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# COOPERATIVE STRATEGIES OF ACCOMMODATION FACILITIES: A DRIVING FORCE TO ENHANCE SECONDARY TOURISM RESOURCES?

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***Abstract***

*The work analyzes how cooperation and coopetition strategies can bring value to the territory, increasing the competitive advantage of stakeholders and possibly enhancing secondary tourism attractions. For this purpose, a literature review is addressed, to analyze cooperative strategies at the entrepreneurial level and consequent potential benefits for destination competitiveness. The case study of Liguria is then presented, an Italian region mainly known for the sea. In order to better understand the attitudes of the territory towards the tourist promotion of secondary destinations, a questionnaire is used, addressed to tourism facilities. The questionnaire aims to explore the perception of entrepreneurs towards the existing territorial strategies, with an emphasis on their attitude towards coopetition and collaboration strategies for the enhancement of secondary and niche destinations. The questionnaire shows how most of the structured accommodation activities (hotels and residences) are strongly linked to the primary attraction of the region (the sea) and how many respondents do not perceive the existing efforts for the promotion of secondary territorial attractions as largely effective. However, there is good feedback about the perception of the potential of cooperation strategies to be implemented to enrich the overall tourism offer and, as a result, the territory as a whole.*

## 1. Introduction

The present study analyses the subject of coopetition and cooperation among tourism stakeholders (Edgell & Haenisch, 1995) and the relationships with specific features of a destination, namely primary and secondary attractions (Benur & Bramwell, 2015; Jafari, 1982). In particular, it deals with the strategies that local stakeholders, mostly small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and specifically accommodation facilities could implement in the form of networks (Gulati et al., 2000; Hitt, 2000; McEvily & Zaheer, 1999), cooperation and coopetition (Edgell & Haenisch, 1995; Kylänen & Rusko, 2011; Wang & Krakover, 2008) to enhance destination's competitiveness, to measure which attractions and resources are used as main determining factors from the tourism point of view (Murphy et al., 2000).

To be successful, tourism destinations should provide that the experiences they offer visitors and their overall attractiveness are the same or better than other alternative destinations. The attractiveness of destinations usually depends on their physical (landscape), ecological (climate conditions, ecology) and socio-cultural (art, history, religion, food) or attribute (Jafari, 1982) characteristics.

More specifically, the work investigates how cooperation and coopetition strategies bring value to a territory, increasing the competitive advantage of stakeholders and possibly enhancing secondary attractions. A literature review is first conducted, related to the theme of cooperation strategies and tourism competitiveness, with the strategic objective of increasing the benefit for the geographic area which, in turn, would bring greater profitability to the stakeholders themselves. In particular, it is investigated how these strategies could benefit secondary tourist attractions, often undervalued in contexts where there is already a strong and well-recognized tourist attraction. Similarly, it is strategic to implement types of tourism that can be considered as "niche", in places where mass tourism already exists, as this would maximize the benefit for the territory and probably also satisfy other potential stakeholders. With this aim, in terms of policy-making, it is important to set-up effective destination branding strategies to bring along different elements of the territory. Some examples can be the artistic and cultural aspects, the gastronomic and traditional ones, which can find a valorisation in a territory that, already in itself, is a tourist-target for its natural beauty.

The work continues by presenting the empirical field research, concerning the Liguria region in northern Italy, especially renowned for the seaside tourism. In particular, to analyse the point of view of the tourism supply, a questionnaire was prepared and addressed to the accommodation facilities. A total of 105 questionnaires were collected from heterogeneous subjects working in that industry. The primary purpose of the descriptive analysis is to assess the level of existing and potential cooperation and coopetition strategies between these subjects, but also the level of sensitivity towards secondary attractions that are not yet fully exploited from the tourism point of view. Moreover, the research aims to evaluate the perception that these subjects have towards the activities implemented at an institutional level for the enhancement of the territory as a whole and, again, towards potential secondary tourist attractions.

