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An Overview of Tourism Seasonality: Key Concepts and Policies

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ABSTRACT

Seasonality in tourism represents a key topic in academic literature. Since the first study of BarOn (1975) about tourism seasonality, this topic is still currently being tackled over decades by several authors, as well as by policy makers of the tourism sector.
The purpose of the study[1], rather than representing an exhaustive and complete framework of a wide field of study such as seasonality in tourism, is to explore the main characteristics of this phenomenon (causes, impacts, spatiality and temporality, measurements) and to focus the attention on policies and strategies in order to highlight how and in which ways tourism destinations can modify tourism seasonality's feature. If the rather more common perspective adopted is that seasonality presents business challenges to a destination and to individual operators, it is a crucial aim of this literature review the attempt to point out the main features of these challenges and to provide a rational framework for the tourism seasonality researches.

Keywords: tourism seasonality, tourism spatiality, seasonality measurements, tourism policy

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1. Introduction

Seasonality is "a temporal imbalance in the phenomenon of tourism, [which] may be expressed in terms of dimensions of such elements as numbers of visitors, expenditure of visitors, traffic on highways and other forms of transportation, employment, and admissions to attractions" (Butler, 1994). In Allcock's (1989) view the most significant aspect of seasonality is that involves the concentration of tourist flows in relatively short periods of the year. Seasonality is largely considered as a physiological characteristic of tourism, and it has been taken for granted as an inevitable feature of this economic sector of activities (Allcock, 1989). Notwithstanding seasonality is a phenomenon that has received much attention in the tourism related literature over several decades, yet it still remains little understood (Butler, 2001) and one of the problems in really understanding seasonality in tourism is a lack of in-depth and longitudinal research (Baum, 1999; Baum and Lundtorp, 2001).

Tourism is not the only economic activity characterised by temporal variation. Seasonal, cyclical and periodic variations are endemic to production and consumption across a wide range of economic activities (Kusnets, 1933; Bar On, 1975, Hylleberg, 1992) such as agriculture and manufacturing. Moreover, seasonality characterises aspects of human activities in many manifestations, e.g. in sports fixtures (Higham and Hinch, 2002) or recreational activity (Hartmann, 1986; Butler, 1994).

In economic terminology, seasonal variation is understood to represent the "rhythmic annual pattern" (Hirschey et al., 1993) of a particular measurement indicator such as output, sales, consumption of profitability. From this point of view, seasonality is a subset of longer term cyclical fluctuation in an economic series exhibiting change, either expansion or contraction, in the overall economy (Frechling, 2001). In statistical terms, seasonal variation is held to be distinct from irregular or random influences on economic performance (Hirschey, 1993) such as those resulting from natural disaster, wars, epidemics, political instability (Bar On, 1975). Generically, the term seasonality denotes a description for what Moore (1989, p.49) summarises as "movements in a time series during a particular time of year that recur similarly each year". Hylleberg (1992, p.4) points out not only a definition of seasonality, but also includes the main causes of this phenomenon: "seasonality is the systematic, although not necessary regular, intra-year movement caused by changes in weather, the calendar, and timing of decisions, directly or indirectly through the production and consumption decisions made by agents of the economy. These decisions are influenced by the endowments, the expectations and the preferences of the agents, and the production techniques available in the economy".

Seasonality has been considered as a crucial problem for the tourism industry and has been held responsible for creating many difficulties faced by the industry: "problems in gaining access to capital, in obtaining and holding full time staff, for low returns on investment causing subsequent high risk in

operations and for problems relating to peaking and overuse of facilities" (Butler, 2001, p.4). Conversely, it has also been blamed for the under utilization of these resources and facilities, often preventing tourism being accepted as a viable economic activity in many areas. Therefore, there have been considerable efforts made by both public and private sector to attempt to reduce seasonality in destination areas, as it has shown on the next pages.
In academic literature, seasonality is considered more as a negative problem rather than a positive aspect of tourism (Butler, 2001). Therefore, seasonality is widely seen as a problem to be overcome, or to be "tackled" at a policy, marketing and operational level. Flognfedt (2001) argues that, in certain circumstances, seasonality in demand presents opportunities to rural destinations, particularly where their economy balances tourism alongside other activities. However, in this study, it is assumed that seasonality can be a problem in terms of social and economic patterns (employment, income, efficient utilization of structures, emigration of population and deficit of social capital, quality of life, etc.) especially for those local communities which are situated in peripheral areas and where tourism represents or could play an important role in the local development model.

