of knowledge in this field. On the other hand, the current development in information technologies allows us to overcome two methodology limitations; that is, time costs and the experts adherence to the study, since it provides a quick and simple information exchange process. (Landeta et al., 2002).

III.2. Expert selection and survey development

The basic criteria for selecting criminal lawyers was based on their professional knowledge and highly qualified experience in the regional turism sector, so that they could contribute with relevant data to the study.

Accordingly, it was intended for the board to be formed by members of the public sector (public admin reps, public experts, etc), as well as the private sector (renowned private entrepreneurs, catering industry representatives, etc) in the Region of Murcia tourism. Consequently, 17 professional experts were chosen and invited to take part. This is the right amount of expert participants according to the nature of the study and Delphi methodological guideline. (Delbeq et al., 1975).

Table 1
PANEL SETTING ACCORDING TO THE EXPERT'S ORIGIN SECTOR

Sector	Post held or former post	Numbers
Public Admin	Tourism Manager Director Tourism public companies Mananger Professionals in Tourism University profesor	6
Organizations and private sector companies.	Hotel Manager directors Private sector representative in associations Prominent entrepreneurs Tourism product Representatives-Coordiators	11

Source: Ginesa Martínez del Vas.

III.2.1. First stage: data collection and analysis

Questionnaires were sent to the experts by email once they had agreed to take part on the study. where the whole process was also explained. A two weeks dead line for their reply was

established (from 1st of March to de 18th March, 2013). Most of them sent their questionnaires back within the given dead line, and just a few of the experts sent their responses shortly after..

After the replies were received, descriptive statistics were obtained which would provide us with numeric values calculated from the sample, and therefore would sum up the data contained in it.

The arithmetic mean was selected as centralizing indicator which shows the observation average; that is, the ratio between all the additions and the final number of them. By doing so, the Typical Deviation was obtained as dispersion indicator that shows greater or lesser data concentration in relation to centralizing averages, which in this case is the average. These descriptive statistics were offered as experts results feedback together with the 2nd stage questionnaire sent.

III.2.2. Second Stage: data collection and analysis

Once this data had been gathered, the questionnaire was reviewed and re-designed, adding to each expert the quantitative analysis obtained for each item. the average, typical deviation and its reply to the first stage, pointing out the possibility of changing his/her reply in relation to the average. The questionnaire given to each one of the experts would not show any change in regards to the questionnaire facilitated in the first stage. Similarly, it was sent by email and two weeks time were given to obtain the final replies. (from 10th to 27th of May, 2013).

The analysis of these replies stability took place as soon as they were received, so that we could assess whether or not to stop the stages process. Since the obtaintion of such stability on the experts replies, the process was finalized and we proceeded to elaborate the results.

Table 2
DELPHI METHOD TECHINCAL DATA SHEET

Study range	Regional experts in tourism and knowledgeable about strategic planning processes of the regional tourism.
Sample size	17 questionnaire in the first stage 17 questionnaire in the second stage
Work date	Starting: 1st of March 2013 Ending: 13th of June 2013
Quantity of items	134

Source. Ginesa Martínez del Vas.

IV. RESULTS CONCLUSION

The applied Delphi's inputs have shown where the strategic planning of the Region of Murcia is placed as a tourism policy tool. Likewise, they have contributed to identify positive and negative factors that are going to define the regional strategic planning applied to the tourism sector. These factors o ítems have been defined under the scientific literature,

which could well be considered as benchmarks for assessment items about tourism strategic planning at a regional level. Such items have enabled us to identify fundamental and vital questions on which the tourism strategy at such level is based on.

Thus, it is clearly shown the importance of strategic planning since it is a required tool for developing tourism at regional levels, due to its integrating and argumental nature, which organize the rest of decisions and instruments in the regional tourism policy.. Amongst other deficiencies in the planning process, we find absences such as clear and straight forward implementation processes, reviews and updates that would guarantee its efficiency in relation to turistic players and the absence of media channels among the agents involved, with the aim of knowing the forthcoming action to be taken.

However, in the Region of Murcia, a real tourism planning is perceived, since there isn't a relationship between carried out policies and what it has been exhibited in the planning. Therefore, we cannot help but to wonder whether the public administration (due to its competences partitioning, its limited nature in regards to coordination establishing and changes in organization structures) should get organized around a regional scope coordinating organism with a more stable inner-administrative skill.

This new place must support to positioning and take down barriers that unable the tourism policy to be regarded as a major policy for society and its territory.

Although they present a fixed structure, tourism policy instruments differ in nature: organization, regulation, financial and other varieties oriented to the development of specific programs. Strategic planning organize and integrate each one of these structures, and due to its setting process provides with veracity and transparency to public tourism management. Nonetheless, only if the strategic planning at regional level is re-positioned in this organizing context will it have the possibility to participate actively in territorial and urban planning when in touristic territories.

Prior to this new positioning, it is required to establish a review of its setting process, emphasising the stage where the assessment process is defined. In this way, we must refer to a new planning model based on the diversity of documents and the new paradigm for a new management settled in the information, innovation, involvement and territorial integration.

The Region of Murcia must review its tourism policies, consider what tourism model wants to based its growth on, adjust its tourism brand and make a comprehensive review of territorial opportunities

The public administration must set up strategies that provide answers actively to the concerns raised by the business network, which has to be at the same participating environment. It is essential to share responsibilities and commitments, and also it is vital an intelligible management of the resources. To that effect a strategic planning framework must be established at a regional level with key factors, adequately consensused, that provides new opportunities, generating a real tourism territory context in the near future for the Region of Murcia.

