Post quake: a territorial marketing approach to respond to natural disaster disruption

Abstract

Natural disasters can represent a series of economic and social criticalities for the areas affected and also damage their image and economy in the long term.

The aim of this research is to explore how territories and stakeholders of the territories affected by natural disasters react. After a literature review on tourism disaster management, a qualitative analysis was conducted to specify and identify the needs and expectations of tourism professionals and experts in the territories affected by natural disasters (earthquakes, floods, hurricanes and pandemics like the current COVID- 19) through the lens of territorial marketing. The exploratory analysis, conducted in Italy involving N=6 tourism professionals and experts, show that territorial marketing approach as a model for reconstruction and development of the territory in the post-disaster situations. Territorial marketing could be applied consistently because it is possible to detect all the theoretical dimensions recognized as indispensable for its theoretical application and intervention.

1. Introduction

Climate change, political and economic events are contextual factors that can have a huge impact on territories. Since territory and tourism are intimately connected, the disasters that affect the territories also deeply affect the tourist activities and the territory image.

The aim of the paper is to highlight how territorial marketing can be a useful approach to set up a virtuous activity of response and recovery within the territories affected by natural disasters. This work adopts territorial marketing as an approach to assess the competitiveness of the area (Tovma et al. 2020) for recovery and reconstruction after a natural disaster (Wut, Xu and Wong, 2021).

The qualitative analysis, conducted adopting the focus group methodology (Lederman 1990; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Krueger and Casey, 2000; Patton, 2002; Wilkinson, 2011), was realized to specify and better identify the needs and expectations of tourism professionals and experts in the territories affected by natural disasters. The empirical investigation was conducted in the central Italy region of Umbria, having faced the 2016-2017 earthquakes.

From the literature and the study finding, we purpose the territorial marketing approach as model for a virtuous development of the territory in the post-disaster situations.

The paper is structured as follows: first, an examination of the literature of post disaster tourism and territorial marketing is presented. Second, the empirical analysis carried on is introduced: methodology, results, advancement of the territorial marketing literature and conclusions for the stakeholders of the analysed context.

2. Conceptual background

2.1 Disaster tourism

Territory and tourism are mutually connected and this can be seen also in the case of crisis and disasters, since tourism is impacted by many external factors, including political instability, economic conditions, the environment and weather.

By disaster we mean those studies that identify it events that produce death and damage cause "considerable social, political and economic disruptions" (Smith 2005, p. 301),

with significant, irreversible loss and damage from disasters, requiring "the need of long-term recovery" (Buckle 2005, p. 179). Furthermore, according to the definition of disaster, reconstruction interventions can also take various forms (Rodriguez, Quarantelli & Dynes, 2007).

For example, stakeholders can be involved including companies, communities and institutions and have a different degree of involvement. Nevertheless, as proposed by Hornby et al. (2016) public engagement in recovery planning is more successful when planners engage individuals and groups and when dedicated staff are assigned to participation activities. Furthermore, the involvement of institutions and communities after the disaster can not only allow a more effective and sustainable long-term reconstruction (Hornby et al., 2016) but also implement disaster risk reduction measures (Witvorapong, Muttarak, & Pothisiri, 2015).

