

Valentina Della Corte

Assistant Professor and Researcher in Tourism Business Management

Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II

Faculty of Economics

Via Cinthia - Monte Sant'Angelo, 26

80126 - Napoli/Italy

valentina.dellacorte@unina.it

Roberto Micera

PhD

Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II

Faculty of Economics

Via Cinthia - Monte Sant'Angelo, 26

80126 - Napoli/Italy

romicera@unina.it

DESTINATION IMAGE ANALYSIS AND MANAGEMENT: RESULTS OF AN EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ON THE CASE OF NAPLES¹

Summary

This paper analyzes the concept of Destination Image and the perception the tourism product's consumer has of it. We're presenting a framework for Destination Image analysis and applying it to the case of Naples, through a survey on a sample of tourists, both National and International, spending their vacation there. The Destination Image is one of the main factors considered during the decision making process in the choice of the location where to spend holidays; so marketers in the tourism industry have to take this into account while creating their competitive strategies if they want to obtain and sustain a competitive advantage, as for what is expected according to Resource-based Theory. Moreover, marketers can use a proactive approach and act to improve the destination image, or gear it towards a given segment they have chosen to insist on. Despite most of the literature on this topic deals exclusively with the demand's analysis during the process of destination selection before leaving, our approach focuses, in particular, on the phase when the real experience is lived by the tourists, in order to see their perceptions of the destination image compared with their expectations.

1. Introduction.

Destination marketing is a very complex process, whose objective is that of promoting tourist destinations, within which two main levels have to be considered:

1) the so called "functional" level, that refers to all marketing actions aimed at reaching the potential tourist and persuade him/her to visit the country and, more specifically, the destination. It refers to all activities generally mentioned within the traditional marketing tools (that are product, promotion, price and placement) and referred to the tourist decision process². This is generally defined through the so called "Aidas" model (Holloway, 1994), that is characterized by the following phases, connected to the first four letters:

¹ Paragraph 1, 3, 4 have been written by Valentina Della Corte; par. 2 by Roberto Micera and par. 5. by both the authors. Special thanks to Dr.ssa Giuseppina Zamparelli for contributing in data collecting and elaborating.

² The point is that if the destination attractiveness matches the tourist's perceptions of his/her need of a holiday (some scholars deal with the so called perceived opportunity set - Stabler, 1998); others write about the perception of both internal and external stimula (Howard, Sheth, 1969; Ashworth, Goodall, 1990), the

- a) *awareness* of the need to take a trip;
- b) *interest* in destinations that better satisfy one's needs;
- c) *desire* of taking a trip to visit one particular destination;
- d) *action*, that refers to the practical act of booking the holiday;

2) the so called "organic level", that refers to the phase when services are really provided. Even in this phase, the quality level of the services represents a significant marketing tool, that acts while the tourist is enjoying the holiday. It's one of the most effective marketing tools.

From this point of view, with reference to the last letter, the "s", in the model, it is bound to customer satisfaction, and refers to the organic level in destination marketing, while the tourist really lives the holiday experience. This is the most delicate and difficult phase, even if the two are overall important of course, because once the marketing actions have convinced the potential tourist to visit the destination, his/her expectations have to be widely satisfied. If not, in case of mismatch the effect will be extremely negative for the destination, with a "word of mouth" process that can generate a negative impact on incoming tourist flows.

In particular, in tourism industry, in front of a hypercompetitive context (Barney, Della Corte, Sciarelli M., 2005), characterized by high deep changes and uncertainty in demand, technologies leaps, a significant role played by knowledge and information and strategic alliances, it is more and more important to be competitive also through a high level of quality, that has to be:

- *commercial*, in promotion, sales, etc;
- *referred to the product*, that is to the quality level of the different services that compose the overall product (hotel stay, lunch and dinner, etc.), with the aims both of customer satisfaction and of customer retention;
- *referred to the process*, that is the quality while providing the service, in terms of hospitality culture's application in the destination. It differs from the previous, which mainly refers to the content of the products offered on the market.

The destination image question, therefore, refers to tourist expectations as well as to the offer side organization that, of course, has to consider the demand side as well.

In this paper, a literature review on the topic will be analyzed, before getting to our personal definition of Destination Image and its main features, with reference to both the inductive level and the organic one. An application of the proposed model is shown,

motivation to visit that specific destination comes out and the potential visit translates itself into a real visit and some factors can accelerate the process.

connected with a study conducted on Naples' image as a "nowadays art city". The first results of an ongoing survey are shown, with reference to the demand's perception of the aspects that mainly characterize Naples' image. Further research will regard the offer's side and, in particular, local firms' capacities in cooperating to acquire and maintain successful images.

2. Literature review on Destination Image.

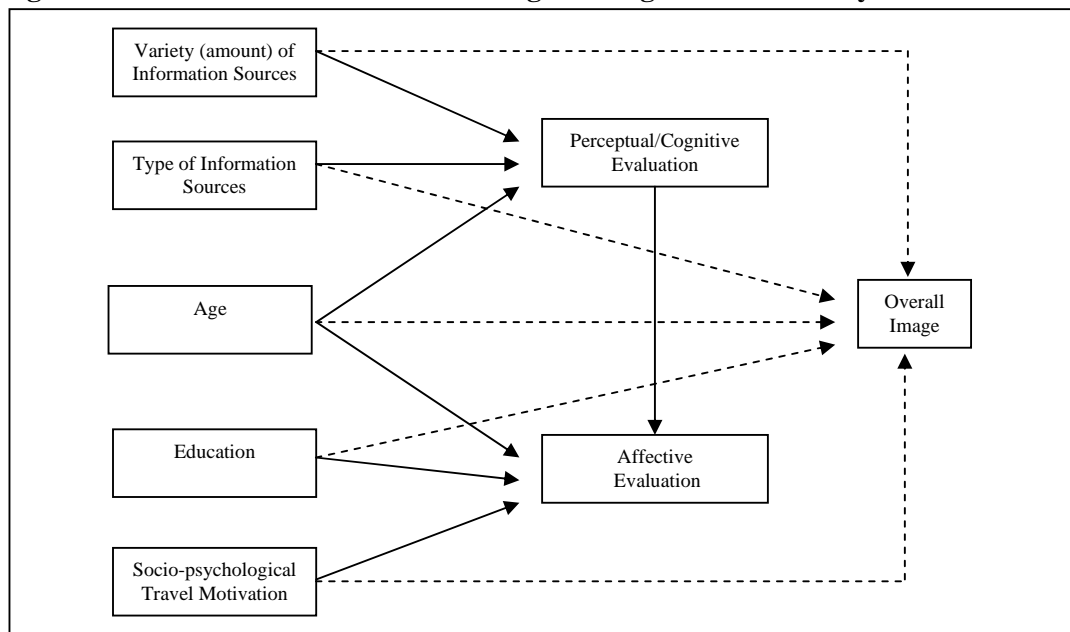
In today's consumer society, where touristic images are considered as an object of consumption and tourist product is among the most virtual ones in services sectors, the client can get knowledge of it only in the consumption's moment (Selwyn, 2001). Moreover, the tourism marketplace has an highly competitive nature that requires the tourism marketers have a thorough understanding of the actual perception of their destinations and even of the desired perception they should have to adequately implement measures to alter or maintain such images. To ensure that potential tourists do in fact encounter favorable destination images, tourism managers and marketers have embarked on extensive campaigns that span enormous geographical regions. In many instances, however, these campaigns offer the exact images despite the varying natures of the markets they are meant to target.

