

The Strategic Plan for Tourism Development in Italy

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ABSTRACT

Conceptual works on tourism destination competitiveness affirm the central importance of planning the process of value creation within destination. Italy is an emblematic case of why and how a leading tourism destination may lose competitiveness along the years. Up to the 1980s Italy was in fact the top international tourism destination, but then such ranking gradually decreased, because of more complexity of sector and, over all, because of marginality of tourism in the government agenda and more in general of the country. After years of strategic myopia, Italy finally has a tool that formalizes its vision and indicates the key factors that can be leveraged in order to regain ground. In 2013, Italy adopted a National Strategic Plan. Therefore, this paper aims to describe an important turning point in tourism policies for the economic and cultural development of Italy. The research highlights the problematic areas of Italy's tourism industry and explains how a new approach should make the Italian destination able to successfully compete on the international tourism market.

KEYWORDS: *international tourism competitiveness, Italian destination, Strategic Plan*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: *M16, M38, O21, L83*

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the research is to illustrate and to discuss the recent “Strategic Plan for the development of tourism in Italy” (Presidency of the Council of Ministers & Department for Regional Affairs, Tourism and Sport, 2013).

Italy as an emblematic case of why and how a leading tourism destination may lose competitiveness along the years, even if Italy still retains a prominent role in international tourism.

In the collective imagination Italy is still considered the most valuable collection of luxury and cultural heritage among the world (FutureBrand, 2012, p. 24).

Even if Italy represents for many reasons the most desired destination, often the final choice of international travellers rewards other destinations, seen overall as more affordable or more “easy”.

As argued by destination competitiveness theories, the presence of historical and artistic attractions is a necessary but not sufficient condition to create unique experiences (Morgan et al., 2002).

In the absence of destination strategy that defines the desired positioning (in relation to the wealth of attractions, the resources available, the desired target of customers and the

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interests of community), the supply tends to focus on a few things already known to the general public, with negative effects on accessibility and quality of the experience of visiting (Lamb, 1988).

Traditionally Italy has known a general, fragmented and myopic approach to destination, with insufficient coordination between public and private sector stakeholders and even less coordination between central and local government (Angeloni, 2012, p. 113).

The novelty is that finally, in 2013, Italy adopted a National Strategic Plan.

Therefore, this article has the potential to offer a first comprehensive assessment of the Italian Strategic Plan that would influence the destination's capability to attract and satisfy its tourism customers.

The originality of the paper is twofold: first, it is since the beginning of the 1980s that Italy had not drawn up a strategic Plan for tourism; second, because of its recent nature, until now no other scholar has analyzed the Italian Strategic Plan at international level.

After some references to literature, the research proposes a reflection on main weaknesses of Italian tourism development and proceeds with the illustration of the Italian Strategic Plan. After a brief description of the Spanish Tourism Plan, used as benchmark, the following discussion explores advantages and limitations of the pilot instrument, and issues for further research are illustrated.

The study should thus contribute to specific research on tourism destination competitiveness.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to a generally accepted definition, the international tourism competitiveness is the degree to which a nation can produce goods and services that meet the test of international markets while simultaneously maintaining or expanding the real incomes of its citizens (Enright & Newton, 2005; Waheeduzzman & Ryans, 1996).

Hassan (2000, p. 239) defined "competitiveness" as "the destination's ability to create and integrate value-added products that sustain its resources while maintaining market position relative to competitors".

Heath (2002) asserts that "the key success drivers" in a destination's competitiveness mainly rotate around the establishment of a shared vision and inspirational leadership, clear guiding values and principles, and strategic emphasis on the "people" factor (e.g., political will, entrepreneurship, community empowerment and human resources development).

To ensure that tourism generates success and benefits, the destination must be planned, organized, led and controlled (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003, p. 166). Tourism management deals with these aspects, since planning, organizing, leading and controlling are the basic function of management (Page, 2011, p. 23).

The need for a strategic planning has been well stressed by the literature (Faulkner, 2003; Fletcher & Cooper, 1996; Hanlan et al., 2006; Lickorish, 1991).

“A strategic or policy-driven framework for the planning and development of the destination with particular economic, social and other societal goals as the intended outcome can provide a guiding hand to the direction, form and structure of tourism development” (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003, p. 71).

