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The importance of a marketing plan for tourism destinations.
Case study: a marketing plan for Empordà

FINAL MASTER PROJECT

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Abstract

Globalization and technological development in transport infrastructure play an important key role in tourism and facilitate the ability to move and travel around easily to almost any desired place in the world. The tourism industry is probably one of the most evolved industries in the world and it does not stop developing and innovating. Among innumerable available places to go, tourism destinations are required to achieve a competitive market position for their multi-faceted place in a rapidly changing macro-environment. Therefore, effective tourism destination management is essential in order to survive. As part of this, marketing acts as a crucial strategic tool towards competitiveness where the major challenge is to differentiate a destination from innumerable other places by a strategic market orientation having a specific target market in mind. This work intends to demonstrate the importance for tourism destinations to develop a marketing plan.

Key words: marketing plan, tourism destination marketing, tourism destinations, Empordà, competitiveness

1. Introduction

Traveling permits us to escape from everyday life and allows people to explore different places, new cultures, traditions and more. Globalization and technological development in transport and infrastructure play an important key role and facilitate the ability to move and travel around easily to almost any desired place in the world. With the almost infinite available destinations, the desire to travel and explore has contributed that the tourism industry is probably one of the most evolved industries in the world and it does not stop developing and innovating. Besides having an immense impact on society and culture, tourism also plays a very important economical role. As one of the largest industries, tourism strongly impacts on the global economic development as it accounted for 1 in 4 of all new jobs created worldwide (The World Travel and Tourism Council, 2019).

The innumerable available destinations tourists can choose from, force tourism destinations to compete for attention in an extremely competitive market (Heath & Wall, 1992).

Traveling for pleasure is a discretionary expenditure for people, which means that it can be replaced by any other emerging priority (Pike, 2020). Therefore, destinations are not only in competition with other touristic places but are also obligated to compete with substitute products and services. Furthermore, there are more indicators involved in destination competitiveness, such as socio-cultural changes and trends which lead to the need of a more differentiated offer of tourism products and activities promoting a unique tourism experience.

Destinations need to stay competitive for their multi-faceted place in a rapidly changing macro-environment. For this reason, effective tourism destination management is essential to support a destination's competitiveness and sustainable growth (Pike, 2020). As part of this, marketing acts as a crucial strategic tool towards competitiveness where the major challenge is to differentiate a destination from innumerable other places by a strategic market orientation.

1.1 Objective and structure

The objective of this work is to demonstrate the importance of marketing and marketing plans for tourism destinations as an essential component of tourism destination management. With globalization and constant changing external factors, tourism destinations must adjust continuously. The aim is to illustrate how promotion and marketing can contribute to a destination's sustainable competitiveness. In the academic literature, marketing has proven itself to be a valuable tool to optimize destination management. However, in practice many destinations do not make use of this powerful tool, thus not realizing their full potential.

For this reason, a proposal of a marketing plan for Empordà is realized to demonstrate the theory in a practical case study. Realizing my internship in the Mas Salvi Country Boutique Hotel in Pals, in the county of Baix Empordà, gave me the opportunity to get to know an area and a type of tourism I have not experienced before. Empordà consists of two counties, and no marketing plan exists for both counties together. Therefore, it seemed beneficial but also challenging to choose this project. During the period of the internship, I had the opportunity to talk to local residents and professionals in the tourism sector to gather relevant information which also helped me to develop and carry out a possible marketing plan for Empordà.

This work has 6 main chapters. Firstly, some basic concepts and definitions of tourism will be clarified as well as its characteristics, objectives and relevance followed by case studies. The next section explains the methodology adopted to gather data, where qualitative research in the form of a questionnaire was conducted with researchers and professionals in the tourism sector. The purpose, unit of analysis, and the questionnaire itself will be illustrated followed by the outcomes and graphics visualizing the results. Section 4 presents the results of the questionnaire compared with the literature findings. In addition, a marketing plan is developed for the county Empordà as a case study. The destination will be introduced by briefly presenting its history, geography, places of interest and tourism.

2. Literature review

2.1 Basic concepts of tourism destination management

Over the last decades, tourism destinations have been focused on intensively (Capone, 2016). Tourism destinations have become the biggest brands within the travel industry and most countries. States and cities realized the necessity of a destination management organization to attract visitors to their destinations (Pike, 2020). For this reason, destination management and marketing emerged as an essential pillar in promoting different destinations.

Destination management and marketing as a research field evolved as an independent topic of tourism at a later stage and has grown exponentially since then (Capone, 2016). A search on sciencedirect for destination management and marketing for example records more than 20,000 results. Scholars, such as Buhalis (2000) in the destination marketing field or Ritchie and Crouch (2003) concerning destination management contributed immensely by outlining important theories and strategies.

The topic of destination development and competitiveness has drawn more attention, as resources are limited and irreplaceable once being destroyed (Buhalis, 2000). Driven by globalization and other changing factors, competitiveness has become an intensified field within the tourism sector (Laesser & Beritelli, 2013). Important contributions regarding have been made by Crouch and Ritchie (1999) or Dwyer and Kim (2003). Porter's pioneer model "The Competitive Advantage of Nations" (1980) has been applied to destination competitiveness and it states that success in any industry is influenced by different forces of competitiveness.

It is important to mention Butler's well-known Life Cycle model of 1980 which is a framework to analyze tourism destination dynamics. It implements that any tourist place goes through a specific series of stages in the tourism place evolution. Over the years, the model has been adapted and modified. It illustrates an important basic understanding of a tourism destination's unique conditions and required individual strategies.

Firstly, it is essential to understand the term of a tourism product as it differs from products in other economic sectors. The World Tourism Organization (2019) describes the tourism product as an amalgam of tangible and intangible elements such as natural and cultural resources, attractions, facilities, services, and activities. These elements create an overall visitor experience including emotional aspects for the potential customers (The World Tourism Organization, 2019). The demand side as well as the supply side are involved in the tourism

product and interact closely with each other. Not only the resources but also the geographical locations where the tourism product or the experience can take place are of great importance.

Therefore, it is necessary to define a tourism destination, which is a physical space with or without administrative boundaries in which a visitor can spend an overnight (The World Tourism Organization, 2019). It is the cluster of products, services, activities, and experiences. Furthermore, a destination consists of a mixture of different elements and facilities which contribute to intangible and subjective perceptions. Morrison (2018) describes this combination as a destination mixture including facilities, such as entertainment, restaurants, shopping areas, attractions, events, transportation, infrastructure, and a hospitable environment. Moreover, Buhalis (2000) and Morrison (2018) both state that tourism destinations also should have a political and legislative framework, which contains a coordinated organizational structure, in which a destination management organization (DMO) exists.

The World Tourism Organization (2019) describes DMOs as the leading organizational entity which encompasses various authorities, stakeholders and professionals, facilitating partnerships towards a collective destination vision. Accordingly, DMOs act as network facilitators, forming the connection point between private and public organizations. Specific tasks DMOs undertake are overseeing tourism marketing and planning, coordinating, and leading the destination's tourism efforts. This should be controlled and regulated by the government. Therefore, DMOs play a key role in the overall management covering a wide scope of tourism involved fields (Buhalis, 2000). Furthermore, DMOs must ensure that all stakeholders involved in the destination's tourism benefit long-term. This is ensured through political power, financial means, and by making sure that benefits are shared fairly (Buhalis, 2000). The author furthermore states that failing to maintain a balance effectively jeopardizes relationships between stakeholders. This leads to threatening the achievement of strategic goals, long-term competitiveness and prosperity of destinations (Buhalis, 2000).

As described earlier, tourism is a multi-faceted sector which consists of a network formed by stakeholders who play different roles. Sautter and Leisen (1999) raise awareness about the difficult challenge to manage and market destinations. Complex relationships among stakeholders and the variety of different natures involved complicate the indispensability to consider all the interests. According to Morrison (2018), stakeholders are defined as groups and individuals that have a direct or indirect interest in the management of a tourism destination. Furthermore, he defines five main groups in the destination management: tourists, tourism sector organizations, community, government, and environment. These groups are directly or indirectly affected by tourism in the destination (Morrison, 2018). The difficulty in its

management lies in the need of the network to interact and communicate successfully among each other in order to reach common visions and goals (Morrison, 2018). At the same time, a positive collaboration is essential to verify that a tourism destination is sustainable regarding the preservation of resources. The destination product is essentially composed of regions, resources, and amalgams of tourism facilities and services, which are mostly public goods (Buhalis, 2000). Thus, a balance between the rational use and the preservation of goods needs to be ensured to avoid exploitation, ensuring that tourism in the destination is lasting and benefitting. Accordingly, effective management is of tremendous importance and requires the collaboration of all stakeholders.

As illustrated before, tourism destinations are a composition of individually produced tourism amenities and services, which are all branded together under the name of the destination (Buhalis, 2000). As visitors consume their trip as an experience, they assess the journey while associating the destinations with the entire range of local producers and suppliers (Buhalis, 2000). Thus, the interactivity between the demand and supply side is reciprocal and affects the total vacation experience (Wang & Pizam, 2011).

The destination stands as its own brand and is perceived with individual and specific expectations and images. These perceptions are highly subjective and determined by the tourists' image of the destination (Buhalis, 2000). Moreover, these views play an important role in the decision-making process as pre-purchase impressions (Lin et al., 2007). Therefore, destinations need to differentiate in a highly competitive market, where visitors are spoilt for choice (Pike, 2020). Thus, an integrated marketing and managing approach is required, creating awareness of the destination and influencing images and expectations of the place. A destination's attractiveness functions as a pull factor which motivates travelers to visit the place (Law, Cheung & Lo, 2004). Middleton and Hawkins (1998) state that marketing is part of an overall management orientation, which reflects corporate attitudes with the need to balance stakeholders' interests with environmental interests of the destination. Simultaneously, demands and expectations need to be met. Furthermore, destination marketing is defined as a constant process through which a DMO plans, researches, implements, controls, and evaluates actions aimed at satisfying visitors' needs while considering the destinations' objectives (Morrison, 2010). Therefore, destination marketing is not only aimed to attract more tourists but also to act as a strategic tool. It is intended to enhance the development and strategic objectives of the destination while ensuring the achievement of common goals regarding social, economic and environmental factors (Buhalis, 2000).

To market a destination, it is of great importance to truly understand its identity and essence since every destination is different and resources must be used properly. Some destinations are endowed with an abundance of resources and competitive advantages, whereas other places are limited in their natural resources and infrastructure to support tourism development (Ritchie & Crouch, 2000). To enhance and differentiate the destination's products, their uniqueness must be emphasized (Buhalis, 2000). Since tourism products cannot grow indefinitely, individually designed strategies rather than adopt a mass tourism orientation is of necessity (Buhalis, 2000).

With globalization comes global competition and industry concentration which provokes additional challenges for the sector (Buhalis, 2000). Due to the ever-increasing competitiveness, destinations must compete directly with other destinations at regional, national, and international levels (Presenza et al., 2005). From the demand side, travelers can choose among countless available destinations, requiring destinations on the supply side to compete for attention from a highly competitive marketplace (Heath & Wall, 1992). Dwyer and Kim (2003) define destination competitiveness as the capacity to offer better performed goals and services than in other places, concerning what tourists consider relevant in a tourism experience. In 1990, Porter contributed to tourism and destination competitiveness with his diamond model. It states that success depends on different forces of competitiveness: factor conditions (core resources), demand conditions, related and supporting industries (related industries), firm strategy, structure and rivalry. Based on this model, other models have emerged. Examples are the models by Crouch and Ritchie (1999) or Dwyer and Kim (2003), in which more specific elements have been added such as attractors and destination management. The conceptual model of Crouch and Ritchie (1999) for example, established that the tourism competitiveness indicators found must result in long-term prosperity which is the essential outcome of destination competitiveness. As discussed earlier, these elements are upon the range of DMO's responsibilities. Therefore, destination competitiveness and attractiveness require integrative and effective managing and marketing strategies (Pike, 2008). A market orientation is needed, where all marketing decisions are made with the target consumers in mind (Pike, 2020).

However, these strategies may not only concentrate on the incoming visitation but also incorporate the entire scope of impacts such as visitor management, overcrowding, environmental issues, seasonality, and the sensitivity to local culture (Evans, Fox & Johnson, 1995). Specific markets should be targeted, whose demands and expectations can be perfectly met. At the same time, the strategies should benefit the destination and its stakeholders in the best possible way without exploiting. Accordingly, destination marketing is of essential

importance as a significant part of tourism destination management, since it strongly affects destinations' success, competitiveness and sustainability.

To implement the defined strategies, marketing plans function as a blueprint for the established objectives as they require the thorough review and evaluation of all steps in the marketing process (Hudson, 2008). Marketing plans describe activities and programs that DMOs plan to accomplish and provide a road map for all future marketing activities, ensuring they are aligned with the corporate strategic plan (Hudson, 2008; Morrison, 2018).

The steps in a destination marketing plan may differ slightly in order. However, all theories have in common that a situation analysis, setting goals and objectives, and the strategic implementation are the key parts of every marketing plan.

For the purpose of this work, the following elements will be considered to develop the possible marketing plan for Empordà. The first section will define the destination's mission, vision and values to outline purposes and aims. Thereafter, a SWOT analysis will be conducted as part of the situation analysis. The destination's life cycle will be explained to review the destination's starting point, from where further decision will be based on. The next section of market segmentation identifies the target groups and markets as well as potential new markets. Afterwards, the positioning and branding of Empordà will be outlined. Moreover, destination competitors will be considered to contextualize and compare the destination on a national and international level, followed by an action plan to select and develop a series of strategic lines. Lastly, product improvement areas will be described to propose a future prospect in order to enhance products and to ensure constant innovation and development. These contents of a marketing plan are a compilation of three books, written by Hudson (2008), Morrison (2018), and Fyall and Garrod (2005) and gathered from knowledge acquired in courses of the master's degree.