The first studies on the destination image appeared in the 1970s, with Hunts' works (1975) on the role of image in tourism development. Research attention has been focused on the notion of image during all the last two decades (Ahmed, 1996; Chon, 1990; Colton, 1987; Deale, 1983; Gartner, 1986; Gartner, Hunt, 1987; Gee, 1986; Gunn, 1989; Kent, 1984; Keown et al., 1984; Knopf, 1983; McLellan, Foushee, 1983; Phelps, 1986; Smith, 1984; Telisman-Kosuta, 1989). A first research stream defines the tourism destination image as a factor that influences tourist decision making process in considering alternative destinations (Fridgen, 1984; Gartner, 1986; Gartner, Hunt, 1987; Goodrich, 1978; Hunt, 1975; LaPage, Cormier, 1977; Mayo, 1975; Waryszak, 2000). Moutinho (1984) focused on the subjective perception of the public image of the destination as one of the factors influencing the tourist's decision making selection process (Baloglu, 1997; Goodrich, 1978; Woodside et al., 2002) as well as the behaviour he/she will have once got there (Chon, 1990).

There are several definitions of Destination Image (DI) in literature. Crompton (1979) has defined it as the aggregate sum of beliefs, ideas, impressions, and expectations that a tourist has about a destination. Engel et al. (1986) state that the image refers to consumers' subjective perceptions of how an alternative performs on important evaluating criteria.

Ahmed (1996) asserts that Tourism Products are perceived by tourists through several images, and that these images in turn influence the behaviours, attitudes, and tendencies of tourists as consumers. One of the main advantages of this research stream is that it highlights the importance of understanding both the positive and negative impacts on the destination image. Kotler et al. (1993) have defined it as the set of tell-tales, ideas, feelings, more or less mediated information, that people have on the location. Some researchers view the Destination Image as a multidimensional construct comprising of several primary dimensions (Ahmed, 1996; Baloglu, McCleary, 1999; Echtner, Ritchie, 1993; Lawson, Baud-Bovy, 1977; Leisen, 2001). The first of these models was created by Lawson and Baud-Bovy (1977). Their model analyzes the image using two perspectives: cognitive and affective. The cognitive, also known as perceptual component, can be interpreted as the whole of beliefs and knowledge about the physical attributes of a destination, while the affective component refers to the appraisal of the affective quality of feelings towards the attributes and the surrounding environments (Baloglu, McCleary, 1999). In particular, Baloglu and McCleary (1999) suggest a model of destination image as the sum of the perception of cognitive evaluations based on information sources and age, and affective ones, influenced by psychographical and demographical factors (figure 1).

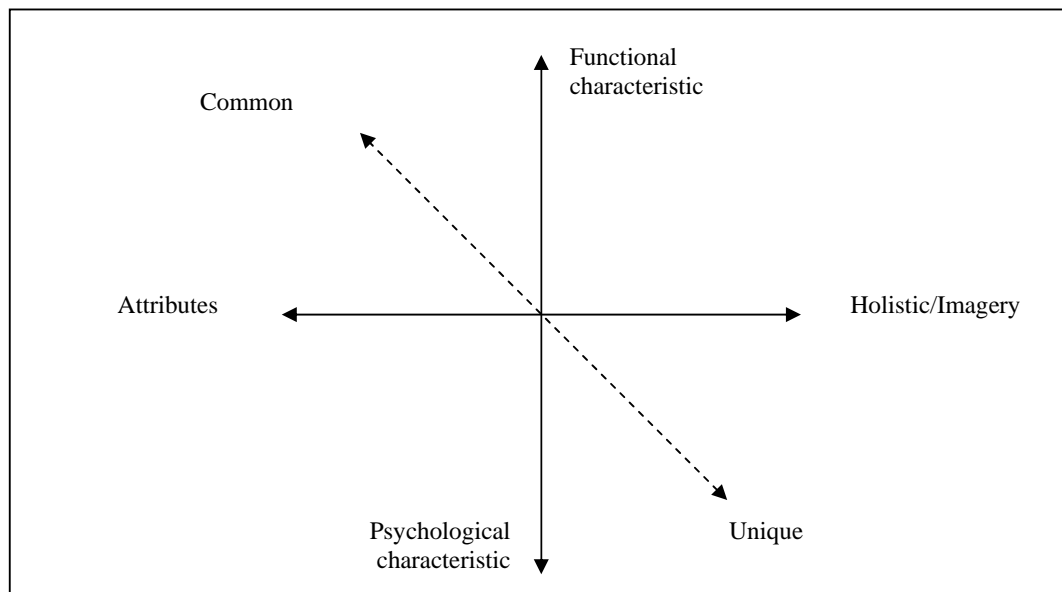
Figure 1 – Determinants of TDI according to Baloglu and McCleary



Source: Baloglu, McCleary, 1999.

Leisen (2001) states that affective associations greatly influence the image an individual has of a destination and, therefore, destination choice. She developed a scale of attributes to measure the influence of affective associations on the Destination Image through customers surveys. This concept of "image" fits closely with the three components' model of attitudes that has been popular in the psychology literature since the 1940 (Breckler, 1984; Bootzin et al., 1991). This model suggests that attitudes are evaluative statements formed through the interaction of cognitive, affective and behaviour components. Cognitive components represent the belief and knowledge one holds regarding an object or person; affective components represent the feeling towards an object, while behavioural components constitute the subject actions towards the object.

Echtner and Ritche (1993) portrayed an image as a bundle of attributes and developed a three-axes approach for measuring destination image consisting of functional/psychological, common/unique, and holistic/attribute (figure 2).



Source: Echtner, Ritche (1993).

The functional/psychological axis is based on the functional component, that is to say physical or measurable perceptions such as scenery, attractions, accommodations, and price levels, and by the psychological component, which can be defined considering more abstract and intangible characteristics such as friendliness, professionalism safety, fame, and atmosphere. The common/unique axis is based on the distinctive or must-see sights of a destination. The holistic/attribute axis is based on imagery processing that includes a gestalt

perspective of a destination. The gestalt perspective is the overall view of a tourist towards a destination, and it can be measured processing qualitative answers given by tourists to certain asked questions.

Other researchers have claimed that the key component in the multiple attribute approach is the composite image based on a bundle of image attributes (Ahmed, 1991). Ahmed (1996) asserted that the differences in the attribute dimensions were more revealing than the composite image and global statement when targeting different geographic regions.

In all the above researches, promotion has always played an important role in creating and sustaining a competitive advantage of a tourism destination over another. Competitive advantage is not determined just by possessing outstanding tourism resources; these resources need to be organized and exploited in a coherent system. With this regard, two of the most important resources seem to be tourists' image of a destination and their attitude towards it. Therefore, the aggressiveness of many advertising campaigns launched by tourism destination has added a new dimension to competitiveness, introducing an increasing number of tourism images both in travel and tourism literature and in the mass media.