A tourism strategic planning is fundamental for product positioning, image creation and demand management (Gilbert, 1990). However, tourism is a complex product created as the composite of a number of key inputs. The final product has to be planned taking into consideration the peculiar characteristics of a number of factors, by involving both public and private organisations in providing the services which are required to market and sustain tourism demand.

Many countries, as Spain, France, Britain, Portugal, Switzerland, have had in the past and/or currently have National Strategic Plans of tourism (OECD, 2012).

In this paper the Spanish Strategic Plan will be briefly described in order to have a basis for comparison with the Italian Strategic Plan.

2. MAIN WEAKNESSES OF ITALIAN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Italian destination shows many critical points due to an insufficient organization of the offer. The problematic areas of Italy’s tourism industry concern the following aspects: sector governance issues, extremely fragmented promotional activity abroad, small size of operating companies, limits in being able to offer competitive tourism products, insufficient infrastructures, inadequate personnel training for the global market, difficulty in attracting international investments, developmental disparities between the North and the South, myopia of politicians, who have never considered tourism as an investment for the development of the country.

The political disregard of tourism potential is evident in the present reorganization of government structure. After the recent change accomplished in 2012, the national tourism government is founded on the following institutions: the Prime Minister, supported by the Minister of Regional Affairs, Tourism and Sport; the Department of Regional Affairs, Tourism and Sport; ENIT-National Tourism Agency, responsible for the promotion of Italian abroad; the Permanent Tourism Coordination Committee, through which the 20 Italian regions can contribute to the formulation of national strategies.

The hybrid Department, which deals with three issues very different from each other (that is regional affairs, tourism and sport), is organized into six offices, the last of which is responsible of tourism policy. As a result, the National Tourism Administration is not based on a specific ministry or a specific department, but is relegated to a simple office.

Moreover, the tripartite Minister is without portfolio, with few levers and economic resources necessary to guide in an effective manner the development of tourism.

This lack of attention is a serious mistake, because tourism is a sector, perhaps the only one, where Italy can have a strong and durable competitive advantage in the years to come.

According to estimates of the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), in 2011, the total contribution of Travel & Tourism to Italian GDP, if all effects (direct, indirect and induced) are included, was € 136.1 billion (8.6% of GDP) in 2011. Again according to estimates of

WTTC, in 2011, Travel & Tourism totally supported 2,231,500 jobs (9.7% of total employment).

Although tourism still plays an important role in the Italian GDP, the figures show that Italy is losing competitiveness and falling behind France and Spain. A comparison between an important Italian Island as Sicily and the Balearic Islands highlights the distance between Italy and Spain. A parity of miles of coastline (1,500 the first, 1,430 the second), the Balearics generate a number of European night stays eleven times higher than Sicily (in 2010 the Spanish islands reached 41.2 million European tourists nights stays, while Sicily only 3.7 million). This big quantitative disparity is unacceptable in the light of the historic, artistic, cultural and gastronomic heritage of Sicily compared with the Spanish Islands.

In 2011, over a billion of persons travelled abroad for tourism. In the last decade, one of the economic fields that have seen the greatest growth rates worldwide has been the tourism sector. In the past ten years, spending on foreign travel has doubled and is expected to increase a further 50% within the next ten years.

Tourism could be the engine for Italian economic growth if the country addresses the necessary efforts to bring to the surface his hidden potential. Tourism offers valuable opportunities for adding value to Italian historic and artistic heritage, both in terms of communicating the identities of our territories and of attracting new resources for their conservation and enhancement.

3. STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN ITALY

In reply to the criticality of the sector, on January 18th 2013, a Strategic Plan for the development of tourism was drawn up in Italy. Therefore, after five years of announcements, for the very first time government has been equipped with an official document, with a view to coping Italy's loss of competitiveness in the tourist industry and to reconquering market leadership.

The Strategic Plan, titled "Italian Tourism 2020: Leadership, Jobs, South", has mainly three objectives: to give back the leadership to Italy in the tourism sector, to create new jobs, and to offer an unrepeatable opportunity to Southern Italy to latch onto the growth of the nation.

The Strategic Plan is a precise and accurate analysis of weaknesses and strengths in the tourist sector and indicates precise steps for the government's agenda, putting forward a strategy that can be implemented in a period of 3 to 5 years. The Plan would be adjourned every two years and a continuous monitoring of the progress of the actions should be carried out at least every six months.

