DETERMINING COMPETITIVE FACTORS IN TOURISM LEADERSHIP IN SPAIN 2015

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The introduction of competitive criteria of a business nature in the analysis of tourism destination competitiveness, as well as the success of these destinations and their Destination Management Organizations (DMO) (Bornhorst, Ritchie and Sheehan, 2010), highlights the importance of tourism markets as a determinant of competitive positioning. Along with markets, the presence of certain competitive factors, based on clear competitive and comparative advantages, facilitates the achievement of high levels of destination competitiveness.

Seminal studies on tourism competitiveness (Crouch and Ritchie, 1999; Dwyer and Kim, 2003) that include both comparative and competitive advantages have focused on the competitive positioning of economies in international markets. This is a key element of the neoliberal proposal (Cerny, 1990, 1997; Fougner, 2006). A clear example of this neoliberal proposal, according to Fougner, 2006, is the classification periodically offered by the World Economic Forum (WEF).

According to the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI) WEF 2015 Report, Spain has been the economy that appears to hold the best competitive position in world tourism.

Two aspects have remained constant in studies of destination competitiveness and DMO: the delimitation of constructs of tourism competitiveness and its measurement. Availability and use of both quantitative and qualitative indicators for these processes of conceptual delimitation and measurement have greatly influenced methodological discussions. Authors like Crouch (2011), Enright and Newton (2004 and 2005), Gomezelj and Mihalic (2008) and Parra-López and Oreja-Rodríguez (2014) have stressed the importance of qualitative information and especially opinion surveys and experts on tourism competitiveness determinants.

The aim of this work is to determine the key competitive factors according to the WEF 2015 model. It also analyzes Spain's leadership, noting the availability of key factors, as well as Spain's strong and weak competitive factors.

To analyze the determining competitive factors of the ranking of the economies included in the 2015 WEF Report and, in particular, of Spain's tourism leadership, the strategic management adaptation of the *Rasch Measurement Theory* (RMT) is used, based on the seminal work by Rasch (1980), and carried out by Oreja-Rodriguez (2005, 2015). This methodological approach allows the objective measurement of intangible constructs as described by Godfrey and Hill (1995). It also satisfies the requirements for studies of strategic management proposed by Boyd, Gove and Hitt (2005) that require the reliability and validity of the constructs that support the research.

To develop research in the context of objective RMT measurement, the *Rasch Andrich Rating Scale Model* (RARSM) (Andrich,1978, 1988) was used. The data obtained from a categorization on an ordinal scale of 1 to 7 of the 14 pillars of the WEF 2015 is considered to provide a good fit for the RARSM. Invariant interval measures are obtained through the transformation of the total scores (sufficient statistics) after the categorization process. These measures can be compared on a linear continuum; they are reliable and globally valid. The categories of competitiveness factors used are effective for this measurement. Table 1 shows the ranking of tourism competitiveness factors and the competitive ranking of the four major tourism powers in the world.

Table 1
MATRIX OF COMPETITIVE DIAGNOSTIC BENCHMARKING OF THE HIGHEST RANKED ECONOMIES IN TOURISM COMPETITIVENESS WITH SCORES WEF (2015)

FACTORS		KEY			NORMAL							RARE			
Economies	TTCI	4	2	3	6	1	5	8	7	12	9	11	13	10	14
Spain	5.31	4.87	5.97	6.11	5.89	4.09	5.26	4.22	3.93	6.58	4.61	5.54	4.59	4.91	6.69
Germany	5.22	5.18	6.06	6.85	4.84	5.32	5.51	3.62	4.24	5.61	4.90	5.99	4.41	4.93	6.00
Singapore	4.86	5.49	6.40	5.44	5.95	6.13	5.98	3.82	5.25	5.17	4.31	6.44	2.87	5.26	3.30
Switzerland	4.99	5.64	6.32	6.50	5.64	5.76	6.03	2.57	4.11	6.35	5.63	6.00	4.32	5.03	2.93

Source: Prepared by autor.

The key factors of tourism competitiveness are the pillars of TTCI WEF 2015: "*Human Resources and Labour Market*" (pillar 4); "*Safety and Security*" (pillar 2); "*Health and Hygiene*" (pillar 3). In all of them, Spain is ranked, using the 2015 WEF scores, in a similar position to those of its competitors. Switzerland is worth highlighting in pillar 4, Singapore in pillar 2 and for pillar 3, Germany. They can be used as strategic reference points for Spain to reach. This information reveals the path that from the perspective of the WEF (2015) remains for Spain's DMO to match their direct competitors that are among the best positioned worldwide and closer to the neoliberal approaches existing in economies worldwide.

Competitive factors in which Spain demonstrates its strength mainly comprise the pillars: "Cultural Resources and Business Travel" (pillar 14) and "Tourism Service Infrastructure"

(pillar 12). These pillars determine Spain's competitive position. In addition, two other pillars (11 "Ground and Port Infrastructure" and 6 "Prioritization of Travel and Tourism") while appearing as strengths in the competitive diagnosis of Spain, are still below some direct competitors. Singapore stands out for both these pillars. In the four pillars (14, 12, 11 and 6), the result of Spain's DMO strategic actions that have been carried out over a long period is collected.

Competitive factors in which Spain shows its weaknesses are "Price Competitiveness" (pillar 8); "International Openness" (pillar 7) and "Business Environment" (pillar 1). Singapore stands out in pillars 7 and 1. In pillar 8, Spain compares well to its direct competitors. In these three pillars (8, 7 and 1), the path is shown, within the neoliberal agenda, which Spain's DMO must travel to achieve the competitive levels that international markets expect. As the WEF report reflects, this includes lower prices, greater legal and tax deregulation.

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