How tourism statistics can support the assessment of effectiveness and efficiency of public actions

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Abstract
Destination Management Organisations (DMO) are increasingly encouraged to seriously assess the effectiveness and efficiency of their policies and actions.
Actually, there is the growing awareness that the evaluation of effectiveness and efficiency is strategic for DMOs, not only for assuring transparency in the use of public funds but also for supporting decision-makers in their strategic choices, offering a clear representation of costs and impacts brought by their actions.
The paper focuses its attention on the assessment of effectiveness and efficiency of actions taken by DMOs and it aims to develop a tool which supports DMOs in the assessment process. The paper proposes an evaluation approach and it discusses a system of guidelines and methodologies, able to adapt to the analysis of different policies and actions. This system is finally apply to a concrete action taken by the Italian Veneto Region in the field of tourism promotion.

Keywords
assessment, effectiveness, efficiency, policy-makers, DEA
Introduction

DMOs are nowadays subject to recent debate about the effectiveness and efficiency (henceforth called E&E) of their activity, since they have to face a considerable pressure on budgets and at the same time to develop successful policies able to deal with the increasing competition of other destinations (Dierz, Ilzkovitz & Mandl, 2008; Blake, Cortes-Jimenez, McCabe & Pratt, 2010). Improving E&E is strategic, since managing public spending in the most effective and efficient way helps to assure better performances and the destination competitiveness, optimising the use of resources.

It is expected that, as any other recipients of public funds, DMOs demonstrate the added value and the return on investment of their policies (WTO, 2003), in order to assure transparency in the use of public funds addressed to tourism and to avoid further budget reductions or limitations of their activities (Hastings, Morgan & Pritchard, 2012).

As a consequence, it is evident that the assessment of E&E plays a strategic role also for DMOs, bringing a lot of benefits not only in terms of control of the public fund allocation, but also of support to decision-makers. The evaluation, which should not be an end itself, is a continuous feedback to identify areas where performance and efficiency are weak, so that interventions can be taken to promote improvements and, given the expected results and the budget constraints, to address public resources to the most effective and profitable actions only (Behn, 2003).

If implemented during the overall life cycle of the action – ex-ante, in-itinere, ex-post -, the assessment of E&E allows to verify the extent to which a planned objective has been attained and the way in which fund allocation has been optimised and to recognise some possible problems, in order to make corrections to the ongoing activity or to next actions, improving results.

The assessment of E&E has great potential, that unfortunately is not yet fully understood and exploited, since it is not largely implemented by all DMOs.

The paper wants as a consequence to offer some clear guidelines and an assessment framework that DMOs can adopt for measuring E&E of their activity.

The paper firstly reviews literature, giving a panorama of the best and most known methodologies available for the evaluation, in particular of public actions in tourism.

It secondly describes the approach and the process that, according to authors, DMOs should implement. It explains how usual tourism statistics can support at each stage the assessment and what the most appropriate methods are, according to the level and type of actions and to type of effects to measure.

The paper finally applies part of the evaluation process to a specific action taken by the Veneto Region in the field of tourism promotion.

Literature review: assessment tools and methodologies

The way in which DMOs can assess E&E of their policies and actions is still developing and it represents a complex area, since methodologies vary significantly, depending on the type of activities undertaken, on the objectives, on the type of effects, on the budget available and on the moment in which the evaluation is
carried out (before planning the action – ex-ante -, during the implementation of the action – in-itinere-, at the end of the action – ex-post) (WTO, 2003).

Literature has focused a lot on the evaluation of advertising activity and less on the assessment of other actions affected tourism and on the overall tourism policy taken by a DMO. Indeed advertising programs represent a frequent topic in tourism literature (Fesenmaier, Hwang & Kim 2005), since they concentrate most of the resources allocated to the tourism policies of the destination.

As a consequence, in order to have a more complete panorama of the assessment methodologies, the authors of this paper have also considered the general literature in public economics, which can be applied to the current study too.