Particularly, the Plan, prepared by Boston Consulting Group, is divided into three sections: industry analysis, development strategies, and actions for the short term.

According to conservative estimates, the implementation of the Plan should generate 500,000 new jobs and an increase of € 30 billion in the GDP by 2020.

More precisely, the Plan implementation will allow Italian destination to regain market shares, taking the tourism contribution to GDP (including indirect, indirect and induced contribution) from € 134 billion in 2010 to € 164 billion in 2020 (+22%), with an increment of jobs from 2.2 billion in 2010 to 2.7 billion in 2020 (+22%). The impact on the GDP has

been estimated equals to a 2% annual about. The impact in term of jobs has been calculated using an increment of approximately 16,000 jobs per every € one billion of created GDP.

Based on a holistic approach, the Plan contains an analysis of the main sector issues and lists 61 “concrete actions”, some of which are cross and others more specific. The actions were grouped into 7 very precise guidelines.

First of all, the Plan identifies *nine* areas characterized by critical issues: *governance, communication and promotion, sales channels, product range, hospitality, transportation and infrastructure, training and skills, investments, regulatory framework*.

At the level of *governance* the main issues relate the lack of strong central governance and the fragmentation of the decision-making between central government and regional/provincial/municipal authorities. It is opportune remember that in Italy, after the constitutional amendment of 2001, regions have obtained an exclusive legislative power in tourism matter. The lack of structured mechanisms of co-ordination causes duplications, conflicts and waste of resources. The same fragmentation may be found with regard to the statistical sources: in Italy there are many organizations that provide figures and information on tourism, but there is not one organization responsible and obliged to provide and process global data.

Consequently, Italian destination does not enjoy of *coordinated communication and promotion* at the level of “Sistema Italia”.

Weaknesses of the *sales channels* concern the insufficient use of digital supports and the lack of structured accords at national level with international and outbound tour operators.

The main issues of *product offer* regard the scarce segmentation of market, the absence of innovation, the undervaluation of cultural heritage, the lack of “APP” services for smartphone/tablet aimed at foreign tourists.

With regard to *accommodation*, the main limits are represented by high proportion of obsolete structures, by small sizes average of hotels, by low reliability of classification systems due to the discrepancies of criteria between the regional rating systems. The small size of Italian hotels is evident by analyzing some data of Spain and France (direct competitors of Italy). Spain and France have respectively 15,000 and 17,000 hotels, against almost 34,000 Italian hotels. The average capacity of an Italian hotel is 66 beds, compared with 94 for a Spanish one and 71 for a French one. But the most troubling aspect concerns the difference in term of average number nights per bed, interpretable as index of productivity per bed. The average number of nights per bed equals to 109 in Italy, versus 190 in France.

With regard to *transport and infrastructure* Italy lags behind in terms of new transport infrastructures and intermodality (integration of various means of transport). Some interesting areas remain unappreciated because devoid of infrastructures and carriers.

Another general problem is inherent in tourism *training and skills*. The education offer in tourism management is qualitatively and quantitatively inadequate to the needs of the sector. As a result, the modest professionalism prevents the high quality of tourist services.

A serious criticality affects also tourism *investments*. High levels of bureaucracy and tax evasion keep away foreign investments.

Finally, many disadvantages are related to *regulatory framework*, too complex to promote the creation and the efficiency of enterprises.

After the investigation of the main issues, the Plan proposes *61 actions*, articulated on the basis of priorities with regards to two relevant dimensions: economic impact and speed of execution.

The economic impact is defined on the basis of economic relevance (consumption, investments, etc.), job creation and return on image for Italy.

The speed of execution is defined instead on the basis of the number of stakeholders involved, available expertise, and level of complexity and completion time (from a few months to a few years). The Plan provides for every action the time of implementation in number of months (3, 6, 9, 12, 18, 24, 36, beyond), also taking into consideration the following distinction:

- actions that can be directly implemented by the Department of Regional Affairs, Tourism and Sport or by the Board of ENIT-National Tourism Agency;
- actions that also require the involvement of other institutions.

