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Title:
**The maturity of a mass tourism destination as a benefit:
the case of Rimini**

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Abstract

Rimini and its neighboring area of the Romagna Riviera form one of the most famous tourist destinations in Italy and thus have an interesting history related to tourism. Analyzing the history of the tourist destination, it is evident that this area has been several times in a maturity phase. Although this is a precarious situation, it has not been treated in a negative manner, but, on the contrary, as a benefit: the first objective of this work it is to figure out how it is possible to handle this delicate stage of a tourist destination's life as a consolidation and a strength.

The second issue covered in this document is the conclusion that can be deduced from the first concept: if a maturity phase can evolve in a consolidation rather than a decline, is it possible for a tourist destination to return to a stage where tourism no longer exists?

The proposed answer will be counterposed with the cyclical theory of tourist destinations of Bogdan Włodarczyk.

Keywords: Tourism, crisis, Rimini, renovation plan, tourism destination life cycle, maturity, mature tourism destination.

Introduction

This work will try to give relevance to the renovation plans for mature destinations, a very important aspect from the point of view of planning a tourist destination, which, sooner or later, will have to deal with situations of maturity, stagnation or recession.

Many researchers have expressed their views regarding birth, development, growth, perspectives, and more generally, the life cycle of a tourist destination. There is no yet a definite and proven theory, due to the complexity of considering all the factors which intervene in the starting phase and, above all, in the development and consolidation phases of a tourist destination.

This research will explain and compare the most acclaimed theories about the life cycle of the tourist destination and, through the practical example of one of the most important and ancient destinations at European level, new considerations will be elaborated.

Given this level of complexity, it is necessary to rely not only on studies and theoretical research, which certainly have significant importance, but also on practical examples. The example of Rimini can be taken as a reference because it is one of the oldest destinations, so it is possible to study the difficulties and the problems that this area has already faced in the past, to figure out how to prevent these difficulties from occurring in younger destinations in the future, or at least how to reduce their impact.

Through the reconstruction of the history of tourism in Rimini and on the Riviera Romagnola, it is attempted to demonstrate how to take advantages from a maturity stage. More in detail, the global economic and financial crisis that began in 2008 has been carefully considered and analyzed, which has affected Rimini significantly and, apparently at first, irreversibly.

Through the renovation plans applied and the results obtained, it is attempted to criticize the cyclical process formation of a tourism space, leveraging on the various crises that this area has faced during its multi-century experience.

In summary, the purpose of this paper is to analyze the concept of maturity in a tourist destination and understand how to exploit this situation to increase its level of competitiveness. The second goal is to verify whether a tourist spot is really destined to renounce the presence of tourism within its territory or, on the contrary, through specific and functional renovation plans, it is possible to avoid a melancholic conclusion.

Literature review

This topic, which initially might seem simple, actually shows the involvement of many variables that make it complex, several theories have been formulated by different authors. The most acclaimed and famous theory has been written by Richard William Butler in 1980, entitled Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC), which proposes a curve that seeks to interpret the path of a tourism space with reference points such as time and number of tourists. This theory argues that there is a start-up phase at the beginning, in which the region starts to discover and explore the processes of tourism, and visitors goes in this kind of area in small numbers, restricted by lack of access, facilities, and local knowledge. As facilities are provided and awareness grows, visitor number will increase. With marketing, information dissemination, and further facility provision, the area's popularity will grow rapidly. Eventually, however, the rate of increase in visitor numbers will decline as levels of carrying capacity are reached.

These may be identified in terms of environmental factors (e.g. land scarcity, water quality, air quality), physical plant (e.g. transportation, accommodation, other services) or social factors (e.g. crowding, resentment by the local population) (Butler, 1980).

The author does not close the process, keeping it open to several interpretations and hypothesizing several solutions: decline, successful redevelopment, a continued growth at a much reduced rate, readjustment downwards, and rejuvenation.

It will be Butler himself correcting his model in 2012, admitting that the variables time and number of tourists are not enough to understand when a destination is facing a period of decline: he claims that it is also necessary to consider variables such as the perceived quality of the tourist, the objective quality of the experience that a destination offers, the level of income generated, the level of investments made and the level of employment; all factors that are related to each other (Butler, 2012).

Another important theory was formulated by the Polish researcher Bogdan Włodarczyk, who first defines the concept of tourism space: it is that part of geographical space where tourism occurs. The necessary and sufficient condition for classifying a part of geographical space as tourism space is tourism itself, regardless of its volume and character (Włodarczyk, 2009).

Thus, he explains his circular theory about the life of a tourist destination: it starts from the Stage I, called pre-tourism space, where there is no performance any tourism functions and tourism is not observed. It must be assumed, however, that the resources of this space are (ore will be) conducive to tourism space development. How soon this type of space will transform itself into tourism space depends on a number of factors and conditions, such as fashion for certain areas or tourism activities, access to information, investment opportunities, or availability of time, economic accessibility, etc. (Włodarczyk, 2011). The II stage is the tourism space, when it is possible to observe the effects of tourism in this area, regardless of its importance. There are three phases within this stage, new tourism space, where there are tourism functions only for a short time (beginning of the entire process), mature tourism space, optimum development and use of tourism resources, and old tourism space, where the tourism functions are aged and the assets and the infrastructures are exploited or degraded. In the end, the III stage is called post-tourism space, when it no longer has tourism functions and tourists have stopped visiting it for various reasons (Włodarczyk, 2011). Even if it is not possible to exclude the possibility that the destination will become a pre-tourism and tourism space again, according to this model, every destination must go through this last stage.