The contents and strategies may differ depending on the marketing plan's purpose and whether it is constructed for a company or for a destination. Furthermore, depending on the tourists' interests and circumstances, the influence of the marketing activity is very likely to vary. However, independently of the purpose, a valuable structure that requires commitment and accountability will be evolved. A marketing plan enables improving productivity, effectiveness, economic growth, and the overall value of the destination as a brand which should lead to success, long-term sustainability and competitiveness. Because of destinations' uniqueness, tourism's complexity, and continuous development and changes, every marketing plan should be flexible, scalable, adjustable and applicable.

2.2 Case studies

As previously mentioned, the proposed marketing plan is created for the Spanish county Empordà. For this reason, this chapter describes case studies referring to similar tourism products as the ones of Empordà, such as coastal destinations in Spain and destinations whose main tourism product is their heritage.

Due to globalization and the importance of tourism economically seen, the interest in the topic of competitiveness on the side of academics and organizations worldwide leads to the question how the most important indicators can be identified and measured (Gândara & Chim-Miki, 2015). An industry's competitiveness is the result of the combination of management practices, organization within the country, and the sources of competitive advantage (Gândara & Chim-Miki, 2015). Therefore, determinant indicators need to be measured and monitored. Through this information strategic actions can be developed, which is essential for the creation of a marketing plan. The identified competitiveness determinants can be used to address improvement areas.

The first case study was carried out by Sánchez and López in 2015 and analyzes tourism destination competitiveness in Spanish Mediterranean coasts. The objective is to obtain a range of indicators and measure their efficiency for tourism competitiveness through tourist arrivals. The Spanish Mediterranean provinces were analyzed, since all share common characteristics, such as the sun and sand tourism product resulting in a relatively homogeneous sample. Moreover, the authors stated that Mediterranean provinces account for 56% of Spain's tourism (Sánchez and Lopez, 2015). The used model is based on the previously mentioned framework of Crouch and Ritchie's (1999) "conceptual model" and based on Dwyer and Kim's (2003) "integrated model". Both models require to result in prosperity as an essential outcome of tourism destination competitiveness. The study's integrated model consisted of the following tourism competitiveness blocks: natural and cultural inherited resources, created and supporting resources, situational conditions and demand. The case study resulted in specialization as the most important factor for competitiveness, followed by services, assessment, culture, attractiveness, and weather (Sánchez and Lopez, 2015). The indicator of specialization included variables, such as tourism quotes, foreign tourism weight and prices. The second indicator of Services consisted of destination related variables such as financial, health and transport services.

This model provides useful tools to improve destination competitiveness. In the context of marketing, this case study is a good example why a marketing plan for tourism destinations is important. As a situation analysis is part of a marketing plan, the indicators of the study

presented can be used for the analysis and can guide destination managers in identifying the destination's most important indicators of tourism competitiveness with the goal to result in long-term prosperity.

The selected destination for the marketing plan proposal is Empordà, which is known for its cultural and historical heritage. The case study conducted by Almeida, Machado and Silva (2020) examines heritage as a source of competitive advantage. Based on new combinations of resources, the potential impact of heritage tourism on the development of tourism products is analyzed, aiming to increase competitiveness. The study offers orientation for actions to improve the cultural component of the tourism experience, which may lead to converting heritage and culture into competitive products. The authors also base their approach on Crouch and Ritchie (1999), and Dwyer and Kim (2003). Crouch and Ritchie have modified their models in their work of 2003 and they focus on more profound additional elements such as philosophy/values, vision, positioning/branding, quality of service/experience or search of information and decision-making aspects. The authors grouped their main items as follows: resources, infrastructure and support services, human related factors, and business environment. The data collected from guests rated the degree of importance of 18 items related to their motivations to visit and their satisfaction. Furthermore, questions regarding their socio-demographic background can help to identify the main markets and target group. The outcomes show that the esthetic dimension contains the highest mean and the higher degree of correlation with satisfaction. Therefore, the development of the destination's tourism products is dependent on highlighting the current destination's advantages, which in this case, is the cultural and historical heritage and maintaining their esthetic. According to the authors, past studies proved a positive relationship between resource development and destination competitiveness and such elements must be emphasized in future marketing campaigns (Almeida, Machado & Silva, 2020).

The study demonstrates that it is crucial to understand which resources are the most important ones of a destination in order to foster competitiveness. A marketing plan requires a situation analysis and a proper evaluation of the available resources and possibilities to base on further strategic decisions. This case study endorses the importance of a marketing plan for tourism destinations, as it highlights the favorable relationship between resource development and destination competitiveness, which are both part of a marketing plan's content and objective.

3. Methodology

The theoretical understanding is based on the literature review and an overview of relevant definitions concerning tourism destination management has been provided. As established before, the academic literature already delivers valuable and extensive sources regarding marketing as a component of tourism destination management. In order to receive an inside and more applied point of view, researchers and professionals in the tourism area have been interviewed to gain insight into individual perspectives of experts via qualitative interviews. The aim is gaining a more detailed and specific point of view on the importance of marketing plans for tourism destinations to support and substantiate the theoretical knowledge and the thesis.

3.1 Qualitative Analysis

Tourism as socio-cultural construction, consisting of intangible elements leading to subjective perceptions and tourist experiences, led to the decision of conducting qualitative research. The qualitative interview permits a person-centered approach taking into account subjective experiences and the opinion of experts in the area, which for the chosen topic of this work was crucial.

The unit of analysis consists of 4 women and 6 men between 30 and 60 years who all currently live in Catalonia, where the majority of the sample lives and works in Empordà. All the interviewees asked are people, whose professions provide valuable information about tourism in Empordà and have an ability of critical judgment concerning marketing and marketing plans in tourism destinations. The validity of their statements made can be assured through several years of experience of working in the public sector, as in the county council of Empordà or the city hall of one of the municipalities or working in other areas, such as the planning of tourist spaces, marketing, communication or tourism promotion, just to name a few examples.

3.2 Questionnaire

The interviews were conducted face-to-face or virtually. After consenting in the procedure, participants agreed on the conversations to be recorded to ensure proper data collection and management. In total, 10 interviews have been performed. They consisted of 10 questions, regarding the importance of a marketing plan in tourism destinations.

The questions made included the most important elements of a marketing plan and possible effects as indicated in the literature review. The questions had to be measured on a scale from 1 – *completely disagree* to 5 – *completely agree*. The questionnaire is presented in the following:

- 1) *Have you ever been working with or on a marketing plan?*
- 2) *Do you think a marketing plan is important for a destination?*
- 3) *Do you think it is necessary to involve the destination's residents in a marketing plan?*
- 4) *Do you think a marketing plan could help to create an equilibrium between all the involved stakeholders in a tourism destination?*
- 5) *Do you think a marketing plan can contribute to ensure that tourism provides enduring benefits to host communities?*
- 6) *Do you think a marketing plan can contribute to improving a tourism destination in terms of economic growth?*
- 7) *Do you think it is important to consider sustainability in a marketing plan?*
- 8) *Do you think a marketing plan is a good way to point out the strengths and weaknesses of a tourism destination?*
- 9) *Do you think every destination should have a marketing plan?*
- 10) *Do you think it is necessary to update a marketing plan in a certain period of time?*
(every 3-5 years)

4. Results

The participants may not have personally developed a marketing plan, but were all somehow involved in one, which was assured in the first question (*1. Have you ever been working with or on a marketing plan?*). The questionnaire itself was designed to support the thesis of the importance of marketing plans for tourism destinations and how they can benefit from strategic plans to achieve sustainable competitiveness.

The interviewees are researchers and professionals who operate in the tourism sector in Catalonia, Spain. Therefore, they are a valuable and reliable source regarding the topic of marketing and marketing plans. Their experience provides the ability of critical judgment to answer the interview's questions.

The bar chart shows the evaluation of the questionnaire. In total, there were 10 questions and 10 participants. The first question does not appear in Figure 1, because it was an entry question to assure that the interviewees have been somehow involved in a marketing plan in the past. As can be observed from Figure 1, the questionnaire has revealed quite clear results. Most of the questions have been affirmed with the highest number 5 which is illustrated by the blue bars.

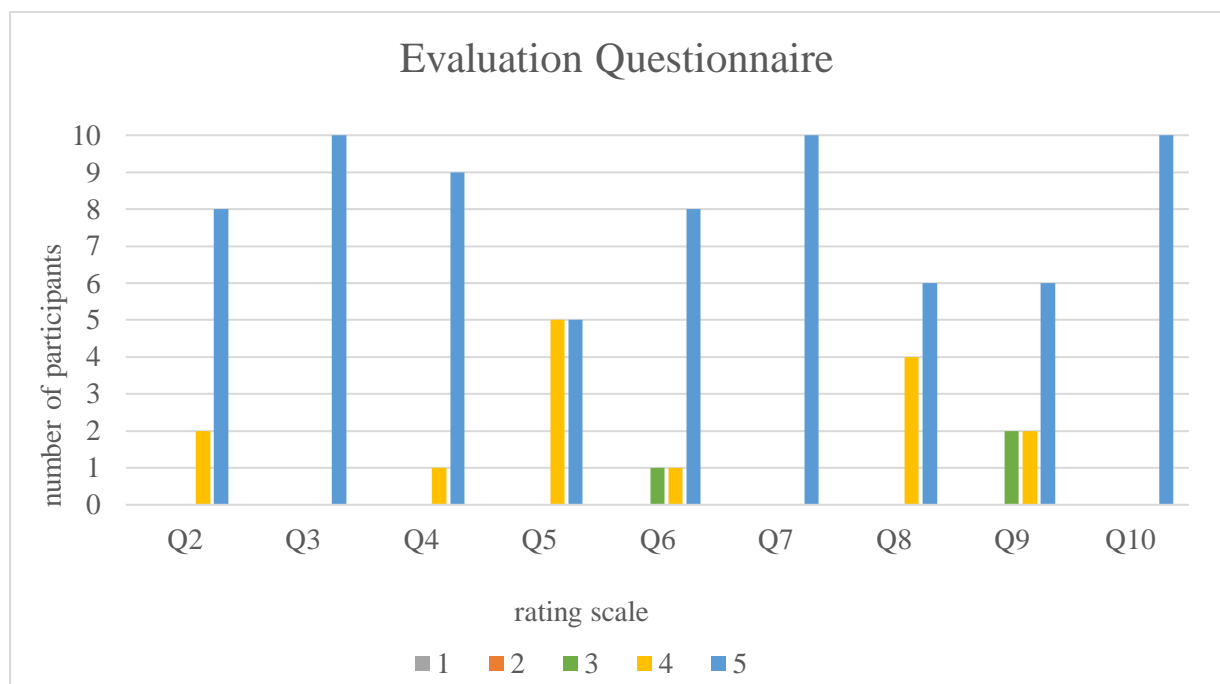


Figure 1: **Evaluation Questionnaire.** Description: the vertical axis represents the sample of the interviewed people. The horizontal axis indicates the 10 questions asked, excluding the first question (Q1). The figure's legend indicates the scale people could answer from, from 1 – completely disagree to 5 – completely agree. Source: own illustration.

Most of the questions can be grouped into general categories concerning stakeholders, relevance of a marketing plan and destination competitiveness.

Questions concerning stakeholders (questions 3-5) resulted in the majority of the participants completely agreeing on the questions asked, with 80% evaluating them with the highest grade 5 (Figure 2).

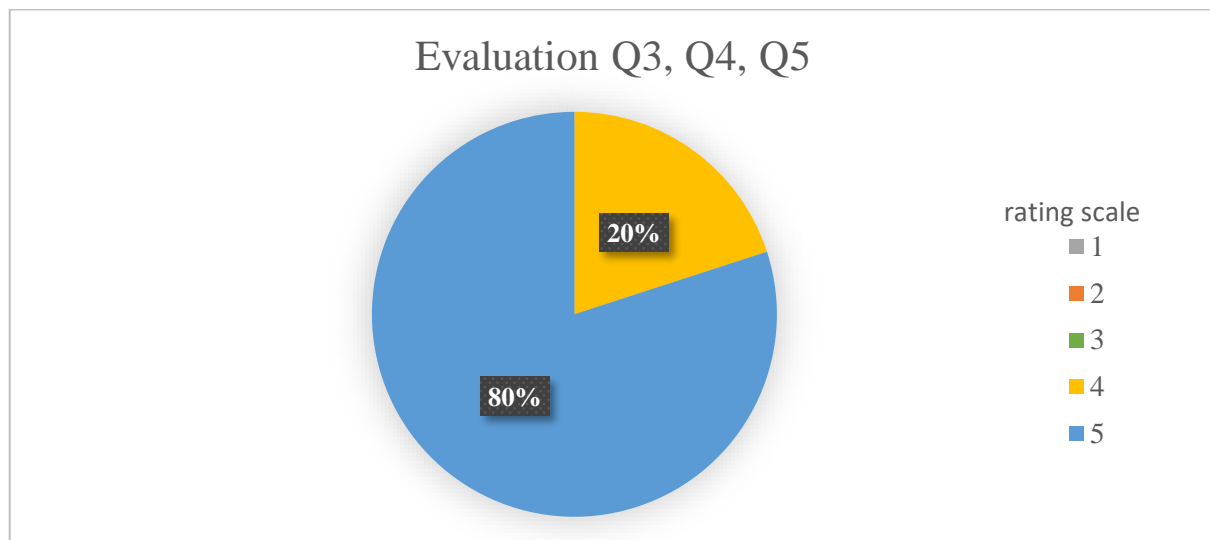


Figure 2: Evaluation Q3, Q4, Q5. Description: the pie chart presents the evaluation of the questions 3, 4 and 5 which can be grouped as questions concerning stakeholders. The figure's legend indicates the scale people could answer from, from 1 – completely disagree to 5 – completely agree. Source: own illustration.