One of the most known and valid tools is represented by cost-benefit analysis (CBA), which evaluates the net benefit of alternative projects, showing whether or not the costs of these projects can be justified by its impacts. Since it allows to identify, among alternative actions, the best one – the one with the higher net benefit -, CBA is in particular applied ex-ante, in order to decide to which project to allocate money (Carin & Good, 2004). The advantages of CBA are the assessment of effects from the standpoint of all the stakeholders ultimately affected by the intervention and the consideration of all the most significant effects. This is made possible by the measurement of both inputs and outputs in monetary terms, so that all costs and benefits can be compared. This advantage however represents the limit of CBA, since it is often difficult to monetise all effects, in particular social and environmental ones. CBA is also considered very complex and time-consuming, so that experts suggest to adopt it only to assess projects with considerable magnitude (Pesce, 2002).

An alternative method to CBA is cost-effective analysis (CEA), that compares costs and benefits of several projects, estimating inputs in monetary terms and, on the contrary of CBA, outcomes in non-monetary quantitative terms. CEA also differs from CBA for a radical change in the assessor standpoint, since CEA refers to the policy-maker intentions and not to the preferences of all stakeholders (Centre for European Evaluation Expertise, 2006).

For the ex-ante evaluation, another important approach is represented by multi-criteria analysis, which compares several projects on the basis of different criteria, appropriately weighted according to their importance. The multi-criteria analysis assigns to every alternative a score for each criterion and it combines them in order to obtain an overall weighted score, that allows to compare the options and to determine the best one (Pesce, 2002; Centre for European Evaluation Expertise, 2006). Since more than one criterion is very often involved in the decision-making process, making more complex the choice, the great potential of this method is represented by the possibility to identify the best solution also when the projects have to be assessed on the basis of different aspects. The multi-criteria analysis has however some limitations, in particular the remarkable discretion, since the selection of the criteria and of their weights and the evaluation of alternatives depend on decision-makers only (Beria, 2005).

A successful method (Fesenmaier and Wöber, 2011), in particular developed for assessing the efficiency, is represented by DEA (Data Envelopment Analysis), a mathematic nonparametric technique, which is used
in the ex-post evaluation to measure the relative efficiency of “operating units” with the same general goals and objectives (also DMOs or specific policies or actions). DEA separates the efficient operating units from the inefficient ones on the basis of whether they lie on the efficient frontier, which is spanned by the best units in the data set. The efficiency measure is established mathematically by the ratio of the weighted sum of outputs (the results) to the weighted sum of inputs (the resources) (Charnes, Cooper & Rhodes, 1978). DEA allows not only to understand whether an operating unit is efficient or inefficient, but also to identify the reasons why it is not efficient and the possible best-practices. On the other hand it has some limitations, since for example it doesn’t consider casual or external disturbing elements that could affect results (Fabbri, Fazioli, Filippini, 1996; Fesenmaier & Wöber, 2004).

Alongside these methodologies that can be adopted for every type of action, the literature is rich in studies about the tools to assess marketing campaigns, through in particular conversion and tracking studies, multivariate analysis and more recently on systems based on surveys and researches aimed to verify brand awareness and image impacts (Hastings, Morgan and Pritchard, 2012).

Conversion study is based on surveys to analyze whether recipients of the destination marketing activity are converted to become visitors as a result of advertising messages; it yields a conversation rate, which is the percentage of tourists who visit the destination after being exposed to the direct response marketing campaign and which can be used to estimate the impact of the activity, in terms of visitor and expenditure increase and return on investment (Blake, Cortes-Jimenez, McCabe and Pratt, 2010). Even though conversion studies are so popular, scholars have pointed some limitations, as failure to correct for nonresponse bias and for tourists who had chosen to do the holiday before seeing the campaign; some experts also underline that conversion studies ignore the relative effects of other variables on tourist decision (Deskins and Seevers, 2010).

Advertising tracking studies too are used to assess the success of marketing campaign and in particular the impact on cognitive knowledge. This method is based on consumer surveys providing information about the effects of the advertising activity at the different stages of the tourist decision-making process, showing the extent to which the campaign has built awareness and positive imagery of the destination (Blake, Cortes-Jimenez, McCabe and Pratt, 2010).