2. Causes of seasonality

Although the broad causes of seasonality in tourism are well known, it is often stressed that they are not well understood (Butler, 1994; 2001). Approaching seasonality means analysing the different nature of causes. In a paper on seasonality in general, Hylleberg (1992) groups the basic causes into the three different categories: weather (e.g. temperatures); calendar effects (e.g. timing of religious festivals such as Christmas); timing decisions (e.g. school vacations, industry vacations). He points out that some causes are stable over long periods, e.g., the timing of Christmas, some change at discrete intervals, e.g. vacations, some vary continuously but predictably, e.g. the timing of Easter, whilst others are unpredictable - e.g. the weather (Dallari, 1982).
Seasonality in tourism is caused by similar conditions. Several attempts to identify and classify the different causes about this characteristic of tourism can be found in the literature (Allcock, 1989; Bar On, 1975; Blas Nogueira et al, 1968; Butler, 1994; Butler and Mao, 1997; Baum, 1998; Baum and Hagen, 1999; Calantone and Johar, 1984; Grant et al., 1997; Hartmann, 1986; Markant and Adviesbureau, 1992; Mourdoukoutas, 1988; Higham and Hinch, 2002). For instance, Koenig and Bischoff (2005) present a synthesis of the main categories of causes of tourism seasonality identified by different researchers, but probably the most comprehensive and exhaustive picture of seasonality causation in tourism is reported by Goulding (2006) who summarizes a notable contribution to knowledge from many authors.
Usually, natural and "institutionalised" factors are considered as the main causes for tourism seasonality (Bar On, 1975; Hartman, 1986). Natural

seasonality relates to temporal variations in the climate during the year, in the hours of daylight and of sunshine, the variability of temperatures. In particular, the distance from the Equator impacts on natural seasonality and at high latitude destinations, especially in the Northern or Southern hemisphere, the problems caused by seasonality are most difficult to overcome (Lundtorp et al., 1999). Natural factors play an important role upon destinations based on outdoor tourism activities, such as coastal areas. While the natural seasons have been traditionally regarded as permanent features (Hartman, 1986) it is becoming clear that climate change is making these less certain and less predictable (Houghton et al., 1995; Butler and Mao, 1995; Butler, 2001). Agnew and Viner (2001) review the potential impacts of global warming for some international tourist destinations and emphasise that the trends toward warmer temperatures will have major consequences for the tourism industry, especially for regions where outdoor recreations are important (for instance, in the Mediterranean destinations).

The term "institutionalised seasonality" pertains to traditional temporal variations formed by human actions and policies, which are often enshrined in legislation (Butler, 1994). Institutional seasonality varies much more widely and with much less consistency of pattern than does its natural counterpart, although precise dates may be established for commencement and termination of such seasons, unlike the situation for natural season (Butler, 2001). Public holidays represent one of the most common forms of institutional causes, which affect tourism. They may be based on one of, or a combination of religious, cultural, social and political factors. Although public holidays were mostly single days, more recently they have expanded into weekends and breaks of longer duration, so that have increased influence in tourism business.

Between institutionalised causes of seasonality, school and industrial holidays play an important role more than public holidays on shaping tourism's features. The scheduling of school holidays during the summer was originally based on the need for children and students to assist farming in many countries, the tradition of the summer family holiday, together with the pleasant weather during the summer months, are the main reasons for the regular peaking of tourist activities during the season (Butler, 1994; Hinch and Jackson, 2000). The traditional long summer school holidays remain the largest single impediment to reducing seasonality, as Butler (1994) states in his work. Industrial holidays have also a strong influence on seasonal peaking of tourist activities, especially after the introduction of paid holidays and the closure of some industrial sectors for one week to a month during summer. This is particularly evident in countries like France and Italy where a consistent percentage of the population take to the roads during the first weekend of August. Butler and Mao (1997) argue that the ageing population may in the long term, change seasonal patterns considerably since the elderly population is less constricted in the timing of their holiday. The ageing population in North Europe, e.g. from United

Kingdom (King et al., 2000) Sweden (Gustafson, 2002) and Norway (Haag et al., 2007) is an important segment for seasonality policies in some Mediterranean areas such as Spain and Italy, in which ageing population use to stay for long period during the winter.