The participants agreed that the involvement of local residents (question 3) is of high importance as all 10 of them would completely agree with the question asked. As a marketing plan requires accountability, it can be used as a guideline to ensure the involvement of stakeholders in the further planning of tourism in the destination. The goal is to result in an equilibrium among the stakeholders and enduring benefits. This is in accord with the literature findings where it was stated that one of the greatest challenges is to manage and market destinations because of the complex relationships among the stakeholders and the variety of different natures involved (Sautter and Leisen, 1999). A very notable remark one of the participants made was the fact that some of the residents are not even aware of the fact that they are part of the whole concept of tourism. Therefore, they are not aware of how their attitude towards tourists may influence the destination's image and how important they are for it. They represent the destination's essence and identity. As stated in the literature review, the visitors' trip is consumed as an experience and it is assessed as a whole (Buhalis, 2000). But there is also another possible point of view residents can take, as several cases have proven in the last

couple of years which is the “tourism-phobia”. Anti-tourism marches took place across Europe and a focal point has been Spain (Coldwell, 2017). Residents have marched through the cities complaining about rising rents, the bad impacts of cruise ships and the pollution caused by tourism to an already delicate environment (Coldwell, 2017). Once again the indispensable need of sustainable management from local authorities involving all the stakeholders’ points of views is made clear. In this case, a marketing plan may not only function as an instrument focusing on the increase of economic growth or attracting more tourists. Its purpose is to provide a valuable structure that requires commitment of all stakeholders involved. However, question number 5 was answered only by 50% with the highest grade, emphasizing that enduring benefits to host communities cannot only arise from marketing. The point of view in this question is more related to the demand side, although enduring benefits to host communities are also very much dependent on the supply side. It is indeed beneficial to use marketing to attract the perfect target group whose expectations can be perfectly met. But if merely this point of view is considered, the marketing efforts may result in economic growth but it also may create the danger of exploitation. Therefore, it underlines the previously made statement regarding the necessary involvement of locals and their opinions. This also confirms what was stated in the theoretical part by Wang and Pizam (2011), who explained that the interactivity between the demand and supply side is reciprocal and affects the total vacation experience.

With respect to the relevance of a marketing plan (questions 2 and 9), 70% answered with the highest grade of 5, which means the majority of the interviewees agree on the statement that tourism destinations should have a marketing plan (Figure 3).

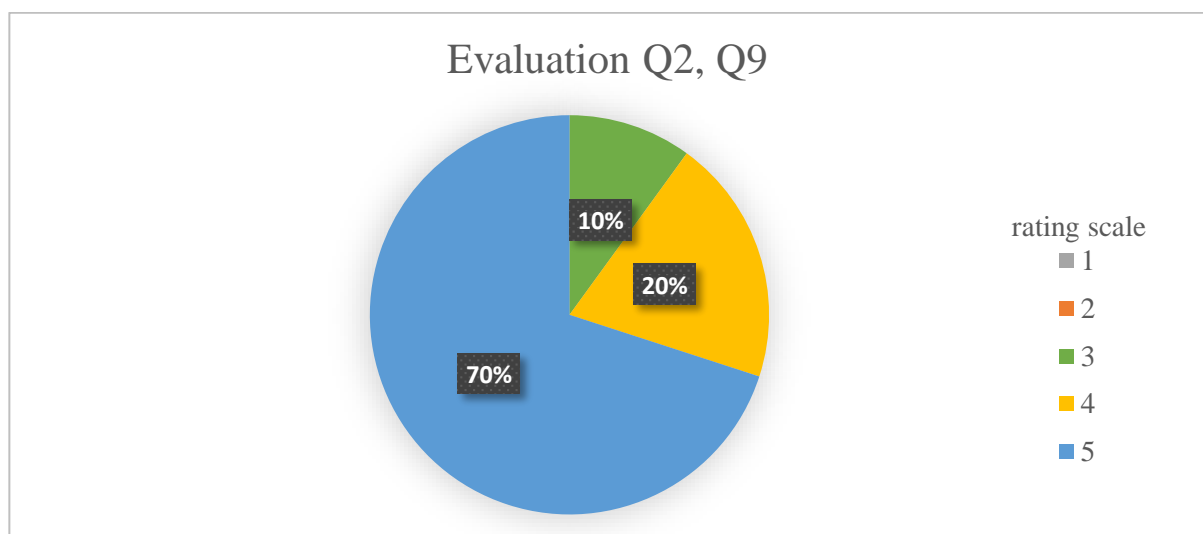


Figure 3: **Evaluation Q2, Q9.** Description: the pie chart presents the evaluation of the questions 2 and 9, which can be grouped as questions concerning the relevance of a marketing plan. The figure’s legend indicates the scale people could answer from, from 1 – completely disagree to 5 – completely agree. Source: own illustration.

4 out of 10 interviewees answered question number 9 with numbers less than 5, stating that not every destination may need a marketing plan. According to them, firstly, it must be defined in which scope destinations are being perceived. As Morrison (2018) was stated earlier, destinations can be considered as such when they fulfil certain criteria. Therefore, the interviewees argued that for example a village, which may obtain its main resources from bigger cities or regions nearby, may not need an own marketing plan but rather benefit from clustering with them and/or other close destinations with a similar tourism product and be promoted under one brand. During the interviews, the participants emphasized the importance of marketing and managing efforts in collaboration. For example, boroughs of the same region which may offer a similar and complementary tourism product should not be considered as competition among them, but should rather support each other by offering brochures of the respective other place in their tourist offices. This is also an important point when it comes to the promotion and marketing. When countries are targeted, which are further away from the destination, it is more probable they may not be aware of smaller boroughs or regions. For this reason, it is beneficial that destinations cluster and work in collaboration as the goal in this case is to gain awareness, which might be easier to reach when they are all branded together. For this reason, marketing plans should also consider goals and efforts of destinations nearby.

Questions regarding competitiveness (questions 6-8) were evaluated with 80% answering with the highest number of 5 (Figure 4).

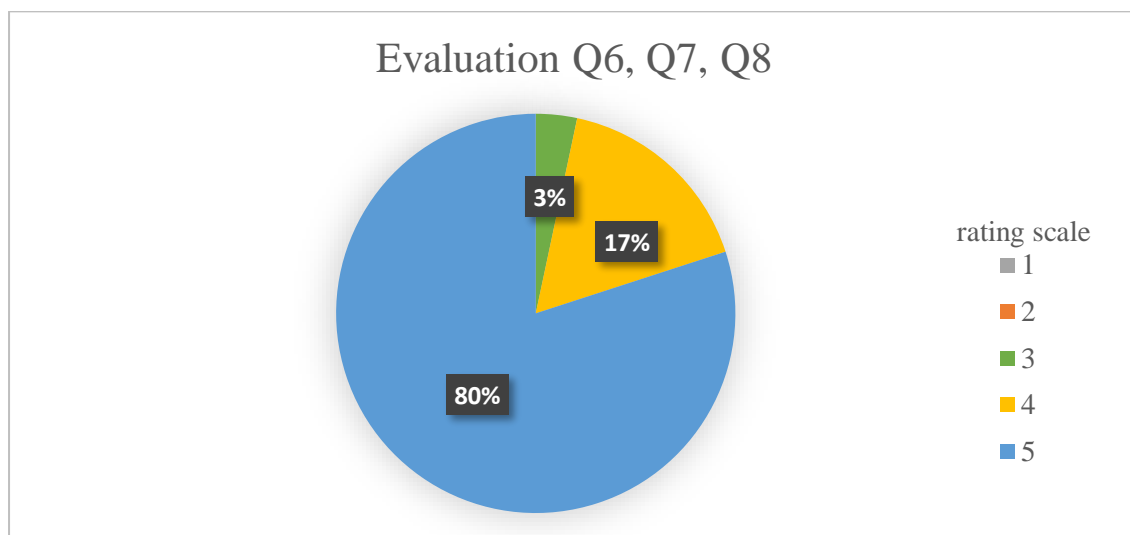


Figure 4: **Evaluation Q6, Q7, Q8.** Description: the pie chart presents the evaluation of the questions 6, 7 and 8, which can be grouped as questions concerning competitiveness. The figure's legend indicates the scale people could answer from, from 1 – completely disagree to 5 – completely agree. Source: own illustration.

5 participants answered with a 4 and only one interviewee rated one of the questions with a 3. Due to the complexity and uniqueness of destinations and continuous changing external factors and circumstances, there is no guarantee that marketing plans will result in enduring benefits. Sustainable competitiveness and success depend on more factors and requires collaboration among more departments than merely marketing. These results underline what was pointed out earlier in the theory regarding the imperative need of all the stakeholders and departments involved in a destination to collaborate and work together in order to achieve common goals. It is also noteworthy, that question number 7 was answered by all the 10 participants with a 5, which proves the common opinion on the necessity of including sustainability in a marketing plan due to the ever-increasing environmental issues on global level, towards which tourism carries great responsibility.

Lastly, all the participants agreed on question number 10 with the highest grade regarding the necessity of updating marketing plans in a certain period of time, as in this case every 3-5 years. Constant changes affecting tourism and globalization requires tourism to adapt. As every destination is unique, individual, and updated strategies are required in order to stay competitive in the multi-faceted tourism sector. Accordingly, marketing plans need to be flexible, scalable, and adjustable. However, although a marketing plan needs to be updated every certain period of time and adapt to technological developments and demands regarding trends and socio-cultural changes, it is also important to conserve the destinations' identity and essence. Every destination has its own unique characteristic and essence which makes it attractive and special. This should always be the focus of a marketing plan, prioritizing the goal to conserve the destination's uniqueness as it is its strongest resource.

The sample tested was quite small, which is why the questionnaire may comprise some limitations concerning the application of its findings to other destinations. The answers and statements cannot be generalized. It should be noted that all the interviewees were informed beforehand about the topic of this work and the fact that a marketing plan will be developed for the county of Empordà. All the participants are familiar with the county as they work or even live there. This is mentioned at this point because it may have influenced their evaluation keeping only Empordà as a destination in mind when they answered the questions.

5. Conclusions

The work aimed to demonstrate the importance of a marketing plan for tourism destinations as an essential component of tourism destination management. A qualitative research was conducted where researchers and professionals who operate in the tourism sector of Empordà or Catalonia were interviewed to evaluate their opinions about the importance of marketing plans for tourism destinations. The interviewees were all somehow involved in a marketing plan and evaluated the questionnaire based on their experience. The participants' majority has evaluated the questionnaire with the highest grades. Rates of 1 or 2 do not exist, which means that all participants somehow agreed on the given questions even though they may not always have been evaluated with the highest grade. Based on this research in alignment with the literature review and study cases, it can be concluded that this work's thesis can be confirmed, as the importance of a marketing plan for tourism destinations has been demonstrated.

Globalization and constant changing external factors require tourism to adapt and to adjust continuously in order to survive in an extremely competitive marketplace. This topic has been chosen to demonstrate that marketing plans are a crucial first step in the planning efforts of destination management. This research illustrates the importance of guidelines and strategies included in a marketing plan which need to be designed and implemented in collaboration.

However, it also raises the questions how effective and predictable the marketing plan's actions and tools are in terms of successful outcomes. Further research is needed to determine the effects of emotional importance in decision-making, satisfaction factors, or trends of the demand's needs and wants concerning the pandemic regarding the effectiveness of marketing plans. While continuous changes in a destination's micro and macro environment limit the generalizability of the results, this approach provides useful insights into how a marketing plan can be operated as a functional instrument to put an emphasis on the allocation of resources in the best and most sustainable and economical way to achieve the set goals. In the case of Empordà, this work provides new and useful insight into how a marketing plan can be designed for the county, also considering the actual sanitary crisis.

6. Case study: Empordà

To implement the theoretical knowledge into a practical case, a case study was chosen where a marketing plan is created for the county Empordà, in Catalonia, Spain. The proposed marketing plan is used as an example to demonstrate how a plan can be developed, since no plan has ever been established for the county before.

6.1 History and geography

Empordà is located in the province of Girona, in the region of Catalonia, Spain. The county is situated in the north of the Costa Brava, adjacent to the Pyrenees and the Mediterranean Sea. The region is divided into two counties which are called Alt Empordà and Baix Empordà. Their capitals are Figueres (Alt Empordà) and La Bisbal d'Empordà (Baix Empordà).

The county is characterized by its natural, historical and cultural heritage. With its castles, citadels, old villas and villages the region is rich in landscapes and stories. The history of Empordà stretches back to prehistoric times, where it was already inhabited (Picazo et. al., 1999). The region shows a strong historical path dependence, shaped by the Roman Empire. These influences result in unique medieval architecture in the villages, for which Empordà is famous for.

The north coast comprises steep cliffs and small beaches. This part stretches from the French border over to Cap de Creus, which is the most eastern part of the Iberian Peninsula, until the Montgrí Massif. In between the bay of Rosas offers long beaches of fine sand. To the southern part, the mouth of the river Ter and extensive beaches form part of the coast, such as the ones from Pals or Cape Begur. Due to its location, during the winter months there is an intense, cold and turbulent wind called “Tramontana” which blows off the Pyrenees from the north (Schröder, 2018). Therefore, the coast received its name as wild coast

6.2 Tourism in Empordà

Spain is the second country worldwide that has the largest number of international tourist arrivals (Statista, 2019). In 2019, the Iberian Peninsula received nearly 84 million international tourists (The World Tourism Organization, 2019). Catalonia also contributes strongly to these huge numbers, as it is among the two most visited Autonomous Communities (INE, 2021). The vast majority of the incoming visitors are from Europe, from which a huge number are French

tourists. Its biggest competitor regions in Spain regarding tourist arrivals are the Balearic Islands and Andalusia (INE, 2021).

Empordà's coast forms part of the famous Costa Brava and attracts numerous tourists whose intention it is to enjoy the plenty of beaches and coves. Prior to the pandemic, most of the people visiting the coast were international tourists (INE, 2021). The proximity to well popular touristic cities such as Girona, Lloret de Mar or Calella is also beneficial for the county.