Another approach is represented by the multivariate and econometric analysis, that allows to identify and assess the unique causal contribution of advertising to the decision of tourists to visit the destination and to control for other variables that affect tourist choice (Deskins and Seevers, 2010). On the other hand, as researchers underline, the need of long time series for each of the variables including in the model represents a limitation (Kulendran, Song, Zhang, 2010).

Literature review has shown that a variety of approaches can be used to assess E&E of DMO policies and actions and that the choice of one or the other method depends on the DMO needs, on the type of activity and effects and on the moment in which the evaluation is carried out. It has also underlined that the DMO activity evolution is nowadays bringing innovation also in the evaluation techniques, developing new
approaches that combine different methodologies and information systems (Hastings, Morgan and Pritchard, 2012).

**Research design: a framework assessing E&E**

DMOs became under increasing pressure to carry out more systematic and rigorous systems for evaluating their activity, so that the investment could be justified in terms of effects and competing priorities (WTO, 2003).

Because of the need of a flexible and complete tool that guides DMOs in assessing their activity, an evaluation framework has as a consequence been developed, in order to clarify and explain how to carry out the assessment of E&E.

This framework suggests not only the most appropriate methodologies to be adopted but also the approach on which the evaluation should be based, so that the assessment can be a real support to decisions and to the implementation of effective and efficient activities.

For this reason the framework is characterized by a global and comprehensive vision that embraces the evaluation both of specific individual actions and of the overall tourism policy taken by a DMO. As shown in graph 1, it is based on the belief that a correct assessment of E&E is a continuous and cyclical approach, in the sense that on one hand the evaluation of a specific action does not make sense if it is not included in a more global evaluation referring to the overall tourism policy; on the other hand the assessment of a policy can not be separated from the analysis of the individual interventions.

**Graph 1: the evaluation approach**

According to this framework, the evaluation process can not be separated from five important elements.

Firstly the ex-ante, in-inihere and ex-post evaluation are connected to each other, in the sense that the in-inihere and ex-post evaluation can not be done without the ex-ante one.

Secondly, since the impacts of an intervention can occur within different time frames, both short-term effects (outputs) and long-term effects (outcomes) must be considered. This means that the assessment process must follow the same time frames in which effects happen and that it is not completed until outcomes occur and they are measured. The policy has in general a greater long-term view with respect to a single action.
Thirdly E&E can not be assessed without verifying whether the impacts monitored at the conclusion of the action have been really caused by the action itself and not by other factors.

As the fourth, the assessment requires a clear definition of objectives and expected outputs and outcomes.

As the fifth, the assessment must be supported by an appropriate information/statistic system, that monitors both outputs and outcomes.

The framework is summarized in the following three graphs, that represent three different levels of evaluation.

**Graph 2: first level of evaluation – priority level of tourism**

- **Ex-ante evaluation**
  - Analyze the tourism situation in the destination, identifying strengths and weaknesses, the development phase, opportunities and threats, challenges posed by the competition, possible gaps to be filled, etc.
  - Compare tourism with the other economic sectors.

- **An appropriate information system**
  - Destination accounts
  - Tourism Statistics, main area:
    - Tourisme Satellite Accounts
    - Variety and exploitation of resources
    - Characteristic of tourism supply and demand
    - Economic importance of tourism
    - Tourism investments
    - Use and suitability of infrastructures
    - Environmental and social sustainability
    - Tourism performance (dynamics of supply and demand)
    - Market segments and competitors
    - Etc.

- **Methods of analysis**
  - Economic impact models (ex. Input-output model)
  - Early warning system (see TNO-CISE, 2001)
  - Environmental impact models
  - Destination competitiveness models (see Ritchie & Crouch, 2003)
  - Etc.

- **Define objectives of minor interventions**, specifying budget and time.

- **Define strategic objectives** and general guidelines for tourism, specifying budget and period of time.

- **Tourism policy**: go to level 2.

- **Minor interventions**: go to level 3.

- **Consider stakeholder needs.**
Plan a policy including programs specifically for tourism. For example:
• Business support
• Marketing activity
• Management event
• Information and hospitality
• Etc.