It is important to add to this research the results obtained recently by Custódio Santos, Ferreira, and Costa in 2014 which, by adopting a mix of quantitative and qualitative methodology, analyze the factors that influence competitiveness within a mature tourist destination. This means that the destination can rely on the different qualities it possesses, depending on the stage in which it is at that moment. By using a quantitative methodology, they find out that among the factors considered relevant for the competitiveness of tourism destinations in the maturity stage: the lack of environmental problems comes in fourth place, after factors already known as crucial, such as climate, safety and the friendliness and hospitality of the local population. At the same time, we note that the fact that the destination is not overbuilt and has kept its authenticity is considered more relevant than having cultural resources. These elements come ahead of factors normally considered crucial in the competitiveness of tourism destinations, such as price; the absence of environmental problems is considered more important than the existence of quality accommodations in that destination (Custódio Santos, Ferreira, Costa, 2014).

However, the support of the tangible example of Rimini to the theories described above, creates a mix that allows to generate different considerations on the life cycle of a tourist destination.

Methodology

The objective of this document is to identify strategies to avoid the decline of a mature mass tourism destination and to demonstrate that their effects produce a benefit for the tourist spot, consolidating the position instead of dragging it in a critical position.

On the other hand, the goal is to criticize the affirmation that a post-decline phase is foreseen within the life cycle of a tourist destination, which puts the tourist spot at a stage where tourism is no longer part of the economic activities of this area, sustained by Włodarczyk.

To demonstrate these objectives two types of methodologies are used. The first concerns the qualitative information with a historiographical review of Rimini, analyzing the empirical example to understand how to exploit the maturity stage as a benefit. The second methodology is quantitative: the different theories will be compared graphically and statistically with quantitative data provided by the Regional Tourist Observatory. The life

cycle of the Rimini tourist destination and is then compared with Butler's and Włodarczyk's theories.

Given the complexity of the theory, underlined by the variation that Butler has made to his own thought thirty years later (adding many variables to the original model), it is necessary to study this phenomenon not just with the theoretical support, always very important, but also with an empirical example. For these reasons and in order to demonstrate these goals, it seems appropriate to use a mix of practice and theory, qualitative and historiographical information together with statistical and quantitative data, which can provide many ideas for discussing previously elaborated models.

An accurate historical review has been produced to study the strategies Rimini has implemented in the past to take benefits from previous crises and maturation phases: the study of the recent economic and financial crisis of 2008, which has produced serious consequences worldwide, and the differences between the empirical model of Rimini and Włodarczyk's theory will be analyzed, after a graphic comparison.

Rimini from birth to maturity

The stripe of lands which goes from Comacchio to Cattolica in the north-east of Italy, which is called Riviera Romagnola, before becoming one of the most important touristic place in European scale, was just an abandoned and marshy place, frequented only by some hunters. The local people believed it was a useless space, without any potential benefits to exploit and full of pitfalls. During the eighteenth century, local intellectuals also considered this area unhealthy and dangerous, mainly because of the high humidity rates which it was believed to create breathing problems to people (Lombardi, 2002). In this period, the main activities in this region were agriculture and fisheries. Nobody was thinking about to exploit the coastal line as a tourist attraction.

At the beginning, only local rich people started to build some little houses and constructions and then, this trend started to be more and more famous. Thus, so aristocrats from all over the Country started to build their own houses to spend the summers at the beach (Gnola, 2001).

In this context, the Counts Alessandro and Ruggero Baldini and the doctor Claudio Tintori had the idea to build the first seaside establishment. The 30th of July 1843 the first tourist infrastructure has been inaugurated. Even Pope Pius IX exalted the initiative of the Tintori-

Baldini establishment in 1857 with the invitation to persevere in the enterprise, but political facts and natural phenomena put an end to the development of this idea: the cholera of 1855, the flood of the Marecchia River of 1866 and the advent of the Italian Independence Wars forced the implant to close (Turchini, 2002).

Thanks to the Baldini counts and the doctor Tintori, the first Rimini seaside establishment takes shape, inspired by the coast and the Tuscan coasts, which were the first to resume the widespread tendency in northern Europe already in the 18th century, marine baths with purpose spa. The Stabilimento Bagni was realized thanks to the funding of the Faenza Cassa di Risparmio, which provided a 2000 shield loan, with which the sandstone was leveled, built the beach structure and transformed a small alley into a carriageway, the current seafront of Rimini (Turchini, 2002). The enormous maintenance costs and the same political instability made the management of the establishment problematic, such that after a disastrous flood in Marecchia in 1866, it closes its doors.

In 1868, the town of Rimini bought the “Stabilimento bagni” and a few years later, the first building was demolished to give birth to the famous establishment, bearing the name of the much larger and more gorgeous Kursaal ("treatment room"), which will be inaugurated the 1st of July 1873 (Gnola, 2001).