There are other factors causing institutionalised seasonality in tourism group in "human customs" or "social" seasonality. Butler (1994) suggests that social pressure or fashion, the sporting season and tradition/inertia are significant additional causes of seasonality. He refers to the social pressure to participate in specific activities at certain destination at particular times of the year: "In many societies the privileged elite frequently divided their year into specific "seasons" during each of which it was considered socially necessary to participate in selected activities and visit in certain locations" (Butler, 2001, p.7). These specific activities include socialising in some capitals at certain times, breaks at spas or spending the winter season at certain fashionable destinations. Examples under the heading of sports include the hunting season and those involving skiing, surfing or golf. The point about tradition and inertia is well expressed in this phrase: "many people take holidays at peak seasons because they have always done so and such habits tend to die hard" (Butler, 1994, p.333).

Butler and Mao (1997) argue that tourism seasonality involves not only temporal variance, but also a spatial component. In the contribution of Lundthorp et al. (1999) the authors point out that little research has been done into which is the more important, the desire to travel at certain times of the year or the restrictions. For instance, tourists have to be in holiday in the peak season due to the fixed school holidays of their children. Considering temporal and spatial component, causes of seasonality can be differentiated in push and pull factors (Butler and Mao, 1997; Lundtorp et al., 1999).

Push factors consist of natural (e.g., climate) and institutionalised motivations (e.g., public holidays, social pressure) that influence the generating area on the demand side; pull factors (climate, events, sporting season, etc.) represent the conditions that attract tourists and they are referred to the receiving area (destinations). The push and pull factors are dependent on one another and they interact. Physical factors and climate in the destination (receiving area) are the foundations for the "true tourism season" and institutionalised causes such as events and activities influence the number and the characteristics of tourists (Butler and Mao, 1997). In order to find new strategies and policies to tackle tourism seasonality is important to realise not only the features and causes of seasonality in destinations (supply side), but also to analyse the factors of seasonality where this phenomenon is generated (demand side).

3. Impacts

The studies on the effects of seasonality are quite spread in the literature. Wall and Yan (2003) note that the impacts have increased their relevance thanks to the growth of mass tourism. The number of enterprises depending on tourism has grown and tourism businesses have expanded in size, and thus the ability to adapt to changes in demand has been reduced. Baum and Hagen (1999) argue that impacts of seasonality depend on the location of the destination and the location of the tourism enterprise within a destination, reflecting in part the variety of physical conditions and the nature of attractions. Usually, the most specialized destinations are the most seasonal and tourist destinations supported by large urban centres due to more diversified demand, and they have a less level of seasonality. However, urban destination can be affected by relevant impacts of demand fluctuations, such as London, because, in spite of all-weather attractions and events, this city records a summer peak and a winter low, caused by high number of overseas visitors during the summer months (Murphy, 1985).

On the one hand, systematic demand fluctuations are considered as a problem, which has to be counteracting in order to reduce and to modify the effects. Lower quality standards and services in the peak months and overcrowding at beaches and airports, can be considered as social and personal costs of seasonality (Bar On, 1975). On another hand, seasonality can have advantages when an ecological and socio-cultural perspective is taken, as the off peak season provides a time to recover (Butler, 1994; Higham and Hinch, 2002). In fact, Murphy (1985) notes that seasonality is not necessarily bad for everyone, and it goes on to add that, to some communities, the end of the tourist season is regarded as the light at the end of the tunnel. Hartmann (1986) states that it would be a mistake to evaluate tourism seasonality in economic terms only, and to isolate a regional tourist services system from its social environment and its ecological base.

Seasonal effects can be grouped into three main categories: economic impacts, socio-cultural impacts and ecological impacts. Economic impact of tourism seasonality deals with problems in the off peak periods, especially the loss of profits due to the inefficient use of resources and facilities (Sutcliffe and Sinclair, 1980; Manning and Powers, 1984; William and Shaw, 1991). Murphy (1985) argues that businesses and communities need to attain sufficient revenues from a few busy weeks in the summer, in order to ensure success for the whole year. In this situation, it is difficult to attract investors or lenders from the private sector and investment from public authorities may thus prove necessary (Mathieson and Wall, 1982). In the accommodation services, the seasonal fluctuations may cause a shortage of hotel rooms in the peak season and underutilization of facilities in the off-peak season. Seasonality has an important impact on employment (Ball, 1988, 1989; Ashworth and Thomas, 1999; Baum, 1993; Flognfelt, 2001). The most important issue is the difficulty in recruiting

and retaining full-time staff (Yacoumis, 1980) and related to this, there is the difficult to maintain product and quality standards (Baum, 1999).