Previous research has addressed the topic of crises and disruption and their impacts on destinations (Wut, Xu and Wong 2021; Duan, Xie, and Morrison, 2022). Ritchie and Jiang (2019) present and divide the literature on the subject into three strands: crisis and disaster preparedness and planning, response and recovery, resolution and reflection. Over the years, research has also pointed that crisis response, reconstruction and recovery, need to be based on the nature and impact of the crisis or disaster (Ritchie and Jiang, 2019; Chan, Nozu and Cheung, 2020; Fountain and Cradock-Henry, 2020), and produced a number of guidelines to support tourism companies in emerging from crises (e.g. Beirman and Van Walbeek, 2015) also considering the cultural paradigms (Huang et al. 2021).
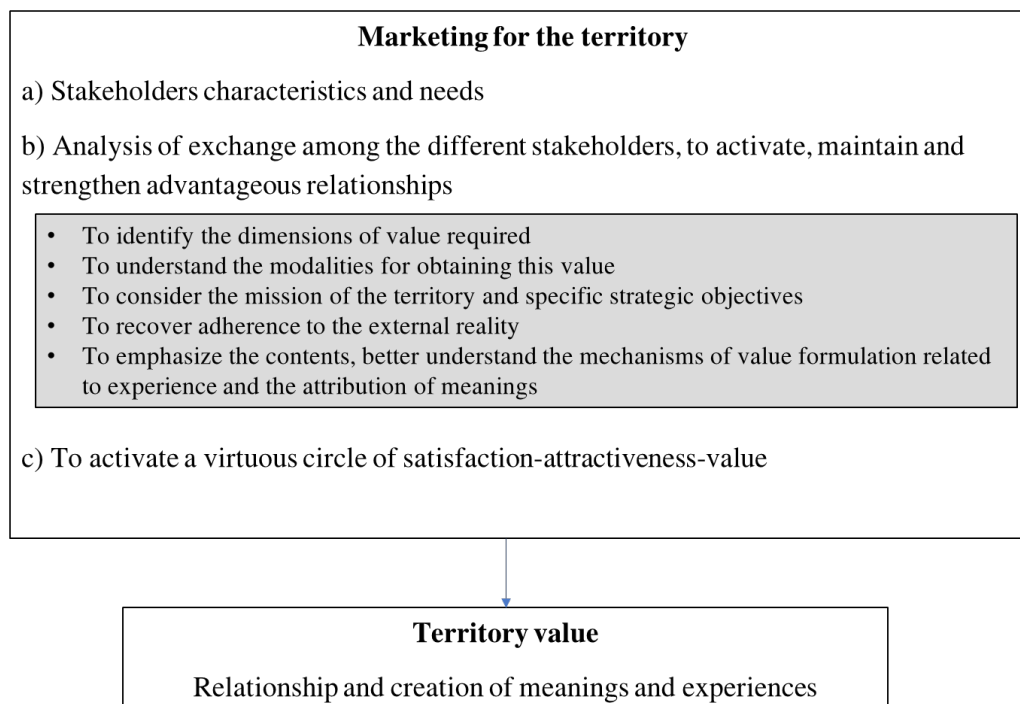
2.2 Territory and Territorial Marketing

The literature on territory management has established the definition of the concepts of territory and environment for decades (Rizzi, Ciciotti and Graziano, 2018). In particular, the territory can be defined as a set of tangible and intangible values - inhabitants, culture, historical heritage, artistic and urban heritage, infrastructure, location, and any other kind of situation - able to increase the overall value of the various elements (Kotler, Haider and Rein, 1993). Thus, the value of the territorial product (Ashworth and Voogd, 1994; Katemliadis, 2022) is the result of both the hard component and the construction that, on the hard dimension, it is possible to implement in terms of services, experiences, relationships; the way in which the different constituent elements (hard and soft) harmonize with each other and the resulting combinations. Hence, territorial value generation depend more on the way in which resources are exploited and connected in the system. Value generation depends on the existing relationships, knowledge, meanings and symbols attributed by the stakeholders of the territory.

In addition, the competitive differentiation between territories is originated (Rullani and Romano, 1998) from the ability of regulation and mobilization that the institutions manage to have towards the local and external productive forces, and from the sense of identity, that is the ability of stakeholders to recognize themselves as a collective actor able to proactively face the market. The territorial marketing approach expresses the analysis of the needs of stakeholders and customers to build, maintain and strengthen advantageous exchange relationships to buold value for the territory, activating a virtuous circle of satisfaction - attractiveness - value (Valdani and Ancarani, 2000).

As summarized in the proposed theoretical framework (Figure 1), marketing for the territory means: a) monitoring stakeholders in order to highlight their characteristics and needs; b) analyzing and understanding the nature and content of the exchange that takes place among the different stakeholders, in order to activate, maintain and strengthen advantageous relationships. If the value of the territory depends mostly on the dimensions of relationship and creation of meanings and experience, the exchange becomes the main moment of value creation; c) activating a virtuous circle of satisfaction-attractiveness-value in order to improve the value of the territory.

Figure 1. Theoretical framework

Marketing for the territory

a) Stakeholders characteristics and needs

b) Analysis of exchange among the different stakeholders, to activate, maintain and strengthen advantageous relationships

- To identify the dimensions of value required
- To understand the modalities for obtaining this value
- To consider the mission of the territory and specific strategic objectives
- To recover adherence to the external reality
- To emphasize the contents, better understand the mechanisms of value formulation related to experience and the attribution of meanings

c) To activate a virtuous circle of satisfaction-attractiveness-value

Territory value

Relationship and creation of meanings and experiences

Source: elaborated by the authors

3. Methodology

The logic of this study has required the use of the qualitative approach and the focus group data collection technique. The interviewees are tourism and hospitality companies' representatives, who have had experience from natural disaster or disaster in general, to portray their experiences and reflections from the disruption. A total of N=6 business owners and associations representatives from the central Italy were involved from the Umbria Region, thanks to the collaboration of the Umbria Chamber of Commerce as a gatekeeper and key informant. The actors involved in the research were mostly small businesses that had suffered damage following a natural disaster (earthquakes of Central Italy 2016-2017). There were also representatives of two associations, always made up of companies damaged by the earthquake. The enterprises interviewed are characterized by family-run management, a customer base of loyal Italian and foreign tourists, strong network with the various operators of the territory (more collaboration than competition).

