

NATURAL ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND MICRO-TOURISM DESTINATIONS: THE CASE OF SOUTHERN ITALY

Angelo A. Camillo - School of Business, Woodbury University, 7500 – Glenoaks Blvd - Burbank, CA 91510 Phone: 818-394 3314- Fax: 818 – 394 3311- Email: angelo.camillo@woodbury.edu

Antonio Minguzzi - University of Molise, Via Duca Degli Abruzzi, 86039 Termoli, (CB), Italy Phone: +39 0874 404840 - Fax: +39 0874 404814, Email: minguzzi@unimol.it

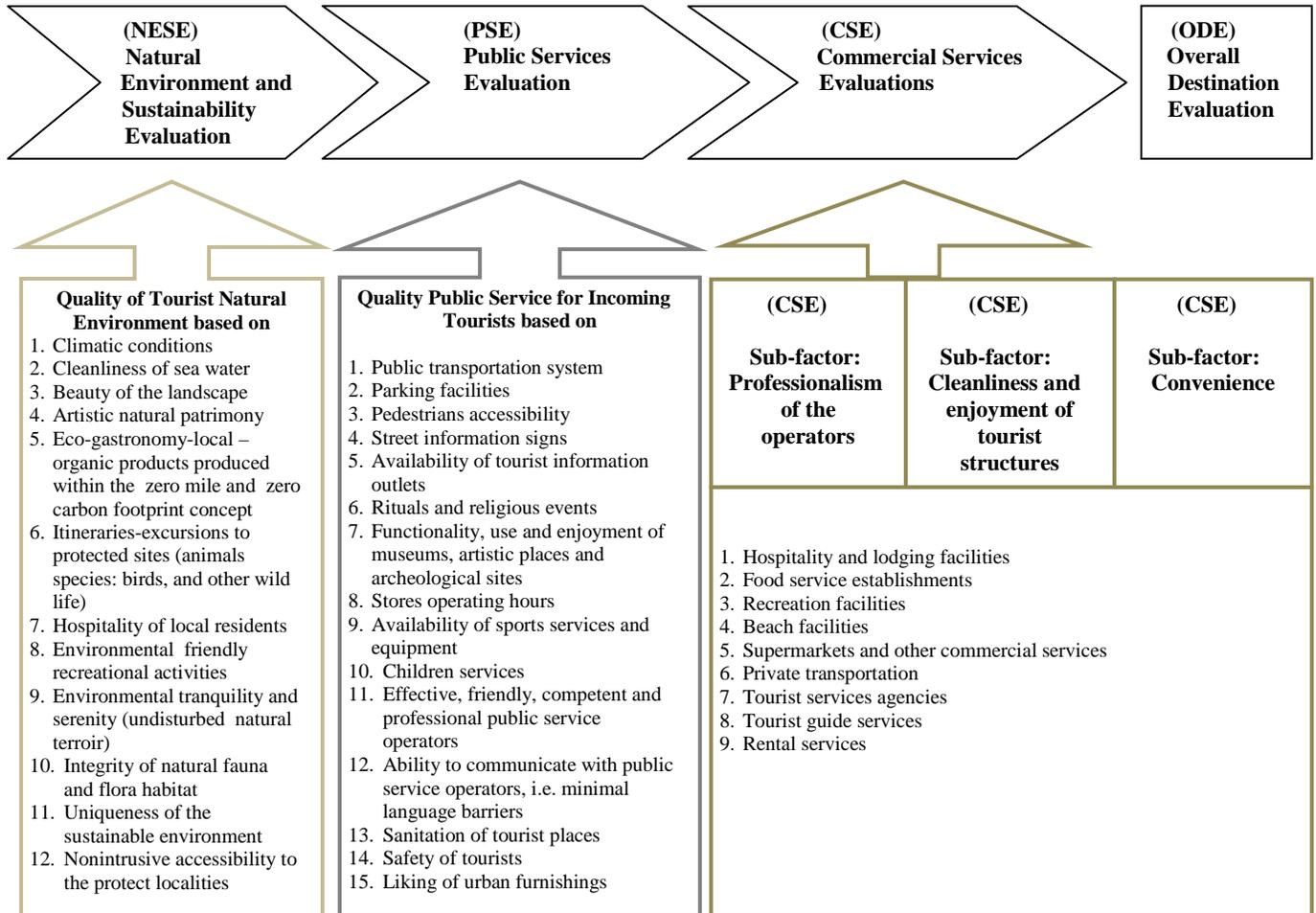
Angelo Presenza - Ph.D. University of Molise, Via Duca Degli Abruzzi, 86039 Termoli, (CB), Italy Phone: +39 0874 404840 - Fax: +39 0874 404814, Email: presenza@unich.it

Svetlana Holt - School of Business, Woodbury University - 7500 Glenoaks Blvd. Burbank, CA 91510 Phone: 818-394-3359 - Fax: 818-394-3311, E-mail: svetlana.holt@woodbury.edu

ABSTRACT

Over the last decade, the concept of sustainability has become a topic of greater interest to researchers and practitioners in the field of tourism and appears to be a critical factor in customer satisfaction—the core of this research. Micro Tourism, within the context of sustainability, is an under-researched topic and published literature deals overwhelmingly with Micro Tourism Enterprises. Within the global context of tourism, scholars have made valuable contributions to the field, and tourist satisfaction continues to be a topic of great interest. Tourists in general choose their destination based on many personal factors, one being interest in Green Tourism and Sustainable Development. This paper investigates the challenges and opportunities in attracting tourists in three emerging micro-tourism destinations in South Central Italy and identifies the determining factors contributing to tourists' satisfaction by contrasting all factors with that of Environmental Quality. Within this context the study focuses on identifying the determining factors that affect customer expectations -- satisfaction in three emergent micro beach tourism destinations in South Central Italy. Two of the destinations, Termoli and Campomarino, are located in the Molise region, and the third, Vasto, is located in the adjacent Abruzzi region. They have a shared coastline of 35 km or 21.8 miles. The regions of Abruzzi and Molise have a remarkable competitive sustainability advantage: the natural environment without factories, local economy based on agriculture, with large truffle, olive oil, pasta, preserved meats, and wine production, nuclear-free zone, only one airport in the Abruzzi region and no airports in the Molise region, zero industrial pollution, preserved national parks with wild life, fresh water fish, etc. This patrimony is rather organic and not intentionally man-made to support the sustainability initiative. In fact, these destinations have received the Blue Flag Awards from the Foundation for Environmental Education for excellent water quality, environmental quality, service quality, security, and environmental education. Recently, the regions have received the highest recognition for being top organic producers of truffles, olive oil, and grape wine, among other specialty products. The study applies qualitative and quantitative methods and introduces an empirical model for evaluating the factors affecting tourist expectations and satisfaction, see figure 1.

Figure 1. Proposed model of the determinants of tourist satisfaction.



Results show that the quality of the tourism environment is the element of greatest satisfaction for all three destinations. Specifically, the uniqueness and integrity of the natural environment, the uniqueness of the territory and integrity of the natural environment are key to maintaining tourist satisfaction. This study contributes to the body of knowledge in the field of tourism in general and benefits strategic marketers and managers in emerging micro-tourism destinations in their effort to promote sustainable tourism.

Keywords: Sustainability, natural environment, tourist satisfaction, strategic management, tourism marketing, destination management, emergent tourism, sustainable micro tourism