

## **QUALITY AND SUSTAINABILITY FOR AN INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT OF TOURIST DESTINATIONS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The approach to integrated quality management of tourist destinations is a new vision of the tourist product, according to the sustainability paradigm and the consistent methodology therein. The author has applied this approach in many experiences on the field : this is the reason why European Commission invited him to be final rapporteur of the european seminar about the best practices in the 15 member countries realized on 11-12 January 1999 in Brussels. In the present contribution, he summarizes the main steps or processes to implement such a scope, taking into consideration all the aspects of the value chain of quality in tourism. He proposes a manual of indicators for an integrated quality management of the tourist destination as a whole, in order to :

- Specify the “ differences “ between tourist organisations and industrial producers in the application of quality systems in their relevant activities and products
- Find the content of the requirements and responsibilities for every territorial level, according to customer expectations at the level concerned ( national, regional, district, municipality, businesses and services )
- Develop a congruity of the different brands and marks in every action : promotion, information, communication, urban planning, conservation policies, new buildings , etc.
- Promote the partnership and project management actions between the different actors or players : along the institutional scale ( national, regional and local authorities ) and along the axis public/private
- Invest financial and human resources to be able to face the challenges of quality in a global competition system
- Adopt a continuous improvement plan, through a careful customer satisfaction analysis and appropriate measures to reinforce the strengths and reduce the weaknesses.

### **1. A global framework**

The specific feature of the tourism and its value creation, moved many researchers and policy makers to identify an appropriate approach to quality in destination management.

It is a theme almost new and the results in this field are not yet well established. However some scientific studies are coming up ( Manente and Cerato ,2000 ; Pechlaner and Weiermair ,2000).

We note an increasing interest to this global view of tourist destinations and destination marketing and management as a “ whole”.

Tourism includes necessarily to find out as soon as possible specific forms of quality application : in spite of the modifications and improvements recently introduced in the ISO 9000 norms ( ISO, 2000 ), we have not yet the possibility to harmonize the quality

requirements already existing in the industrial and services sectors with the quality requirements of the tourist products and offers. Nevertheless, the new edition of the ISO norms includes some key references to the service sector and environmental requirements more than the past editions.

Additionally, in Annex A of the edition above mentioned, we find a correspondence list between ISO 9001:2000 and ISO 14001:1996 . Environment quality is more clearly involved into the tourism needs and such an approach to the destinations quality management and responsibilities therein seems to be the logical framework to be adopted.

The practical application of ISO 9001 and ISO 14001 is not easily applicable : the main reason is due to the fact that tourism production processes and elements involved are deeply different, but alternative, to the industrial production processes, particularly in the relationship between offer and demand, between producers and consumer expectations, as already explained in some contributions on global quality of tourism elsewhere (Toppan ,1997 ; 1998a ; 1998b)

It would be interesting to summarize some of the differences detected, in an accurate comparison between industry ( specially manufactures ) and tourism, focused on the aspects concerning quality.

In the final report for the benchmarking seminar on integrated quality management of tourist destinations in Brussels, organised by the European Commission in 1999 ( European Commission, 1999) , these differences were outlined, in order to draw the attention of the experts involved, coming from all over Europe, “to the irreducibility of tourist processes and offers to the industrial ones “, and to the necessity ( or duty ? ) not only to be “ prudent “ in any mechanical translation of the ISO ( 9000 or 14000 ) norms from the industrial and services sectors to tourism, but also to open new ways.

Firstly, quality systems and its methodologies have been introduced very late in tourist sector, in comparison with industrial sector : E. Deming started in 1946-47, in Japan, United States introduced quality systems in the seventies, Europe in the eighties. In tourism, we have the first trials and experiences not before 1992-93, restricted to the hotel & catering industry, where the analogies with manufactures seemed to be relatively transferable. Yet, a “ global “ view about quality in tourism was considered the only possible approach in the last nineties.

This contribution would clear at least three points to be respected for a specific framework in the application of quality systems to tourist sector :

**2. The respect of the sustainability paradigm : differences between industry and tourism.**

First of all, we should carefully examine which are the specific differences between tourist production processes and offers and industrial ones :