Liguria was chosen as a case study, since it has some peculiar characteristics, which make it particularly suitable for the specific topic dealt with in this work. It is a region particularly known for seaside tourism, a strong and solid primary natural attraction both for Italians and for foreign tourists. Despite this, however, the region offers other considerable natural and cultural resources and, very importantly, the presence of both sea and mountain in the same territory, in the space of a few kilometres, as noted in Zanini (2012). It seems possible, therefore, to develop niche or secondary tourism. Moreover, as a partial consequence of the strong primary attraction, Liguria is literally "stormed by tourists", during the summer period, while remaining inactive for most of the year, with an evident imbalance in environmental and economic sustainability. In this vein, the enhancement of secondary attractions, focused on, e.g., culture, art, gastronomy and hiking, could create additional value for the territory and different stakeholders and foster off-season activities.

The results show that Ligurian accommodation facilities are largely oriented towards the region's primary tourist product (the sea) and this is also confirmed by the fact that many of these companies close their business off-season. Moreover, it also emerges that many of these facilities do not consider their business as sufficiently valorised by local institutions. Coopetition is a strategy that is little used to date, but it is considered as potentially positive and implementable in the future. A more pro-active attitude is shown towards the collaboration with other entrepreneurial subjects with different businesses, a strategy widely used by the analysed companies, especially towards bathing activities and restaurants.

## 2. Cooperation and coopetition for tourism competitiveness

According to Hitt (2000), entrepreneurship involves identifying and exploiting business opportunities. Entrepreneurial strategy is the integration of entrepreneurial and strategic perspectives into the development and adoption of value-creating actions. There are several domains that entrepreneurial integration and strategic management naturally cover (Ireland et al., 2001). The domains mentioned above include: external networking, organisational research and learning, innovation and nationalisation (Hitt et al., 2001). The external network has become increasingly important for all types of enterprises, as the economic environment continues to grow in an increasingly competitive way (Gulati et al., 2000). Networks allow companies to compete on the market without possessing all the resources necessary to do so. This is particularly important for new and small enterprises which often have limited capital (Cooper, 2017). Companies usually seek partners in forming an alliance or network (Tsai, 2000). Among the possible sources of competitive advantage for allied companies, a decisive one is the "relationship of trust" (Davis et al., 2000). Local/regional cooperation and collaboration among the stakeholders is often required, possibly also in the form of coopetition (Edgell & Haenisch, 1995; Kylänen & Rusko, 2011; Wang & Krakover, 2008), to provide a complete and qualitatively adequate tourist product, able to compete globally in an effective way. Particular emphasis is placed on the increasingly evident links with cultural aspects at territorial level (Van der Ark & Richards, 2006), with the economy (Kim & Chen, 2006) and strategies to enhance lesser-known or potentially niche destinations (Robinson & Novelli, 2005).

Cooperation among companies on the territory is considered an effective factor for tourism and local competitiveness (Aureli & Forlani, 2015; Beritelli, 2011). The literature indicates actors such as hotels, restaurants and travel agencies, which can cooperate to provide attractive and high-quality services to more sophisticated clientele (Bullock, 1998; Pansiri, 2008). The fragmentation of the tourism supply is, therefore, increasingly confronted with the desire for an all-in-one experience expressed by customers (Maggioni et al., 2014).

The need for cooperation is particularly important for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which are at the heart of the tourism industry (Wanhill, 2000). Thanks to stable relationships with other operators in the sector, SMEs can develop new business opportunities, achieve growth, improve competitiveness and reach international players by creating global networks that are crucial to attracting tourists (Erkuş-Öztürk, 2009; Pansiri, 2008). Buhalish (1996) suggests that SMEs should coordinate their supply by exploiting technological opportunities to improve their competitiveness and profitability concerning their destination. When SMEs work in cooperation, they can develop long-term strategies, as in the case of small receiving enterprises that manage to have a positive impact on their community.