From this moment on, the great Romagna tourist business machine takes shape (Lombardi, 2002).

Thanks to the Rimini Discount Bank, which offers loans for the construction of summer residences, numerous villas are born in the residential center of Marina Centro, for a noble, elegant and qualified tourism: the new and exclusive seaside resort.

Thus, begins the Belle Epoque period, which has given life to an elite tourism and baptizing Rimini one of the most prestigious seaside resorts in Europe.

The early years of the twentieth century represented in fact the golden age for Rimini tourism and the Romagna coast in general, which sees many prominent personality, from the nobility and from the high rank of the army. However, this is a rather ephemeral season, destined to not survive the censorship of the Great War (Gnola, 2001).

On the other hand, the birth, favored by the politics of fascism, of a middle-class, of more modest demands, which determines the change of customs. In 1926, the Autonomous Residence Company was established, which boosts Romagna's infrastructure by expanding

the road network, the bus line to Riccione and launching the seafront promenade in Rimini, with the project to create a city Seafront extended for 12 kilometers (Lombardi, 2002).

Fascism gave a special boost to the construction of marine colonies: they existed since 1880, but the aim was to host, free of charge, lymphatic children for almost forty days.

These sick children, thanks to the open air, the gymnastics and the good Romagna food regained weight and healed. It can be said that it was during the fascist phase that Rimini really came to be a tourist town. In fact, the fascist party members immediately understood the real benefits of the development of tourism in an area that did not have other valid alternatives (Turchini, 2002).

Between the two World Wars, Rimini sees the increasingly pressing rise of mass tourism and the first pensions with family management were born, a small business which represented the real engine of the region, suitable for customers who attended the Rimini's beaches (Turchini, 2001).

After the Second World War Rimini has to be reconstructed: almost nonexistent infrastructure, destroyed tourist facilities, unemployment, and inflation. Nonetheless, in 1945, the first tourists arrived: this is a stimulus for a rapid renewal of the city of Rimini and of all the accommodation and seaside resorts (Lombardi, 2002).

Another key factor that aroused the tourist phenomenon in the second post-war period is that many children, who became adults, workers or employees, went back to the Riviera with the family eager to rediscover those places they had been during their infancy. This intention is also explained by Butler with the concept of inertia: it is a trait among people, reflecting their long held habits tastes and preferences, and their willingness to return to familiar holiday destinations, related to a feeling of comfort and nostalgia. The desire for constancy is present in both tourists and in residents, along with a general dislike of sudden change (Butler, 2012).

Reconstruction takes place very quickly, so that in 1947 the presences are already stabilizing on the values recorded in the pre-war period. In the 1950s, there was a continuous expansion of Romagna tourism, thanks to the many hotel services, the friendliness of the treatment and the low prices and competitive.

The prosperity ahead, and above all the prospect of a future improvement, opens the way for a widening of consumption that, after 1950, announces the season of consumerism (Gnola, 2001).

In the 1960s, the "economic miracle" of Rimini became the "Riviera of Europe" and there was a settling of Rimini tourism, with thousands of tourism facilities.

This period is considered the "Golden Age" of tourism in Rimini, as the mass tourism found in Romagna a natural habitat thanks to the low prices and the elevated level of the quality.

The main difference between the Fascist period and the Golden Age was that the latter witnessed the influx of foreign tourists who, from May to September, populated the Romagna coast, expanding the season compared with the tourism focused on the classic three months of summer (Turchini, 2002).

Immediately after the years of great development and, in particular, after the 1950s marking the economic boom, the first signs of crisis showed up. The development in the 60s slowed down considerably. The main reason is that hotel owners did not have the right tools to leverage their offer due to the lack of a specific entrepreneurial culture, typical of small business, but also due to a lack of investments.

Over the years, new tourist destinations such as the Costa Brava (Spain) and Croatia (Yugoslavia) have risen. During the early seventies had been equipped with modern accommodation, infrastructures and airports for charter flights, increasing the competitiveness inside the same segment. According to Butler's life cycle diagram, in the sixties and seventies, tourism activities in Rimini gradually enter a maturity phase under the combined effect of a change in demand for national and international supply. In this situation, three types of response were needed: inventing innovative marketing strategies, refurbishing the city and improving hotel quality (Battilani, 2002).

The resolution to the first problems

Rimini in the 1970s is characterized by a sharp slowdown in the volume of business caused by the rise in the rate of inflation and the unemployment rate. All this led the country to face a significant negative economic cycle. After more than two decades of growth, the tourism industry had entered a maturity stage caused by the inability to initiate a substantial overcoming of the structural backwardness of the offer, compared to the novelty of tourism services.

It is very important to emphasize that these are the years when the public administration began to consider the inland as a factor of attraction that can give a plus to the seaside resort offer, trying to include collateral activities. Another important intuition was to attract new types of tourism not only to the seaside but also to attract the trade fair and congressional, scholar and social activities with the primary purpose of stretching the summer season, given the low indices of utilization of the structures accommodation. The intuition of building the Fair and its transfer and expansion is one of the possible examples of the role played by the public in determining choices that have contributed to boost the recovery and retraining of a tourism that was experiencing a crisis that seemed almost impossible to overcome (Lombardi, 2002).