When tourism began to develop in Empordà at the end of the 50s, it consisted of fisher and agricultural villages. Visitors started discovering the authentic natural beauty and the tourism offers started to evolve. The villages are characterized by a very indigenous essence, which was the initial attracting factor. Sun and beach form one of the most important travel motivations to visit the Costa Brava. What makes Empordà unique, is that its tourism product goes beyond the typical sun and beach offer. As described earlier, Empordà is characterized by its medieval monuments and the history that can be found in every corner of its towns and villages. The contrast to the sun and beach experience is what attracts tourists to the county. Furthermore, the county offers unique landscapes, a maritime charm with its fisher villages and a special gastronomy. Due to its broad range of different products and activities, a diversified tourist experience is guaranteed. Therefore, it provides offers for different niches, combining calm and rural inland activities with the typical sun and beach experience. Furthermore, Empordà is equipped with numerous accommodations, from campsites to hotels to accommodations such as old mansions or farmhouses which offer an authentic stay in the medieval villages.

Empordà's international tourists are mainly from France, the Netherlands and Germany. Due to the proximity, French tourists are probably greater represented in the county. Spanish visitors mostly come from Barcelona or from Girona and its surrounding areas. It is assumed that the beneficial proximity is also the reason why most of the national tourists come from cities nearby. Due to other Spanish regions offering a similar tourism product, national tourists might choose other regions to travel to, depending on their place of residence and distance to the destination.

In terms of its tourist promotion, the destination is a special case because, as explained before, Empordà consists of 2 counties, which offer very similar tourism products but has recently started to brand itself under one name.

6.3 Tourist activities and products

Empordà wide range of possible tourist experiences goes beyond the sun and beach tourism. There are many rural, cultural and historical activities that take place in authentic ancient villages and rural landscapes. TripAdvisor's "Top Attractions in Emporda" (TripAdvisor, n.d) can be summed up in natural parks, small beaches and bays, castles and museums:

1. Parc natural dels Aiguamolls de l'Empordà
2. Plage Canyelles Petites
3. Requesens Castle
4. Museu Memorial de l'Exili
5. Aquabrava
6. Salvador Dali House
7. Ciutadella de Roses
8. Plage de Sa Tuna
9. Platja de Can Comes
10. Cap de Creus National Park

The mix of the coastal tourism products and rural, cultural and historical activities offer a great variety targeting different types of visitors. One of the most important treasures are the numerous beaches and coves in Empordà. A special singularity are their *caminos de ronda*, which are paths along the seashore. The tracks along the coast have had different purposes throughout the history: accessing the coves in case of shipwreck or watching over the horizon to prevent pirate attacks. Nowadays these paths offer access to hidden coves and calm beaches.

Besides that, there are more activities to discover: Empordà's nature and its great offer on outdoor tourism. Several trails connecting the interior and the maritime landscape can be accessed on foot or by cycling. Sports enthusiasts will find lots of activities too: golf or water sports such as kayaking, surfing, waterskiing, windsurfing or diving and snorkeling. Other routes lead through forests or cultivated fields, where important local products come from. Empordà is known for its special rice of Pals, marmalade, olive oil or vegetable garden products as well as apple cider, beer and wine. The gastronomy is an important factor since the county is known for its cuisine called "sea and the mountains". Due to weather conditions, the county has a long tradition of viniculture (Schröder, 2018). The wind "Tramontana" plays a beneficial role in the winemaking because it blows off unwanted side effects on the plants resulting from long and cold winters (Schröder, 2018). Other artisan products are pottery or sheep wool, which also represent the region's traditional and historical identity.

7. Marketing Plan for Empordà

This proposal of a possible marketing plan for Empordà is a two-year plan to outline the destination's objectives. The plan explains strategies and tactics that will be used to achieve the set goals. It is designed to be flexible to have the ability to react and adapt to any possible fast-paced changes that might come up in the ever-changing global tourism marketplace. Due to the global pandemic, the future of tourism is still uncertain and can change at any time. This plan is aimed to function as a guide to promote Empordà as an integral county. Hotels, campsites, attractions, shopping venues, restaurants and other tourism-related businesses should be encouraged to use brand elements in their marketing efforts to promote Empordà as a holistic destination brand. Segments of this plan can be used for their own marketing plans.

Empordà consists of two counties and needs to be promoted under one brand. No marketing plan has ever been developed before. A possible reason might be that the touristic prospect in Empordà was created after the demand to visit started to evolve and it has been working well since then. The two counties are Alt Empordà, with its capital Figueres, and Baix Empordà, whose capital is La Bisbal d'Empordà, consisting of 104 municipalities in total. Located in the province Girona, in the region of Catalonia, it is situated in the north of the Costa Brava. The Pyrenees and the Mediterranean Sea play a key role in the main tourism product of the region. However, the most important reason why travelers come to visit, is its indigenous essence and identity reflected in its history, culture, old traditions and architecture. The union between tradition and touristic development is its most important obstacle. If done well, this could be the decisive aspect that makes Empordà stand out amongst other tourism destinations. Between maintaining its identity and adapting to the process, Empordà needs to adapt to the challenges tourism faces. The region is still well conserved and is not damaged by tourism yet, which needs to be maintained as well as the quality of its resources.

In a time where the future of traveling is still uncertain, post-COVID represents an advantage for the region as it becomes even more popular. As trends changed, the desire for quiet and remote getaways evolved strongly with an emphasis on safety. Travelers now look to avoid crowded spaces and are more inclined to seek secluded areas, where the wilderness, nature breaks and excursions have become attractive. Consequently, the pandemic created opportunities for Empordà and a marketing plan might help to embrace it.

7.1 Mission, vision, values

Mission

The mission is to promote year-round authentic vacation experiences which result in positive economic growth and prosperity in a sustainable and competitive manner, where the essence of the county is maintained.

Vision

The vision is to be recognized internationally on a large-scale as a welcoming contrast to coastal tourism and other preferred travel and getaway destinations.

Values

The values, through which the actions will be carried out focus on: innovation, improvement, collaboration, commitment, positive attitudes, and balance.

Innovation: globalization as a fast-paced factor forces the tourism sector to innovate and react quickly to technical developments, which is why Empordà is aimed to be a dynamic and forward-looking destination, generating new actions, products and services.

Improvement: although the county is blessed with natural resources that offer a unique experience, it cannot be afforded to rest on the laurels which is why a constant improvement of products and services needs to be assured to find an alignment between the brand and visitors.

Collaboration: the different agents operating in the sector will be related to and considered in the process of design, execution and evaluation of actions, because they are part of Empordà's essence and identity.

Commitment: according to the mission, the actions would be carried out in the best efficient way while maintaining the ethics and principles the county stands for. This value correlates strongly with collaboration as all the involved stakeholders need to cooperate and commit to achieve common goals.

Positive attitudes: with the goal of turning difficulties into challenges, a positive attitude and point of view will be maintained. This value goes with empathy and ethics which will be interpreted in the transparency in all the actions that will be carried out.

Balance: the alignment between the brand and the visitors as well as among the involved stakeholders will lead into an integrated joint vision paying attention and balancing needs and potentialities.

7.2 SWOT

This assessment tool will be used to evaluate Empordà's competitive position by analyzing internal and external factors as well as identifying current and future potential and threats. Strategic planning requires a realistic and fact-based view at core strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to avoid gray areas and focus on real-life context which leads to new ideas and perspectives.

Strengths

Empordà's location at the Mediterranean Sea and proximity to the airport of Girona is a great strength. The airport of Barcelona is reachable within approximately 2 hours and offers more airline connections. The county forms part of the famous Costa Brava, which attracts numerous tourists desiring to enjoy the beach and sun tourism product which is one of the county's strongest assets. Beautiful landscapes, nature, cultural and historical heritage are also one of the strongest and most important resources that Empordà boasts. Their touristic offer is diversified by the possibility to enjoy rural tourism and relaxation as contrast to the sun and beach tourism product. Therefore, a great strength is that Empordà is not as affected of seasonality as other coastal destinations. The authentic natural beauty and villages characterized by a very indigenous essence offer numerous tourism activities. Therefore, a great variety of activities is given and several niches can be attracted: families, couples, sports enthusiasts, culture and history enthusiasts or tourists who would like to take a break from bustling beaches at busier destinations.

Weaknesses

The lack of awareness by the national and international market as well as a poor brand image is a huge weakness. The region is outshined by the Costa Brava and its attractive summer and beach tourism. However, the negative image of Costa Brava's night-life impacts on the environment and disturbing locals might cast a poor light on the region. As mentioned earlier, the county consists of two counties and no marketing plan exists so far. Another area they lack exists in the infrastructure regarding mobility inside the county, as trains or busses are not well connected to other municipalities or closer major cities. Hence, tourists are heavily dependent on cars. The connectivity is reduced in the low season, which in turn reduces people's access to the destination. Another weakness is the poor statistical data concerning tourist profiles,

arrivals, expenditure and other variables whose records help to improve. The existing statistical data is measured for the two counties separately.

Opportunities

There are many opportunities for Empordà. Firstly, the county's most important essence, its cultural and historical heritage are very well maintained and not damaged by tourism. As part of the famous Costa Brava, Empordà benefits from the contrast it presents to the typical sun and beach experience. The growing interest in nature tourism and awareness of the necessity of sustainable and environmentally friendly tourism are also huge opportunities.

Due to the pandemic, tourists seek outdoor tourism now more than ever and Empordà's biological and ecological wealth enables to meet this desire. Other outdoor activities which could open new markets and whose promotion could be improved are hiking, golf or cycling. This is also a useful opportunity to combat seasonality. Activities and tourism prospects for younger people could be improved in order to attract an additional target group. Weaknesses in terms of online presence and promotion have great potential to be improved and turn into an opportunity to generate an integrated marketing communication of Empordà. This would avoid dispersing efforts and facilitate access to information and web content. The improvement of communication and marketing could open new markets and technological development can be used to offer personalized trips and travel experience.

Threats

Threats Empordà and the whole tourism sector face, are weather and climate changes. Tourism carries a great responsibility towards preserving the environment. Especially for Empordà it is crucial to protect its ecological and biological wealth. Therefore, a balance needs to be found between attracting more tourists and the need to protect the territory. Another threat is COVID-19 since its future and consequences remain unpredictable. Although it has brought its benefits and opportunities, it could easily turn into a threat at any time and influence tourism negatively. Other threats are destination competitors, who offer similar tourism products but attract more alternative markets. An example would be the Costa Daurada, as it offers sun and beach as well as cultural and historical heritage. Similarly, popular destinations like Turkey, Egypt and Greece have successfully positioned themselves well in the same market. The lack of awareness by younger generations is also a threat to Empordà and needs to be considered in present and future marketing and promotion actions.

7.3 Situation analysis and life cycle

In order to achieve a better understanding of Empordà's actual situation, its tourism will be presented and explained in numbers and put into context. This analysis helps to understand where to proceed with the strategic planning and design of actions to promote and manage tourism in a destination.

Butler's model of the Tourism Area Life Cycle, also known as TALC, foresees that any tourism destination goes through a specific series of stages in the tourism place evolution (Butler, 1980). It understands tourism destinations as dynamic and ever-changing, which is important in order to analyze the situation.

According to a report from 2019 of the World Travel & Tourism Council, the travel and tourism industry accounted for 1 in 4 of all new jobs created over the world. To demonstrate that in numbers, it was 10.6 % of all jobs in total (334 million), and 10.4 % of the global GDP (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2019).

After France, Spain is the second country around the world which received the largest number of international tourist arrivals in 2019 (Figure 5). Over 83 million international tourists travelled 2019 to Spain.

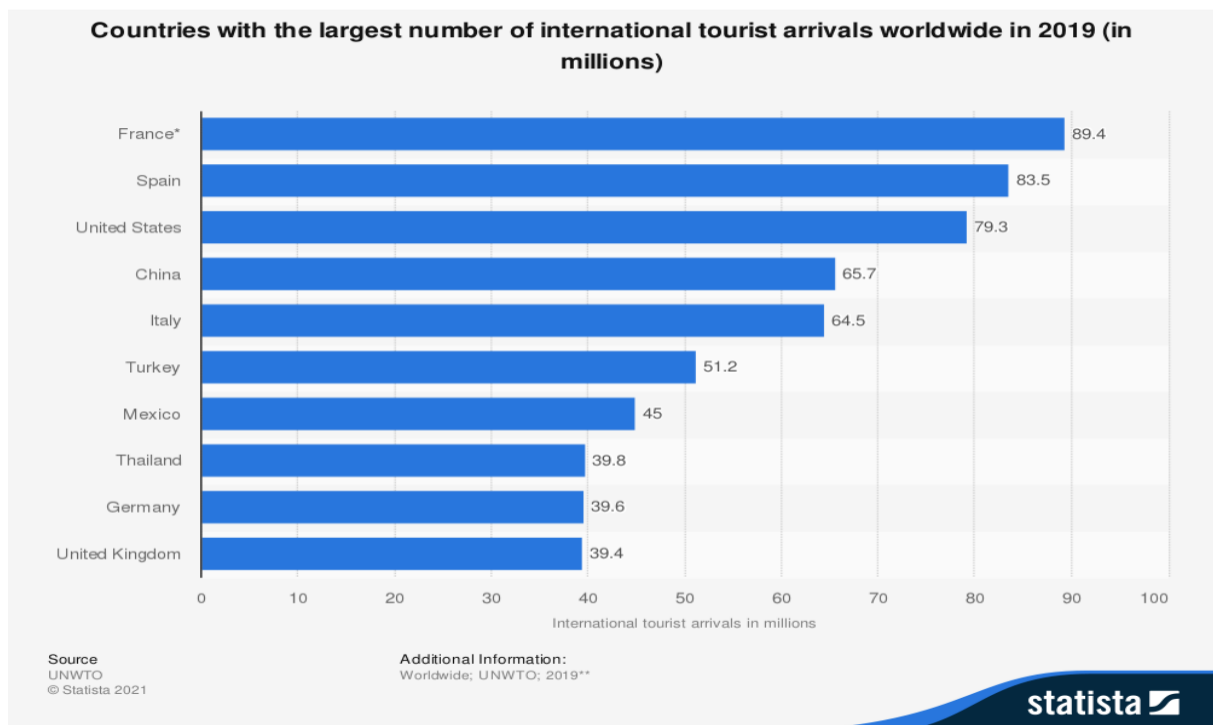


Figure 5: Countries with the largest number of international tourist arrivals worldwide in 2019 (in millions). Source: UNWTO, by Statista

As Figure 6 illustrates, the number of tourist arrivals in 2020 was significantly lower with around 18 million visitors. The main travel purpose was leisure and vacations with more than 15 million visitors. The drastic difference is a consequence due to the global pandemic outbreak and its travel restrictions.