The first research stream to use consumer's behaviour as one of the key elements in the dynamics of tourist behaviour was developed during the eighties (Mayo, Jarvis, 1981; Pearce, 1982). McLellan and Foushee (1983) affirm that, in case of equally attractive destinations, a tourist will choose the destination in which negative consequences are less likely to be encountered. Hahti (1986) has highlighted the issue of image comparability as one of the main factors in developing strategic promotion programs.

Gunn (1989) recommended that the final goal of an image building endeavor should be promoting modifications of an image, leading it toward the desired one. This view of destination image change has been supported by subsequent empirical studies (Chon, 1987; Gartner, 1986; Phelps, 1986; Gartner and Hunt, 1987). Gartner and Hunt (1987) have identified advertising as playing a key role in image enhancement (on the same subject see Mayo, Jarvis, 1981, too); while Goodrich (1978) and Perry et al. (1976) suggested using astute advertising of the unique and diverse tourism attractions of a given destination to develop a positive image.

Another important element to be considered is the nature of the customers attracted, as services marketing literature stresses that the consumption experience can be heavily influenced by it. Customers will factor into their image construction both their conclusions about the patrons of the destination actually observed (if previously visited) and their expectations of the nature of the clientele based on marketer-dominated forms of

communication as well as non marketer dominated forms of communication (word of mouth, etc.). So the perception of a destination's image could differ by needs, wants, and behaviors between demographic market segment (Sirakaya, Shepard, McLelland, 1998), travelling experience (Ahmed, 1996), motivational segment (Baloglu, McCleary, 1999) and stylistic segment such as backpackers (Ross, 1993). Through the use of segmentation techniques it is possible to design destination image strategies of the commonly known types. A destination could choose to focus its promotion on differentiated messages each tailored for each market segment, or to use undifferentiated messages, similar messages across market segments, or to concentrate on messages focused on selected market segment. Using geographic segments the destination managers can adjust the type of image strategies towards the geographic origins of tourists. The geographic market segmentation became a tool to assist in prioritizing the destination's markets into primary and secondary markets (Heath, Wall, 1992). The strategic foundation of this segmentation comes from the potential economic impact associated with the long distance travellers and the related evaluations for the allocation of the marketing budget to high priority markets³.

Some researchers have tried to support this thesis comparing samples from different geographic origins (Gallarza, Saura, Garcia, 2002). Hunt (1975) asserted that the overall image of closer markets appeared as more differentiated and realistic, and that of distant markets as more homogeneous. On the contrary, Ahmed's (1996) and Leisen's studies (2001) found that the more favourable the overall image, the farther the tourist goes to reach the destination⁴.

So the research studies of the relationship between destination image and distance indicate a lack of substantial uniformity for whether a long distance traveller or nearby traveller will view the destination image as favourable, unfavourable, homogeneous or differentiated. A favourable destination image is built upon certainty, credibility and trust. So these characteristics are one of the most important intangibles of the destination. The image is one of the main factors in tourists' decision making process. It helps the players create better and stable relationships with the customers, letting them create positive communication flows on the territory and strengthening their strategic and competitive position. If in the short run the image can only be used as a leverage, a tool, in the long run it can become a real strategic

³ The factors weighted in these evaluations are measured in real term such as miles, kilometers, time and monetary cost, and portrayed by the geographic origins of the tourists.

⁴ Davis and Sternquist's (1987) studies had three clusters of respondents with similar distance characteristics as measured in miles from the destination, and all three clusters varied in their assessment of the destination's attitudinal images.

resource. The information represented through the image is kept in personal memory set, influencing the opinions and the perceptions of all those who interact with him. This leads to evaluate the destination image as one of the main resources in order to create value and growth in the long run.

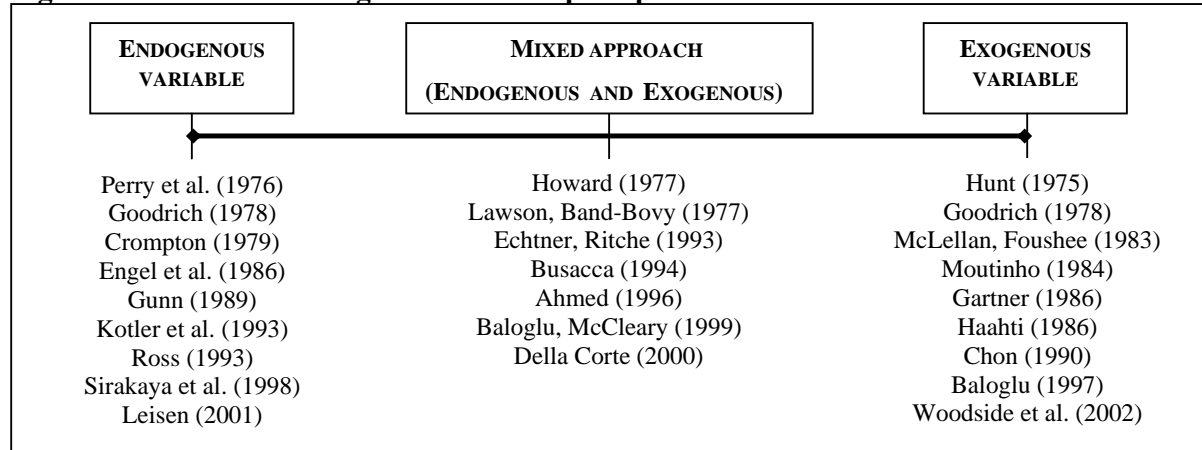
Howard (1977) and Busacca (1994) considered the image as a perception construct geared to synthesizing the functional and symbolic characteristics of an area. It has been defined as the combination of several evaluations referred to factors as: nature of the offered products and services, technologies, working places, management. Generally speaking, it could be identified as the sum of all the relationships that exist inside the area and between the area and the relevant environment. Those factors concur in creating an area identity, and how it is perceived by the market, the residents, and by all the stakeholders, taken in its broadest meaning. The studies on the relationship between the destination image to the destination brand have identified three main linking components: the identification one, referred to the distinctive characteristics of the area; the evaluation one, made up by the functional and symbolic values the customer links to a given area; and the trust dimension, that is the possibility to accurately forecast given behaviors. So a good image is identified with trustfulness, professional attitude and fairness. So the image can be defined as the main stakeholder's perception on the location. If it is a positive one it will lead toward reaching the area aims, as in the case of full information on locations operations. At the same time, even in asymmetric environment, a positive image built on trust will gain competitive advantage since the image will substituted the missing information.

Della Corte (2000) links the image concept to customer satisfaction. The customer satisfaction of the destination is measured using the three levels of a pyramidal model. The base is constituted by the qualitative level of each single service carried on by local tourist firms; the middle one measures the quality of the offered complex products; the top level represents the overall destination image. Therefore, the destination image must take into account both the actual situation and the future development opportunities for the destination, aiming at being the more realistic, credible, appealing and distinctive.

In order to classify the various theories on destination image we have reviewed literature, examining its role in the tourist's decision making process (figure 3). So we can distinguish between those that are more "interior" (i.e. bound to the specific character of the tourist - this is an endogenous variable) and those that are more related to the outside world's perception (i.e. it is an exogenous variable). This classification gives a more thorough knowledge of the destination image literature perception. Moreover, it can be useful to know if the various

theories suggest marketers focusing their efforts on customer, on the destination itself or better use a mixed approach.