From another perspective, there are also positive economic effects of seasonality. For instance, maintenance work on buildings or attractions is a typical activity to do in the off-peak periods. Murphy (1985) states that up market hotels in the accommodation sector have been very successful in attaining usage efficiency, because they are open all year round for business and so that they are able to keep their highly skilled staff. On employment sector, seasonality can offer opportunities of temporary jobs to some people, such as students, artists, housewives. Mill and Morrison (1998) note that farmers that provide farmhouse accommodation during touristic season, might not only receive increased revenues, but also a higher status.

Although socio-cultural impacts include effects on both the host community and tourists, the academic literature focuses on impacts relating to the local community. During the peak period local people can suffer problems of congestion on traffic, on the access to commercial services, queues for service, and especially in significant increases in the costs of services and goods. As an effect of higher prices, the quality of life can be low (Fitzpatrick Associates, 1993). Another relevant issue linked to the higher number of people present during the peak season is the increase of crime (Mathieson and Wall, 1982). Murphy (1985) states that extra facilities and extra services are required (e.g. extra police, sanitary, health and park personnel) in order to maintain an acceptable level of local services. Usually the amount raised from the local tax base and central government grants is not sufficient, because this is calculated in relation to the resident population. Manning and Powers (1984) argue that socio-cultural impacts (e.g. crime, congestion, higher prices) place a strain on the social carrying capacity of the destination, which might result in resentment from the local community towards all tourism activities.

The relationship between host and guest has received much attention in the academic literature, especially in sociological and anthropological sciences. Doxey (1975) describes resident-visitor interactions and relationships creating the “Irritation Index”. He identifies different stages of relation that start from euphoria, apathy, irritation, until antagonism, the last level in which local communities have forgot local values, and the natural environment is destroyed. Another important model of analysis derives from Butler (1975) who states that community behaviours can be positive or negative, active or passive, or a combination between all. Considering the two models of analysis at the specific topic of seasonality, the type of relation between resident-visitor depends on many factors; it can’t be determined a priori and it is important to contextualize the analysis considering geographical and spatial dimensions of the specific area which is object of study.

Seasonality can be seen as a positive impact on local populations. For some communities “the lull before and after the storm helps to make the season

more bearable and the industry tolerable" (Murphy, 1985, p.31). Some authors (Mathieson and Wall, 1982) note that the dead season allows the community relief from stress and helps to preserve its identity, as traditional social patterns in a community are sometimes disrupted during the summer peak. Hartmann (1986, p.31) expresses a more radical position: "I would maintain that dead seasons are the only chance for a social and ecological environment to recover fully. A dormant period for the host environment is simply a necessity in order to preserve its identity". A significant suggestion made by Butler (1994) is related to the necessity to involve host communities in realizing strategies to extend the main season or to attract more visitors outside the season.

Ecological impacts are largely synonymous with negative effects occurring due to the concentration of visitors during the peak season at destinations. Between these effects are well known physical erosion of footpath and other natural resources, litter problems, disturbance of wildlife, and congestion of rural lanes. The heavy use of the natural environment during the peak season impacts on the ecological carrying capacity of a destination (Manning and Powers, 1984). Butler (1994) points out that areas with high peak usage may be in the long run better off than having the use spread more evenly throughout the year. The same point of view is shared by Hartmann (1986) who argues that the lengthy dead season is the only chance for the ecological and the social environment to recover fully.

4. Spatiality and temporality

Seasonality is a phenomenon that clearly depends on spatial and temporal dimensions. Notwithstanding, Butler (2001) states that spatiality has not been explored to any degree in the literature. In fact, urban tourist is quite different from the local tourism. While the urban tourist tends to support a more continuous operation that other location types, some authors (Butler and Mao, 1997; Butler, 2001; Dominicus 2006) note that different forms of urban setting within the same destination country can show large temporal disparities, manifesting in different problems for local and regional economies.

In some areas in which mass tourism has developed based on temporally defined leisure markets, such as Mediterranean coastal resorts, temporal polarization reinforces spatial polarization (Meanwhile et al., 2002). This reflects the fact that institutional and climatic causal constructs mean that tourist purchase access not only to particular places, but also to seasonal environments.