In this way it is possible to identify *four* categories of actions, which are the result of merging the two dimensions, as shown in Figure 1. Each quadrant has a fixed number of actions, with a particular economic impact and expected speed of execution, according to the following scheme:

1. the right upper quadrant includes 29 actions, characterized by high economic impact and high speed of execution;
2. the left upper quadrant includes 20 actions, characterized by high economic impact and medium-low speed of execution;
3. the right lower quadrant includes 9 actions, characterized by a medium-low economic impact and high speed of execution;
4. the left lower quadrant includes 3 actions, characterized by a medium-low economic impact and medium-low speed of execution.

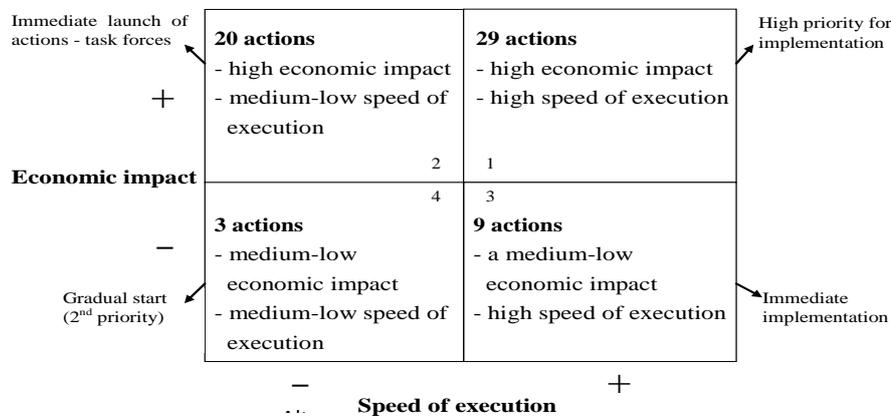


Figure 1. Methodology for setting the priority of the actions

Source: adapted from Presidency of the Council of Ministers & Department for Regional Affairs Tourism and Sport (2013)

The actions are also grouped into *seven guidelines*. The Strategic Plan distinguishes the following *guidelines*:

- I. *improvement of governance*, by strengthening of the support and central coordination in the tourism industry (6 actions);
- II. *relaunching of ENIT-National Tourism Agency*, by redesigning of its mission and organization and providing it with an adequate availability of human and financial resources, in line with the best international tourist agencies (18 actions);
- III. *organization of a modern offer*, by its alignment to needs of tourists (11 actions);
- IV. *modernization of accommodation facilities*, by encouraging the upgrading and the aggregation of hospitality structures (5 actions);
- V. *update of transport and infrastructures*, by achieving an evolution consistent with the needs of tourism (6 actions);
- VI. *development of knowledge*, aimed to increase training and skills and the job appeal in tourism sector (4 actions);
- VII. *interventions for international investment attraction*, through specific incentives and abolition of bureaucracy (11 actions).

The complete list of 61 actions, grouped on the basis of the 7 guidelines and 4 quadrants which they belong, is shown by Table 1.

