

Annex 8. Touristic knowledge at a regional level. The Tourist Information System of Asturias

By Luis Valdés Peláez. University of Oviedo and Director of the Tourist Information System of Asturias. 2013. www.sita.org.

Tourism, like any branch of economic activity, requires information systems that allow to structure useful tools for decision making by all the stakeholders, of both the public and private sectors, involved in its management, at a national level and with more reduced administrative units such as the regional or local governments. In the case of Spain, the areas of competence in the field of tourism are assumed by the autonomous regions who are in need of specific local information. On the other hand, the private sector also demands precise knowledge linked specifically to its activity (accommodation, transport, distribution, hotel management...) that allows it to adopt the most suitable business strategies (Valdés & Del Valle, 2011).

Since 1997, the Tourist Information System of Asturias (SITA) (<http://www.sita.org>) has undertaken an integral analysis of the tourist sector of the Principality of Asturias by means of a series of research lines organized in four basic blocks of information, perfectly complementary and synergical: the analysis of demand, the study of supply, the estimation of the economic impact generated by the touristic activity, and also an area of research and knowledge making it a reference model for the study and analysis of tourism in a socio-economic framework.

Analysis of demand

The goal of the study of demand is to characterize the behavior of the tourists who visit Asturias. The methodology used is based on the completion of a structured personal interview by the visitor. The data obtained sheds light on the opinions and perceptions of the visitors, highlights complaints and suggestions and identifies which elements should be modified. It helps to determine new demand for products, the activities the tourists undertake, pool information on the time of year in which they travel to Asturias and how they travel to the region, their expenditure, the duration of their stay, the factors of attraction of the tourists to their holiday destination, etc. The sampling procedure is structured on two different levels: in collective establishments and in the street, in places of particular touristic interest, using different places to conduct the interviews throughout the year. Market Studies in Origin (EMOs) are studies into the characteristics of the trips of the individuals carried out in their place of residence with the objective of determining the potential of a specific geographical market or segment thereof. By means of a personal survey, the dynamics of choice of touristic destinations are evaluated, revealing the image of Asturias as a tourist destination and determining the basic profiles and potential demand of the population in origin with regard to our region. The field work is carried out by means of market research by zones, taking into consideration the population, sex and age, using a random selection. The period of collection of the information is very reduced, of approximately one week and always in non-holiday periods. This information is completed by in-depth interviews with travel agents in order to learn more in detail about how the commercialization of Asturias as a tourist destination is carried out (Valdés et al, 2004b).

Analysis of Supply

An analysis is undertaken of the characteristics of the touristic accommodation establishments, their strategies and company policies. By means of a survey, information is gathered on different aspects such as: investment made, human resources training policies, the degree of technological equipment of the sector, prices, invoicing, environmental policies, evaluation of the activity, etc. Thus an overall view is obtained of the sector, highlighting its strengths and weaknesses.

The methodology of the study is based on the accomplishment of an annual personal interview with the owners, managers and those in charge of or responsible for accommodation.

Moreover, through administrative registers, a database is built up which gives a quantitative analysis in terms of establishments and the capacity of the touristic supply, monitoring the opening and closing of the accommodation establishments and also elaborating indicators of the evolution of the capacity of the touristic supply.

The economic impact of tourism

Through an input-output analysis, and with the data obtained from the different statistical operations, the impact of the touristic activity on the local economy is evaluated, showing the important role that tourism plays. The starting point is the estimation of tourist expenditure which is obtained through the survey of demand in destination. The average expenditure of the different types of visitors is calculated and according to different areas of expenditure (lodging, meals, transport...).

The methodology employed consists in the application of the input-output analysis to the measurement of the regional touristic expenditure, so allowing to evaluate the different levels of effects (direct, indirect and induced) and also discover the sectorial disintegration (Valdés *et al.*, 2010).

The analysis is carried out annually and is updated according to the regional Input-Output Tables that are elaborated periodically.

Research and knowledge

The continuous research, the accumulated experience and the knowledge acquired by the SITA multidiscipline team has led to interesting results both through externalisation and application in other zones or socioeconomic areas and also from the development of methodologies which enhance touristic research.

The experience of SITA has also been used by cities such as La Habana in Cuba (Valdés *et al.*, 2011b) designing operations of demand for touristic knowledge, also in the state of Baja California del Sur in Mexico or even nationally in cities such as Santiago de Compostela or Gijon. In the field of research and methodological development, SITA has also contributed through the publication and spreading of its work in journals of scientific interest, not only with the analysis of results but also in the diffusion of estimation techniques.

The use of new techniques with nonparametric models can be highlighted for the estimation of the economic cost of the tourists in destination from the expenditure made in the establishment of collective lodging (Valdés *et al.* 2007).

Given that the classical parametric procedures (linear or logarithmic regressions, etc.) are not adequate in this particular case, a more realistic and objective model is developed, based on new nonparametric techniques. This model permits the analysis of expenditure in destination, taking into account the different touristic typologies.

A research line has also been developed about private touristic accommodation and problems associated to quantification in places of touristic interest (Torres, *et al.*, 2002).

The surveys made over a number of years have produced a great volume of data, facilitating analysis of tourist segments as in Valdés and De la Ballina (2005) where the results are presented, from the point of view of both supply and demand, of the establishments of rural tourism that assume quality as a competitive strategy in relation to other establishments. The differences perceived by the management of the quality mark Casonas Asturianas have been analyzed, in terms of competitive evolution and their business strategy and the influence on their principal management ratios in comparison with the rest of the establishments of the sector. Through the analysis of demand, it has been possible to learn and estimate the significative differences in terms of the assessment of the establishments, the tourists' expenditure and even the organization and development of their stay.

Given the constant growth of the use of the Internet by tourists, both for searching for information and as a means of reserving accommodation, in Menéndez (2012) a model is presented that explains the variables of the tourist receiver which are the most decisive in the accomplishment of hotel booking through the Internet, offering data on the probability of the use of this method as a means of reservation according to the type of tourist.

All the above means that SITA is a centre of knowledge orientated to the improvement of tourism and society. In 2013 SITA has developed the Strategic Program of Tourism of the Principality of Asturias (2013-2015 PrEsTa) (Department of Economy and Employment, 2013), in which from a diagnosis of the current situation and a review of the main perspectives of tourism, proposals are made and the necessary high-priority actions in order to improve the tourist activity in Asturias are defined, preserving the economic, social and environmental interests.

FURTHER LINKS:

Consejería de Economía y Empleo del Principado de Asturias (2013). Plan Estratégico de Turismo del Principado de Asturias (PrEsTa 2013-2015). Principado de Asturias. <http://www.asturias.es/Asturias/descargas/presta.pdf>
Sistema de Información Turística de Asturias (SITA) <http://www.sita.org>
Sistema de Información Turística en Estado de Baja California del Sur en México <http://www.sitcaugc.com.mx>

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