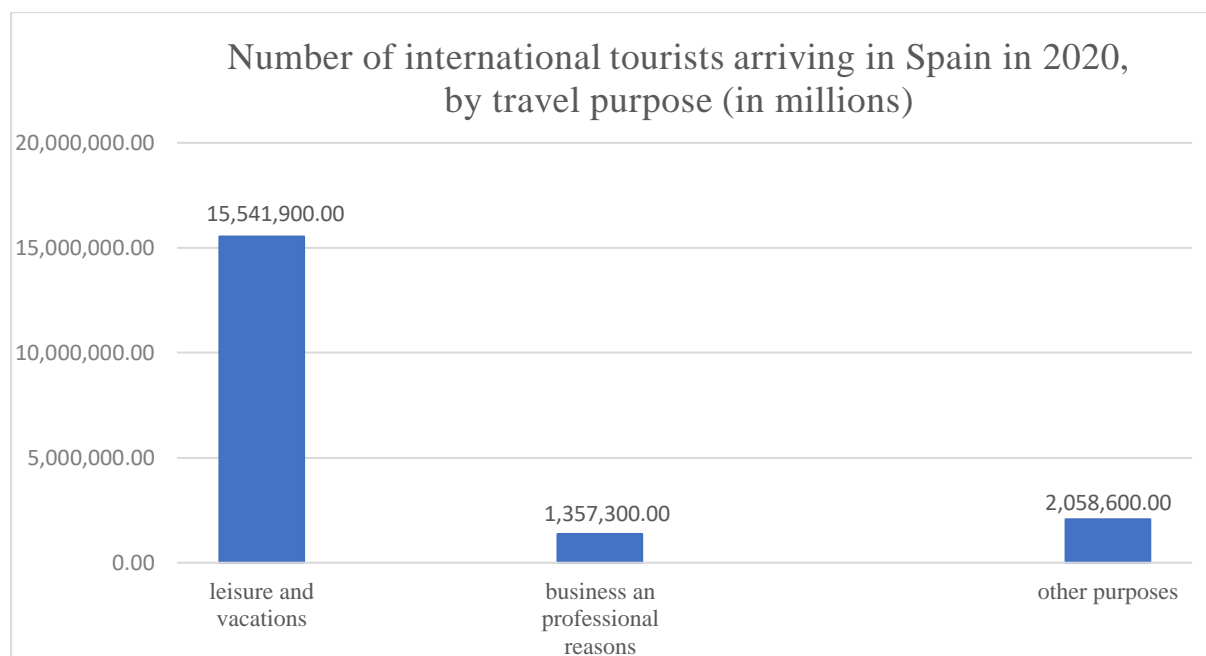


Figure 6: **Number of international tourists arriving in Spain in 2020, by travel purpose, in millions.** Source: Statista; own illustration

According to a press release from the INE (2021), where tourist movement at borders was measured in the first 6 months of 2021, the most popular destinations by Autonomous Community are the Balearic Islands with 29.6% of the total visitors (Figure 7). Catalonia holds the second position with 18.2% of the total visitors, which is still very well positioned and promises great potential. In this case, it is to say, that this was and still is also strongly dependent on the restrictions of each region regarding the pandemic, as they were established independently from each other as well as restrictions of the countries visiting. This position varied throughout the years, as in previous years, Catalonia has been the number 1 destination within Spain.

However, the number of tourists visiting the region of Catalonia has been growing continuously from 2016 until the pandemic began (Figure 8). 2019 was a record year for Catalonia regarding annual tourist arrivals as they reached 19.3 million tourist arrivals. Also, the tourists' expenditure increased within the last years (Figure 9). Since the pandemic began in 2020, the total expenditure spent in Catalonia increased by an annual average of around 5%

yearly from 2017 to 2019. According to statista (2020), most of the money spent by tourists in 2019 among all Spanish regions was in Catalonia. That changed in 2020 when most was spent in the Canary Islands, however Catalonia was still on the second place in 2020.

International tourist arrivals by main autonomous region of destination.
Percentage of the total

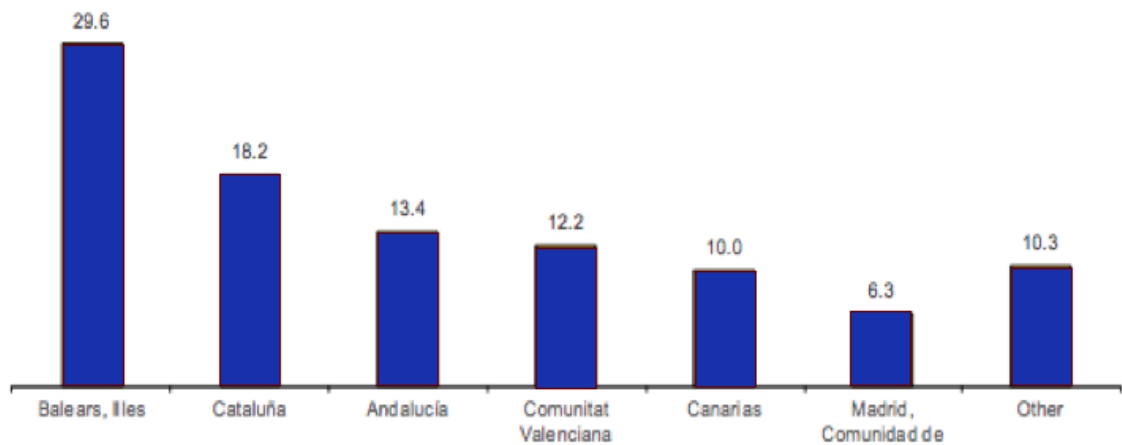


Figure 7: **International tourist arrivals by main autonomous region of destination.** Percentage of the total in 2021. Source: FRONTUR, by INE

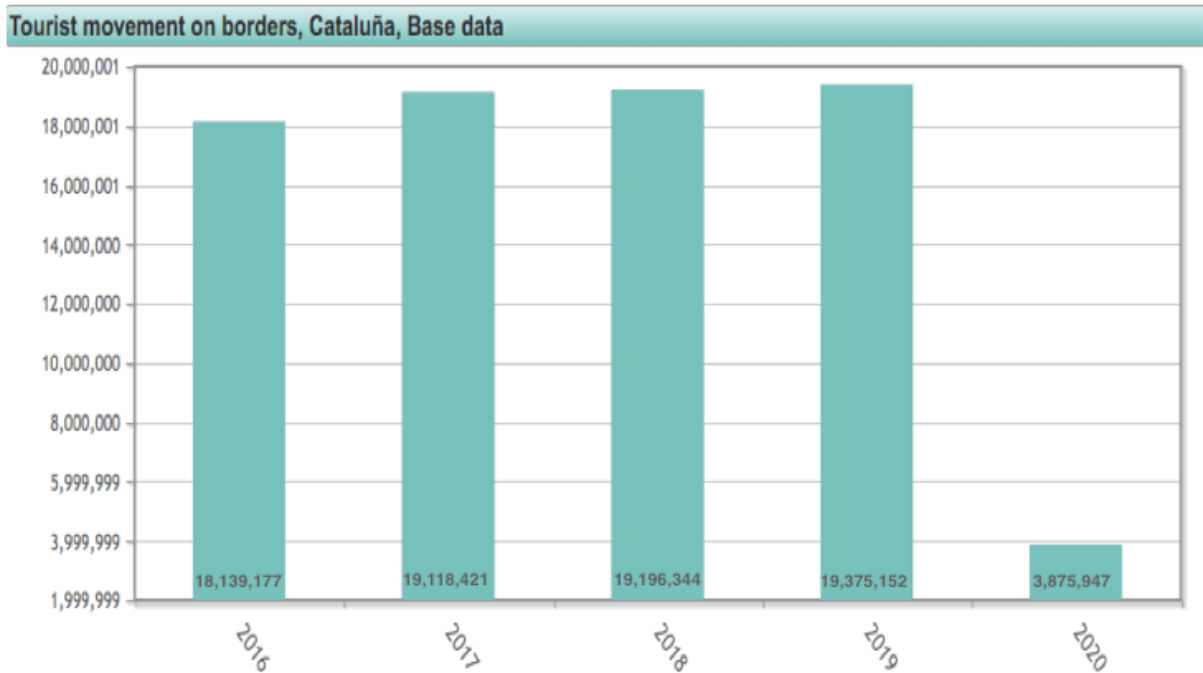


Figure 8: **Tourist movement on borders, Cataluña.** Description: the figure represents the number of tourists arriving to Catalonia in millions from 2016 to 2020. Source: INE

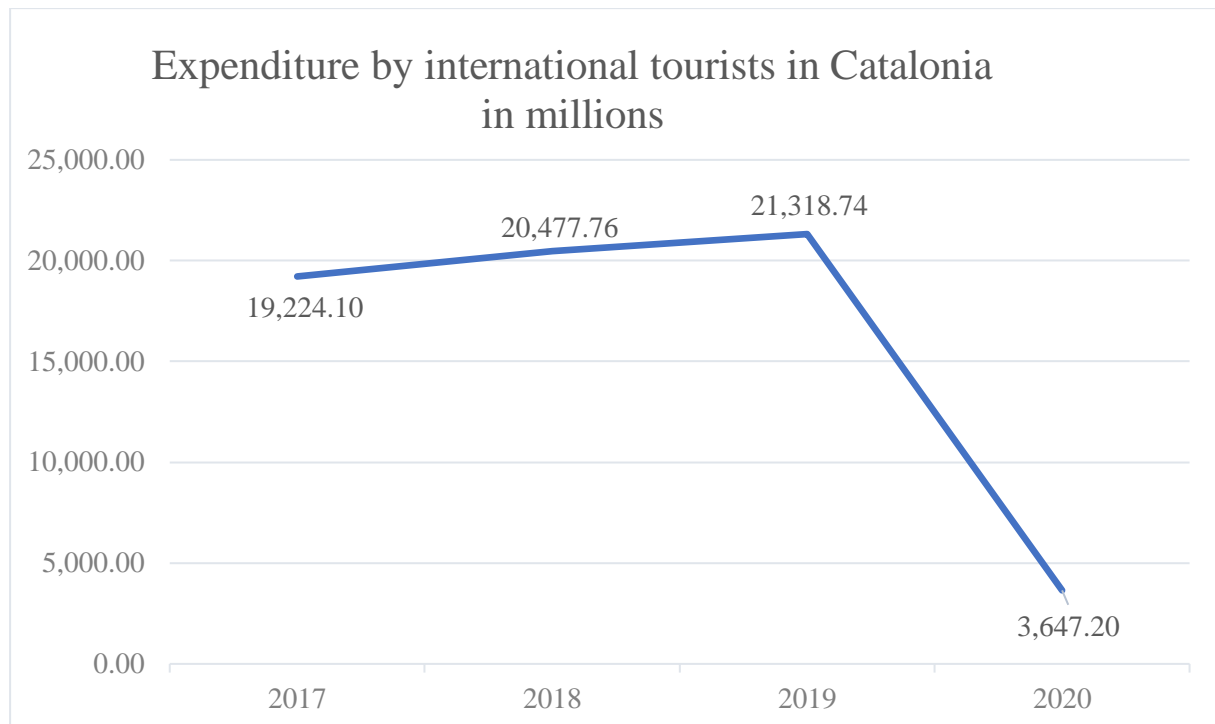


Figure 9: **Expenditure by international tourists in Catalonia in millions.** From 2017 to 2020. Source: INE / own illustration

The Costa Brava plays a significant role for Catalonia's tourism. In comparison to the national market, the international market leads in the Costa Brava (Figure 10). In 2019 both markets increased their arrivals. Due to the pandemic, international tourists were strongly limited in terms of travelling, which is why in 2020 around 70% less international tourists travelled to the Costa Brava. However, the national market was not as affected and presented only a loss of around 17% less national arrivals in 2020 compared to 2019 (Figure 9).

As presented in Figure 10, the international market leads the annual tourist arrivals in the Costa Brava. According to the official tourist website of the Costa Brava and Pirineu de Girona (2021), the foreign markets are led by French tourists, followed by the Dutch. The website also states that tourists stay approximately 3 to 4 nights.

Table 11 presents travelers and overnight stays in hotels by country of origin in Alt and Baix Empordà from 2017-2020. The international market leads in terms of overnight stays in hotels. However, national tourists are strongly presented as well, which means they account for a significant part of tourists in Empordà. Most of the national tourists are from Catalonia. Especially in 2020, most of the travelers in total were from Catalonia and accounted for more than half of the total travelers of daily and overnight stays. The proximity is the crucial factor in this case, which is why the Catalan market, as well as the rest of Spain, will probably continue to be strongly presented in the county as travelling has not returned to normality yet.