According to an interview by Alonso (2010), small enterprises consider business relations as a tool to improve the image of a destination with further implications for the promotion and marketability of the whole territory. The instruments of cooperation are different and manifold. Each instrument is designed with a specific purpose and has a precise configuration that can affect the functioning of inter-company networks in terms of power allocation: for example, while franchising and subcontract imply asymmetric relations, cooperatives and consortia assume equal decision-making powers for each participant. According to Forlani (2005) and Pencarelli & Folrani (2002), because of the specific features of a tourism product, a SME is a system that always works within two larger systems that include, on the one hand, the system of tourist service provision, whose actors co-produce joint leisure experiences (the tourism product itself) and, on the other hand, the system identified with the geographic area in which it is located, which can be a city, a provincial district, a region and even a country (Bonetti & Simoni, 2005; Caroli, 2006; Golinelli, 2002; Valdani & Ancarani, 2000).

In other words, organizations operating in the tourism sector should never be considered isolated but should be viewed and analysed as a complex tourism system.

## 3. Destination competitiveness: primary and secondary products

Several tourist destinations are inherently endowed with attractions with a strong mass appeal. These natural attractions make it possible to generate sustainable business purely based on them and, as a frequent result, no efforts are made to enhance other aspects of the same territory. Obvious examples are the seaside or mountain regions, where the largest investments and managerial efforts are being made in the creation of specific tourism to exploit natural attractions. Hence, in these areas, the general strategies of both local stakeholders and institutions should focus on valorising the existing natural tourism products, which are considered as primary for that territory, while paying way less attention to other attractions that, if exploited, make the overall touristic experience richer and wider.

Primary tourism products are defined as those aspects that mainly attract tourists to certain destinations (Jafari, 1982). Diversification, intensification and interconnection between these are essential for the competitiveness of tourist destinations and their sustainable development. In Benur & Bramwell (2015) it is stated that tourism products considered as primary are themselves made up of multiple sets of elements. It is therefore important not to consider just the most obvious elements since, if exploited, other elements also have the potential to increase competitiveness, creating different activities and experiences. In fact, it would be possible to diversify the supply, by personalizing products that would respond to different needs and interests. This would bring greater tourism flexibility to the territory, potentially also attracting tourists previously not interested in a more monolithic supply. This also makes it possible to deal more effectively with any changes in tourism demand, should they occur over time. Smith (1994) points out that the elements that make up the primary products mutually interact. Some of these elements are more tangible (e.g. natural and geographical characteristics, local services), while others are intangible and experiential (e.g. perceived hospitality, emotional involvement). It is, therefore, necessary to promote, with appropriate entrepreneurial strategies, both the more obvious and objective aspects and the less obvious ones, as the latter could compete to differentiate the tourist experience more than similar destinations (Murphy et al., 2000).

In Mo et al. (1993) it is shown how the environment is often the main driver for a tourist decision. However, Zeithaml (1988) argues that it is not easy to create a quality perception for tourists, since the overall experience is often rich in complex and less tangible aspects. In (Russo & Van Der Borg, 2002), they read that the tourist's choice is based on an analysis of the perceived quality of the primary product on an overall level, but they put the quality of secondary products as the second determining factor. The third factor is then the image of the territory, which, in a certain sense, includes the first two factors. It is possible to optimise these strategic aspects by implementing targeted actions, promoted by local stakeholders and public administrations. As noted in Berg et al. (1995) and Van der Ark & Richards (2006), tourism strategies often focus, instead, on the most obvious aspects of a specific attraction, not enhancing other potential elements of competitiveness. This can lead to a deficiency of vision of the territory as a complex whole.

