APPLICATION OF A QUANTITATIVE-OBJECTIVE MODEL FOR MEASURING THE COMPETITIVENESS OF TOURIST DESTINATIONS

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The touristic industry has been for decades the fundamental generator of our country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Although we continue in the leading position worldwide for number of tourists entering our frontiers as well as for the income generated by the tourism, we must be conscious about the existence of a series of factors, exogenous as well as endogenous, which could lead us to lose this privileged position, hence provoking repercussions within the companies in the sector as within the rest of the Spanish economy.

In order for Spain to continue remaining the touristic destination of reference, it is going to be necessary to continue being competitive at an international level. This study has been developed in this context hoping: 1) to go in-depth and provide new perspectives about resources, destinations and touristic competitiveness, 2) to analyze and compare the touristic competitiveness models' literature, 3) to suggest a new objective quantitative model of the touristic destinations (MCOCDT), 4) to use this model to measure the degree of touristic competitiveness of the countries within the European Union, 5) to position Spain in this space, 6) to highlight the existence of intangibles in such model and 7) to suggest performance measures to increase the degree of touristic competitiveness in our country.

To that end, a state of the art analysis has been conducted related to the touristic products and destinations as well as the competitiveness in general and touristic in particular. A review of the primary existing touristic competitiveness models has been made whilst comparing them with the existing literature. Thereafter, the model proposed by the World Economic Forum (2013) has been selected as it has been considered the most adequate as a starting point to be able to achieve an objective quantitative measure for the touristic destinations.

So, from the fourteen pillars that configure this model, objective quantitative indicators that integrate the variables have been searched in order to substitute the weak indicators based in expert opinions that are in abundance in this model (in particular, 31 out of 79 variables in this model were weak ones). Ultimately, we aimed for all the variables to be of a hard type, in other words, drawn from statistical sources o databases. This objective has been reached by creating a model constituted by 62 variables, all of them objective quantitative, measured through hard type indicators from which around seventy percent measured intangible factors.

A measuring instrument was developed and tested by four experts to determine the weights that each pillar and variable have in the touristic destination competitiveness. The definite questionnaire was submitted to a convenient sample constituted by the three main collectives intimately related with the object of study: professionals from the touristic sector, specialists of the touristic sector and university lecturers that teach tourism subjects.

From the 186 experts that filled in the questionnaires from the 12 of January to the 20 of February 2015, 24,2 percent declared themselves tourism professionals, 55,4 percent indicated to be tourism university lecturers, 8,1 per cent pointed out to be specialists in tourism and the rest, marked other residual options. On the other hand, 58,2 per cent of the people that answered were man and 41,8 per cent woman, most of the answers -39,01 percent- were from people between 41 and 50 years of age, and the majority- 24,4 percent- had over 20 years experience.

The experts found the Air Transport Infrastructures as the highest valued pillars within the competitiveness model, reaching 8,694 as an average rating on a Likert Scale from 0 to 10 points, followed by the Touristic Infrastructures with an average of 8,632, Security and Protection had a 8,608, Cultural Resources with a 8,408, Health and Hygiene with 8,333 and the Natural Resources with 8,315. Consequently, the weights within the fourteen pillars were calculated which had 62 considered variables, creating an objective quantitative lineal model of touristic competitiveness.

Given the fact that it is in Europe where our main destination competitors are, the European Union (EU) has been chosen as the field of reference and therefore, the competitiveness of each of the 28 countries that integrate such field, has been calculated. The country in the EU with the most competitiveness is Germany, attaining a total of 631,589 points over a maximum of 1.000 points. Italy is situated hereafter with 626,846, followed by the United Kingdom with 603,351, France with 578,918 and Spain with 550,431 points.

Analyzing the partial competitiveness of these touristic destinations through each of the fourteen pillars selected and considering the two following pillars as being the most influential upon the destination competitiveness -the Air Transport Infrastructures and the Touristic Infrastructures-, the biggest tourism receiving countries occupy the first positions- the United Kingdom, Germany and France in the first case and Italy, Germany and Spain in the second-. For the third pillar-Security and Protection-, the first positions are occupied by Bulgaria, France and Rumania.

With regards to Spain, it is situated in the first place within the EU in terms of Environmental Sustainability, in second place for Cultural Resources and in third, for the tourism priority and the travelling sector destination as for the Touristic Infrastructures. However,

we are not very well positioned focusing on the Telecommunications Infrastructures, for the degree of travelling and tourism widening, for the health and hygiene, and what is even more serious, for Human Resources.

Following the application of MCOCDT and the subsequent development of the EU countries competitiveness ranking level, an analysis for those same countries has been performed using all the collected data. The model of reference used- WEF (2013)- detected the existence of a correlation of 0,646. Looking at the positions occupied by the twenty-eight countries of the EU from both rankings, we can find similarities as well as discrepancies. For example, whilst Germany, United Kingdom, France and Spain occupy positions of privilege according to both models and the worst ranking positions are taken, for both models by Rumania, Latvia and Lithuania, these similarities are not occurring in other cases. Similarly, while Italy is in second position and Bulgaria is in tenth position according to our model, the WEF (2013) puts them in a further fifteenth and twenty-sixth positions respectively. On the contrary, whilst Austria and Switzerland are in ninth and sixteenth position in our model, in the WEF (2013), they reach second and sixth positions.

When a triple comparison was carried out, between the MCOCDT, the WEF (2013) model and the volume of entries of international tourists to each touristic destination, similarities and differences emerged. The five EU countries that accomplish attracting a higher number of international tourists are the same that occupy the first five positions according to our model, although the order changes, fact that does not happen for the WEF (2013) as Italy is not within the first five EU destinations but moves to the fifteenth position. As for discrepancies, Luxemburg occupies the sixth position on our model though in terms of tourist entries, it moves to the twenty-eighth position.

In any case, even though there is a certain correlation -0,646- between MCOCDT and the reference one, the existing correlation between international tourist entries and those touristic destinations competitiveness levels calculated through the MCOCDT- 0,732- is considerably superior than the existing one between the named entries and the competitiveness measured through the WEF (2013) model- 0,546-. This would seem to indicate that our model is, to a large extent, better adjusted to the touristic attraction capacity of the destinations referenced by the model.

From the creation of this model and the analysis of the pillars and variables in which Spain is worst situated, it can be inferred that our Public Administration has to try and improve the telecommunication infrastructures, the opening of our country to the tourism, health and hygiene existing in Spain and the degree of qualification of our human resources.