Thus, the two main components identified to solve this first stage of maturity of the destination were the involvement of the inland potential along with the seaside offer and the attraction of new types of tourism, even if this meant to focus principally on the national market, losing an important part of international tourists. With this first attempt to diversify the offer, the idea was to give importance to the absence of environmental problems that characterize the region, not forgetting the climate and the renowned Romagna hospitality, always hearty and friendly.

Between 1978 and 1988, tourism was rising, mainly due to the rise in Italian attendance and the fortunate "invention" of the entertainment district, consisting of nightclubs, playgrounds and theme parks. In fact, the Rimini coast was unknowingly specialized in marginal tourist segments (Becheri, Bonini, Dall'Ara, De Podestà, Pasi, Taiti, Vavassori, 2010). In Rimini, the urban planning of the coast is episodic, not far-sighted and takes on the character of a parcel of urban planning (Conti & Pasini, 2000).

In fact, the greatest efforts were directed towards the realization of discos and gambling halls. For example, the licenses of the latter ranged from an average of 24 to one 80 (Battilani, 2002), and Rimini, who until that time had specialized in family tourism, was transforming into the favorite destination of young people who came to the Riviera just to dedicate themselves to the many possibilities of day and night entertainment.

In 1983, Camilla Cederna, in her "Casa Nostra" book, defined Rimini and Coastal reality as a "divertimentificio", (a place devoted only to have fun¹) re-igniting the local debate on the identity and prospects of the Riviera. With the data presented by Ronci (94 discos and

¹ Translated by the author.

ballrooms) it is easy to understand how the new image of Rimini has become the capital of entertainment. It is true that Rimini's offer was less and less evident to the family needs that had been the basis of past tourism. The city was changing into a big city with the resulting problems, such as drugs, prostitution and delinquency.

1989 is in Rimini the summer of mucilages. These strange algae invaded the Adriatic making it useless and above all pushing away tourists. In 1989, attendance dropped by 35% (around seven million less tourists), causing all tour operators to panic and causing serious losses to the Riviera. Only by the end of August the gelatinous mass began to disappear, but in any case, the damage to the image and the economy was enormous, since the phenomenon had been present at the moment of major tourist activity (Turchini, 2002).

The dizzy drop in attendance due to mucilages allowed to focus on a type of tourism that helped Rimini also in the past, but which in these years became a salvation and at the same time a boost for the relaunch. Rimini boasts an International Trade Fair, able to organize events of remarkable importance and to mobilize thousands of people from all over the world.

The development of congress tourism allowed to repair the serious loss of loyal foreign tourists, promoting the offer of Romagna to other markets and conveying new nationalities into the city and enhancing the level of tourism accommodations and facilities.

The effects of the crisis: a new period of maturity

In 2008 the entire economic world was affected by a general crisis, whose effects can still be seen today. Initially launched in the United States of America in 2007 following a crisis in the real estate market with the outbreak of a real estate bubble (subprime crisis) and a subsequent global financial crisis.

The production system of the province of Rimini has inevitably been involved in the slowdown of the economic cycle that has affected most of the Italian and European regions over the last ten years. The crisis has hit the Rimini area since the second half of 2008, but the worst effects occurred the year after. In 2009, the main economic indicators show strong negative variations in production (the average of the quarterly variations is 13.5%), the turnover (- 13.4%) and the value of exports (- 7.4%).

After more than 150 years since the birth of tourism in Romagna, in 2008 Rimini had to face its toughest time. There are several indicators that show the advent of this profound crisis, which explain the maturity that Rimini has had, once again.

The contractions of the tourist movement (some of the most serious ones) are not solely attributable to the difficulties arising from the economic downturn, but are also related to various structural factors, including the level of the quality of the supply which is among the main causes of the difficulties on the beachfront (OTR, 2009).

A significant investigation conducted by “Il Sole 24 ore”, one of the most important Italian economic journals, has found out that Rimini is the most dangerous city in Italy, counting almost 8000 crimes per 100000 inhabitants per year (Gianotti, 2016). These data, which make this area sadly famous, besides indicating a steadily increasing crime, *affect negatively the image and the quality perceived by the tourist of the destination.*

The lesser perceived quality is also due to the investment sector: as mentioned earlier, one of the strengths of Romagna tourism is the family management, a small business that represents the real engine of the seaside economy structured for the supply of a cheap product, suitable for customers who attended the Rimini's beaches. This strength, however, has a weakness: the patriarchal family, as well as preventing the growth of the demand for seaside tourism, also plays a negative role on the supply side, as it hampers investment in innovative initiatives. Renewal of family structures occurs through the claim of individual freedoms and the identification of certain rights, defined as inviolable, of man. In Rimini, however, renewal is slow to occur (Gardini, 1990).