Interviewees features are summarized in table 1.

Table 1. Interviewees' characteristics

N.	Role	Organization(s)
1	Entrepreneur	SME / B&B
2	Entrepreneur	SME / B&B
3	Entrepreneur	Organic Farm and B&B group
4	Tour Guide and Head / President	Association of enterprises born after the disaster (Earthquake)
5	Entrepreneur, Member of the board of national union for hospitality for region Umbria, Member of the regional council of Umbria	B&B, hotels and restaurants group
6	Entrepreneur	B&B, Camping area and Organic educational farm

Source: elaborated by the authors

The focus group technique was chosen as a data collection methodology (Lederman 1990; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Krueger and Casey, 2000; Patton, 2002; Wilkinson, 2004) to ask questions to participants while soliciting free discussion in an interactive setting, in order to encourage participants' sharing of their own views in the context of the views of the others (Patton, 2002). During the focus group sessions, data was collected through different mean and techniques, primarily transcripts and researchers' annotations (Krueger and Casey, 2000).

The focus group was conducted in July 2022 in the interviewees' native language and moderated by three marketing researchers, to ensure the best comprehensibility of the topic and to foster the discussion among subjects, with different levels of education and experience.

The research team provided for translation and linguistic adaptation (Harkness et al. 2004). The focus group aimed to verify:

1. *Pre-disaster reality*: enterprise management and daily experience.

2. *Situation, Reaction and Gap* experienced during disaster: a) description of the period and conditions of life and suffering experienced; b) type of decisive support in terms of role, persons, workers, managers; c) type of gap - in terms of role, people, workers, managers - experienced in that period; d) type of support - in terms of role, persons, workers, managers - desired at that time and after the disaster.

4. Results and discussion

Earthquake/disaster effects can be traced back to various levels. The first level is the immediate damage on the economic return of the territory. The first visible damage is that of image linked to the communication of the disaster by the media in emphatic and inaccurate terms. The disaster impact on the destination image led to an immediate cancellation of bookings and, in general, the turnover of companies. The reaction from the local operators was to activate a direct communication with loyal customers in order to better explain the situation in the area and, in general, to reassure and convey serenity about what they were living.

The second level is related to structural damage, mild or medium and not solvable within a few months. The most common response is to repair such damage directly, without counting or waiting for State aid, which is considered too slow and inadequate for the present situation.

The third level is related to the territorial devastation connected to the long-term hard and soft aspects. There are damages related not only to physical structures (roads, railways, public buildings, etc.), but also to key elements of attraction of the territory, such as museums, monuments, leisure services, or aspects related to the quality of life (lack of services and relations) that leads citizens to leave the territory.

These three levels of damage correspond to some perceived dimensions of reaction.