Figure 3 – Destination Image in the tourist perception.



3. Destination image: our definition

Confronted with existing literature, our definition implies not only a mixed approach, as previously defined, but goes further, since it is equally based on both demand's and offer's points of view, since these two dimensions have to be considered on their whole. It is the following:

“The whole of believes, ideas and impressions a destination can generate in potential and actual tourists' minds”.

Of course, it refers to some mental associations a person can make to the destination characteristics, but while most of the definitions above analysed refer to the impressions people have of a place, we do think it's strategic to see the impressions the place can generate in people's mind and not only in potential tourists, that are people that are deciding wether to make a holiday and where to go (decision process phase, “inductive” marketing level), but also on actual demand, while the different services are provided and local attractions are visited (that is the “organic” level).

Moreover, the destination image may be defined as the perceptions, beliefs, impressions, ideas and understandings one holds of places and it is a simplified, condensed version of which the holder assumes to be a reality.

On the other hand, a destination image can be viewed as the *mental picture* that promoters are trying to instil within a target audience, while tourism marketers through their marketing images are creating identities, which represent certain ways of seeing reality, images, which both reflect and reinforce particular relationships in societies. Thus, the image can be either created or mental and the brochure, as a symbolic representation of a place, has only one task, to create a positive image; to get the reader to consume, ie. to buy a trip to a certain place.

Around this theme, one of the most important tasks in the development of a destination's image is the creation and the transmission of a favourable image to a potential tourist – this clearly strengthens the destination's competitiveness. Destination promoters have to tailor their marketing efforts to suit the image of a particular destination market, and so they must take into account the image of it held by visiting tourists.

In this direction, it is really important to underline and take into account some critical factors, and precisely:

- 1) DI differs significantly from the concept of stereotype, that usually "suggests a widely held image that results distorted and simplistic and that carries a favourable or unfavourable attitude towards the place" (Kotler et al., 1993);
- 2) DI is very difficult to manage especially when the destination operates towards different market segments and for different products;
- 3) managing DI when the perceptions generated by the place are contradictory;
- 4) managing DI when the destination refers to different market targets;
- 5) thinking and proposing a destination brand connected with the image;
- 6) building an image able to favour customer satisfaction and retention (that is capturing new targets but also increasing the loyalty degree towards the destination).⁵

As regards the first observation, it is obvious that DI requires a careful managing process, especially when the stereotypes generally associated to the place are negative (mafia for Sicily, camorra for Naples, etc.). It's important to build such a strong image in order to overcome the negative aspects, especially when these are stuck in peoples' mind. Of course, this questions refers first of all to residents, because it has to generate a sort of awareness of the destination's value of the whole of local resource, in order to gain major respect for the place, that has to become a self-esteem mean. In this process, both business-to-business and business-to-consumers' goals have to be reached and in particular: visitors (in terms of tourists rather than excursionists) as the main targets, local companies, that are the main local

⁵ Moreover, as widely demonstrated, the most effective promotional tool is the so called "word of mouth".

actors, investors and in many cases also foreign investors. This is as much more difficult as the number of products and served market segments increases. In other words, DI is a critical factor not only in the tourist marketing process but also in territorial marketing, that is in the phase when the place has to attract investments from outstanding companies of the industry.

Image strategy depends on the destinations current image and on the attributes mainly connected with it. Six main situations (Kotler et al, 1993) may be encountered:

- 1) *positive image*, either established (for example the city of Rome) or emerging (Praga);
- 2) *overly attractive image*, that regards places so much well known that they do not have to receive more visitors, because of the risk of depleting wonderful resources. Examples of this type are art cities such as Venice or Rome;
- 3) *weak image*, referred to places often very small, with a few attractions, generally unable of carrying out significant marketing investments;
- 4) *negative image*, connected with bad news broadcasted by media, such as violence, pollution, disaster, poverty, storms, etc.;
- 5) *mixed images*: places that can be both loved and associated with negative aspects, such as Washington D.C. seen as a beautiful city but with a fast growing crime rate;
- 6) *contradictory images*: more exasperated than the previous category, with very positive and very negative inputs and associations. A typical examples is the city of Naples, known for its historical beauties, its wonderful view and climate, its music and songs, the association to pasta and pizza but, at the same time, to camorra, crimes, violence, traffic and lack of organization.

The different situations, of course, are connected with the destination lifecycle phase and the tourist policies implemented both by public and private local companies. Therefore, the DI is strictly bound with the choices of the destination strategic positioning through a careful Strategic Image management (SIM)⁶, aimed at creating an image that results:

- ✓ *realistic*, that is as much close to the real place as possible;
- ✓ *believable*, especially important in the phases of destination launch or rejuvenation⁷.

Moreover, images serve, according to Morgan and Pritchard, many functions at many

⁶ For further investigation on the topic (Ashworth, Goodall, 1990; Asworth, Voodg, 1990, 1994).

⁷ This study has also the aim to demonstrate how and in which measure travel behaviour is influenced significantly by both self - congruity and functional congruity.

Self -congruity is the match between the destination visitor image and tourists' self-concept (actual, ideal, social, and ideal social self - image). Functional congruity is the match between the utilitarian attributes of the destination and the tourist's ideal expectations related to those attributes. Self - congruity is hypothesized to influence functional congruity. In this context, destination environment influences the formation and change of the destination visitor image and the tourist - perceived utilitarian destination attributes (Morgan, Pritchard, 1998).

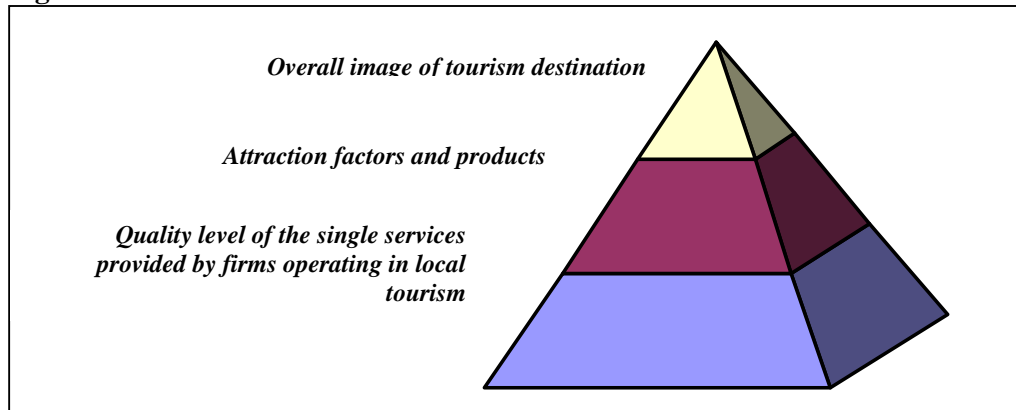
different levels. In fact, in this context, they are used in a number of practical ways to convey ideas and messages. Firstly, images can be used to communicate messages about particular tourist segmentation of Naples. Secondly, they can be used to redefine and reposition the city, according with the national and international scenery of tourism. Thirdly, images can be used to counter negative, and enhance positive, perceptions of destination. Finally, images and representations of places and peoples can be used to specifically target key and market areas, in which it is possible operate with success, especially in an age of highly targeted and sophisticated market segmentation.;

- ✓ *with an appeal*: in a very synthetic way, it has to communicate why people should come; this association may appear in contrast with the question of selling the destination to different market segments. This is one of the most difficult challenges in SIM, because it is necessary to find something impressive and at the same time accessible to the different market segments. Of course, according to policy makers' decisions, if there is a sort of repositioning to build, the image has to take into account the objective to reach higher market segments (both economically, and socio-culturally speaking);
- ✓ *distinctive*: there has to be no confusion at all with the images of other destinations.