A tourism product should, instead, be considered as composed by a multitude of sub-products and experiences, which combine and interact with each other according to the expectations of potential customers, i.e. tourists. Hu & Ritchie (1993) define a tourist destination as a modular package of facilities and services, consisting of a series of multidimensional attributes. Another important aspect is the dichotomy between mass and niche tourism (Marson, 2011; Simmons, 1994). Mass tourism refers to a massive influx of tourists to a specific destination (Vainikka, 2013) and is usually characterized by the fact that tourists move along identical routes, follow fashions, seek relaxation, do not like risk. The concept of niche tourism, on the other hand, refers to specialized types of tourism, usually focused on a specific theme or a particular concept, based for example on art, sport, gastronomy or other. It is commonly observed that mass tourism often develops towards territories with natural peculiarities (e.g. sea or mountains), thanks to which the territory itself becomes known and renowned in the tourism field. As noted in Panakera et al. (2011), niche tourism could be more sustainable, both because it draws on many potential heterogeneous and different elements, and because it is more widespread and less concentrated, both from a seasonal and territorial point of view. If a mass attraction is present in the territory, moreover, niche (complementary) tourism products could be developed that could become secondary attractions to the already established primary one. This would guarantee higher value creation for the territory and would allow distributing in a virtuous way the potential of mass tourism also on other potential local stakeholders. Niche tourists, in fact, are usually looking for the different, are heterogeneous, attentive to the environment and social context. Niche tourism usually includes groups of people who want to deepen their hobbies and interests and, on average, have special attention to the environment, respect for what surrounds them and want to learn. It would, therefore, be particularly advisable to encourage niche tourism, even if some mass tourism were already developed, possibly using the latter as a flywheel to foster the former (Lew & McKercher, 2006).

## 4. The empirical research

The empirical work aims to investigate some strategies of the receptive companies, with a particular interest in the Ligurian territory, used as a case study. In detail, the work aims:

1. to understand the relationship between the receptive enterprises and the territory (valorisation by the institutions, direct collaboration with them, strategies implemented for the promotion of the territory).
2. to analyse the use (or lack) of the coopetition with other subjects, both in order to create value for their business and for the territory
3. to understand the strategic attitude towards attractions other than the main one (the sea in the case of Liguria), i.e. those secondary attractions and/or niche that could, in turn, contribute to seasonally adjusted supply and bring value to the territory and other business entities

Liguria is located in the north of Italy and has a resident population of 2.5% of the whole Italian population (source: ISTAT, September 2019). This region has been chosen as a case study since it is, historically, an important tourist destination in the Italian context (Zanini, 2012). Moreover, the region is currently widely perceived as a single-product tourist destination. Its primary attraction, the sea, is evident from the point of view of tourists and this has been one of the reasons why other possible attractions over the years have not been adequately exploited and financed by local governments. Notwithstanding, it can be noticed that Ligurian structures, specifically created for seaside tourism, are often not perceived as good as those offered by other regions (Ugolini, 1996), nevertheless Liguria is often chosen for the convenience of reaching it (geographical proximity to Piedmont and Lombardia).

The present research, therefore, also aims at providing new elements of policy-making for the development of the region, through the analysis of the tourism supply and the propensity for cooperation and coopetition strategies on the side of local stakeholders. In fact, this work provides an entrepreneurial point of view that considers both the strategies at the level of individual enterprises and the possible synergies between them, as well as the relationship with local institutions to promote the territory and the creation of an image that is not limited only to the primary tourism product.

To analyse and evaluate the strategic attitude of the Ligurian stakeholders and the region as a whole towards tourism, with a particular focus on the enhancement of secondary attractions, a structured questionnaire was prepared and sent, via the internet, to several accommodation facilities, also including holiday apartments for rent. In total, over 1.000 accommodation facilities were contacted, but the redemption rate was quite low, and the total collected questionnaires have been 105, divided as follows: 36 hotels, 18 residences, 2 inns, 23 B&Bs and 26 holiday apartments. The e-mail addresses of the structures have been collected through the Regione Liguria website and, especially in the case of holiday apartments for rent, through online booking sites.

These facilities are spread in the whole territory, with the majority of them (almost 87%) in the central and western Liguria, in particular in the provinces of Genova (30.48%) Savona (35.24%) and Imperia (almost 21%). The remaining 13.3% were from the province of La Spezia (eastern Liguria).

After a brief demographic section, concerning the business location, type and dimension (indicated as the total number of available rooms), the subsequent questions were thought to investigate the perception of coordination with local institutions (question 4) and, above all, the attitude towards coopetition strategy (Q: 5, 6 and 7) and cooperation in general (Q: 8, 9 and 10). The remaining questions (11 to 15) are aimed to investigate the off-season strategies of the respondents and, even more specifically, their attitude towards secondary and niche attractions. The questions and the synthetic results are shown in Table 1.

