

## **TOURIST INSTRUMENTS OF PUBLIC-PRIVATE COOPERATION ON CRISIS TIMES: COMPETITIVENESS ENGINE OR ENDANGERED SPECIES?**

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Advanced time and based on the original ideas of Porter, specific new models for the analysis of the competitiveness of tourist destinations have emerged, being the model of Calgary (Crouch and Ritchie, 1999) and the integrated model of Dwyer and Kim (2003) those that greater recognition have achieved. Every model emerged give the public-private cooperation a key role as the engine of competitiveness of destinations. Since then, countless studies analyze experiences of public-private partnerships in tourism, both in the theoretical sphere (see, among other Bramwell and Lane, 2000; Dredge, 2006; Hall, 2009; General Secretaria of Tourism, 2008 ; Selin and Chavez, 1995 and March and Wilkinson, 2009); as applied (see among others Bové and Guim, 2013; Casellas, 2007; García, 2007; Muñoz and Fuentes, 2013), trying to establish the virtues and difficulties in the cooperation process and their influence on the competitiveness and sustainability of destinations.

This paper describes the experience of Calpe Tourism Consortium, an instrument created in 2011 and dissolved in 2014, in order to analyses the virtues and difficulties it has faced in its mission to promote the competitiveness of the destination. The main conclusion is that some anti-crisis measures, especially those aimed at streamlining the functioning of the Local Administration, seriously compromise the operation of this entity to the point of making it unviable in current terms. This poses a threat to their continuity at a critical time for the recovery of this destination.

The public-private cooperation is considered a fundamental element in the tourist destination management. Current products and tourist destinations involve the participation of a variety of both public and private actors who share responsibility for planning, managing and marketing the tourism product in order to ensure consistency (General Secretariat of Tourism, 2008: 23). Thus, it is considered that cooperation between the public and private

sectors is vital to improve the competitiveness of destinations, the profitability of companies, tourist satisfaction, reduce social and environmental impacts of tourism and align the tourism development other priority actions in the territory.

On a global level, the DMO are entities that channel the efforts of different actors in the framework of a flexible strategic vision. Among its most common functions include: creating a favorable framework for destination competitiveness, promote the conservation and improvement of tourist attractions, promote the improvement of environmental quality, facilities and services, promote and coordinate efforts to product development, create and manage an image-level target, lead and coordinate market research and coordinating the promotional activity with the private sector (World Tourism Organization, 2004). Compliance with these features suggest the existence of DMO mixed, public-private, well-organized nature, market-oriented and managed by professionals.

These entities are thus a key in shaping true tourist clusters, clusters or groups that are as well elements of sustainable competitive advantage of the destination. Although the sustained growth of the global tourism demand in recent decades seems to bring a bright future for this sector, the globalization process along with changes that both the demand side (socio-demographic changes and international tourism increasingly knowledgeable and demanding) as the supply side (increasing number of destinations, more modern) is experiencing tourism, destinations require to remain constantly alert to remain competitive and market shares.

Consortium “Calpe Tourism”, created in January 2012 was a joint venture formed by the city of Calp and various tourist professional associations of the town (the Association of Employers of Hospitality, the Retail Association, the Association of Real Estate Agencies and Association of Complementary Supply). It was therefore a local entity, with actions and aims oriented to the improvement and promotion of the tourism sector of the villa, enjoying full legal status and capacity to act. The directive guidelines were grouped into five blocks: research and advisory work; promotion of demand; promotion and diversification of supply; improving business competitiveness and general information on tourism in the town. These lines were agreed by all members of the Consortium and represented a true shared by all stakeholders in tourism development in Calpe effort.

But beyond mere quantitative considerations, what is relevant in this area are the qualitative aspects of cooperation. The launch of the Consortium led to the generation of dynamic cooperation, both among private agents themselves, and between them and the City Council hitherto unknown. Thus, some of the actions carried out by the Consortium complemented or developed those traditionally held by the City Council. Others, on the contrary, represented real innovations with regard to the tourism sector in town.

As for innovations, actions related to the promotion and diversification of the tourism product supply and the municipality were, perhaps, the most representative. Make Calpe a true cluster of tourism was a key objective of the Consortium in a context in which tourism demand is increasingly understood and demanding, they appear new competitors trying to aggressively expand its share of the tourism market and bases its development on a specialized tourism product (sun and beach) you need a continuous reinvention to remain attractive to potential customers. Similarly, the Consortium has also sought closer

ties with entities and tourist institutions national and international, trying to share good experiences and information and, where applicable, to raise funds to carry out the ambitious goals of the Consortium.

But the global economic and financial crisis started in 2008 reached Spain with particular virulence derived from the bursting of a housing bubble that was triggering a banking crisis unprecedented (Ortega y Peñalosa, 2013). In that context the Spanish Administrations have to carry out notable trimmings in their spending budgets. The legal framework of consortia, were altered. It has been tremendously complicating their continuity and forcing tourism responsible destinations to seek alternative forms of cooperation. Thus, it is very possible that trying to find a solution to a very deep crisis, will finally eliminate a structural tool for promoting the competitiveness of destinations.

In the Spanish case, the consortia are one of the legal forms preferred by destinations to finalize the constitution of these participatory bodies. However, this recurring pattern of participation is now threatened. The recent economic and financial global crisis and specifically one of the answers given to it, the stability measures and administrative rationality at the local level is jeopardizing consortia survival.

Analysis of Calpe's case and its consortium "Calpe Tourism" highlights the virtues of this model of cooperation and uncertainties and difficulties involved in their future. To the extent that, as has been said, this is a model preferred by many mechanisms, the conclusions are generalizable to all municipalities that choose this figure as a model of cooperation.

It is well known that crises are also opportunities periods. Therefore, from here it is claimed that at the current situation, national tourism leaders take the opportunity to define and articulate specific formulas of public-private cooperation, which will stay, allow to continue this basic tool to promote competitiveness touristic destinations.