To be effective, however, DIM has to include some surveys and on field researches, in order to evaluate both demand's and offer's perception of destination image. This can be made identifying some key variables/dimensions to examine, in order to evaluate the judges that come out and even confront them with other destinations.

The definition provided can be outlined within a framework, called the Destination Customer Satisfaction Pyramid (figure 4), according to which destination image, in order to generate customer satisfaction, loyalty⁸ and positive word of mouth has not only to satisfy but even to surpass the tourists' expectations; in case, on the contrary, of mismatch between the client's expectations and the quality level of the services provided, there can be a deep negative impact. Besides, the negative effect is usually by far more intense than the positive effect generated when the quality provided exceeds expectations.

⁸ Researches on the relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty, however, show different results: some works show higher connection (Reichell, Aspinall, 1994); others often very weak, in the sense that a high result in customer satisfaction is necessary but not enough to generate customer loyalty (Heskett, Sasser, Shlesinger, 1997; Kotler et al., 1999).

Figure 4 - A framework of Destination Customer Satisfaction.

Source: Della Corte, 2000.

This implies, however, a significant role of the organic phase in the marketing process (see par. 1), in the destination image building itself. In the pyramid, in fact, the DI has to express the destination as a whole and its products' attractiveness and, at a lower level, the quality of the single services offered by the different companies operating in local tourism. The significant difference between the two levels is that the intermediate ones implies that companies not only show themselves very professional in providing their own specific services but are also able to develop inter-firm relations, aimed at better evaluating local resources promoting them adequately. If the DI reflects objectively the two levels below, this is an assumption for destination marketing effectiveness and, mainly, for destination sustainable competitiveness. In many cases, however, it happens that there are significant and considerable marketing efforts on DI that do not reflect the real offer's capacities and competences behind, with the consequent negative effect explained before.

4. A Destination Image analysis: the case of Naples.

Through an on field research, we have been able to analyze what kind of image Naples' destination has, not only from the prospective of the demand, but also from that of the offer, that are the operators who work in Neapolitan tourism. In this paper, we will focus, in particular, on the demand's opinions.

In particular, we explore the concept of tourism destination loyalty, the role that destination image has in travel behaviour and the attributes that affect it, such as: familiarity

with a destination and conceptualization and measurement of image, conceptualization and operationalization of beneficial image in marketing terms.

4.1. Methods

According to Baloglu and McCleary (1999), the image of a place is created as the result of its perceptual/cognitive and affective evaluations. Among the attributes that influence destination image there are: scenery; level of congestion; a pleasant climate; costs and prices; size of cities; types of accommodation; friendliness of the locals; special events or attractions such as music festivals or important monuments or museums; beauty of the landscape; and feelings associated with places of religious pilgrimage or connected with historical events.

For this reason, to give a complete analysis of the point of view of the market's players about Naples' destination image, the current research work is based on two kind of surveys: one about *Destination Customer Satisfaction* to investigate the demand side of the marketplace; the other about the *Management of Local Tourist System* to investigate the offer side of it. The second phase will be discussed further, while in this paper we concentrate on the first part, the one on the demand.

We applied the Destination Customer Satisfaction Pyramid framework as an analytic model which aims at verifying the degree of attraction of "Naples" destination, according to three variables:

- ✚ the quality level of the single services provided by firms operating in local tourism;
- ✚ its attraction factors and products;
- ✚ its overall image, that is strictly related to the other two.

As it was suggested in figure 4, the destination image is just the pick of a complex system of cooperation among the tourist operators. In fact, without the valorisation of all the steps it isn't possible to obtain a solid and sustainable competitiveness, especially in a complex system like the tourism market place.

4.2. Naples' image: on field research results.

The Destination Customer Service and the Management of Local Tourist System both are strictly linked to the evolution of the tourist market. In fact, as was previously underlined, today it is not possible to consider the single services on their own, but it is needed to give

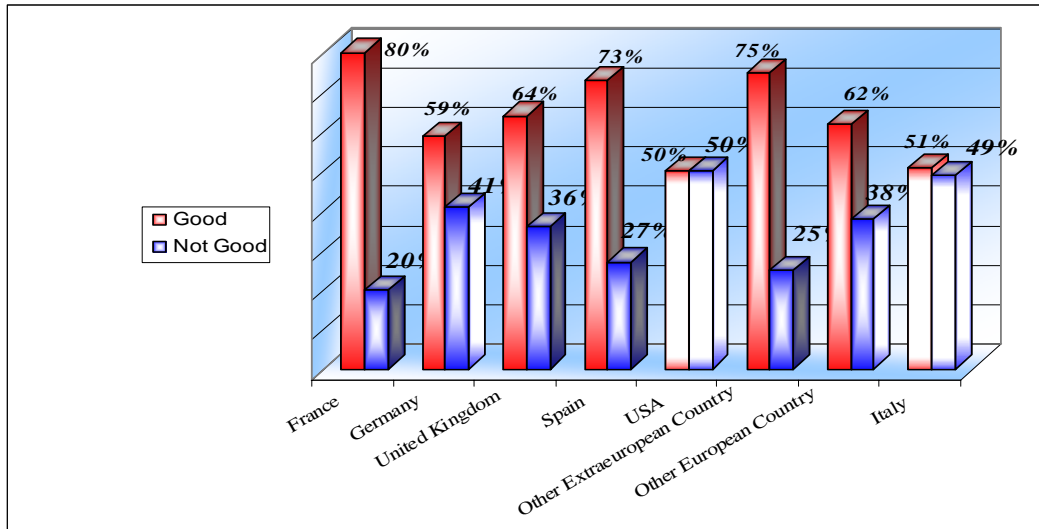
value to destination's resources, on the demand and the offer side both, using a *systemic optics*, which considers them all together. This idea is based on the SLOT concept (Local Tourist System – Rispoli, Tamma, 1995; Della Corte, 2000), that is an *ensemble* of activities and amenity factors which, located in a given place, allow to offer tourists an integrated system– thanks to the different kinds of resources involved – system so that the single operator is only a part of a complex frame.

The concept of system, as can be affirmed, highlights the need for cooperation between all the tourist actors, public and private both. In spite of this aspect, today, we can't already see Naples as a real SLOT, at least as far as the demand's perceptions are concerned. The idea is that the city has strategic potential resources, not adequately used by local actors⁹ through their organization and commercial relations, but this will be discussed in further papers. The goal of this research is to verify the perception of Naples' image as a destination by tourist that were just living the experience of visiting it, that had some expectations on it before arriving and have been satisfied or dissatisfied with it. In other words, this part of the research is the application of the Destination Customer Satisfaction Pyramid.