The slowdown is also affecting the emerging economies for the first time in this decade, that in 2009 while maintaining the engine of growth, will record a halving growth rate, attributable to lower investment. Moreover, the forecasts were not favorable for the following years: despite massive government interventions, not only in the US, the stabilization of financial markets is still far behind, while domestic demand, both in terms of investment and consumption, tends to fall further; it is incontrovertible that Italy has also entered the heaviest recession of the last eighty years (OTR, 2009). The knowledge and return value of investment, especially intangible, in the tourist SMEs is the real strategic node for the successful transition to the next few years (OTR, 2009).

Starting in the 1980s, family-owned hotels were enriched with little effort, given the peaks of arrivals and attendance in those years and the great ability of spending a young clientele

looking for fun. This factor led Romagna's entrepreneurs to be satisfied and not to invest in the future. Excluding the very first 90s, in this decade only some investments were done, the ones demand-driven: as mentioned earlier, only a few structures invested in increasing services and supply, following the affirmation of the most demanding congress tourism compared to previous audience, to avoid being excluded by the market.

In 2002, the change of Lira coin to Euro, along with the growing inflation rate further slowed down investment, offering to the customers always the same offer and lowering the level of quality of experience year after year.

Overall, the crisis has had rather negative effects on provincial employment. The number of employed people, estimated by ISTAT (Italian National Institute of Statistics), remained substantially stable between 2008 and 2009, reaching around 135,000 units, then dropping dramatically below the 131,000 in 2010. This decline affected especially self-employed and particularly those engaged in the services sector (- 13.4%).

This decrease in the number of employees is also linked to the overall decrease in the income generated. Despite all attempts to extend the duration of the season and involve different types of tourism, the main trend of the tourist is to reduce the length of stay. In fact, the lower spending capacity of tourists, especially Italians ones, has led to a change in preferences: rather than a week-long vacation or, in some cases, longer, now the weekends are preferred. Moreover, congress and business tourism, involved in the 90s, have also a short length of stay.

In the province of Rimini, during 2008, average weekend arrivals (Friday-Sunday) recorded 57% of arrivals the whole week (OTR, 2009).

Adding to these factors the fact that Rimini's business model has always been based on affordable and favorable prices, leaving a little profit margin, the result is a collapse of earnings.

In the article published by Butler "Mature Tourist Destinations: Can we recapture and retain the magic?" in which elements are added to his original TALC theory of 1980, he explains how to understand when a tourist destination presents some difficulties. He argues that it is not enough to rely on the numbers, but even then, it was indicated that they were not a foolproof measure of the health of a destination. Many other elements must be considered, in terms of the perceived quality of the destination, of the quality of the visitor experience (perhaps measured in terms of proportions of repeat visitors), a decline in income resulting

from tourist expenditure, a decline in investment in tourism related facilities and infrastructure, and a decline employment in tourism-related services (Butler, 2012). Clearly all of these items are related to each other, and it was possible to see all these negative effects in Rimini in conjunction with the onset of the economic crisis.

All this analysis led to the worst of the hypothesis: Martina Castigliani in 2012 in her article examined the situation of a significant actor in the Rimini's image and history, the discos, stating: The Romagna Riviera lives its darkest period from the postwar period to today: a tourism model that no longer works (Castigliani, 2012). In this investigation, there is a comparison between the economic crisis and the discos, which had a lot of problems from the 2006: some of them closed, others are struggling to survive; threatened by reduced availability of money, other low-cost destinations, and online music.

The investigation of Matteo Marini in "La Piazza" journal, even more pessimist, is called "Tourism-crisis: the end of the Rimini model?" The author, through some questions to hotel owners, tried to understand the weaknesses of Rimini in the middle of the economic crisis. The result is that this area is affected by its own previous strength: the downward struggle of prices, too much competition at the expense of quality and investments. "We are stucked at a tourist offer of 40 years ago. The future goes through change and adaptation, but we do not have other ingredients useful to sell the holiday" (Marini, 2010).

In the light of these assertions it can be useful to have a look at the SWOT analysis made in 2009 by the OTR.

Swot Analysis Rimini 2008

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Unbeatable hotel accommodation dimension. ▪ Strong and consolidated image, especially on the domestic market. ▪ The strength of typical Romagna hospitality, able to loyalty the customer. ▪ Easy access. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Decline on international markets. ▪ Part of the supply aged and inadequate. ▪ Difficulties in accessing credit for retrenchment and investment. ▪ Lack of a strong and unique brand. ▪ Decrease of loyal customers due to aggressive competitors and low-cost and last-minute deals.
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Launch innovative products and access new markets. ▪ Development of image promotion on foreign markets. ▪ Greater integration between coastal towns and art cities in the region. ▪ Enhancement of the great environmental and natural resources near the coast. ▪ Communication of a new image to attract new targets: South Italy and international markets. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Heavy economic crisis that in 2009 will further reduce arrivals and attendance. ▪ Possible degradation of the offer, in the absence of credit facilities. ▪ Private, casual and negligent marketing. ▪ Price increases, particularly in the extra-receptive system. ▪ Absence of market orientation and co-operation by some private exponents.

Source: OTR

How to take benefits from a mature destination

Traditional mass tourism destinations in the Mediterranean are nowadays trying to react to the difficulties of the local tourism system by the introduction of new modes of governing the tourism phenomena (Conti & Perelli, 2007) and supporting a rejuvenation process (Butler, 1980). Two driving forces (occasionally integrated) are reshaping the traditional approaches to tourism policies and planning strategies: the dominant discourse on the sustainability of tourism and the attention for innovative governance processes (Conti & Perelli, 2007).

