EXTENDED ABSTRACT

HOW EXPERTS ASSESS STATISTICS REGARDING KNOWLEDGE ABOUT TOURISTS[1]

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1. INTRODUCTION

Recently, tourist behaviour has changed and data are needed to understand those changes in order to plan tourism activity in particular and the territory in general.

The need for management and knowledge of tourist territories, linked to the recent technological revolution, has resulted in the development of Intelligent Tourism Destinations (ITD). These must have Tourism Intelligence Systems (TIS) with updated information on the evolution of tourism supply and demand, responding to the demands of the three actors that make up the destination: a) destination managers, who must make decisions based on data converted into knowledge; b) private enterprise, as demanders and generators of data; and c) the tourists themselves as the centre of the territorial and business strategy, whose experience must be improved and their satisfaction guaranteed.

2. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The present research aims to respond to two objectives. On the one hand, to elaborate a diagnosis (evaluation of use and needs) of this information and, on the other hand, to determine the degree of efficiency and value of this type of data for experts.

The research is based on the hypothesis that there is a large volume of data on tourist behaviour. However, this information is not valid for making intelligent decisions in the processes of strategic planning and management of tourist destinations. Likewise, the enormous volume of data generated is not used to create knowledge.

For this purpose, qualitative personal interviews were carried out with a group of 18 experts, most of them being professionals from the Canary Islands regional geographic area, as it is one of the main coastal tourist destinations in Europe.

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3. RESULTS

3.1. The desirability and use of tourism statistics for the public administration

The questionnaire was given to experts working in the public administration to find out their opinion on the value of tourist data. They unanimously agreed that the public administration is fully aware of its importance and is making every effort to learn more about it.

They believe that private companies, and especially the public administration, regularly use public data sources to make decisions.

The different actors in this group consider that the information needs detected as a result of changes in the tourism sector and, more specifically, in the change in tourist behaviour, make it necessary to create new data. However, public statistics agencies indicate that since these are statistical processes subject to rigorous legislation and methodologies, it is not easy to make changes.

As for the use of the new data generated by private companies, they feel that they should not be ignored as they are very interesting, despite the fact that they have a very high acquisition cost, they are very biased, and the methodology used to produce them is unknown, which calls into question their reliability and use.

In this sense, both sources of data, public statistics and private data, are complementary.

Although the term Intelligent Tourism Destination (ITD) is a concept originally linked to the administration, most of the actors are unaware of its true meaning and those who claim to know it tend to relate it to a purely technological component.

Finally, with regard to the construction of a public information system through public-private collaboration, all those interviewed consider that it would be an extraordinary initiative and that it is already taking place, at least on the part of the public administration. However, they believe that private companies are not in favour of providing their data, as it would reveal their strategies.

3.2. The desirability and use of tourism statistics for private Enterprise

The opinions of this group of experts (mostly people related to hotel establishments) reveal the distances between the private sector and the use of public statistics.

They believe that the tourist is at the centre of the tourism enterprise and they base their business strategies on their segmented analysis.

The generation of data by companies depends fundamentally on the concerns that motivate the knowledge of customers and on the capacities and resources available. Some institutions consider tourism establishments as the best means of data collection.

Large hotel chains do not use any kind of public statistics, instead employing their own CRM processes. Medium-sized hotel companies use the data generated by the Regional Statistical Institutes as well as the qualitative information obtained from their satisfaction questionnaires. Independent hotels use the data usually provided by the Tourist Board, the information collected in the establishment itself and the market situation from proximity meetings with other hoteliers.

As far as the new approach to Smart Destinations is concerned, there is almost total ignorance of this issue.

There is total agreement in the recognition that technology is vital to gather knowledge about today's tourists, although they also recognize the existence of a certain bias.

As for the willingness to incorporate their data into a public TIS, although at first they respond negatively, after a few moments of reflection they change their minds, arguing that they would do so as long as it is done in a way that could have a positive impact on them..

3.3. The desirability and use of tourism statistics for university research

This group of experts also considers the tourist to be the centre of the tourism business strategy. They stress the importance of their behaviour in the territory, while at the same time they believe that territorial planning must always take the tourist into account.

They consider that, traditionally, greater emphasis has been placed on public statistics on supply, to the detriment of those on demand, while at the same time they affirm that the public administration has been generating, for some years now, a greater quantity of data, of better quality, more systematic, more accessible and with greater transparency. However, there is a perception that, with the exception of some regional institutes that have included greater territorial breakdowns and variables relating to social networks, no new variables have been incorporated into the analysis. In addition, there are important gaps in the data generated by the public administration.

Data produced by private companies are considered indispensable "information mines" that cannot be ignored. However, there is mistrust of the methodologies and samples used to carry them out. Nevertheless, they complement the traditional public data.

They consider that very few tourism enterprises use public statistical data for decision-making, even though public statistics could provide them with a global perspective of the tourism destination.

As far as ITDsare concerned, the views among researchers vary considerably.

The use of technology is considered fundamental to gain knowledge about the tourist and its use should be adapted to the characteristics of each tourist destination and its needs.

Finally, they consider that there is no public TIS, although it would be desirable, beyond specific local initiatives.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Firstly, expert opinion reveals that complementary relationships between public administration and private enterprise in the generation of tourism data are absolutely necessary, although they have not been able to coordinate and act in an aligned way.

Secondly, the public administration should encourage tourists and citizens to share data with it, in the same way as they do with private companies, allowing the generation of a public data source in Open Data.

Thirdly, destinations need more qualitative information on the motivations of tourists, their experiences and mobility in the destination, as well as information on the reputation, infrastructures and services of destinations, to complement the quantitative information

from public statistics sources. As a consequence, new national public institutes should be created to monitor and manage social network analysis, which would be a valuable source of qualitative information, public and complementary to the statistical institutes or CIS surveys.

Finally, the hypothesis put forward at the beginning of the research is confirmed: there is a large volume of data regarding the behaviour of tourists, however, this, firstly, is insufficient for intelligent decision-making in the processes of strategic planning and management of tourist destinations and, secondly, the enormous volume of data generated is not used to create knowledge. This fact imposes the need for the immediacy of new approaches and methods in the collection, use and exploitation of data relating to tourist behaviour.