In order to reach this goal a sample of 504 tourists, divided in 283 Italian and 221 foreign (the percentages were chosen to follow those of tourist overnights), was interviewed beside the airport, the port, and the hotels in city centre. The former mainly comes from northern and central Italy (Lombardia, Emilia Romagna, Lazio, Piemonte, Toscana, but also Sicily); the latter from UK, Germany, France, Spain, US and Japan.

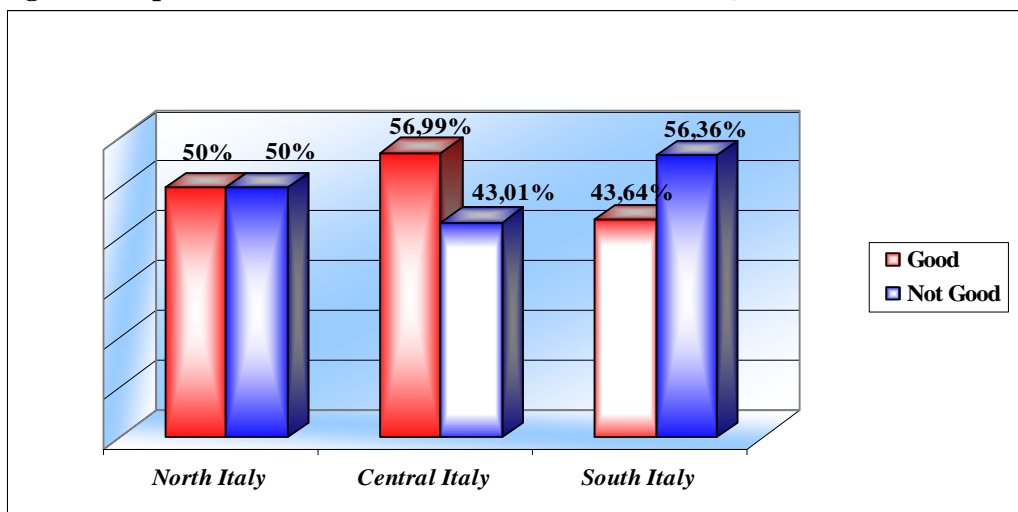
As regards the opinion on the city as a whole that tourists from different countries have, the positive perception surpasses the negative ones. The most critical target is that of Italian and US tourists (figure 5). This result is, of course, positive in relative terms. But in absolute terms the negative opinion percentage is significant (from 20% to 50%), with the highest picks for US market. This shows very high prejudices and biases on the city of Naples.

⁹ This is the resource-based theory approach, based on the research of strategic resources as source of sustainable competitive advantage. The VRIO framework is the analytical model aimed at examining the resources according to some variables, such as value, rareness, inimitability, organization. For further analysis, see Barney J.B. (1996) "Gaining and Sustaining Competitive Advantage", translated, reviewed and modified by Della Corte V. and Sciarelli M., "Risorse, competenze, vantaggi competitive, Carocci, 2006. This framework, however, regards the analysis of the offer, which is not the content of this paper.

Figure 5 - Opinions on the destination.

With reference to the information got about the destination, on which the Destination Image is based, three main channels come out: chosen service's operator advertising; press and media releases; and, last but not least, world of mouth.

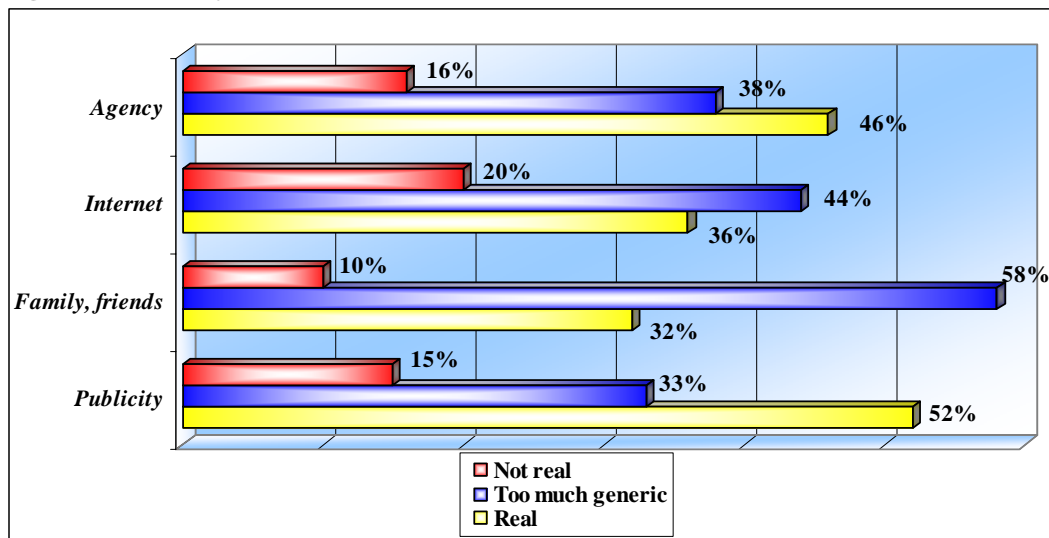
The data show (figure 5 for foreigners and Italians and figure 6 for details on Italian tourists) the positive and negative information fall in a short range, with some particular aspects, i.e. in France there is the highest percentage of positive news (80% good and 20% not good), while in the South of Italy the situation is upside-down (43,64% good and 56,36% not good). This shows how more critical is Italian market to manage in terms of communication.

Figure 6 –Opinion of tourists from different areas (North, Centre and South of Italy).

Besides, both for Italian and foreign visitors, if the initial opinion is negative, this means a very high barrier for destination attractiveness and those who despite of all decide to come are "the bravest".

It is important even to evaluate the media used to get these information and the truthfulness of them related to the conditions of Naples as a touristic area (figure 7). Some information, such as those obtained through internet or by friends and relative seem to have been too much generic, if compared with publicity and travel agents' promotions. This is one of the more common errors in destination image development: dispersion of information. In particular, it is clear that the information source results, for almost all channels taken into account, is too much generic. In fact, to create a suitable image, this must be: *realistic, believable, with appeal, distinctive, unique and coordinated*, all under a **customer oriented** point of view.