Table 1. The 61 actions defined by Italian Strategic Plan

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| <p>I. IMPROVEMENT OF GOVERNANCE (2 actions)</p> <p>4. Start of the process of revision of Title V of the Constitution in order to reassign to the State the role of driving force in the industry.</p> <p>5. Allocation of a budget to the Minister of Tourism and establishment of a Ministry of Tourism.</p> <p>II. RELAUNCHING OF ENIT-NATIONAL TOURISM AGENCY (1 action)</p> <p>17. Allocation of a part of the regional funds to the ENIT-National Tourism Agency for the promotion of tourism, using them for promotional marketing.</p> <p>III. ORGANIZATION OF A MODERN OFFER (6 actions)</p> <p>29. Relaunch of international tourism offer, through the positioning of the 30-40 priority products to promote and through activities with Regional and Local Authorities about gaps to be filled.</p> <p>30. Focus on affluent Europeans and BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) to increase the value of the average expenditure per tourist.</p> <p>31. Establishment of 1-2 new important tourist destination hubs in the South funded through project bonds and European funds.</p> <p>32. Introduction of regulation benefits to support the implementation of the new important destination hubs.</p> <p>33. Development of MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions) tourism.</p> <p>34. Valorisation of cultural sites with high tourism impact through public-private partnerships.</p> | <p>I. IMPROVEMENT OF GOVERNANCE (3 actions)</p> <p>1. Revamping of the Permanent Committee for Tourism with Government, Regions and Autonomous Provinces.</p> <p>2. Establishment of workgroups with Regions and trade associations for the implementation of the Strategic Plan.</p> <p>3. Establishment of a task force for the implementation of the Strategic Plan reporting directly to the Minister of Tourism.</p> <p>II. RELAUNCHING OF ENIT-NATIONAL TOURISM AGENCY (10 actions)</p> <p>7. Transformation and reorganization of ENIT-National Tourism Agency, providing it resources and specific skills.</p> <p>8. Improvement of ENIT-National Tourism Agency in efficiency also with involvement of external subjects.</p> <p>9. Creation of a “Factory of Products” with the task of creating, selecting and promoting priority tourism products (including multi-regional).</p> <p>10. Launch/revamping of Italy Brand.</p> <p>11. Communication and promotion of tourism in the country even including Italian tourists.</p> <p>12. Establishment within the ENIT-National Tourism Agency of a laboratory of e-tourism for the definition and implementation of the digital strategy for tourism.</p> <p>13. Communication of EXPO 2015 for national promotion.</p> <p>14. Strengthening and promotion of the Italian calendar of events (focus on priority destination hubs).</p> |
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| <p>IV. MODERNIZATION OF ACCOMMODATION FACILITIES (4 actions)</p> <p>36. Push and facilitations for aggregation and consolidation of tourist facilities, and for the creation of business networks.</p> <p>37. Introduction of tax credits and benefits for tourism enterprises that comply with the standards of hospitality, especially if they pass to a higher category.</p> <p>38. Support to the modernization of the hospitality industry by allowing the possibility of “scrapping” the facilities.</p> <p>39. Possibility of allocating the facilities no longer competitive for other purposes.</p> <p>V. UPDATE OF TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURES (2 actions)</p> <p>44. Strengthening of selected airport infrastructure with high tourism potential.</p> <p>45. Improvement of the connection and of the intermodal transport between main tourist locations (focus on the 4 top cities and other main locations).</p> <p>VI. DEVELOPMENT OF KNOWLEDGE (3 actions)</p> <p>47. Relaunch of the tourism sector’s perception among the youth to attract the most successful (increase of appeal of professions within the tourism industry on the job market).</p> <p>48. Implementation of permanent training programs for those already working in tourism, either teachers or operators.</p> <p>49. Drive and support for “Program of excellence of the national tourist training development”.</p> <p>VII. INTERVENTIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL INVESTMENT ATTRACTION (2 actions)</p> <p>60. Implementation of an office and a site for the promotion of tourism investments for international investors (coordinating with the plans of Ministry of Economic Development and of Agency for Foreign Trade).</p> <p>61. Reuse and conversion of government industrial sites (located in areas of high tourism potential) for tourism purposes.</p> | <p>15. Development of agreements with tour operators and international air carriers.</p> <p>16. Rise in public awareness of industry tourism and relaunch of image through Italian media.</p> <p>III. ORGANIZATION OF A MODERN OFFER (4 actions)</p> <p>25. Identification of 30-40 priority destination hubs for international tourism.</p> <p>26. Initiatives aimed at improving the distribution and quality of tourist flows in the top 4 cities (Rome, Venice, Florence and Milan) and at contributing to their seasonal adjustment and sustainable tourism.</p> <p>27. Strengthening of shopping itineraries (focus on top 4 cities and surrounding areas).</p> <p>28. Opening of a work-table with a focus on sea, beaches and the relaunch of concessions.</p> <p>V. UPDATE OF TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURES (3 actions)</p> <p>41. Unblocking of the plan to expand Fiumicino airport.</p> <p>42. Increase in direct flights from BRIC.</p> <p>43. Development of selected agreements to increase low cost European flights.</p> <p>VII. INTERVENTIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL INVESTMENT ATTRACTION (9 actions)</p> <p>51. Stimulus of large Italian and foreign tourism investments (higher than € 250 million), also using European funds and differentiated tax treatment.</p> <p>52. Creation of a “Tourism” section within the new community programming for the 2014–2020 structural funds.</p> <p>53. Support in the creation of tourism networks.</p> <p>54. Abolition of bureaucracy for new businesses in the tourism industry, enhancing predictions from the Ministry of Economic Development plans.</p> <p>55. Transfer of part of the exceeding VAT compared to the main competitors (such as France) to the tourism industry.</p> <p>56. Retrieve of a part of the margin, today left to the specialised operators, allocating it to a fund for the actions of the Strategic Plan.</p> <p>57. Reuse of the proceeds coming from the increase of visas granted for tourism and speeding up of procedures to obtain tourist visas for primary countries.</p> <p>58. Harmonizing of the Municipal Tourist Tax, converting it into a “purpose tax” and allocating a part of the income to the development of tourism.</p> <p>59. Earmarking of the resources derived from the actions of the Plan (goods and services tax, tax refund, visas, etc.) to a new fund for tourism.</p> |
| <p>II. RELAUNCHING OF ENIT-NATIONAL TOURISM AGENCY (2 actions)</p> <p>23. Integration of e-commerce portal of Italia.it and its use for promotional marketing in collaboration with the Regions.</p> <p>24. Support for the creation of a large Italian incoming operator/incoming network of companies.</p> | <p>I. IMPROVEMENT OF GOVERNANCE (1 action)</p> <p>6. Creation of tourism database unified under Ministry/ENIT-National Tourism Agency.</p> <p>II. RELAUNCHING OF ENIT-NATIONAL TOURISM AGENCY (5 actions)</p> <p>18. Incentives and implementation of agreements for the production of foreign films in Italian tourist location (focus on BRIC).</p> |