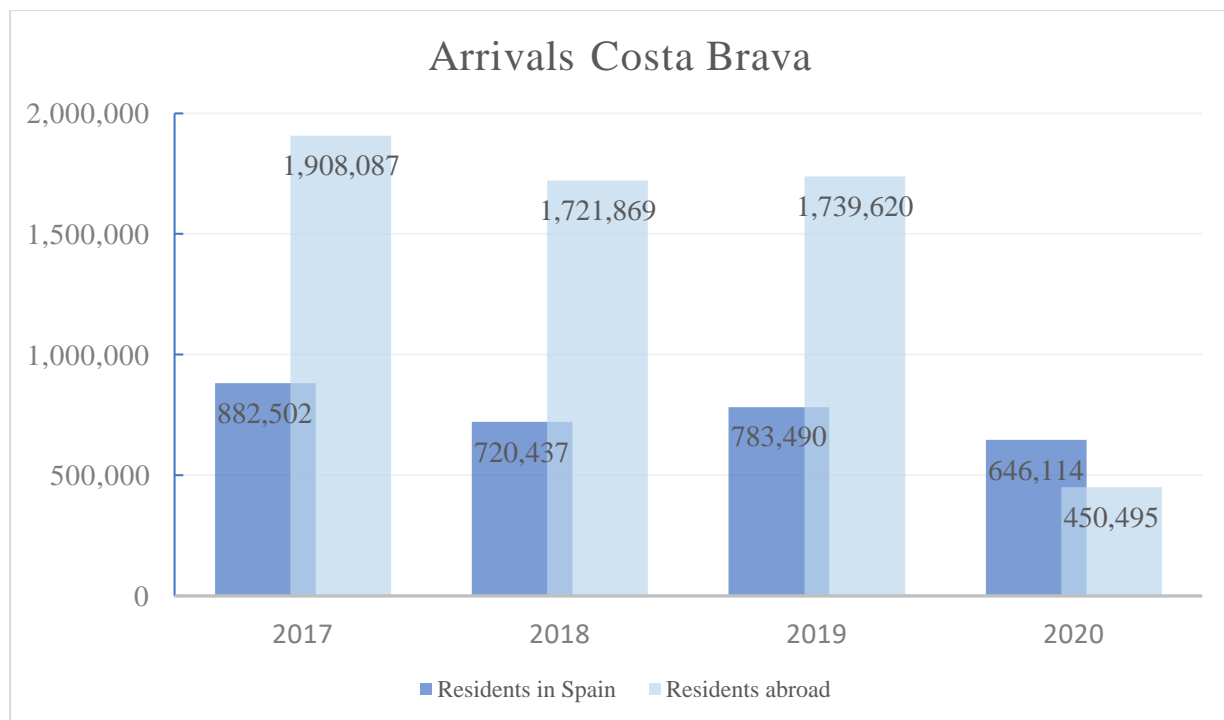



Figure 10: **Arrivals Costa Brava in millions.** Residents in Spain and Residents abroad from 2017 to 2020. Source: INE / own illustration


 Generalitat de Catalunya
 Departament d'Empresa
 i Treball

Travelers and overnight stays in hotels by market of origin in Alt and Baix Empordà. Years 2017-2020

thousands

	Travelers				Overnights			
	Catalans	Rest of Spain	Internationals	Total travelers	Catalans	Rest of Spain	Internationals	Total travelers
2017	493,7	128,9	901,9	1.524,5	1.048,3	356,8	2.535,5	3.940,6
2018	546,6	112,9	902,3	1.561,8	1.084,0	297,7	2.506,5	3.888,2
2019	610,7	128,5	934,2	1.673,4	1.193,5	354,3	2.473,6	4.021,4
2020	420,4	50,7	274,9	746,0	882,5	120,4	601,7	1.604,6

Source: Gabinet Tècnic del Departament d'Empresa i Treball a partir de l'Idescat de l'EOH de l'INE.

Table 11: **Travelers and overnight stays in hotels by market of origin in Alt and Baix Empordà. Years 2017-2020 in thousands.** Source: Generalitat de Catalunya, department of business and labor / own illustration.

In terms of accommodation, Alt and Baix Empordà both present a solid number of possible hotel, campsites and rural tourism accommodations (Table 12). As Empordà is well-known for its nature and landscapes, it offers a large selection of accommodations at campsites. With almost double the amount of beds at campsites, Baix Empordà has a greater capacity than Alt Empordà. The number of hotel beds is almost equal, as well as beds in rural tourism establishments. In total, there are more possibilities of accommodation in Baix Empordà.

Tourist accommodations. 2019

Establishments and beds. By type. Counties and Aran, areas and provinces

	Establishments				Beds			
	Hotel establishments	Campsites	Rural tourism	total	Hotel establishments	Campsites	Rural tourism	total
Alt Empordà	229	33	148	410	14,865	35,184	1,284	51,333
Baix Empordà	205	45	110	360	15,622	61,146	940	77,708

Institut d'Estadística de Catalunya

<https://www.idescat.cat/pub/?id=aec&n=540&t=2019&lang=en>

Table 12: Tourist accommodations. 2019. Establishments and beds. By type. Counties and Aran, areas and provinces. Alt and Baix Empordà. Source: Idescat, based on data from the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Families / own illustration.

Butler's Life Cycle model and its phases can be used to position Empordà as a tourism destination (Figure 13). The county is currently positioned between development and consolidation. The increased number of tourists before the pandemic as well as post-COVID times were beneficial for the county as visitors sought out natural and open spaces. Its resources are still maintained well. The weakness of the lack of awareness is beneficial in terms of avoiding mass tourism, which has not been a great danger so far. Nevertheless, there is still a lot of potential to make more use of concerning the resources and capacity the county possesses. Infrastructure and the urban image need to be improved and its image needs to be repositioned to attract different niches as well as its traditional cultural and social essence needs to be maintained. The strategies aim to result in a solid competitive destination.

TOURISM LIFECYCLE

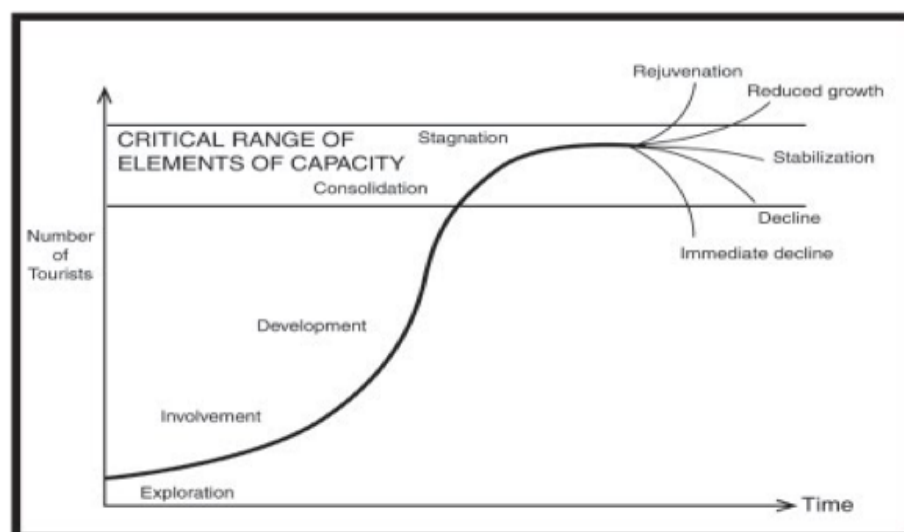


Figure 13: TOURISM LIFECYCLE. Source: Butler, 1980

7.4 Segmentation

Products

What makes Empordà special is its tourist offer that goes beyond the typical coastal tourism. Dynamic sun and beach activities are combined with rural inland activities which offer a contrast promising great variety and diversity. Therefore, it is oriented to the segment of families with children, couples or elderly visitors. According to the county council of Baix Empordà (2021), in 2019 and 2020 most of the visitors were families or couples between 36 and 70 years.

The county is characterized by its medieval monuments, culture and history. Unique landscapes and the Mediterranean Sea allow the variety of a broad range of different products and activities. Its main products can be categorized into the following:

Cultural and historical heritage: prehistoric times have had a huge influence on the region and a unique medieval architecture evolved, giving castles, villages, mansions or citadels a special identity. Museums and art are also important products in Empordà, as for example the Salvador Dalí House can be visited as well as the heritage of other famous artists who were born in the region.

Location: being located in the Costa Brava between the Pyrenees and the Mediterranean Sea is a benefit for Empordà. Numerous tourists visit the Pyrenees, and the proximity to bigger cities such as Girona or Lloret de Mar offer the possibility to stay in Empordà but also explore cities offering slightly different tourism products. The Catalan region is located at the French border and therefore it attracts numerous French and Catalan tourists. The region is accessible for international or national tourists through the airport of Girona, which is about 40 minutes away by car. Barcelona's airport is approximately a 1 hour and 40 minutes car ride away.

Coastal tourism: the Costa Brava is known for its sun and beach product, whereas in Empordà small beaches and coves can be found as a welcoming change from bustling beaches. The *camins de ronda* allow to walk along the coast and enjoy nature.

Gastronomy and wine tourism: in Empordà, the cuisine of the sea and the mountains is famous and has a good reputation and awarded restaurants. Due to the weather conditions, wine has a long history in the region and can be tasted not only during lunch or dinner, but also when joining wine tours.

Local products: typical products of the county are the famous rice of Pals, marmalade, olive oil, vegetable garden products, apple cider, beer or artisan products such as pottery and sheep

wool. While visiting cultivated fields, or joining markets or events, the traditional preparations and processes can be explored.

Sports: besides water sports, such as kayaking, surfing, waterskiing, windsurfing, diving or snorkeling, Empordà is a special and well-known place for Golf.

Rural tourism: the unique landscapes allow hiking in nature, trails by cycling or foot, natural parks, routes through cultivated fields or fisher villages to be discovered.

Target group

The focus lies on the segment of families with children, or couples between 36 and 70. Due to the county's historical and cultural heritage, other segments, such as couples, individuals or elderly visitors are targeted too. The county has little night life, which makes it calmer as the Costa Brava for example, but does not attract a lot of younger adults. The tactic of targeting these specific groups in the past seems to be successful, as tourists who have already visited Empordà in the past are likely to come back to visit it again (Figure 14). Almost 28% of the tourists visited Baix Empordà within the last 5 years and more than 33% visit every year between June and September and outside the peak season between October and May.

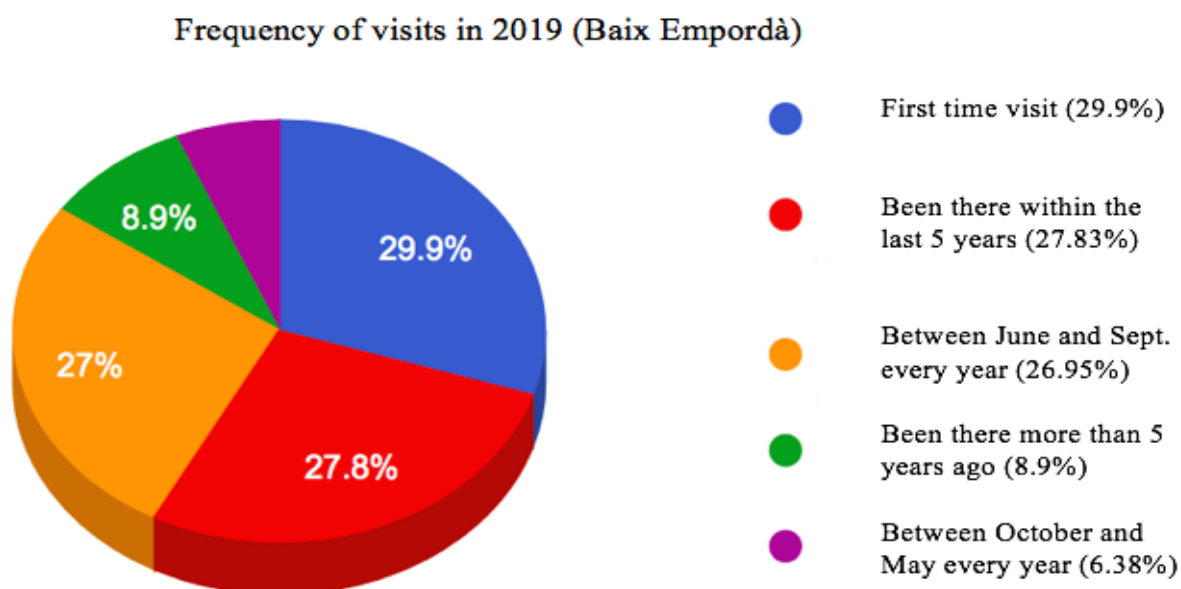


Figure 14: **Frequency of visits in 2019** (Baix Empordà) in percentage. Source: observatori del turisme CCBE / own illustration

The activities and products Empordà offers are quite stable and can be offered outside the peak season as well. As Table 15 shows, the interests in the activities did not change throughout

the pandemic and the demand in nature and sports tourism increased, as well as the trend of sun and beach tourism. Therefore, the targeted groups are outdoor enthusiasts, who enjoy sports, inland activities as well as sea-related activities, or culture and history interested individuals and groups.

Consultations at tourist offices, Baix Empordà

	2018	2019	2020
active tourism	27%	30%	29%
cultural tourism	25%	24%	23%
nature tourism	16%	16%	17%
sports tourism	14%	14%	16%
sun and beach	10%	8%	10%

Table 15: **Consultations at tourist offices, Baix Empordà**. Source: observatori del turisme CCBE / own illustration

Target market

The main international markets in Empordà are led by French, Dutch and German tourists. However, half of the tourists are domestics from Catalonia and the rest of Spain (Figure 16). The graphic shows data from 2019, prior to the pandemic.