In the very short term, what prevails is the discouragement, the lack of confidence; discouragement is often followed by hope, especially as a result of the solidarity that emerges in these situations. Solidarity has been expressed not only in the sending of aid, but also in a purchase of goods from the territories and a return of tourists when the situation was normalized, especially Italian tourists for short stays. Solidarity linked to aid is seen not only in a positive sense: the aid should be adapted to the needs of the territory and to the new idea of development that it's need to give to the territory, starting from the conditions of the post-disaster; on the contrary, the aid generally depends on who helps and is defined by the beneficiary, with the consequent compliance with the needs, priorities and characteristics of the territory.
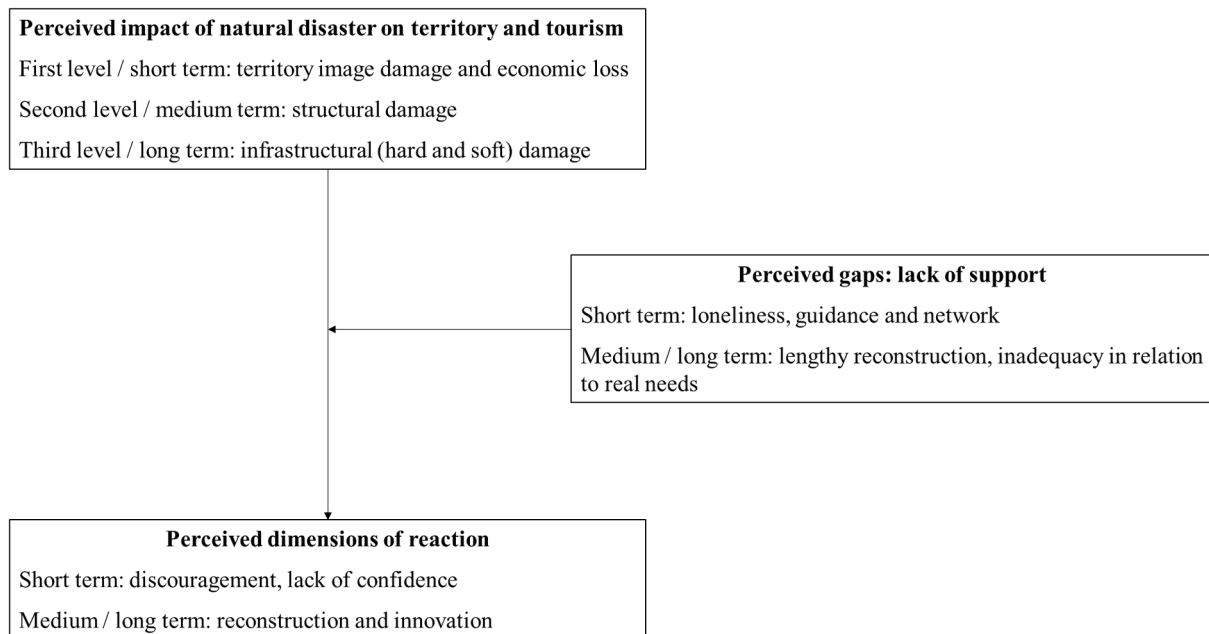
In the medium and long term, the disaster leads people and communities to do things that had never been done before: the search for the new, for different solutions, prevails.

Finally, we identified some gaps experienced after the disaster. In the *very short term*, the main gap was the lack of support and guidance, the lack of a network that would allow for the management of relationships and actions.

In the *short and medium term*, the lack of support concerns reconstruction aid: what emerges is the slowness of aid, and its inadequacy in relation to real needs.
The need for an institutional body and a working group to which it can refer is expressed, focusing attention and resources for the reconstruction of structures and infrastructures (hard and soft) and understanding how to carry out not only reconstruction, but a new development. The findings levels are summarized in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Summary of findings

Perceived impact of natural disaster on territory and tourism
First level / short term: territory image damage and economic loss
Second level / medium term: structural damage
Third level / long term: infrastructural (hard and soft) damage

Perceived gaps: lack of support
Short term: loneliness, guidance and network
Medium / long term: lengthy reconstruction, inadequacy in relation to real needs

Perceived dimensions of reaction
Short term: discouragement, lack of confidence
Medium / long term: reconstruction and innovation

Source: elaborated by the authors

What emerges from the study findings the idea of:
- the territory as sets of hard and soft elements (Katemliadis, 2022), and set of relationships between stakeholders and stakeholders and territory that generate value and meanings (Ashworth and Voogd, 1998; Katemliadis, 2022),
- territory stakeholder identification as an expression of the territory, in a collective subject (Rullani and Romano, 1998).
- reconstruction, enhancement and development of the territory, that is a strategy developed on the basis of the existing, with the aim to establish new dynamics and potential (Valdani and Ancarani, 2000).

These elements are consistent with the idea of territorial marketing as a key element of a territory in a multi-stakeholder and phased approach to reconstruction. Hence the hypothesis of application of the territorial marketing for the recovery and development of a territory in the post-disaster is consistent both in terms of theoretical coherence and of response to territory needs.

5. Conclusions

This study analyzes the literature on disaster tourism and proposes an exploratory study with focus groups, trying to intercept the needs and responses of territories affected by natural disasters.

The analysis of the literature and the findings show that the territorial marketing approach lends itself as an element of analysis and intervention consistent with the needs of stakeholders and customers following a natural disaster. In a territorial marketing perspective, the elements of continuity and attention to the interventions are the analysis of structural

damage; the impact of damage on hard and soft (socio-cultural) infrastructure; the analysis of strengths and weaknesses in the physical/structural and social/lifestyle dimensions.

The contribution of this work could stimulate further investigation on how the territories have started reconstruction and development after natural disasters. moreover, in a logic of intervention, it is suggested to investigate how best to support the territorial stakeholders in the analysis and implementation phase of the shared territorial value creation, to activate a virtuous circle of satisfaction-attractiveness-value.

6. Aknowledgements

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