Ex-ante evaluation of the programs
Depending on DMO needs, apply methodologies as:
• Cost-benefit analysis
• Cost-effectiveness analysis
• Multicriteria-analysis
• etc,
in order to choose the most effective and efficient programs to be included in the policy, according to strategic objectives, costs and expected benefits they produce and considering the relations between different programs.

Avoid policy fragmentation, paying attention to programs implemented in other sectors but affected tourism. For example in:
• Agricultural
• Transports
• ICT
• Culture
• Environment
• Monetary policy
• Fiscal policy
• Etc.

Not include ineffective and inefficient programs in the policy.

Include effective and efficient programs in the policy, specifying period of time and budget.

Implement selected programs: go to level 3.

If necessary, define/redefine programs.

Define the assessment system for the in-itinere and ex-post evaluation, according to the type of programs and starting from the information system (level 1):
• select the most appropriate indicators for monitoring the effects of programs;
• develop a system to collect data, if it is lacking;
• estimate the expected values for every indicator.

Consider the evaluation results (in-itinere and ex-post) obtained in level 3

In-itinere / ex-post evaluation of the programs
• Measure outputs and outcomes of programs, through the system of indicators.
• Verify causal relation between effects and programs.
• Compare real effects with expected results, assessing effectiveness, and with costs, assessing efficiency.

In-itinere: if necessary, make corrections to the ongoing programs. Ex-post: pay attention to ineffective and inefficient elements for improving future programs.
Graph 4: third level of evaluation – implementation of programs through actions

What is the most suitable marketing activity?

Define specific objectives of the marketing activity, in a smart way (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time) specifying:
- time;
- market target;
- space;
- budget.

On the basis of specific marketing objectives, decide among:
- trade shows
- usual advertising (TV, newspapers, etc)
- advertising on web site and web 2.0
- promotion in local events
- educational tours
- Etc.

Define the assessment system for the in-itinere and ex-post evaluation:
- select key performance indicators, according to the goals and type of advertising;
- develop a system to collect data, if it is lacking;
- estimate the expected values for every indicators.

In-itinere / ex-post evaluation
- Calculate the real value of the indicators, verifying the causal relation, through conversion studies, tracking studies, multivariate analysis, experimental design or other surveys.
- Compare expected values and real values.
- Give a judgement about effectiveness and efficiency, analysing indicators, calculating return on investment, applying DEA, etc.

Implement the marketing activity

Partial and final results

Return to the assessment of level 2

Ex-ante evaluation
Starting from the information system (level 1), analyse the market and the competitors, identifying problems, constraints and opportunities.

Consider stakeholder needs
The first level, which is essential to the other two, refers to the decision about the priority level of tourism and, if it is high, about what the strategic objectives and general guidelines are.

The second level, which depends on the previous one, is represented by the assessment of the overall tourism policy, that can be composed of programs specifically for the area of tourism (business support, marketing activity, etc.) but that it can be influenced by programs implemented in other sectors (agriculture, transport, culture, environment, ict, etc.). This phenomenon is the result of the interaction of tourism with many other economic sectors and it can cause the so-called fragmentation of policies, that leads policymakers to pay attention to programs adopted in other areas, but affecting tourism in a positive or negative way (EU, 2007).

Finally the third level refers to the evaluation of the implementation of programs through specific actions. Even though authors have chosen the marketing activity as example, the described procedure can be adapted to any other intervention.

In the first level the priority level of tourism can be decided after an ex-ante evaluation only, in which the tourism situation is analyzed and compared with the other economic sectors, identifying strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats, challenges posed by the competition, possible gaps to be filled and investment areas. If the priority is high the policy-maker can define the main objectives and strategic guidelines of the tourism policy, planning the period of time and the budget and paying attention to stakeholders needs. On the contrary, if tourism is not considered so important for the destination, it could be necessary to carry out only some minor interventions.