Main markets by country of origin in 2019 in %

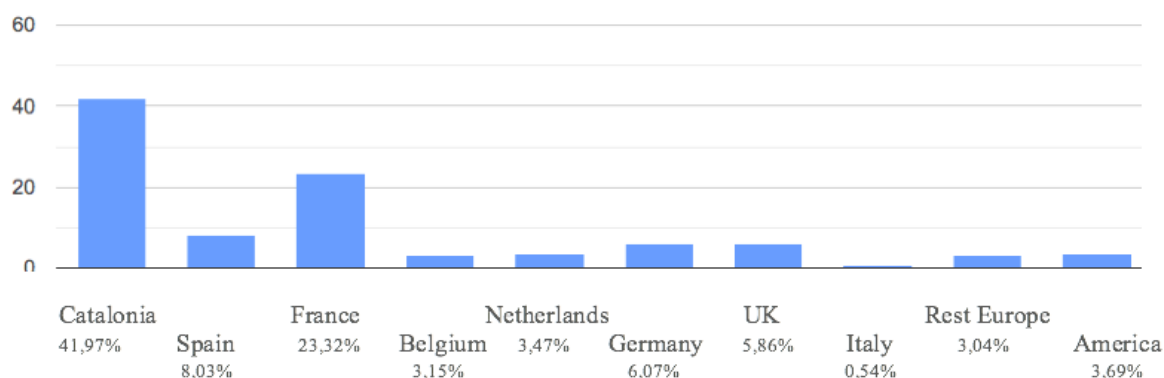


Figure 16: **Main markets by country of origin in 2019 in %**, Baix Empordà. Source: observatori del turisme CCBE / own illustration

In 2020, the biggest market share still consisted of tourists from Catalonia, where the number increased drastically in comparison to 2019 with 73,10% of Catalan tourists (Figure 17). French tourists follow on the second place with 12,77%. Other domestic tourists preferred

to travel somewhere else, as the number decreased almost 60%. The Dutch and German market declined significantly as well. However, the Belgian market was more present in 2020 than Germans or Dutch and might be a possible emerging market. Due to the uncertain future of tourism, it can be assumed that the Catalan market together with the rest of Spain will be the strongest represented main market in the county. Nevertheless, the proximity to France is a great benefit which must be considered in the marketing strategy.

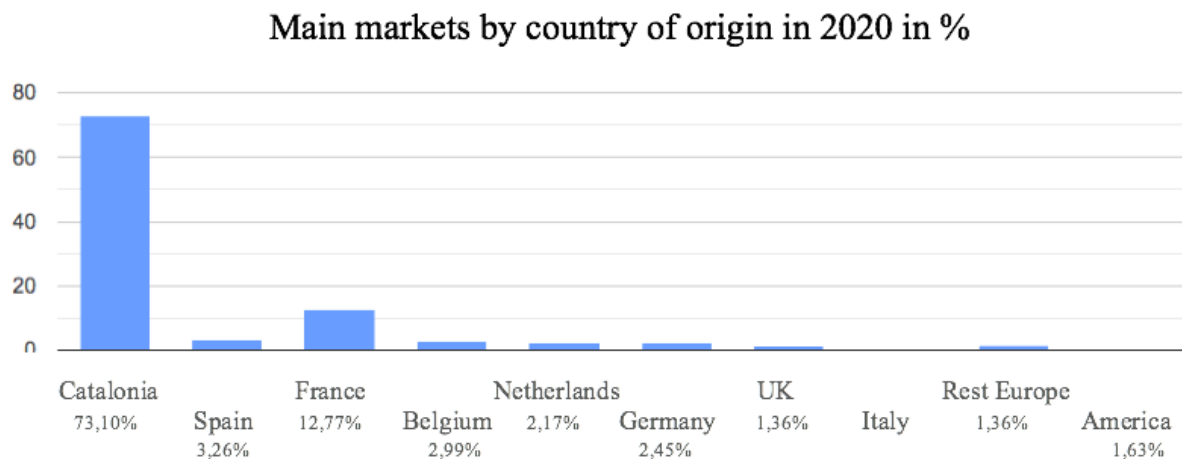


Figure 17: **Main markets by country of origin in 2020 in %**, Baix Empordà. Source: observatori del turisme CCBE / own illustration

Many tourism products Empordà offers can be enjoyed in the low season as well, which reduces the effects of seasonality. In the recent years, the county made a name for itself in the golf scene, as several golf clubs exist with resorts restaurants as well as tournaments. This can be used to foster markets, such as the UK, Germany or Sweden. Figure 18 shows the tourists' main countries of origin who played golf in Spain in 2015 and shows that people from the UK present the highest share, followed by German and Swedish tourists. Other markets that should be considered as potential future markets, would be the Benelux countries or Austria, as they have similar weather conditions, which might attract them to travel to the South as well as they have similar distances to Spain. The same groups as illustrated earlier should be targeted in these countries. A potential niche would be nature enthusiasts, who would like to enjoy these activities outside the peak season as well. Since the autumns and winters in those countries are longer, they would be attracted to visit Empordà during these months. This way, the effects of seasonality could be reduced as well.

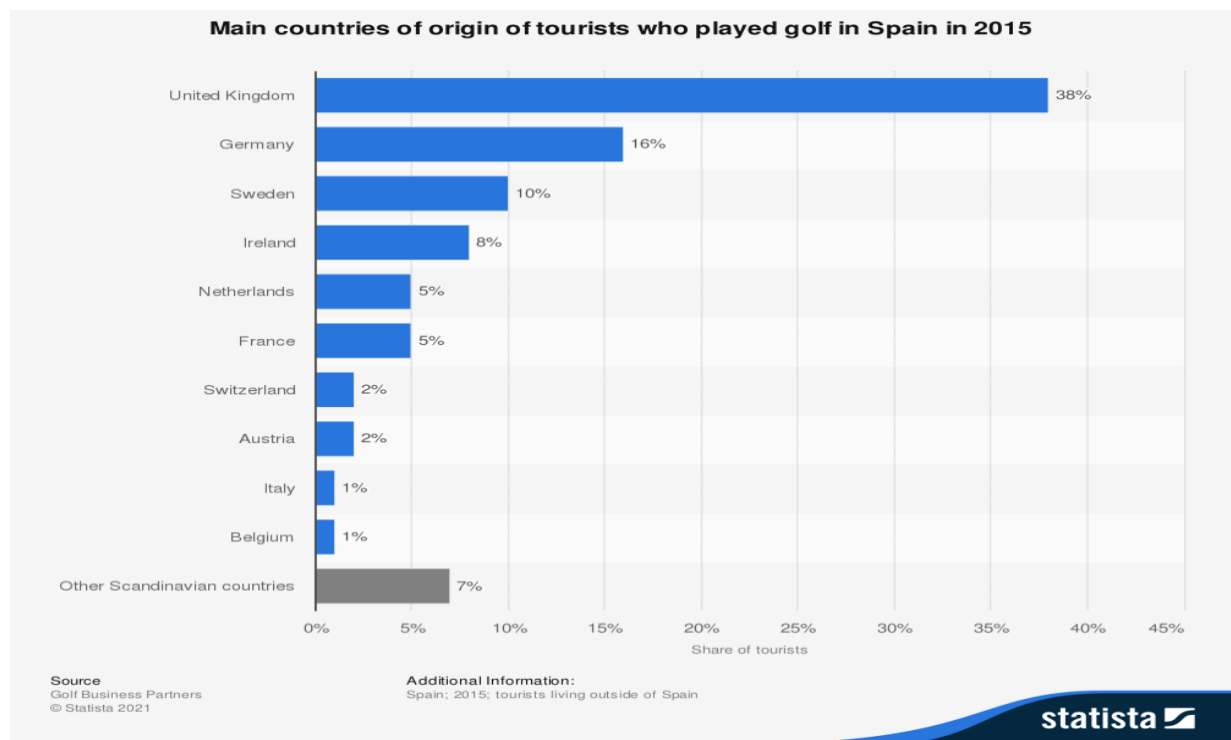


Figure 18: Main countries of origin of tourists who played golf in Spain in 2015. Source: Statista

7.5 Positioning and branding

Empordà consists of two counties which is why in the past they have been promoted separately. However, in 2019 the two county councils presented their joint brand of Empordà (El Punt Avui, 2019). Their aim is to disseminate the common values, for which they also created a web page and a logo:



Source: socemporda

<https://www.socemporda.com/#inici>

The name of the tourist website, which is driven by both city councils, means “I am Empordà” translated from Catalan. The communicated message is that the people of Empordà are the most important essence and resource of the county. They are deeply involved in the tourism product which is why they are also part of different launched campaigns. The message

is that anyone could identify themselves with the county, as it is multi-faceted. In the promotion video of the website, the unique identity of the county is underlined, where locals are interviewed and shown. Some of the residents are shown at work, where the production of local products is presented. It is said that the future of the county is tourism and technology. Empordà brands itself focusing on their territory and its people, who are deeply involved in its tourism, and nature and gastronomy, which is presented in an authentic manner, presenting all the main tourism products. The county's resources are still strong and not damaged by tourism. For that reason, the focus lies on the promotion of the resources and products, which already proved their success in the past. Their resources are their competitive advantage, which is why Empordà brands itself as a destination of coastal tourism, nature and rural tourism, gastronomy and cultural/historical heritage. At the same time, the focus on development and technology is set and despite its traditional essence, the county wants to adapt to the process of globalization and new technologies. However, there is still great potential to communicate the brand among a wider range and raise awareness of their brand. Therefore, the positioning is successful so far, but the branding efforts need to be improved and reinforced.

The products that need to be promoted more are golf and wine tourism as they promise a great source of attracting visitors and higher expenditures, as a lot of the other offered products and activities in nature do not require any expenses. At the same time, golf and wine tourism could attract younger families, friends, couples or individuals as well, which are target groups that are not presented in great numbers yet. These two tourism products are also activities that can be enjoyed during the spring, autumn and winter months. Another aspect, that should be communicated more, is its ecotourism and biological and ecological wealth in resources. Sustainability is a concept that finally has received more awareness globally and tourism recognized its great responsibility towards it a long time ago. Therefore, tourists tend to be aware of that too, which is why the benefit of its resources should be used to underline that Empordà is a sustainable tourism destination.

Efforts regarding have been made in June, 2021, where Alt Empordà promoted sustainable tourism through innovative proposals as part of the project of PECT Natura i Cultura (Emporda Info, 2021). Eight unique and sustainable tourist proposals were presented, which allow tourists to get to know the region through culture, heritage, nature and gastronomy with the aim to move forward in a new tourism model towards sustainability (Emporda Info, 2021). The proposals are designed to enjoy the natural and cultural heritage outside the conventional routes at little-known places, and in 4D format. The goal is to promote the territory, deseasonalize the sector,

promote the deconcentration of the demand, increase visitor spending in favor of the local economy and diversify the tourism offer.

Another campaign that was launched by the two county councils in 2020 “Jo em planto a l’Empordà”, which means “I settle down in Empordà”, target proximity markets such as Catalonia and the south of France (El Periodico, 2020). In the campaign, the territory is branded as a safe destination, which is close, sustainable, and available outside peak season as well. Therefore, the campaign targeted residents of closer destinations and people who already know the territory.

The campaign “Esperit Empordà” (Spirit Empordà), launched in June, 2021, is a project initiated by different administrations of Girona to encourage tourism in Empordà in association with the two counties of Empordà, and the tourism board of Costa Brava (baixemporda, 2021). The previously mentioned campaign “Jo em planto a l’Empordà” the focus was on the territory offering a tranquil space, highlighting the landscapes and heritage. However, this campaign’s focal point lies on emotional value, focusing on the people and outlining the distinction to other destinations. The campaign markets the territory by highlighting its values and the way of understanding life which are important factors to attract visitors. When the campaign was launched, the necessity of the collaboration between public and private sectors have been emphasized, which has already been applied in the campaign (baixemporda, 2021).

Furthermore, the official website empordaturisme.com launched this year to promote local tourism and to increase the visibility in the network of all the associated entities of the county. This is an important step towards the joint path of the two counties.

In conclusion, efforts have been made to promote the integrated brand of Empordà. However, the targeted people were mostly the ones who already know Empordà and/or live at closer located destinations. Due to the pandemic, that has been the best strategic so far. Nevertheless, as soon as the situation allows it, efforts need to be performed concerning targeting other markets too.

7.6 Destination competitors

As explained in the SWOT analysis, Empordà lacks visibility in other Spanish regions or countries of Europe which is why there is great potential to attract other markets too. The marketplace is becoming more and more competitive and the competition is strong on a regional, national and international level.

Regional competitor

The strongest competitor on the regional level is the Costa Daurada which is also located in Catalonia. As Figure 19 shows, the Costa Daurada presents a similar curve than the Costa Brava regarding visitors and overnight stays. They offer similar touristic services, such as sun and beach holidays and are both mainly focused on family oriented tourism. The Costa Daurada carries the advantage of the Portaventura theme park, the close by airport of Reus and a better climate. However, their offer of activities outside the peak season is poor in comparison to the Costa Brava. Rural tourism in the Costa Brava accounted for 30% in whole Catalonia in 2020 whereas the Costa Daurada only accounted for 6%, according to idescat. As Figure 19 shows, the trend of arrivals during the winter months tends to be higher in the Costa Brava. Considering the year of 2020, the Costa Brava welcomed a substantially higher number of visitors, especially in August.