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| <p>V. UPDATE OF TRANSPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURES (1 action)</p> <p>46. Segmentation and quality control for taxi services (for example, introduction of classification on the basis of the vehicle size with consequent differentiating fares, support training programs to learn the English language).</p> | <p>19. Improvement of crisis management that have an impact on tourism through a dedicated Public Relations facility.</p> <p>20. Partnerships analysis with leading web operators (focus on BRIC and affluent).</p> <p>21. Development of “APP” for smartphones and tablets aim.</p> <p>22. Involvement of the Italian Radio Television for the purpose of tourism promotion abroad.</p> <p>III. ORGANIZATION OF A MODERN OFFER (1 action)</p> <p>35. Establishment of a program to raise awareness for environment and decorum.</p> <p>IV. MODERNIZATION OF ACCOMMODATION FACILITIES (1 action)</p> <p>40. Adoption in all regions of the European standard classification system for the hospitality industry.</p> <p>VI. DEVELOPMENT OF KNOWLEDGE (1 action)</p> <p>50. Launch of a Foundation for university studies and enhancement for tourism (network among the best Italian and international experiences).</p> |
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Source: adapted from Presidency of the Council of Ministers & Department for Regional Affairs Tourism and Sport (2013)

4. MENTION OF THE SPANISH STRATEGIC PLAN

To better assess the Italian Strategic Plan, the Spanish Strategic Plan is analyzed, since the Spain is one of the direct competitors of Italian destination. Spain is the world’s leading tourism country. It ranks second in tourism revenue and fourth in the number of international tourists. Tourism is crucial for Spain’s economy, as it accounts for over 10.2% of the GDP and provides 11.39% of the country’s jobs (figures for 2010).

The Spanish Council of Ministers recently approved the Comprehensive National Tourism Plan (Plan Nacional e Integral de Turismo), that covers the period 2012-2015. The Comprehensive National Tourism Plan, elaborated by the Spanish Ministry of Industry, Energy and Tourism & State Secretariat for Tourism (2012), is based on 6 pillars: strength of the Spain brand, focus on clients, supply-side and destinations, alignment of public-private stakeholders, knowledge, talent and entrepreneurship.

The Spanish Plan establishes 7 objectives: boost tourism activity and profitability, generate quality employment, encourage market unity, improve the international ranking, enhance the cohesion and renown of the Spain brand, favour public-private co-responsibility, work towards the deseasonalisation of tourism. These objectives are accompanied by 3 instruments: boost knowledge, entrepreneurship and training, improve the tourism supply, and diversify demand.

The Spanish Plan provides several indicators for each objective and instrument.

The Spanish document encompasses 28 measures and proposes a set of actions.