In the second level, through an ex-ante evaluation, based for example on cost-benefit / cost-effectiveness analysis or on multi-criteria models, it is possible to compare the alternative programs in terms of costs and benefits they produce and to identify the best solutions to be included in the policy, according to the strategic objectives defined in the first level. After identifying the most effective and efficient programs and before implementing them, it is necessary to design the assessment system (definition of indicators, methodologies to monitor them and expected results), in order to be able to carry out the in-itinere and ex-post evaluation. Monitoring outputs and outcomes and comparing them with the expected results and with costs, it will be possible to assess E&E of programs and of the overall policy, obtaining a feedback for making corrections to ongoing programs or for better planning the next policy.

In the third level, the ex-ante evaluation consists first of all in analyzing tourism market, in order to firstly identify the specific goals of the marketing activity in a “smart” way – specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time -, defining the period of time, the market target and the budget allocation and secondly to decide the specific action to be carried out (trade exhibition, advertising, educational tour, website, etc.). As explained in the second level, before implementing the actions, it is necessary to plan the assessment system, selecting key performance indicators, defining their expected value and establishing methodologies to survey effects. In the in-itinere and ex-post evaluation, E&E must be assessed, measuring outputs and outcomes through the use of conversion studies, tracking studies, multivariate analysis or other surveys, in order to obtain a feedback for improving ongoing or future activities.
As shown by the schemes, the assessment of the specific actions is essential for the evaluation of the programs and of the overall policy.

In each level, the evaluation can not be carried out without a complete information system, consisting of destination accounts, tourism satellite accounts and tourism statistics describing (see Manente, 2008):

- variety of resources and their level of exploitation;
- characteristics of tourism supply and demand;
- economic importance of tourism;
- ability of the destination to develop projects and investments in tourism;
- use and suitability of infrastructures;
- social and environmental sustainability (for example carrying capacity);
- dynamics of supply and demand;
- overall trends and margins generated by each product/segment, brand awareness, competitiveness,
- etc.

While in the first level of evaluation, it must be considered the information system in its entirety, since the assessment refers to the overall tourism situation, in the second and third level the evaluation is based on a part of this system, according to the type of programs / action and to the effects to be measured.

A case study

A tourism marketing activity taken by the Italian Veneto Region has been considered as example, in order to better explain the evaluation scheme described above. Because of editorial needs, the case study refers to the third level of evaluation only.

Buy Veneto, which is organised every year by the Veneto Region, consists of a daily workshop in which local tourism businesses (sellers) meet international tour operators (buyers), in order to promote and sell their products.

In order to assess E&E of this activity (in particular the last edition), authors have firstly developed a system of 13 indicators (Table 1), according to the type of action and to the goals. These indicators, that have been calculated through the results of a specific survey carried out among the event participants, refer to the effects that organisers expect to be achieved thanks to the event and they express the number and the monetary value of new contracts, the seller and buyer satisfaction, the variety of seller and buyer during the workshop and the return on investment.

Secondly authors have applied DEA, in order to assess the efficiency and to verify in which edition fund allocation has been optimised. Authors have in particular used 4 indicators as outputs – number of sellers, variety of sellers (accomodation, travel agencies, etc.), seller and buyer satisfaction – and 1 indicator for input – expenditure for the Buy Veneto organisation.

It must underline that it was not possible to select other more appropriate output indicators, since the lack of other comparable data for all the Buy Veneto editions.
DEA has calculated a measure for the relative efficiency (min = 0, max = 1) for each of the ten editions (Table 2).

Table 1: indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>During the workshop</th>
<th>Short-medium term</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effectiveness – 1st category</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Number of seller concluding new contracts with buyers</td>
<td>37.1%</td>
<td>58.2%</td>
<td>85.7%</td>
<td>61.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Number of new contracts concluded by each of the seller</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Effect (%) of new contracts value on seller turnover</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Effectiveness – 2nd category** |                      |                   |               |               |               |
| 4. Number of seller who have seen a qualitative improvement in their customer portfolio, thanks to new contracts | -                   | 84.2%             | 84.6%         | 85.0%         |

| **Effectiveness – 3rd category** |                      |                   |               |               |               |
| 5. Variety of sellers participating in B.V. | Very good          | -                   | -              | -              |
| 6. Consistency between buyer interests in Veneto tourism products and the sellers participating in B.V. | Good                | -                   | -              | -              |