*Tab. 1. Questions and aggregate results in percentage*

| **1) Type of accommodation facility** | |
|---|---|
| Hotel | 34,29% |
| Residence | 17,14% |
| Inn | 2,86% |
| B&B | 20,00% |
| Holiday apartment | 25,71% |
| **2) Dimension of business** | |
| Small (less than 30 rooms) | 57,14% |
| Medium-large (more than 30 rooms) | 42,86% |

| | |
|---|---|
| **3) Province** | |
| Genova | 30,48% |
| Savona | 35,24% |
| Imperia | 20,95% |
| La Spezia | 13,33% |
| **4) In your personal experience, do you think that your business is adequately valued by local institutions?** | |
| Yes | 34,29% |
| No | 65,71% |
| **5) Do you consider coopetition a viable and interesting strategy for your own business? [1..7]** | |
| 1 (not at all) | 5,71% |
| 2 | 8,57% |
| 3 | 17,14% |
| 4 | 28,57% |
| 5 | 34,29% |
| 6 | 2,86% |
| 7 (very much) | 2,86% |
| **6) Did you ever use some form of coopetition as a strategy?** | |
| Usually | 9,52% |
| Sometimes | 16,19% |
| Rarely | 52,38% |
| Never | 21,90% |
| **7) Do you plan to use this strategy in the near future?** | |
| Yes | 68,57% |
| No | 31,43% |
| **8) What kind of structures have you mainly collaborated with, in the past?** | |
| Other tourist accomodations | 14,29% |
| Bathing activities | 31,43% |
| Beauty Farms/Sport facilities | 8,57% |
| Restaurants | 22,86% |
| None (never collaborated) | 22,86% |
| **9) Have you ever collaborated with other companies or institutions, with the primary aim of promoting the territory, without direct and immediate repercussions on your own business?** | |
| Yes | 8,57% |
| No | 91,43% |
| **10) Do you think that collaboration between tourism companies is useful to promote the territory?** | |
| Yes | 80,00% |
| No | 20,00% |

| | |
|---|---|
| **11) What is your prevailing ”off-season” strategy?** | |
| Business activity is closed in off-season periods | 30,48% |
| Conditions of supply are radically changed, to meet demand | 50,48% |
| Specific collaborations and synergies are implemented, to increase customer base | 19,05% |
| **12) Is your business activity strictly related to the primary tourism product of your region (i.e. seaside) and favored by it?** | |
| Yes | 60,95% |
| No | 39,05% |
| **13) Would your business benefit from a greater enhancement of secondary (and/or niche) tourism products on your territory?** | |
| 1 (not at all) | 0,95% |
| 2 | 7,62% |
| 3 | 21,90% |
| 4 | 26,67% |
| 5 | 25,71% |
| 6 | 4,76% |
| 7 (very much) | 12,38% |
| **14) Which of the following strategies do you consider to be the most efficient for promoting secondary (and/or niche) tourism products on your territory?** | |
| Direct promotion (e.g. advertising by regional institutions) | 51,43% |
| Cooperation among local businesses | 19,05% |
| Word of mouth (advice from other people or e-WOM) | 29,52% |
| **15) Do you feel that this (and other) strategies are being currently implemented on your territory, to promote secondary (and/or nice) tourism products?** | |
| 1 (not at all) | 8,57% |
| 2 | 5,71% |
| 3 | 37,14% |
| 4 | 22,86% |
| 5 | 17,14% |
| 6 | 2,86% |
| 7 (very much) | 5,71% |

## 5. Results and discussion

Over one-third of the structures that returned the questionnaire are hotels, despite, in recent years, Liguria has been affected by the reduction of this type of facilities. Subsequently, we have the responses of managers of apartments for rent, used exclusively for this purpose, B&B, residences and, last, the very rare inns. From the dimensional point of view, it can be noted that most of the structures that responded are small (less than 30 rooms). Surely, the fact that one-quarter of the respondents were managers of rented apartments and B&Bs had a great impact on this figure.

