Chapter 52

Knowledge Management for the Development of a Smart Tourist Destination:
The Possible Repositioning of Prato

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents, through a case analysis, the linking between knowledge management and the development of a smart tourist destination. The case here proposed, concerning the city of Prato, is an experimental project of the Region of Tuscany referring NECSTouR model (www.necstour.eu) for the implementation of a Tourism Observatory for competitiveness and sustainability of the destination. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate how the Tourism Destination Observatory (TDO) is a knowledge management tool for the further development of tourism in this area, and how this could act as a driving force for the creation of a smart city. The methodology includes an original set of indicators on the sustainability and the competitiveness of tourist destinations, in a perspective of integrated and complementary measurements between tourist destination sustainability and city smartness. This may be a starting point for local government process.

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge Management (KM) is establishing itself as an intertwined and integrated approach in the studies of economics and management, which increasingly consider knowledge as a real source of competitive advantage. Thanks to its wide application and its cross-meaning, a considerable amount of articles and quotations have appeared on this theme along with growing interest towards the constructive advancement of the topic, as well as towards an accurate empirical validation of theoretical considerations (Barcelo-Valenzuela et al., 2008; Bontis & Serenko, 2009; Edwards, 2011; Edwards et al., 2003; Firestone, 2008; Magnier-Watanabe et al., 2011; Serenko & Bontis, 2004; Swan &Newell, 1999).

The study of Knowledge Management is gradually expanding its area of interest from the enterprise to the territory (Albino & Schiuma, 2003; Cappellin, 2003; Rullani, 2002; Schiuma & Lerro, 2008; 2010); not only for the strong and reciprocal links that are created between the organization and the elements of local environment, as regards the interrelated flows of information and knowledge, but also because of the importance that territory is increasingly acquiring as a cognitive system, which accumulates knowledge from local experiential and evolutionary processes (Becattini & Rullani, 1993; Rullani, 2002). Knowledge Management creates the conditions for innovation and increase in value for the individual and for the system.

The attention towards these topics has been recently enhanced with scientific contributions and institutional initiatives referring to the tourism sector (Baggio & Cooper, 2010; Cooper, 2006; Jensen, 2003; Seitan, 2009; Varra, 2012) in which knowledge issues are particularly critical for several reasons. Firstly, the presence of an enormous quantity of data scattered throughout the territory that are extremely heterogeneous and often unconnected and therefore (Varra, 2012) not easily acquirable and transferable. Secondly, remarkable deficiencies in terms of skills, whose development is difficult due to the small dimensions of the enterprises and to their not always strategic attitudes (Braun & Hollick, 2006; Collins et al., 2003). Last but not least, the large gap as regards ICT competencies compared to present needs (Braun, 2004; Buhalis, 2003; Hjalager, 2010), a gap that is not bridged by the operators' behaviour because they are not very willing to devote themselves to creating the networks which are effective tools for the development of individual and collective knowledge (Baggio & Cooper, 2010; Copp & Ivy, 2001; Nordin, 2003; Otto & Richie, 1996; Schiuma & Lerro, 2008; Scott et al. 2008a; 2008b; Swan et al., 1999).

These cognitive deficits emerge with major force now that the attention on the tourism sector is focusing on the "destination", no longer meant as a geographical container of resources and attractions to be "sold" to potential customers, but as a territorial circle to be built up, by organizing the resources in clusters of products which are functional to the continuous and composite satisfaction of the tourists' needs. The arrangement of the resources into various solutions for tourists requires an integration of data, information, knowledge and their responsible management in order to make the destination competitive on a global level, in the increasingly difficult search for the acquisition and retention of customers (Bieger, 1998; D'Hartsrre, 2000; Ferri, 2012; Krugman, 1994; Manente & Cerato, 2000).

The search for a profitable relationship between the *tourist's needs – resources – designed supply* is incomplete if the concept of competitiveness is not only suited to the tourists' needs but also to the stakeholders of the destination, who benefit from the resources in a parallel, complementary or alternative way from the tourists. Thus, we cannot consider the tourist destination only as a "product for the customer", although it is directed to him, but also as an output addressed to a plurality of individuals

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