



Integrated quality management for tourist destinations: a European perspective on achieving competitiveness

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Abstract

Maintaining and improving high quality supply in Europe is fundamental to keeping Europe's leading position as a destination in world tourism, to meeting the challenges of competitors and to increasing its market share. The paper presents the results of eight best practice case studies of different destinations in four European countries, which were part of a study, assigned by the European Commission (DG XXIII). The purpose of the study was to determine whether selected European destinations apply integrated quality management as a means to raise their competitiveness. To this end a comparative survey of destinations was conducted, based on the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) model. Its results indicated that integrated quality management in tourist destinations is rather underdeveloped. In general, destinations tend to be strong in one element of the EFQM model, such as policy and strategy or human resources management, as opposed to showing a balanced and integrated approach to quality management. © 1999 Published by Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

Until recently, European tourism was more or less the unchallenged champion in comparison to other continents. Currently, European tourism still represents 60 per cent of the global market by volume and 50 per cent by value. World Tourism Organisation (WTO) projections show that by 2020 an estimated 14 per cent of the European population shall be able to travel abroad, that is double the world rate (Frangiali, 1998). Whilst most Europeans will continue to travel primarily on an intraregional basis, the rise of tourism in Pacific Asia and the Americas has challenged Europe's number one position in tourism. European tourism seems to have arrived in the mature stage of the life cycle and is likely to lose market share to the global competition of emerging destinations. Nevertheless, globalisation

has fundamentally changed competition between firms that vie for customers. Due to the effects of globalisation the competition in tourism has shifted from interfirm competition to the competition between destinations.

The European Commission (EC) has taken the initiative and invested considerable resources to develop 'strategic guidelines based on practical experience to improve integrated quality management in tourism destinations'. The purpose was to review the more significant dimensions relating to the implementation of integrated quality management in selected destinations as a means of satisfying tourists' needs, enhancing the competitiveness of the European tourism sector and ensuring balanced and sustainable tourism development.

The authors were part of a team of researchers assigned to conduct a comparative survey of coastal destinations and urban destinations, across European countries, with the application of the European Foundation for Quality Management, (EFQM) model. An attempt will be made to put into perspective the various arguments and counterarguments concerning the application of integrated quality management in European destinations. More specifically the present study

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addresses the following issues:

1. What is integrated quality management in tourist destinations?
2. An analysis of selected cases to examine to what extent integrated quality management techniques have been implemented by European destinations and what are best practices, based on the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) model?
3. What specific quality management measures are observed and required, and who should implement them?

2. Integrated quality management

Up to now the management of quality in destinations in relation to competitiveness has received very little attention (Ritchie & Crouch, 1997). However, destinations are increasingly reliant on the delivery of quality products and services, and where customer needs and business goals are increasingly inseparable, every enterprise in a destination, not just its public management, must be committed to meet customer needs. In dealing with these business dynamics, changing towards a more participative style of management, or quality philosophy, may prove to be the most appropriate management and organisational change for European destinations. This calls for an understanding of destinations, what makes them distinctive, and the applicability of integrated quality management to destinations (Vanhove & De Keyser, 1998).

Quality has become a major interest of private and public operators in the emerging global market. As a critical issue, quality deserves a comprehensive approach and a definitive integration amongst its key stakeholders' (residents, visitors and trade) and in depth knowledge of their needs and expectations. A quality framework is required, including policies that help improve the quality of service production and delivery. Within the tourism field, same implies that the implicit and explicit visitor experiences need to be matched with destination features and private sector and public sector practices (Manente & Furlan, 1998).

The adjective 'integrated', meaning to 'amalgamate', is appropriate in that tourism consists of an assembly of elements, enabling the temporary migration from a 'usual habitat' to one or more destinations for business, recreational or other purposes. Against this backdrop, tourism may be viewed as a medium for consumers to experience culture and nature and a potential source of inspiration. The requirement for integration relates also to the network of organisations of a heterogeneous nature, in the private and public sector, which require interaction to cater effectively and efficiently to consumers' needs and expectations and to minimise the potential negative socio-cultural, economic and ecologi-

cal impacts on the environment of a host community. The term management can be, and is often used in many different ways. For the purposes of this report it refers to the process of reaching organisational goals through the co-operation with and by people and other organisational resources. Accordingly, in this report, the integrated quality management of tourism, at the *operational* level, is explained as the management process designed to enhance the quality of European tourism, so as to satisfy tourists' needs and expectations, achieve a competitive tourist trade, and create and sustain liveable host communities.

3. European Foundation for Quality Management

In its desire to improve the competitiveness of tourism in destinations and thereby enhancing employment prospects, the European Commission identified the Quality Award Criteria Framework that was developed by the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) as the model and basis on which to improve the performance of destinations in Europe. As a non-prescriptive framework the Quality Award can be used to assess an organisation's progress towards achieving sustainable excellence in all aspects of performance. It is based on the premise that "Customer satisfaction, People (employee) satisfaction and Impact on Society are achieved through leadership driving policy and Strategy, People Management, Resources and processes, leading ultimately to excellence in Business Results" (European Foundation for Quality Management).

The objective of the EC research was to develop an evaluation model on the basis of the EFQM model and translate the EFQM model to manage quality in an integrated manner in tourist destinations. The resulting concepts are depicted in Fig. 1.

Within the non-prescriptive framework, certain fundamental concepts underpin the EFQM model. Table 1 compares the criteria for integrated quality management according to two different systems: the Baldrige Award, and the European Model for Quality self appraisal. Both frameworks identify leadership, planning, human resources, resources, customer satisfaction, and measurement of performance as prerequisites to attaining quality improvement and implementation.

4. Comparative analysis of European destinations

The authors were involved in eight case studies of European urban as well as coastal tourist destinations involved in quality management (Amsterdam & IJmond in the Netherlands, Knokke-Heist in Belgium, Dublin in Ireland, and Blackpool, Glasgow, Nairn & St. Andrews in the UK). Based on many interviews with industry representatives at all the destinations and a detailed

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