The primary objective of the questionnaire is to understand the perception of the respondents about the valorisation of their activity by local institutions. It emerges that most of the facilities consider their activity not sufficiently valued by local administrations and institutions of the territory.

The second objective of the research is to investigate the interviewees' attitude towards coopetition. In this sense it was asked to evaluate, on a Likert scale between 1 and 7, how much this strategy is considered feasible and interesting for their business. The results certainly indicate a potential interest, with a majority between 4 and 5 votes and very few positioned at both extremes. It is also asked how often this strategy has been used. If the previous question revealed a potential interest in coopetition, this question shows that less than 10% of respondents use it regularly, while the vast majority have never resorted to such a strategy. However, it emerges from the next question that many respondents are oriented towards using coopetition in the future. A further objective of the survey is to understand the broader attitude towards collaboration with other subjects, in order to create value for the territory. While coopetition strategy implies a type of collaboration between similar and potentially competing subjects, here we ask to indicate with which other subjects (not only competitors) they have collaborated in the past. The majority states that they have collaborated with bathing activities (e.g. beaches), followed by restaurants, other accommodations and beauty farms/sports facilities. It should be noted that almost a quarter of the respondents never collaborated with any other business in the area.

In order to deepen the discourse of value creation for the territory, it was subsequently asked to indicate whether there has ever been a collaboration (with other companies or institutions) with the explicit and primary purpose of promoting the territory, without having an immediate and direct advantage. The result is discouraging, with almost all the subjects who have never had this type of collaboration.

However, the subsequent question shows how the majority of companies consider this objective important. This suggests that, perhaps through the intermediation of an administrative institution, things could improve significantly in this respect.

With regards to off-season strategies (for Liguria everything that does not coincide with summer and part of spring), it can be seen that more than half of the sample radically changes the features of their supply, to follow demand. About one third of the companies, on the other hand, remain mostly closed in these periods and only a fifth of the sample implements managerial strategies (collaborations and synergies) to try to increase the customer base during these periods.

In particular, it can be deduced that many accommodation facilities do not consider this period profitable for their activity. If we add to this the fact that, as already highlighted, about 25% of the respondents manage apartments for rent (and therefore these entities never interrupt their activity), it follows that almost all the classic accommodation facilities (hotels, B&B, residences, inns) adopt this strategy, effectively giving up work during the low season. Once again, it can be seen that collaboration is a relatively little used strategy to cope with periods of low demand, not to mention the creation of new potential tourist demand. This shows, therefore, how much space there would be for strategies to enhance the value of the territory, to enhance its attractiveness even for those specific periods.

The survey tries to help understand if the type of activity is considered to be closely related to the main tourist product of the region (the sea). Almost two-thirds of the companies responded positively and these are mainly hotels (more than 91% of which chose that option) and residences (about 83%). The B&B business follows (about 47.6%), while the least related to the sea, predictably, is that of apartments for rent (just over 11%).

This also fits with the type of activity and especially with its location: B&Bs are usually in areas less close to the sea and are often linked to other types of attractions (e.g. excursions, inland explorations, food and wine tourism).

The final part of the questionnaire aims to understand the strategic possibilities to enhance secondary attractions. Most companies show an interest in enhancing potential new tourist attractions not related with the seaside. Just under 1% do not consider this as useful for their business. More than half of the sample believe that direct promotion (for example, advertising by regional institutions) is the most profitable strategic model to promote secondary attractions. Also word of mouth among tourists, both direct and virtual (e-WOM), is considered important and chosen by almost a third of the sample. Only a fifth believe that cooperation between local businesses can have positive effects on the promotion of secondary or niche attractions, showing the limits of possible strategies at regional or aggregate level. This could be due to the lack a strong aggregator, able to promote cooperation with synergistic actions.

The survey, in fact, ends with a negative attitude about the current state of implementation of strategies for the enhancement of secondary attractions on the territory. More than one half of the respondents claim that these strategies are either not implemented at all or poorly implemented (or, in any case, poorly perceived). Less than 10%, in fact, believe that the strategies for the enhancement of secondary attractions are widely and effectively implemented.