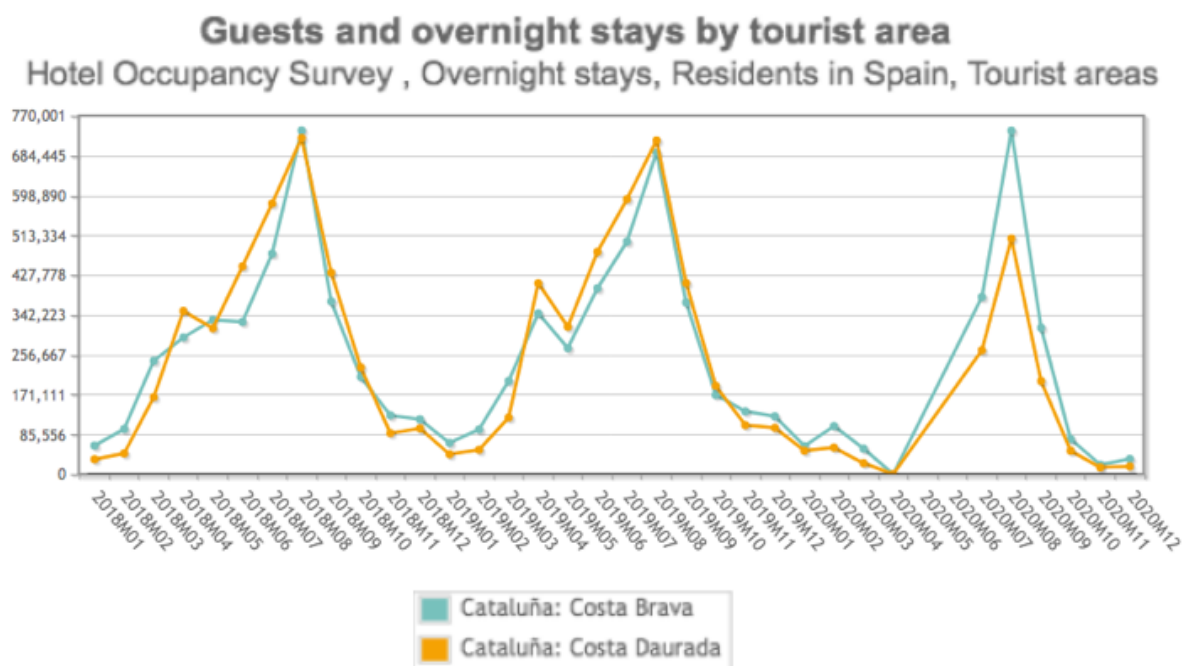


Figure 19: **Guests and overnight stays by tourist area.** From 2018-2020, Costa Brava and Costa Daurada. Source: INE

National competitors

Other regions who pose a threat are the Balearic Islands, the Canary Islands or Andalusia. Among them, the Balearic Islands are the strongest competitor, as they received around 11% more international tourists in 2021 (Figure 7). Nonetheless, the air connectivity is reduced in the low season, which is why the accessibility to the island is limited. In addition, the number of activities offered outside the peak season is low, which is why they are dependent on the sun and beach tourism. Even though there are numerous destinations on the islands with beautiful landscapes, the islands are mainly known for and communicated for idyllic temperatures and delightful coastlines, which is a great advantage for Empordà and the Costa Brava.

Rural tourism in Spain is also famous in the north, with destinations, such as Galicia, the Basque Country whose main tourism products are also nature, gastronomy and historical and cultural heritage. The Costa Brava however still has the advantage of the better climate and the possibility to connect rural tourism with the typical touristic offers of a coastal destination.

International competitors

Although Spain established itself as a very strong destination in the tourism sector, the great potential of tourism has long been recognized by other destinations too. Spain is confronted with destination competitors, such as Turkey, Greece and Egypt. Turkey and Egypt are great rivals for Spain in terms of capacity and all-inclusive hotels, which attract a lot of families. Combined with interesting package-deals, these destinations attract numerous tourists who want to enjoy a summer and beach vacation. On the other hand, Greece attracts with similar products around sun and beach as well as with cultural and historical heritage. According to statista, they attract mostly German, British and French tourists, which are the same markets that Empordà intends to attract. However, air connectivity is also limited to the inland and its islands due to the pandemic but also during the low-season, as these countries are promoted mostly as coastal destinations.

Croatia is also an emerging tourism destination, whose growth in tourist arrivals increased significantly since they joined the European Union in 2012 (statista, 2021). Their touristic offer has developed strongly within the past years, as the country has a coastline of 1,800 kilometers and more than 1,000 that can be visited. The destinations Split and Dubrovnik are a great rival for Empordà, as they are characterized by their unique architecture of their old towns and their location at the beach. In addition, their awareness level goes far beyond. However, these destinations are known to be very expensive and they are not perceived as destinations to visit outside the peak season, which is why Croatia is highly dependent on seasonality.

7.7 Action plan

Four main strategies are developed to improve the tourism sector in Empordà. Due to the global pandemic, the future of tourism is still uncertain and could change at any point in time. This plan is a two-year plan to outline objectives and goals according to the analysis of the actual situation, also considering the sector's situation prior to the pandemic. The four strategic lines that are set for Empordà are the following:

- 1) Brand Development Strategy
- 2) Customer Relationship Strategy
- 3) Service and Product Improvement Strategy
- 4) Communication and Promotion Innovation Strategy

Brand Development Strategy

The awareness and knowledge about the brand of Empordà as a destination needs to be improved by focusing on transmitting the destination's values and its products. The branding of Empordà has only just commenced and needs to be consolidated. Until now, the destination is not well-known in other parts of Spain or Europe. Therefore, the goal is to gain awareness among target groups of new markets to build a stable and well-known brand.

The brand development strategy will be realized through offline and online advertisement, campaigns and its diffusion in the web and social media among present and new markets. Until now, the diffusion of campaigns has mostly focused on Catalan and French markets due to the pandemic. But as there might be prospect of improvement in the future, campaigns should also focus on the Spanish, German, Dutch, British and Belgian market. As the Catalan coast has had difficulties with mass tourism in the past, Empordà needs to stand out and separate itself from this image. Numerous Spanish residents possess second homes in the county and seek for tranquility, which is why the branding needs to aim specific target groups as mentioned earlier.

The province of Girona, the Costa Brava and Catalonia should promote the brand at their tourist offices, at trade fairs or other events and by promotional videos on the TV or on the web targeting families, couples, elderly people and younger adults as well as sports, culture, history and nature enthusiasts. The collaboration of the public and the private sector at this stage is highly important, as one of Empordà's most important resources are their products, produced by local residents and companies. The product messaging and content distribution will be operated domestically as well as internationally. The focus lies on the valuable differentiated

tourism products, which present a welcoming contrast from the sun and beach tourism products of the Costa Brava or other close by destinations.

Communication and Promotion Innovation Strategy

The clear positioning of Empordà is a great benefit and its full potential can be used through the communication and promotion innovation strategy with the goal, to reach a wider coverage of awareness and promote Empordà's brand, as its branding has not reached the desired range yet. The county is endowed with rich landscapes and well-maintained resources, which need to be promoted more by promotional videos or tools in different languages and launching in different markets. In addition, tools, such as a 360° view of the natural spaces and other tourist activities and settings enrich the official tourist websites and allow insight into Empordà's treasures.

Furthermore, the official tourist websites need to be organized. Each county of Empordà has its own tourist website and its promotion has been done separately in the past. One of the first findings a search engine presents when indicating "Empordà tourism" is the website visitempordanet.com, which offers valuable information, but only about Baix Empordà. Another website appearing as one of the first ones is empordaturisme.com, which is the official tourist website for Alt Empordà. This leads to confusion among tourists who are not aware of the fact that Empordà consists of two counties. The joint website socemporda.com will be the prioritized website that will appear first in the search in order to guarantee a clear and consistent message. In addition, the website will be translated into Castellano, English, German and French and will be optimized for smartphone users.

Furthermore, an online marketing plan should be developed, since digital marketing is an economical tool, that needs integrated and detailed planning. Other tourism entities and websites supporting Empordà's tourism should be promoted and the messages should be communicated in alignment and collaboration.

Customer Relationship Strategy

The relationship with the visitors who have already been to Empordà once or more often must be consolidated through loyalty programs and attractive package deals. Through social media diffusion, newsletters or direct communication at accommodations and tourist entities, customer's engagement and the probability for them to return to the destination will be fostered. A continuous dialogue channel will be established, through which visitors and potential new

visitors can communicate. This will be realized through an app, where a proactive communication between Empordà as a destination and the visitors, as well as the communication among the visitors can take place. Therefore, desires, needs, expectations, complaints and experiences can be shared to foster engagement and facilitation of information and complaint processes. The app would not only function as a communication tool, but could also incorporate loyalty programs and package deals as well as travel blogs and reviews from visitors. This should be managed and operated in alignment with official social media accounts to ensure the direction of communication is integrated. Furthermore, market research will be monitored continuously to keep track of customers' satisfaction and ever-changing needs. Tourist accommodation, booking platforms, the mentioned app for Empordà and other tourist offices and entities should incorporate emails and questionnaires in order to learn about visitor's experience before, during and after the trip.

Service and Product Improvement Strategy

As Empordà is endowed with stable and valuable resources, it needs to be made sure that it remains this way through a sustainable and wise use of resources. In order to make more use of them, special tourist projects and events will be designed, following the example of the “Encant de l’Empordà” or the “Món Empordà” market, which both take place in Baix Empordà. Organic products, art, vintage furniture, records, paintings, ceramics, artisan work and more can be found in these markets. Events like this will be organized in collaboration with Alt Empordà as well. Food events, or small village festivals are planned, as far as the pandemic situation allows them. Occasions or seasons such as Easter, autumn, winter or motto events, regarding food, wine or other artisan products also help to attract visitors outside the peak season. In doing so, networks and clusters with local tourist entities are fostered.

The previously explained app also includes a tool to facilitate the reservation process and at the same time promote tourism products. Tailored propositions through personalization tools could attract more visitors by meeting their exact needs. An overview of accommodation possibilities will be given, since Empordà does not only have a great number of hotels of different classifications, but also offers numerous campsites and rural accommodations, meeting different interests and motivations for the visit. The app could also include a city guide function that highlights best attractions and other things to do in the county.

Another crucial area is the infrastructure, that needs to be optimized to the tourism service through investments and improvement. Accessibility to close by cities and among the municipalities needs to be improved by a well-developed network of public transport. More

public sanitary facilities at the beach and natural areas will be planted, beach equipment needs to be provided, hygiene and cleanliness of public zones as well as its general enhancement need to be improved. It needs to be made sure, that public tourism zones are distributed well to avoid the accumulation of huge crowds of tourists, which will disturb locals. Trash bins, posters and signs should encourage tourists to maintain the public spaces clean and act sustainable. Less attractive buildings or facilities, which do not give a welcoming impression, will be embellished through the planting of trees, shrubs and plants. The collaboration and constant communication between the public and private sector is necessary for all the illustrated actions.

The staff working in the tourism facilities need to be trained and updated regularly about new strategies, innovations or changes concerning tourism, so the whole sector in the county functions in alignment.

7.8 Product improvement areas

Although Empordà is well equipped with valuable resources and products, continuous improvement and innovation are essential due to the consequences of external factors such as the changing nature of globalization and the extremely competitive tourism marketplace. Meaningful product changes may lead to the attraction of new target groups and markets or increased benefits in the present market. All the goals for the improvement areas require the collaboration between public and private entities and continuous communication.

Gastronomy and wine

Although the gastronomy and Empordà's "cuisine of the sea and the mountains" already reached a great reputation, it needs to be promoted online and offline as it is mostly known among Catalan visitors. In order to market the important products of Empordà's brand such as the rice of Pals, its fish or its DO wine, collaborations with restaurants could be improved to use their rice and wine in the menus and also offer brochures about wine tours or tours where the region's other special food can be discovered.

Golf

Empordà holds a long tradition of Golf and offers great places Golf enthusiasts might want to stay. However, other actions such as undertaking advertising campaigns in the golf press of English, German, Swedish or Dutch could improve the awareness of Empordà as an attractive

destination for golf players. Their tournaments offered on the official empordagolf.com website should be promoted more by Catalonia, the Costa Brava and Empordà online and offline as well as by tourist operators.

Infrastructure

As outlined in the action plan section, the accessibility through infrastructure needs to be improved so that natural areas and other municipalities can be reached easier by public transportation. As distances are further and the network of public transport is not well-developed, cooperations with car-renting companies should be considered, where marketing agreements could also market other activities and products of the county.

As Empordà is mainly attracting families, couples, friends or elderly people, some establishments and actions should be designed in order to attract other target groups, such as younger adults. Through music events or festivals, or trendy bars, another niche could be attracted in Empordà.

7.9 Evaluation and control

The efforts and collaboration of both city councils of Empordà have made a good start but still have a long way to go. Four main strategies have been developed to improve the tourism sector in Empordà: Brand Development Strategy, Customer Relationship Strategy, Service and Product Improvement Strategy and the Communication and Promotion Innovation Strategy.

Due to the global pandemic, the future of tourism is still uncertain and could change at any point which is why the exact period in which the strategies can and should be realized cannot be predicted specifically. This marketing plan is a two-year plan to outline objectives and goals according to the analysis of the actual situation, also considering the sector's situation prior to the pandemic. It is designed to be flexible to have the ability to react and adapt to any possible fast-paced changes that might come up in the ever-changing global tourism marketplace and to function as a guide to promote Empordà as an integral county.

In order to evaluate and control the success of the outlined strategies, some actions should be taken continuously. In general, it is crucial to become more data-driven and use analytical online and offline tools to gain more information about the visitors in order to improve and make better decisions while tailoring offerings to their needs. Key information must be tracked, such as the number of website visitors and app downloads, how many visitors buy an offer or

which offers sell the best, travel motivations or the coverage and success of online advertisement. Aside from that, general satisfaction in accommodations, restaurants and other tourist establishments needs to be assessed and reflected in the actions taken. These measurements and evaluations must be taken and checked up on regularly and discussed among the involved tourist departments in order to adapt actions.

In all the actions and strategies, the collaboration of the public and private sector is of high importance. The close communication among all the involved stakeholders needs to be ensured continuously. Additionally, the residents' points of views must be considered in all the present and future tourism strategies and actions. All the decisions need to be based on hard data instead of assumptions, which is why this marketing plan requires actualization and improvement at a later stage, when more joint information about Empordà as one county has been gathered in order to implement the strategies in an efficient way.

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