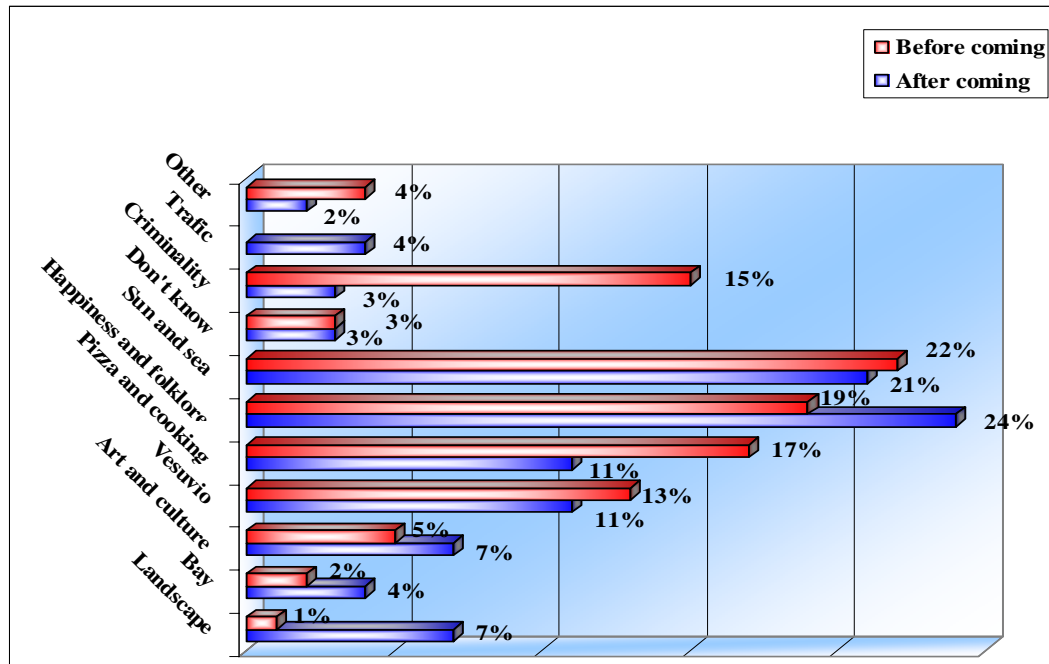
Figure 7 - Quality of information's source.



To create loyalty to the destination, which, in this case, depends on the perceived image of Naples, relevance is attributed to the self-congruity, that is the relationship between the image that the tourist has before and after the vacation. Naples (figure 8) has a strong traditional image linked to the stereotypes of "pizza" and "Vesuvio". On the other hand, important factors such as art and culture and happiness and folklore (that is the atmosphere) are rather underestimated before arriving and appreciated during the stay. As regards this aspect, there's the evidence of the poor attention to factors that are farer from the traditional

stereotypes and yet represent strategic resources to make more valuable on the offer's side. Astonishingly, criminality seems to have been perceived by the sample as less effective than as it was expected and this is a very important result to build a safer image of the city. On the other hand, arts and culture seem to be very feable, compared with other factors.

Figure 8 - Naples' image before ad after touristic experience.



The considerations above underlined are confirmed also by the data about Naples attraction factors. Actually, from data regarding the main touristic and attraction places (figure 9, 10 and 11), composed not only of monuments, but also of artistic and natural beauties, it is clear that even when the various resources amaze the tourists, the lack of organization and, therefore, of a correct evaluation process of potential resources can sometimes become an obstacle to the completely good fruition of the city. It has been asked tourists to give a mark, between 1 and 10, to both beauty and services connected with those that, according to them, are the main attractive factors in the city.

Of course, this situation prejudices the creation of a positive image about Naples as a destination. So, even if the amenities of a place are fundamental to transform a country in a tourist destination, they are not the only needed thing in developing the location in a tourist way. In fact, there are a lot of places that have had a huge success in this marketplace thanks only to the organizational aspects, that have created the chance to build upon the few natural or artistic resources of in their own areas. Looking at fig. 9 it's interesting to notice that there

is a gap of two points on average between beauty and services and the latter result just sufficient and the variance and SQM of services are higher than on beauty. However, the spread is higher for museums and monuments. This makes us think about the real competitiveness of our cultural resources and sites, compared with other cities. Are they adequately organized and evaluated?

Figure 9 - Average marks on attractive factors.

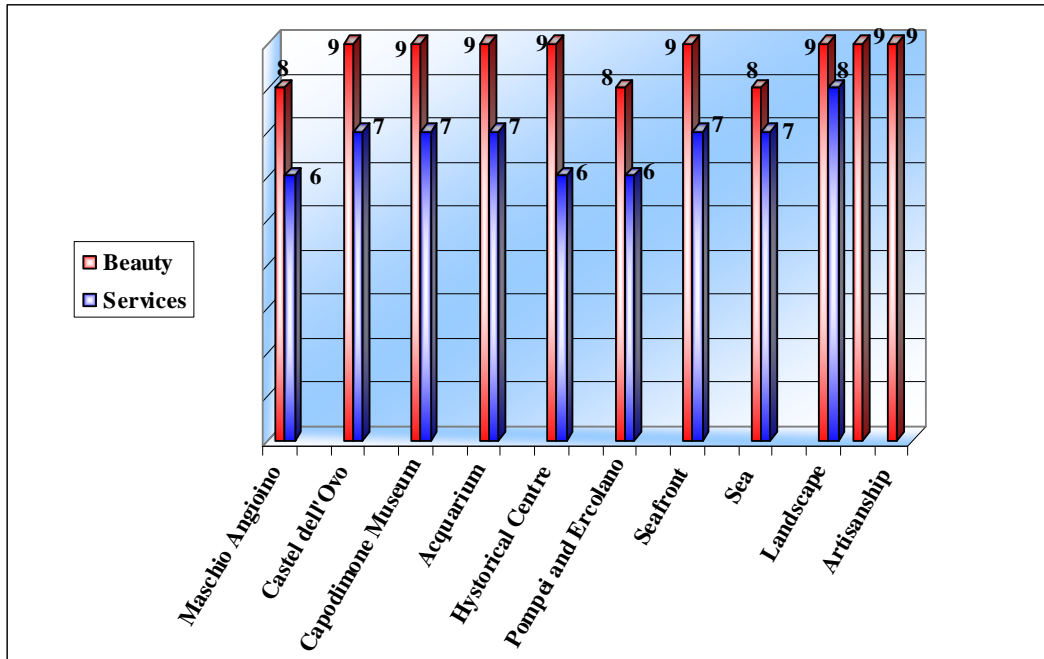


Figure 10 - Variance of judgment on attractive factors.