## 6. Conclusion

The present work was intended to describe and analyse coopetition and collaboration strategies and explore how these strategies can be effective for the valorisation of secondary tourist attractions in mainly single-product territories and the business-level strategies that could create value for the territory. Destinations without natural or industrial attractions have difficulty competing against destinations with both natural and urban potential (Al-Masroori, 2006). Resources and specific attractions can hence be regarded as being crucial factors in destination competitiveness (Hu & Ritchie, 1993), but other attributes also determine its touristic value. In this vein, a conceptual model has been developed (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999), according to which competitiveness depends on six aspects: qualification, destination management, resources, primary attractions, support factors and general resources. This model, in turn, refers to Porter's "diamond" model (Porter, 1998), which proposes the analysis of the competitiveness of a destination by using several elements, among which: factor condition, demand, related and support industries and strategies and rivalry of the companies located at the destination. In this context, a destination is seen as a "bundle of resources" (Ryan, 2002; Saleh & Ryan, 1992). Based on Porter's factors, competitive advantages for a company are provided by the possession of rare resources, irreplaceable and difficult to imitate (Barney, 1991).

More specifically, the purpose of this paper was to analyse the potential of coopetition strategies among local stakeholders, to achieve these competitive goals. The analysed literature shows clear connections between such strategies and the potential virtuous results for a territory and its sustainability. Moreover, there are possible positive effects both for existing stakeholders and in the creation of new niches. To further deepen the topic, the article presented a case study, by analysing Liguria, an Italian region known, at a tourist level, mainly for the sea. After a brief analysis of the territory and the local evolution of tourism, a questionnaire was used to assess the perception of accommodation facilities, concerning three specific aspects:

1. the valorisation of their business by the institutions
2. their attitude towards coopetition and, more generally, collaboration with other local stakeholders and companies
3. their links and attitude towards the primary attraction (sea) and the possible promotion of secondary (and niche) tourist destinations

Although with a very low redemption rate (about 10%), 105 questionnaires were analyzed, coming from: hotels, residences, B&B, inns, holiday apartment managers.

From the analysis, two levels of implications emerge: managerial implications for the stakeholders involved (the accommodation facilities) and implications about the territorial strategy and policy-making, mostly addressed to institutions.

Regarding the former, the results show that most of the subjects do not consider their business to be adequately valorised by local institutions (point 1).

Moreover (point 2), it is clear that coopetition is a poorly used strategy, although many companies are currently considering it for the future. The feedback regarding broader spectrum collaborative strategies is much more positive, since most of the respondents have cooperated in the past and actively collaborate with other entrepreneurial actors.

It emerges that most of the structured accommodation facilities are oriented towards the primary attraction of the region (point 3). However, many of them see positively a strengthening of the territory as a whole, with a particular interest in secondary attractions. In this vein, however, the most effective strategy is considered to be direct promotion, followed by word-of-mouth, while coopetition is not perceived as very effective (or at least not easily implementable).

The results of the analysis are interesting to understand the level of business strategies implemented in Liguria and can be useful both for private stakeholders (e.g. the accommodation facilities themselves or, more generally, companies operating in the territory in the tourism sector) and for local institutions (policy-making strategies).

Liguria has become known as a seaside destination and, therefore, large investments in real estate (creation of second homes) and adaptations of the coast and the area near the sea have been done over the years. This makes it clear that the phenomenon has not been temporary, but has even strengthened over time and has contributed to losing sight of other potential attractions offered by the territory. In fact, Liguria has great tourist potential, thanks to the peculiar conformation of the territory, which makes the landscape pleasant and the experience very varied, which can vary from the sea to the low mountains. Moreover, the climate is generally mild and this can allow active tourism also in autumn and winter months. Finally, as noted Zanini (2012) in Liguria there are many small villages far from the sea, little known to tourists, rich in cultural, artistic and gastronomic traditions. Despite this, Liguria is a favourite destination for tourists who prefer the summer period, for seaside tourism.