- QUALITY MANAGEMENT OF THE INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION PROCESSES AND ITEMS ACCORDING TO INDUSTRIAL CULTURE/VISION	• <b>QUALITY MANAGEMENT OF THE TOURIST PRODUCTION PROCESSES AND OFFERS ACCORDING TO TOURISM CULTURE/VISION</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Industrial items are submitted to a physical monadic selling and lay out : even its advertising sublimation becomes strictly individual and monadic “ utility “ ( real or not )</li> <li>- In the relationship between item produced and consumer, place has no matter at all : it is far from the consumers, better if so far as possible, to favour a most complete separation even in the mind. Direct contacts with clients are normally interdicted on the place of production.</li> <li>- The quality of the place where premises are settled does not concern the consumer or client : it does not touch his purchase motivation, because object, item and packaging move to the place where consumer lives and proves , perceives and satisfies his needs and wishes.</li> <li>- Quality is achieved through conformity to the customer requirements or expectations : item reflects more or less deeply, perfectly or completely the consumer wants.</li> <li>- Most important investments are normally connected with high technologies factors. Innovation through high tech.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i><b>Tourist offers are destinations, submitted to a global selling processes : even its advertising sublimation is normally connected to a “ global “ perception of utility ( real or not )</b></i></li> <li>• <i><b>In the relationship between tourist destination offered and consumer, place is completely shared both by the producer or production chain and consumers. He moves towards the place of production or/and the place which is the product ( place becomes product and product is the place : his mind is involved through the place itself) *.</b></i></li> <li>• <i><b>Consumer ( voyager, visitor, tourist ) and tourist offers form a unique motivation : they become a unit.</b></i></li> <li>• <i><b>Quality is achieved through conformity of the destination and offer to itself : client reflects more or less deeply, perfectly or completely the destination offered.</b></i></li> <li>• <i><b>Most important investments are connected with high touch creation, attractions and innovations.</b></i></li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Quality control is possible “ before “ item being purchased. Trading can be simulated just in time : remainders can be stocked and sold later.</li> <li>- Tangible components are prevailing in spite of the pretension of the trademarks to assign to items intangible and metaphysic meanings. Quality is mostly empirically“ experienced “ : items can be touched, tested, manipulated, refused before the purchase. When purchased, they are unconditioned property of the consumer or customer. He is the “ owner “ .</li> <li>- Items give satisfaction to limited, specific motivations, emotions and utility : level of the emotions generated by an object is rarely “ totalitarian “ : a new car, a hi-fi, a handy, a dress by Armani can be very attractive and involve many emotions and symbolic traces, but normally they touch only the <b>surface</b> of the consumer.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Quality control happens with the client, through the client. Time ( crucial factor of the consumer purchase ) is not stockable.</b></li> <li>• <b>Intangible components are prevailing. Trademark are mostly created in the mind of the voyager, traveller or tourist. Quality is mostly perceived : destinations, attractions and experiences of the time spent cannot be tested, manipulated, accepted or refused before the purchase nor used unconditionally. Consumer can enjoy them for a provisional time, like a rent. Headline of the tourist purchase is : destination is here to change you, not you to change destination.</b></li> <li>• <i>Destinations, travels, vacations and voyages generate a displacements and, some times, changes of the global self of the consumer ( body, mind and soul ) : he goes here or there with all himself .</i></li></ul>
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Therefore, we have to distinguish the quality management processes of the industrial organisations from the quality management processes of the tourist destinations. Value chain in tourism is much more complicated and multifacet. Players are both social and natural, and success factors are environmental, cultural, educational, professional and temporal.

Time is crucial in tourism, but still time is the unique factor we cannot rule or produce as we wish. We can refuse an item or purchase it later : time cannot be refused, while we experienced it. If time we experienced has quality, we enjoy it. If not, we cannot exchange it later. Time has no surrogates. Tourists, visitors, consumers of holidays need quality **now or never**. Tourism has quality constraints unknown by industry : purchasing time to enjoy it ( tourism) has no replay. It is another time.