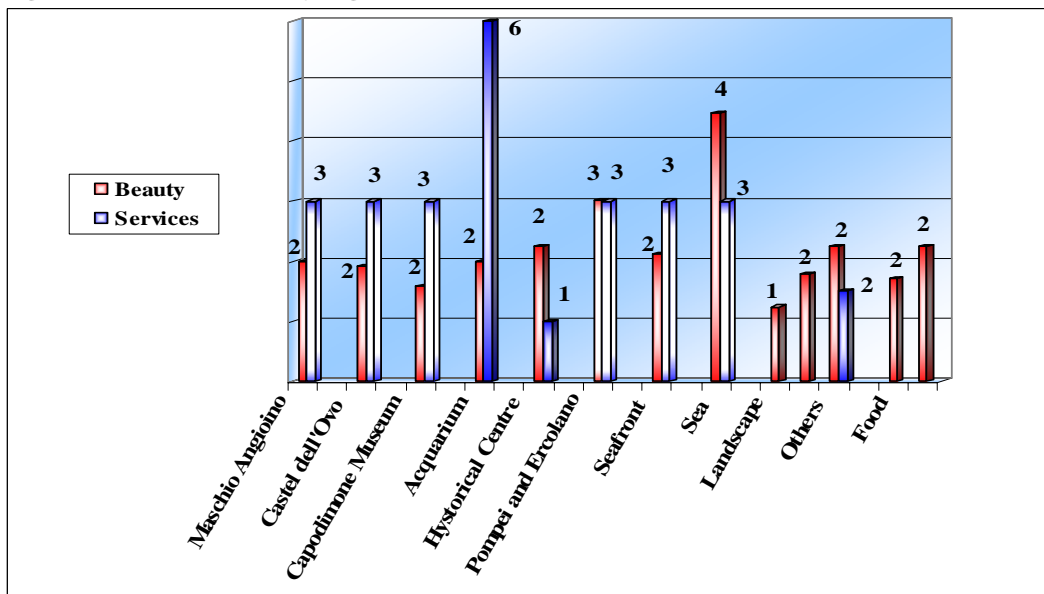
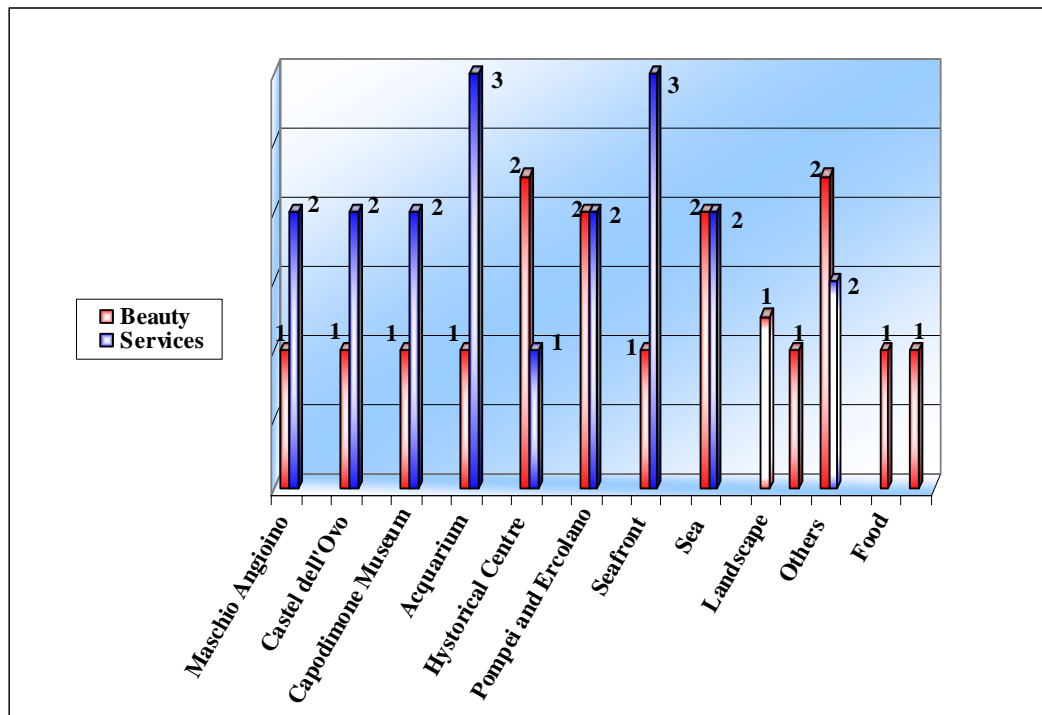


Figure 11 - SQM of judgment on attractive factors.

Besides, while variance and SQM are higher with reference to beauty, they show more homogeneous answers for services. This proves that the demand requires services and facilities that have to be satisfactory, otherwise the potential, even if unique, resources can not be perceived as it should be.

A comparison between expected and perceived quality, besides, shows not much difference as far as hotels and restaurants are concerned (between 8.1 and 8.2 the expected and between 7.7 and 7.9 the perceived), while high complains were registered with reference to local services (6 for the expected and 2.5 for the perceived) and synergic effects (7 for the expected and 3 for the perceived). This is a serious aspect to think over.

In spite of these considerations, 87% of interviewed tourists declared that they would come back and, among them, 47% would come back to have a more thorough visit of the city. These data are important, but they do not mean loyalty, and this is due even to the lack of the systemic perspective needed in developing an appropriate destination marketing plan, also including a detailed and widely spread program of events¹⁰.

¹⁰ In these months, however, a medium-term strategic plans as well as a specific guide for big events is being carried out.

The elements of the analysis have to be seriously taken into account also for strategic and operational actions to make on the subject of hospitality and welcome.

In this context, it appears necessary to follow the Pyramid of Customer Satisfaction and this means operating on every single service, viewed not isolated from the others, to improve the full offer and giving way to inter-firm and public-private initiatives, in order to get to better resources' fruition, so to make them real attractive factors. Only in this way, the client have the possibility to keep a good impression about Naples, free by influences of news about criminality and dirtiness, which often see Naples as a protagonist¹¹.

According to the analysis, therefore, Naples' image can be considered overall rather positive, even if the perception of its attractiveness is not proportionate to its strategic resources and there is still to work on negative factors in order to improve it. A hard job is required in particular, in terms of organization, so to ameliorate the image of the city, according to the suggestions provided by the Destination Customer Satisfaction Pyramid framework.

5. Conclusions.

The economic significance of international visitors suggests the importance of understanding destination perceptions of both National and International visitors to our areas. As a result, more research needs to focus on what is important to visitors and why some attributes seem to be relevant. As researchers, it is imperative that we first establish that differences do exist before we delve into the issues of what and how. The popular press has highlighted the pervasive nature of the Internet and the recent trend in globalization, all pointing to the creation of the global village in which people today are more alike than they are different. Past research in the area of image perceptions suggests just the opposite: that people from different backgrounds and cultural orientations have different image perceptions of destinations (between the others Berlyne 1977; Britton 1979; Buck 1977; Thurot and Thurot 1983). This study validates past research, suggesting that despite the technological revolution and the influence of globalization, differing cultural backgrounds still lead to different image perceptions. Much of the past research was built on image perceptions of *potential* tourists from various geographic regions (Ostrowski, O'Brien, Gordon, 1993). This

¹¹ The second phase of the survey regards, in fact, investigations on local firms.

study involves viewpoints from *actual* visitors, thereby offering empirical validation of previous research on the subject of image perception. This makes marketers efforts on building a positive image for a big complex city like Naples by far more difficult since this kind of destination itself already has contradictory elements that have to be turned on overall positive aspects as far as possible.

This study is a preliminary step in attempting to uncover not only what draws both national and international visitors to a. destinations but also what ensures their return. The impact of world economic recession, terrorism, war are seriously changing the industry set and dynamics. If we are to increase these numbers again, destination marketing organizations need to better understand what is important to visitors during their on-site experiences. Researchers need to further examine existing destination perception differences among key international markets for Naples as well as look into how these differences vary across markets. Based on the results generated in this study, the message is clear: international visitors have higher service image expectations and standards, and they place more importance on environmental factors, than do domestic visitors, especially because they have a littler knowledge about Naples and they are more influenceable by negative aspects. This implies that the tourism stakeholders have to ensure better products and higher service quality. If this is achieved, tourism destination marketing and management professionals will fully understand how these dimensions are perceived across their different target markets, allowing a competitive sustainable advantage.

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