The new politics that Rimini decided to adopt were simple: *cooperation between private and public local entities, diversification, rejuvenation, innovation and sustainability.*

Cooperation

It is absolutely necessary to foresee investments to realize integration projects: it is enough to think about reception, transport, environment and energy rescue. To understand that the territory needs a unique project that can grasp the value of integration. (OTR, 2009). This was the call to cooperate extracted from the annual report of the Regional Tourism Observatory, which was decided to follow immediately.

Companies in pursuit of diversification and innovation and in response to the crisis find the need to adopt co-operative models and co-operatives come up as flexible solutions that complement the opportunities for business development and the promotion of local systems. In particular, it is possible to identify two types of co-operatives that carry out different support functions: infrastructure management co-operatives and cooperatives supporting market segments.

In the first case, we have the construction of cooperatives which support and make productive for the system the presence of infrastructures built by the public bodies to make possible with the event tourism, the deseasonalization of the tourism flows and assuring a management network of support and link between the small concerned.

Similarly, in reference to particular market segments that have been identified as a "product club" by regional promotion legislation, consortium models have been used to carry out a market segmentation and specific promotion of both the quality of supply and of the promotion and the orientation of demand. In this case, it is evident the integration into the consortium tool between territorial promotion and business (Travaglini, 2012).

Diversification and heritage

For a new course in tourism, Emilia-Romagna is also working on the initiative to provide an offer that can intercept the needs of a more and more sensitive demand about the complexity of situations that determine the quality of life. The tourist asks for a diverse range of products:

health, wellness, exploration of the territory, culture, gastronomy, in summary pleasant experiences (OTR, 2009).

Looking for an alternative to the seasonal seaside resort, Rimini begins in 2010 a campaign of public and private actions to promote the inland as an autonomous product, a territory which offer many cultural, natural and social attractions of the first order, such as the fortifications built in San Leo. Because they say the inland "is the land of our roots, typical products, villages and traditions, nature and landscapes, art and spirituality, culture and hospitality, all this is in inside" (Scatizzi, 2011).

To this end, they gather together public and private resources of all the provincial territory drafting a document for the following five years, that can satisfy the national and foreign demand of the clients of this market niche to which they have previously studied.

The main points are:

- Perform internal marketing;
- Provide integrated tourist information;
- Coordinated image; communication of system and local protagonism;
- Package company "inland" and work in network, products, services, itineraries;
- Promotion and marketing - Product Club – Internationalization;
- Events and manifestations;
- Typical products, gastronomy, handicrafts;
- Connections and accessibility related to transfers;
- Alliances and tourist destinations with local co-participation and check what has been done;
- Government aid and regional resources (Scatizzi, 2011).

In addition, sport tourism has been expanded and improved: thanks to the cooperation between nine municipalities named "Unione Rubicone e Mare", which has valorized and publicized the cultural heritage of the hinterland, building organized paths to promote the tourism segment devoted to cycling, trekking, mountain biking and horseback riding.

Rejuvenation

In order to rejuvenate the destination some investments were done, trying to rethink mass tourism using new approaches, the aim was to attract a young clientele from all the continent in search of fun and with a good spending availability. For example, the famous disco called “Cocorico”, one of the top 15 discotheques at European level, invested a million-euro capital to host some of the most renowned world djs.

Eugenio Angelino, head of the promotion of this investment, explains how he wanted to integrate in 600 specialized facilities on the Riviera the expertise to professionally promote the tourist offer as a whole, looking to excellence: theme parks, Cocorico and the world of discos and the inland.

Another non-traditional investment to promote the thought of “being proud to have fun” is the shores phenomena. Summer 2017 brought to Rimini the first Italian edition of this TV format, called "Super Shore". Ten guys from all over the world lived for about a month in a villa, constantly recorded by cameras and doing various activities with the only aim of having fun. Even Rimini Mayor, Andrea Gnassi, considers this opportunity as unique to Rimini to revive the territory on an international scale, also considered the youth target of MTV, the producers of this format.

Sustainability, innovation and future

The ability to constantly innovate and propose ever-new offer paradigms coupled with the dynamism of regional operators and the convinced public support system will enable Emilia-Romagna to obtain meaningful tourist outcomes for the future and give new impetus to regional tourism in the face of such demanding challenges (OTR, 2009).