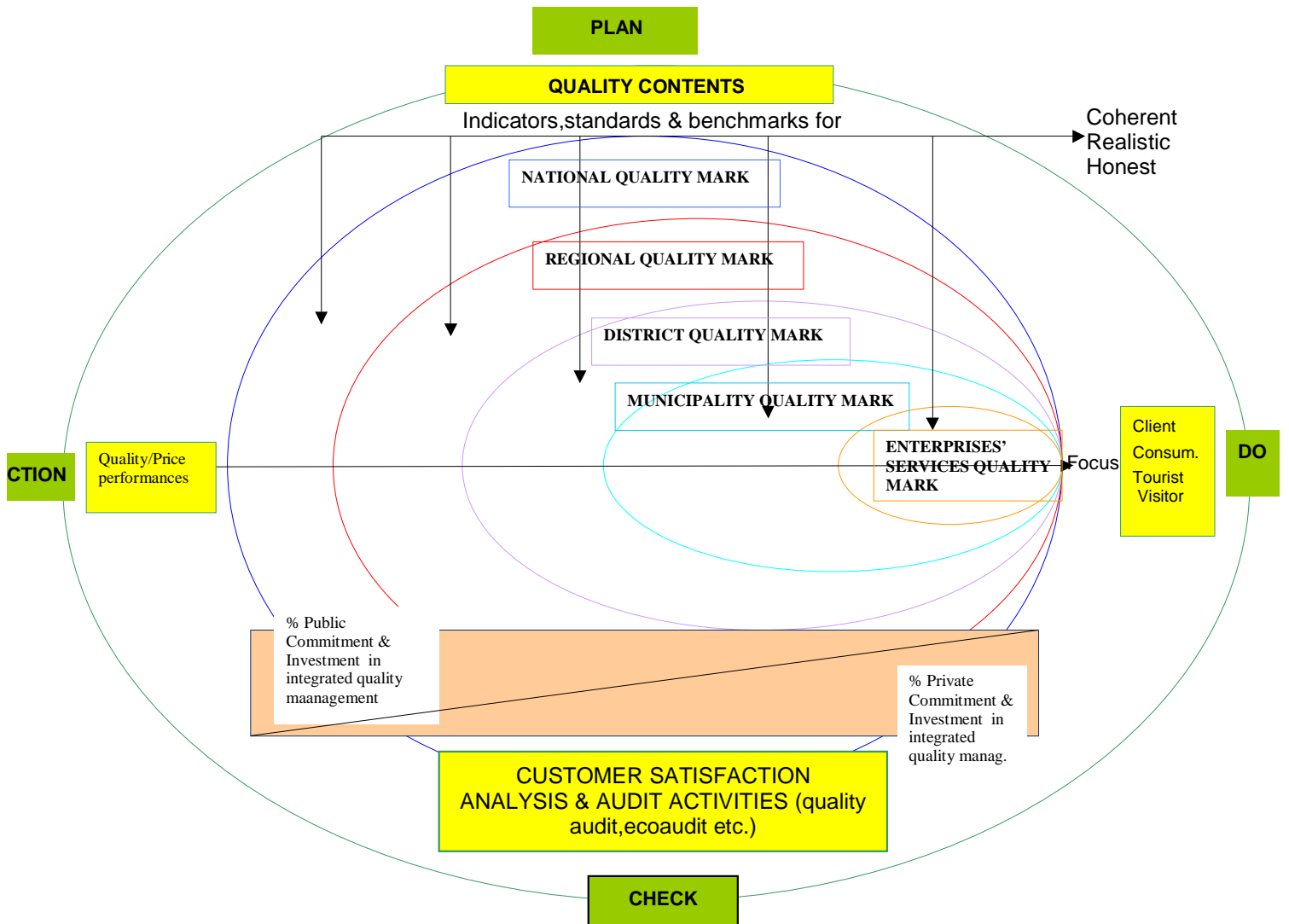
3. **In tourism all the components of the value chain need almost equivalent quality to ensure quality for consumer :**

We have two questions to put in this field to the actors in tourist sector and both correspond to basic tourist expectations as well :

- How to be sure that destinations' claim is ensured before purchasing them ?
- How to define the " equivalence " of the quality for all the components of the value chain in the production processes of the offers ?

Quality system in tourism is quality " of " the system. This is the reason why we have to design a model for the integrated quality management of tourist destination as a " global " quality strategy or policy at different levels : from local to global, from direct services in the hospitality single businesses to a general service of the whole country (see Fig.n 1).

**Fig.n.1**



Just to clear the meaning of the figure, we consider :

- consumer is the focus of the system
- hospitality is a continuum from host structure ( whatever it may be ) to the state or nation ( host state or nation )
  - every player of this continuum should adopt a quality policy ( brand or trade-marks ) with their relevant norms, requirements and standards
  - the main rule to be considered for quality is the Deming loop or wheel : plan, do, check, action
  - quality / price is not only a business's matter, but is the result of the global performance of all the players along the axis do-action of the Deming wheel

- Contents of the quality requirements and customer satisfaction analysis are the hinges of the axis plan-check of the Deming wheel

- Requirements and standards must be realistic, honest and tangible, especially when communicated

- Integrated quality management ( responsibility, investment, commitment, financing, promotion, services etc. ) involves everyone in all the organisations concerned or players in different intensity, according to a continuum from state ( nation ) to host structures : more public than private at the left side of the model, balanced between public and private in the centre of the model, more private than public in the right side of the model.

Finally, we draw the attention to the fact that graph proposed has two not separable axes of action to be implemented for successful integrated management of tourist destinations :

- a) Axis PLAN – CHECK ( AUDIT ): it is the axis of the “ **branding** “ , that’s the “ dignified part of destinations “ . Everything is involved in planning and improving the quality “ marks “ through specific and appropriate indicators, rules, standards and benchmarks. We “ create “ quality design and we “verify “ in progress its **compliance** conformity, thanks particularly to customers ;

- b) Axis DO – ACTION : it is the axis of the “ **delivery** “ , that’s the effective offer and its price ( quality offer and related price are not separable as well for successful advertising, trading and sales actions).