Among the various points, the document plans the following initiatives: enhance the positioning of Spain brand in consolidated markets, and raise its profile in non-traditional ones; encourage tourists who have already visited Spain to come back through special cards that accumulate points at associated Spanish companies; stimulate domestic demand for

tourism, as well as support the promotion of destinations away from the coast; optimize the issuance of visas, making the process quicker and more effective; open new credit lines for tourism companies aimed at renovating all kinds of infrastructure; promote the management of differential tourism products and activities; standardize the classification of hotels, rural accommodation and campsites; recognize incentives to entrepreneurs disposed to participate in the Spanish Tourism Quality System; enhance and promote national heritage, including its cultural and natural attractions and rich traditions in food and wine; harmonize tourism regulations across the country; favour the structuring of eco-friendly tourism; foster the internationalization of Spanish tourism SMEs, accompanying them in opening up new markets, and promoting exports of their tourism products and services; favour and promote, also financially, the young entrepreneurship in tourism; conclude agreements with Spain's most prestigious universities and business schools and with other organizations for creating incubators for young entrepreneurs who can come up with ideas for the future.

5. DISCUSSION

The Italian Plan is undoubtedly an important document from the point of view of the analysis and proposals. Many of the suggested solutions go in the right direction, such as those concerning the simplifications of the regulations, the digital strategy, the tourism education, the revamping of ENIT-National Tourism Agency, the relaunching of Italian image and Italy Brand (developing and promoting an “umbrella brand” for Italy), the review of Title V of the Constitution and consequent establishing of a Ministry of Tourism with an independent budget, etc.

Other actions seem less shareable, such as those stating the need to focus on large hotel chains or on 40 poles for their significant touristic and economic potential.

First of all the document skips the precise identification of the 40 areas that should be better exploited, deferring the detail to a next document.

Second, the focus on large hotel and few products seems disconnected from reality and from Italian territorial specificity, proposing a model that is already in crisis elsewhere.

The Italian destination needs to focus on the development of new “tourisms” linked to the territory and the environment rather than on widespread patterns already across the world.

Really it is only partly acceptable the criticism on low size of Italian accommodation facilities, since the richness and the variety of Italian accommodation facilities are the solutions better able to reflect the diversity of territorial identity (see Italian formula of “albergo diffuso”, meaning something like “scattered lodgings”, that is a collection of restored houses and suites dotted around a village).

Unlike some commonly-held beliefs, small size is not an Italian anomaly and it is unfair to consider it as a source of problems for the tourism sector. Indeed, small size can have advantages, as well as drawbacks (Getz et. al, 2004; Shaw & Williams, 2010; Thomas, 2004). On the negative side, small and medium-sized tourism enterprises (SMTEs) show several limits: businesses run according to family principles rather than managerial criteria, difficult access to credit, low bargaining power with suppliers, difficulty in achieving economies of scale and limited productivity in working processes, lack of skilled

employees and difficulties in attracting high-profile human resources, modest knowledge of foreign languages, lack of ability in using technology, lack of strategic marketing skills, little willingness to obtain certified quality (Bastakis et al., 2004; Riley et al. 2002). Despite the presence of these objective limits, it would be simplistic to infer that low competitiveness is the result of small size. A small hotel, better than a large one, is able to offer tailor-made services and to establish a personal relationship with guests. Small businesses are the secret of the Italian success, because they are the ones that guarantee the authenticity and the identity of the sites (Buhalis & Murphy, 2009; Dall'Ara, 2010). The widespread presence of small accommodation around the country is a historical peculiarity, traditionally highly valued by the tourists, because it allows them to experience the Italian way of life and "live" the culture of the places. So, the high proportion of small business must be considered the backbone of the Italian tourism system and a very strategic strength.

The real critical issue for SMTEs is not the size factor, but the strategic and organizational isolation in which these firms operate. Many Italian enterprises (food suppliers, other services providers) do not always see themselves as parts of the tourism system. Cooperation is an obligatory path to improve business efficiency, since enterprises can benefit from economies of scale and have greater bargaining power in trade channels. In addition, it is necessary to develop solutions that allow SMTEs businesses easier access to credit, also to renew or upgrade their buildings (as less than 10% of the hotels are new) or to employ new technologies, indispensable tool to connect more effectively to final consumers.