Rimini already entered the debate on sustainable tourism in 2001, in fact, the second International Sustainable Tourism Conference was held in the city, with the approval of the "Carta di Rimini per un Turismo Sostenibile” (Rimini Agreement for Sustainable Tourism). The key objective of this document was to identify strategies and tools for sustainable tourism development in mass tourism destinations. The concrete commitment of the Province of Rimini, however, is to be dated back to 2000 when it presented to the European Commission a project proposal entitled LIFE "Strategies and Tools for Sustainable Tourism in

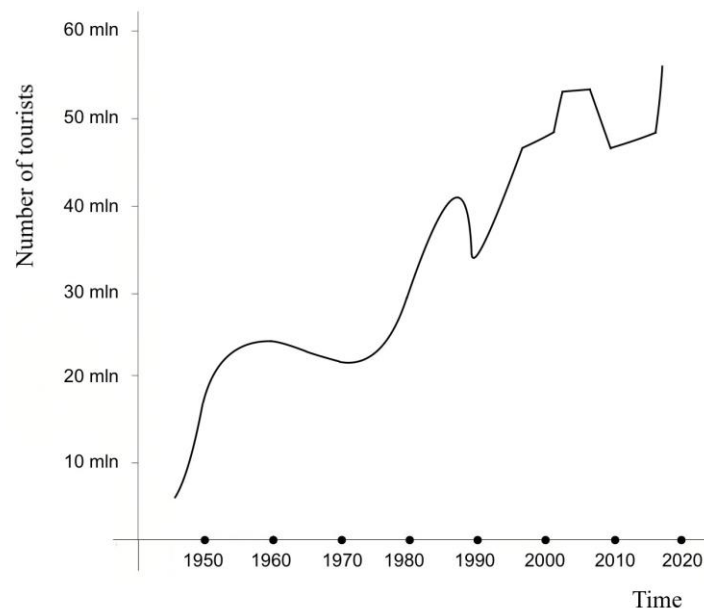
Mediterranean Coastal Areas" together with the Municipality of Calvià (Balearic Islands), the National Hotels Federation and the Italian Institute for Research and Environment. Rimini has been one of the first tourist destinations to understand the importance of the theme of sustainability and to place it as the cornerstone of its development plans.

The city of Rimini is also very dedicated to sports and wellness, being the organizer of RiminiWellness, the largest trade fair event in the world dedicated to fitness, wellness, business, sports, physical culture and healthy eating; with nearly 270000 participants coming from more than 80 countries in four days. Thus, it is not strange to find in Rimini's future projects a set of facilities to promote sporting activities along the sea park, which would become the largest Site-Specific Gym in Europe (Semprini & Mijic, 2013).

The Romagna town is unmistakably changing skin, repositioning the brand, trying to forget the rites and stereotypes that have been accompanying it for the last hundred years. The future of Rimini passes for the protection of territory, art and culture. A paradigm shift started from the study of the development model of Sweden and Denmark. Precisely from this study, the need to stop the ceaseless soil consumption and radical redevelopment of the environment has been realized. Without car and cement, the entire seafront will become Europe's largest open-air gym. More than 155 projects - for a private investment of just under 200 million - will lead to 20 km of uninterrupted physical activity trips with open air and indoor gyms; wellness centers with salt water; restaurants that offer local and organic food. All framed by 115 km of bike paths and many green areas. The other pillar of the project is culture. Today, the center of Rimini is a great work in progress: with an investment of around 100 million, an urban reconstruction started from the restoration of historic and artistic heritage (Sparaciari, 2017).

Graphic comparison between the models

In this section of the research, quantitative data will be analyzed, building a simple plot of the Emilia-Romagna region - which contains the territory of Rimini and the Riviera - which relate the number of tourists over time, taking into consideration the official data collected by the Emilia-Romagna Regional Tourism Observatory (OTR). The collected statistical data refers to the duration of the entire solar year and take into account not only coastal seaside tourism but also all kinds of tourism that offers the hinterland. The result of this operation is the graphic 1.



GRAPHIC 1

Data source: Osservatorio Turistico Regionale

If we correlate this graphic with Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle theory, it can be seen how the tourist destination had faced several times maturity: excluding the World Wars from the graphic - when about all activities were interrupted, not only tourism - it is possible to notice three stages where Rimini had the previously mentioned difficulties. These problems, as mentioned earlier, were solved through different strategies, which allowed the destination to treat this phase in a positive manner, and to consolidate its tourism activity.

A significant discrepancy arises from the graphical comparison between the trend of tourism in the Emilia Romagna region and the model of Włodarczyk. As previously mentioned, he argues that the cycle of a tourist destination (Figure 1) foresees that it will return to a certain point in a status which does not perform any tourism functions and tourism is not observed (Włodarczyk, 2011).

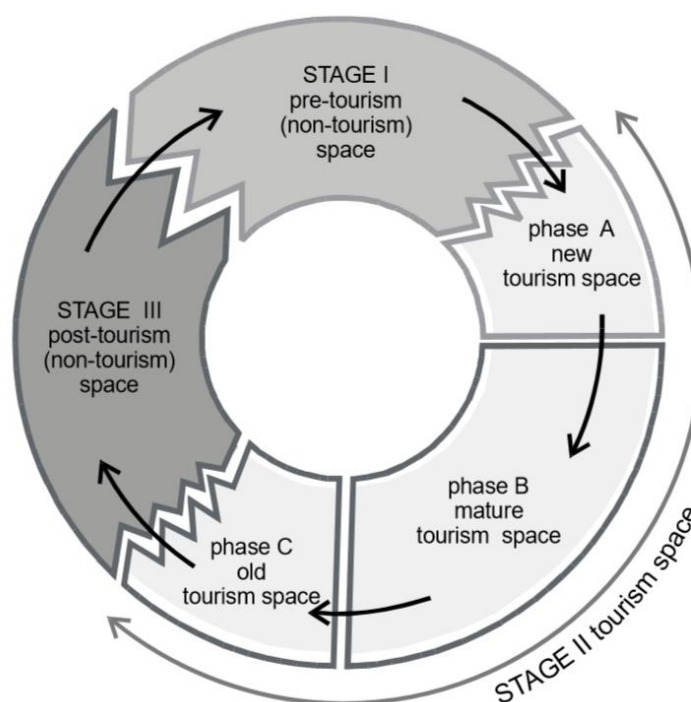


FIGURE 1: Włodarczyk's process of tourism formation.

