

## **CULTURAL VARIABLES, AS STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES, IN THE COMPETITIVENESS DIAGNOSIS OF TOURISM DESTINATIONS: THE CASE OF TENERIFE'S TOURISM ZONES**

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Strategic management of tourism destinations needs to take into account the competitive base that a destination has, particularly in terms of its resources and capacities, on which a competitive strategy can be supported. This strategy must consist of a tourism offer that provides the best competitive positioning for a destination.

The analysis of competitive factors is usually carried out from the perception of visitors and often depends on their expectations and satisfaction. However, the information required to reliably evaluate the competitive factors involved in the positioning of different destinations is not always available. When this is the case, the use of experts is gaining ground as a valid option in tourism management models (see review by Eysteinnsson and Gudlaugsson, 2011).

Starting from the seminal works of Crouch and Ritchie (1999), Dwyer (2001), Kim (2003) and Dwyer and Kim (2003), and including the approaches developed by Sánchez and Fajardo (2004), Sánchez (2006), Parra-López and Oreja-Rodríguez (2008a; 2008b), the construct "Competitiveness of Tenerife's Tourism Zones" has been delimited. This construct includes both the resources and capacities of the destination (original and created), and other complementary factors that represent tourism activity on Tenerife. The purpose of this theoretical construct is to demonstrate its operational potential by integrating diverse competitive factors into it that are psychometrically unidimensional (Eckes, 2011). This implies that measures obtained jointly can be placed on a continuous line and, subsequently, analyzed statistically.

Parra-López and Oreja-Rodríguez (2008a), who delimited the construct of "Competitiveness of Tenerife's Tourism Zones", developed a questionnaire that includes the competitiveness factors.

This study focuses on the analysis of cultural tourism as an alternative to "sun and sand" for Tenerife's tourism destinations. Cultural tourism can produce wealth for local

economies, moreover, historical and culture heritage constitutes one of the most important components of tourism management (Gutiérrez and Oreja, 1998 a and b).

The availability of competitive factors related to tangible and intangible cultural resources (well-known historical and cultural sites in the area; fiestas and festivals of interest to tourists and infrastructures such as museums, arts centers and galleries ...) needs to be integrated into the construct “Competitiveness of Tenerife’s tourism zones”. This information is required to determine the relative importance of these cultural resources and capacities in the competitive positioning of the destination (Montero-Muradas and Oreja-Rodríguez, 2008). This would allow the development of potential competitive strategies involving cultural tourism in Tenerife’s tourism zones (Montero-Muradas and Oreja-Rodríguez, 2010).

The use of Rasch Measurement Theory (hereafter RMT) Rasch (1960), the integration of the Many Facet Rasch Model (Linacre, 1989; Eckes, 2011) and the Rating Scale Rasch Model (Andrich, 1978; 1988), through the application of their corresponding programs FACETS (Linacre 2012a) and WINSTEPS (Linacre, 2012b), has provided us with measures for the competitive positioning of these tourist zones and with valid and reliable competitiveness factors. Similar kinds of results have already been obtained from previous applications of RMT (Oreja-Rodríguez and Armas-Cruz, 2012). However in this study, an advance in its use as an analytical tool has been made by obtaining Diagnostic Reports on the competitiveness of each tourism zone, through the use of expert opinions, following the work by Crouch (2011). Possible biases that can originate from these opinions, mainly because are more severe or lenient judgments are taken into account (Eckes, 2011).

The results obtained have allowed us to determine the influence of different competitive factors in the positioning of each tourism zone and, in particular, to discuss the likely strengths and weaknesses of cultural factors compared to others. To do this, we have designed a system of Diagnostic Benchmarking to highlight the role played by these competitive cultural factors in each of Tenerife’s tourism zones.

The competitive factors (CF) related to Historical-Cultural Heritage used are:  
 CF6: Availability of well-known historical/cultural sites in the zone.  
 CF7: Availability of fiestas and festivals of interest.  
 CF12: Availability of Historical–Cultural Infrastructures (museums, art centers, galleries,...).  
 Tenerife’s Tourism zones: 1.- Isla Baja. 2.- Puerto de la Cruz / La Orotava.  
 3.- Santa Cruz de Tenerife / La Laguna 4.- The South.

**DIAGNOSTIC BENCHMARKING OF TENERIFE’S TOURISM ZONES 2012**

zones	FACTORS OF TOURISM COMPETITIVENESS																			zones			
	1	3	2	9	8	18	16	14	21	22	6	15	11	12	7	10	13	4	17		5	20	19
zone 2	E	E	E	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	C	4	4	C	C	4	4	4	C	C	4	C	zone 2
zone 1	4	4	4	4	4	C	C	C	D	D	D	3	D	3	3	D	3	3	B	D	3	3	zone 1
zone 4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	4	4	D	3	D	D	3	zone 4
zone 3	3	3	3	D	3	D	D	D	3	3	D	D	3	D	D	3	B	B	D	B	3	3	zone 3
	1	3	2	9	8	18	16	14	21	22	6	15	11	12	7	10	13	4	17	5	20	19	

Source: Authors

The analysis of the Diagnostic Benchmarking carried out refers to competitive factors 6, 7 and 12, linked to the Historical-Cultural Heritage of zone 3 (Santa Cruz de Tenerife / La Laguna). This zone is, overall, the worse positioned when considering competitive factors, although it has the greatest availability of cultural factors compared to Tenerife's other zones.

The competitiveness diagnosis carried out demonstrates that zone 3's competitiveness is mainly based on the cultural resources analyzed. These consist of heritage linked to historical places, museums, cultural facilities, as well as fiestas of a cultural nature, such as the Santa Cruz Carnival, which attract visitors to this zone. In the other zones, the availability of noteworthy historical and cultural resources does not reach a level that can add to their tourism competitiveness, as other factors stand out more. The possible use of available cultural resources involves specific strategic actions in the different zones. In particular, the strength of factor 6 (well-known sites of historical/ cultural interest) should be taken advantage of as shown by zone 1.