Both couples of axes are bounded into a system composed by : **space, time, contents and enjoyment**, globally perceived and together experienced by tourists, visitors, voyagers and clients. A suggestion to achieve , step by step, the objectives and purposes of this model, is to adopt a benchmarking methodology, at least at European level : the European Union is up to shape the application of it through its policy and programmes ( e.g. Structural Funds ) . A benchmarking between European countries should be a great opportunity in this field.

In its documents on tourism, EU considers quality as a priority , together with sustainability. Both are closely connected.

Sustainability is required as mandatory expectation ( according to Max Weber terminology ) in tourism, for all the players, consumers included. Quality is preferential expectation : quality is not an obligation, however, survival, Deming said, is not compulsory. Quality is a critical question in our global and competitive world.

#### **4. Effects of the quality & sustainability approach to the tourist sector :**

Strategy for quality in tourist sector produces much more impressive and wide effects than any other sector, not only for the number of the players concerned, as already explained, but also for the radical turnabout in many aspects of our vision and lifestyle :

- tourist sector requires a clear plan and strategy about environment, cultural resources, heritage and self-esteem of countries and people ;
- quality of tourism involves not only the survival, but rather the renaissance of many local, typical and minor economies , which are disappearing or vanishing under the huge hits of the industrial and financial economy ;
- memories and identities of the small communities, often marginalized and underrated, are able to renew the production of the time lost and rediscover forms of happiness already forgotten : time is, in tourism, the main resource to be spent at present ( past doesn't exist anymore, future is not yet possible ). Nevertheless, tourist experiences could allow to be contemporary to the past ( less frequently to the future ) in form of emotion.

Basic condition to join these effects is quality : meeting then exceeding customer ( visitor, traveller, tourist ) requirements and expectations, above all to live the time, to enjoy it, to create it, to stop it, to replay it.

As far as the effect on strategy is concerned, quality implications should suggest, finally, the policy makers to pay more attention to the tourism economy and its requirements : their policy should improve immediately, and not rarely be changed. Until now, a strategy for tourist sector is not so spread in the world.

World Tourism Organization, in its documents, complains over the indifference of many governments and states about tourism economy, in spite of the fact its turnover reached the first position in the commercial exchanges in the world. Moreover, the transfer of monetary flows from richest to less developed countries is much more positive for the local communities and populations than the most part of the other types of business : a German tourist who decides to spend money in Parintins ( Amazonian small town ) for the



Event of the “ Two Bulls “, makes it to gratify himself, not the destination. The best form indeed to convince him to give his money to the others. The development programmes could find a significant way out.

We tried to focus this concept or vision, comparing what happens in the mind of the policy makers responsible of a town or district, with or without a vision about an integrated quality management of the destination :

POLICY QUALITY OF THE TOWN WITHOUT A QUALITY VISION AND SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY ABOUT TOURIST DESTINATION	POLICY OF THE TOWN WITH A QUALITY VISION AND SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY ABOUT TOURIST DESTINATION
<p>Extensive growth and urban metastasis</p> <p>Local goverment role : to control the development according to the administration or formal procedures</p> <p>Citizens as dependents</p> <p>Productive vocations : not well selected</p> <p>Urban planning : business friendly</p> <p>Private and public interests : collusion</p> <p>Traffic : hard impact</p> <p>Buildings and industrial plants with hard impact on urban landscape</p>	<p>Urban renovation and growth with omeostasis</p> <p>Local government role: to promote the development and the expected results</p> <p>Citizens as clients ( tourists and visitors included )</p> <p>Productive vocations : carefully selected</p> <p>Urban planning : user friendly</p> <p>Private and public interests : cooperation</p> <p>Traffic : according to the carrying capacity</p> <p>Buildings and industrial plants with sustainable approach and compatibility with urban landscape</p>

We could continue with many other comparisons : the effect of tourism quality oriented policy is evident, effective, durable.

The European Union, in its Green Book on Tourism ( European Commission, 1995 ) , has clearly pointed out these advantages : tourism is one of the most important means for a sustainable development and its application. Tourism calls sustainability in itself, like a success factor also to be “profitable”, not only by virtue of moral philosophy : it is seen like an opportunity, not only a constraint. Sustainability is considered a constraint by the

industry ( building, mechanical, chemical, etc. ) much more easily than by tourist sector : specifically by tourist sector based on integrated quality vision of the destination.

Many other documents, declarations or guidelines at international level have been published and are at our disposal for this vision of the tourism ( for both quality and sustainability ). It will be the content of the second part of the present essay, in order to draft a scheme for an integrated quality manual of the destination management : which are the “ contents “ of the requirements and standards mentioned in the graph ( Fig. n.1 ) at the different institutional and organisational levels ?

What is the specific meaning of the “ marks “ ( branding ) in relation with quality policy ?

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