| **Effectiveness – 4th category** |                      |                   |               |               |               |
| 7. Number of satisfied sellers | 59.9%               | -                   | -              | -              |
| 8. Number of satisfied buyers | 54.1%               | -                   | -              | -              |
| 9. Number of sellers believing B.V. is an important opportunity for their business | 79.8%               | -                   | -              | -              |
| 10. Number of sellers who positively judge B.V., in comparison to other similar initiatives. | 68.6%               | -                   | -              | -              |
| 11. Number of buyers who positively judge B.V., in comparison to other similar initiatives | 60.9%               | -                   | -              | -              |

| **Efficiency** |                      |                   |               |               |               |
| 12. Monetary value of all new contracts | -                   | 11.303.580€           | -              | -              |
| 13. ε produced by the overall value of new contracts for every ε spent by organizers | -                   | 22.88€                | -              | -              |
Table 2: relative efficiency calculated through DEA.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Editions</th>
<th>Efficiency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E2002</td>
<td>0.888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2003</td>
<td>0.702</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2004</td>
<td>0.459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2005</td>
<td>0.537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2006</td>
<td>0.833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2007</td>
<td>0.568</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2008</td>
<td>0.878</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2009</td>
<td>0.819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2010</td>
<td>0.859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E2011</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According first of all to the analysis of indicators, the high satisfaction both of buyers and of sellers, the high possibility for sellers to improve their customer portfolio, the good variety of local businesses participating in the event and the consistency between buyer needs and seller products are all elements that reveal the effectiveness of Buy Veneto.

The only critical aspect is represented by the first category of indicators, that shows a low level of trading between sellers and buyers. However the number of sellers concluding new business orders is higher in the short-medium terms, in particular for small enterprises (the majority of Buy Veneto participants) and for some categories of businesses (for example travel agencies). In addition, even though these contracts represent only 5% of seller turnover, they generate more than 11.000.000€, on average 68.000€ for every seller.

As a consequence, in terms of efficiency, one euro spent in Buy Veneto is able to produce 23,00€ in the local tourism industry.

Secondly according to DEA, the most efficient edition is the last one, in which a remarkable reduction of the budget allocation with respect to the past editions has produced the same or even better results. As a consequence the 2011 edition is that one has minimised the use of resources, optimising performance, and it represents a best-practice for Buy Veneto future editions.

The evaluation carried out by authors have some limitations, caused by the lack of a complete information system and by the impossibility to compare Buy Veneto with other similar events organised by other DMOs. Nevertheless the results can be useful for the Veneto Region for improving effectiveness and efficiency of Buy Veneto future editions, solving the critical elements and controlling costs.

Conclusion

In order to give some clear guidelines on the best process for evaluating not only marketing activities but every type of policy and action affecting tourism and every level of intervention, the paper has first of all described the most important assessment methods used in the tourism and general public economic literature.
Secondly it has proposed a comprehensive assessment framework, that defines the approach and the procedures that DMOs should follow in the ex-ante, in-itinere and ex-post evaluation, showing the statistic-information system and the methodologies that DMOs should implement, in order to make a correct evaluation and ultimately to use resources in the most effective and efficient way.

The paper has in particular emphasised the evaluation approach, believing that the assessment of E&E is based on a cyclical process, that can not be separated from the respect of every evaluation stage – ex-ante, in-itinere, ex-post -, from a comprehensive information system and from the definition of the causal relation between effects and activity.

The advantage of this framework is first of all represented by its flexibility, in other words by the possibility to be applied to different interventions. Secondly it has the advantage of having synthesized the overall evaluation process, that can seem complex and confused, in a logic and understandable way, promoting a global and comprehensive vision that embraces the evaluation both of specific individual actions and of the overall tourism policy taken by a DMO.

Authors are conscious that the assessment framework can be improved, for example better specifying the most appropriate methodologies to be applied in each stage. However they believe that this scheme and in particular the approach they propose can represent a remarkable tool for those DMOs who want seriously assess the E&E of their activity.

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