This contributes to making the tourism supply in this region less adaptable to different and more varied tourist needs. Only a strong commitment at the level of local stakeholders, combined with institutional strategies promoted by public administrations, could make the tourism supply more attractive, integral, multi-product and experiential (Wu et al., 2018).

So, regarding the policy-making implication of the present research, the literature indicates in the collaboration (in general) and coopetition (in particular) strategies to strengthen the territory. While the interviewees seem potentially interested in this and other forms of collaboration, but at present do not implement them, the institutions could try and promote these strategic mechanisms, possibly through calls for tenders, targeted events, fairs and so on.

For the local institutions, in particular, the recommendation relates to the enhancement and valorisation of existing activities, which currently, for the most part, do not perceive as sufficient the commitment of the institutions in this sense. Hence, an important effort for the institutions would be to strengthen the strategies to implement the right level of coopetition among stakeholders, a strategy that is currently lacking. In this vein, another criticality is the scarcity of collaborations created for the sole purpose of promoting the territory, certainly something fundamental to implement a driver of growth for the region that, although not immediately, will end up having a positive impact on all the business players involved. Similar indications can be obtained for businesses; it certainly stands out the figure relating to almost a fifth of respondents, who state they never cooperated with any other subject in the area. Equally significant is the response relating to off-season strategies, where the polarisation of tourism in this region is evident (enormous influx during the summer months, which almost completely "shuts down" during the rest of the year).

Moving more specifically towards the concept of the valorisation of secondary attractions, many companies consider this as an important aim for the territory and also for their business, even if, for the most part, they do not evaluate with great enthusiasm the strategies currently implemented to achieve this aim (nor do they attribute to coopetition a significant contribution in this sense).

This, combined with the undeniable natural and cultural richness of the area, shows that there would be a great room for manoeuvre to promote secondary or niche attractions, which could both benefit from mass tourism during the summer and give value to the area during the months when, for natural reasons, such tourism does not exist. In this vein, it can be seen that the stakeholders, even if for the most part expression of a business related to the primary attraction, would consider as positive the enhancement of other niches and secondary attractions of the territory. There is, therefore, a positive proactive aspect, which should be strategically exploited by institutions.

All this said, it is clear that Liguria, if effectively enhanced in the tourism supply, would have all the characteristics to present a plurality of possibilities and destinations, which could become secondary destinations. This would have several positive effects; clearly, it would allow the economy of the territory to grow even on directives other than those linked to seaside tourism, for example by bringing out new commercial activities even in areas that are currently undervalued. Moreover, thanks to existing mass tourism, it would be extremely easy to create virtuous synergies, with targeted communication, in order to make the secondary attractions, which are currently hidden and undeveloped, known. Finally, as already noted, most of these secondary attractions would allow a seasonal adjustment of the tourism supply, currently concentrated in an extremely unbalanced way in the summer months alone, favouring greater economic and environmental sustainability for the region.

The work is original in linking enterprise-level strategies (cooperation/coopetition) with policy-making implication regarding the valorisation of the territory as a whole and secondary/niche attraction in particular. It investigates this topic in a very characterized touristic territory (Liguria - Italy) through a questionnaire addressed to accommodation facilities.

Its main inherent limitation is the relatively limited number of responses collected. Unfortunately, although the questionnaire was sent out to more than 1.000 entrepreneurial subjects, only 105 responded. Besides, many of these subjects (about a quarter of the respondents) are not structured accommodation facilities, but rather managers of holiday apartments for rent. While acknowledging the change in the tourism supply base over the years, which is becoming more and more deconstructed to the detriment of hotels and residences, it is also evident how the answers coming from these subjects can, in part, distort the results at an overall level, since their needs and strategic perceptions are profoundly different from those of, for example, a hotel.

The work can be further developed by comparing the obtained results with those from other tourist areas where the gap between the perception of primary and secondary attractions is less evident. This would be useful to evaluate the attitude of local operators and, at the same time, to provide local administrations and Ligurian stakeholders suggestions on how to act to achieve similar objectives, potentially virtuous for the territory and its overall sustainability.

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