Furthermore, it is disappointing that there is no provision in the Plan for engagement "sustainable tourism". According a definition of UNEP & WTO (2005, pp. 11-12) sustainable tourism is a tourism based on the principles of sustainable development, taking "full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts". The main recommendations of sustainable tourism are strongly acknowledged by the Spanish Plan 2012-2015, that explicitly encourage eco-friendly and sustainable tourism. On the contrary, the Italian Strategic Plan does not promote ecological programs or sustainable approaches. The absence of actions for sustainable tourism is somewhat strange (Berke, 2002) since, on September 27th 2012, Italy signed the adoption of Global Code of Ethics for Tourism.

Likewise, some regret must be expressed for the fact that the Plan does not provide actions for accessible tourism. One aspect that Italian destination cannot underestimate is the increasingly "ageing population", the result of increasing life expectancy and declining fertility. In the richest areas of the world such as North America and Western Europe, the population is aging rapidly. By 2020, it is estimated that approximately 35% of the population will be over 65, and about half will be 50 and older (Gomez-Mejia & Balkin, 2011, p. 222). Such a demographic composition will obviously have an impact on tourism markets. Senior tourists generally are customers with high disposable incomes, with preferences for cultural destinations and with specific needs, careful to choose easily accessible destinations and a good standard of comfort/luxury in accommodation (Glover & Prideaux 2009). As a less seasonal market, senior tourists will be a segment that each country has an interest to capture and keep.

Another remark regards the very general and rough information about financial resources for implementation of Plan. The document does not describe fully and accurately the costs of every actions and the corresponding sources of coverage.

Moreover, the Italian Plan lacks of a system of qualitative and quantitative indicators, instead reported by the Spanish Plan.

The Plan also underestimates the importance of making useful alliances with other countries. As argued by Hong (2008, p. 10), countries can become more attractive in the international tourism market by competing effectively, but also by cooperating with each other to enhance overall competitiveness.

Another limit of the Plan is methodological. The Strategic Plan has been drawn up by a large working group (more than thirty people) but without triggering a real debate with various stakeholders (Becheri, 2013, p. 544).

Beyond these critical aspects, the final judgment on the Strategic Plan is very positive.

As outlined above, the Italian tourism system suffers from a number of weaknesses: a lack of integration at level of governance, laws, statistics; disparities in development between the North and the South, with regions of the South appearing poorer in terms of transport infrastructures and quality of services; a fragmented promotion of Italian tourism attractions; a gap between the needs of the tourism industry and the training offered by tourism education, which is still unable to provide students with the right skills.

To face these issues, the Plan suggests a novel approach, based on integrated design of the destination at national level.

The Plan lists many important challenges such as: restore the centrality of national policies on tourism through a dedicated national tourism administration; entrust the central government the right/duty of bringing about a unified regulatory framework and shared governance; plan an efficient and effective use of resources; bridge the quality and quantity gap in education/training system to meet the needs of the tourism industry and sophisticated demands; increase public investments, as a prerequisite to stimulate private investments and innovation.

CONCLUSIONS

The study highlighted the problematic areas of Italy's tourism industry and analysed the new Strategic Plan, intended as the response of central government to the business environment dynamics.

The tourism sector is more complex today than in the past because the globalisation has increased the level of competition on the supply side and has increased the level of knowledge and information on the demand side.

The challenge of globalization asks Italy to update its strategies and tools for incoming tourism.

Italy is universally recognised as one of the most beautiful countries as regards landscape and artistic-cultural heritage.

Unfortunately, Italy, with some exceptions, has not been able to exploit this wealth economically and has failed to meet the challenge of globalization.

Precise actions are needed to enhance and make destination as a product competitive.

To develop tourism in Italy the recent Strategic Tourism Plan proposes a considerable number of concrete actions that could quickly improve the competitiveness of the national tourism.

The recent Strategic Plan represents a break with the past, because it introduces a vision and a direction of Italian tourism development, by defining different priority level, economic impact and implementation timeframe.

Undoubtedly, the Plan has the great merit of changing a certain cultural perspective, by starting to consider tourism as a great opportunity for Italian country and by coordinating the efforts required to add value to its unexpressed potential.

Therefore, the paper offered a first survey on future perspectives provided by the new Italian strategic framework, identifying areas for further research. Particularly it is important to verify whether the recent Strategic Plan will be implemented and, overall, if the implementation will allow Italy to counter the loss of competitiveness in the tourist industry and to reconquer market leadership.

The major contribution of this paper is to display the qualities, but also possible spaces of improvement, of a document to consider as a first step to promote a new economic and cultural revival.

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