This theory is largely questionable, especially in the light of what happened historically in the central Italian region, and also bearing in mind the most recent literature, which argues that a mature destination can leverage on certain aspects to reach a consolidation level instead of heading towards a slow decline.

Results

The results of these new policies implemented in Rimini have been excellent: already in the 2017 season it has been confirmed that the corrective actions carried out in the tourist destination have been effective. The data confirms this fact, a summer promoted with optimal grades, with 7 out of 10 of the 22 million nationals remaining in the borders that chose sea and beaches, sharing the primacy with Sicily, Sardinia, Emilia Romagna and Puglia (Nutti, 2017). All accommodation facilities were full at various times of the year, recording an

exorbitant + 24% over the previous year, even with positive signs regarding the elongation of the season, with many reservations also in September and with very good results also on international markets. The excellent performance at the regional level was mainly driven by the investments made: the business association shows that 92.5% of the companies supported investments, an unprecedented percentage, never recorded before.

The strategy based on diversification, rejuvenation, innovations, sustainability, heritage and, above all, the cooperation between public and private entities has had an excellent aftermath. Lastly, the innovation and sustainability projects already studied and approved for the next years leave hope that Rimini has learned the lesson, avoiding a stagnation period without worries about the future. To these results derived from the historiography, it is necessary to add the interesting results obtained from the study of "Influential factors in the competitiveness of mature tourism destinations", which explain how the presence of good infrastructures and natural, cultural and social attractions, the lack of environmental problems, good climate, the friendliness and hospitality of the resident population help the mature tourist destination to consolidate itself (Custódio Santos, Ferreira, Costa, 2014). All the elements that have been identified by Custódio Santos, Ferreira and Costa have been used as guidelines for applied strategies described above: this has allowed the destination to treat this recent maturity stage as an advantage, and, consequently to consolidate its position. This in fact allowed to avoid the decline and, on the contrary, to get the excellent results that have been recorded in the last year.

The ability of the Romagna destination to recover several times contradicts in part the cyclical process of tourism space formation theory of Bogdan Włodarczyk.

A very important aspect is that tourism in Rimini was born in 1843, almost two centuries ago, and although it has lived very critical times, the results achieved in 2017 are great, among the first at Italian national level.

Moreover, the confirmation of the first objective of this work states that a tourist destination can take positive opportunities from a mature situation. In fact, recent literature argues that a mature tourist destination can avoid phases of decline by leveraging certain parameters to promote its tourist offer (Custódio Santos, Ferreira, Costa, 2014).

All these indications suggest that the phase in which tourism is not part of the main economy of Rimini is still far away, or even that this phase will never be part of this city's path. Plans for the future also seem to further extend this new consolidation and, why not, expansion

phase of Riviera's tourism, which focus on two themes of world relevance such as sustainability and innovation.

These elements criticize the cyclical process of Włodarczyk, a concept that is further underlined if a global analysis is carried out: this condition, in fact, can be replicated in the vast majority of tourist destinations worldwide. Almost no destination, except for exceptional events, have completely lost their tourist vocation; instead, it is possible to notice many examples such as Rimini, which have been able to avoid a slow decline towards a complete change of their nature, such as the destinations of Benidorm, Torrevieja or Mallorca in Spain, the Côte d'Azur, in France or the Cinque Terre in Italy. In these places in fact, there has been a similar circumstance to the one of Rimini, where a maturity situation has shown signs of crisis, but these have been exploited to have benefits through a consolidation.

Conclusions

The use of two different methodologies, which enabled, on one hand, to consult qualitative information through a historical review of the destination, and, on the other hand, quantitative and statistical data, made it possible to come to different conclusions.

The first hypothesis of the document, after being compared with qualitative information, recent literature and empirical examples worldwide, has been confirmed. In fact, all the elements described in this research suggest that a decline in the tourist destination can be avoided, exploiting the maturity situation as a benefit, through specific strategies, which leads to a consolidation condition.

The second hypothesis, which is more a critic of the obsolete Processes of Tourism Space Formation theory of Włodarczyk, derives from the statements that were elaborated from the first conclusion. By analyzing quantitative data and plot comparison with the most acclaimed theories about the life of a tourist destination, it can be stated that it is not possible for a tourist area to return to a condition where tourism no longer exists.

This concept is underlined not only by the Rimini case, but numerous cases can be listed at world level where the tourist destination has implemented effective renovation plans, which have allowed a consolidation to the tourist spot. On the contrary, it is difficult to list cases where the tourist destination has vanished.

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