Spatial and temporal dimensions can be observed in peripheral areas, for instance in cold water North Atlantic margins, which are characterised by temporal issues encountered within that region through spatial remoteness, limited year round access and distinct climate patterns (Baum and Hagen, 1999). Baum and Hagen (1999) point out the role of institutional and supply-factors as constraints to temporal extension of tourist markets. In particular,

they identify labours market constraints as a barrier to extending the period of operation beyond the main season. While such issues are not necessarily correlated with spatial remoteness, they are seen to exacerbate the existing problems of managing a seasonal tourism economy in a remote location. In their research, Baum and Hagen (1999) focus on strategic policy responses that such communities, provinces and countries have developed and implemented to the challenge of seasonal fluctuations and short operating cycles. Events and festivals, market and product diversification are strategies in meeting the challenges of temporal extension of the tourism operating season.

While spatial-temporal studies may be relatively scarce, the evidence suggests that there are relationships between relative remoteness or peripherally and degrees of seasonal concentration, albeit still largely untested (Goulding, 2005). Butler and Mao (1997) demonstrate that seasonal peaking increases with distance from the "core", urban and coastal areas, although they approach the spatial-temporal relationship issue from different measurement perspectives.

5. Measurement

The ability to quantify the degree of seasonality and other seasonality-related characteristics of an observed demand pattern is an important prerequisite for much of the applied work in this area. However, relatively few authors have closely examined ways of quantifying and comparing empirical patterns (Koenig and Bischoff, 2005). Most of the research has been focused on longitudinal studies involving time series decomposition, with the modelling effort being aimed primarily at obtaining seasonally adjusted data. In general, seasonal factors are computed in the first step of the analysis and these are then compared using a variety of measures for the acuteness of the seasonal variations.

The majority of the studies have been conducted in the context of international tourism. The best well-known work is the comprehensive study by BarOn (1975), which analyses the seasonal pattern of tourist arrivals at borders for 16 different countries over a 17 year time frame. Average monthly seasonal factors are estimated using the moving average approach. Several statistic measures, such as the "Seasonal Range" (difference between highest and lowest monthly indices) the "Seasonality Ratio" (highest seasonal value divided by lowest) and the "Peak Seasonal Factor" (highest monthly seasonal factor) are then applied to compare the seasonal factors obtained. A similar approach is taken by Yacoumis (1980), and Sutcliffe and Sinclair (1980). Other examples are the studies by Drakatos (1987) and by Donatos and Zairis (1991) who derive seasonal factors for different nationalities of visitors; various statistical indexes are applied to compare the acuteness of seasonality for different regions. Wall and Yan (2003) use a classical time series approach to identify the structure, characteristics and intensity of temporal fluctuations in China's international visitor arrivals from 1980 to 1998. Seasonal variations are examined using

monthly ratios (number of visitors for each month in a year divided by the average monthly numbers of visitors for that year) along with their deviations and the "Seasonal Index". Some studies using a similar approach have been conducted at a national level (Wilton and Wirjanto, 1998).

At a sectorial level, such work has largely focused on the accommodation sector. Grainger and Judge (1996) analyse the changing patterns of seasonality in hotel arrivals in Portsmouth for the period 1987 to 1994. They stress that attempts to measure seasonality, changes in the pattern, or the causal factors involved are affected by the way in which the seasonal factors are modelled. Coenders et al. (2001) examine the effects of different characteristics of holiday hotels on the monthly price in the sun and beach segment for the Spanish continental Mediterranean coast. Several other studies have focused on hotel capacity utilisation levels and the factors, which may explain the observed variations in occupancy levels (Campbell, 1995; Jeffrey and Barden, 1999).

The boundary between forecasting approaches and quantitative models and methods aimed at analysing seasonality is not a clear-cut one. Several papers have put forward sophisticated methods for modelling tourism seasonality with the aim of improving forecasting models (Kulendran, 1996; Kulendran and King 1997; Gustavsson and Nordström, 2001; Goh and Law, 2002; Kim and Moosa, 2001; Lim and McAleer, 2003). Whilst a wide variety of approaches for measuring aspects of seasonal variations in tourism demand data are used in the literature, only a few studies make the attempt of comparing these measures regarding their merits and limitations and thus provide some guidelines for analysing seasonal variations (Koenig and Bischoff, 2005). The "Gini Coefficient", a measure that takes account of the skewness of the distribution and is less influenced by extreme values than other coefficients, is espoused by Wanhill (1980) and it has been applied by Lundtorp (2001), Rossello et al. (2003) and Candela and Castellani (2009). Lundtorp (2001, p.29) starting from the point that "the basic unit for measuring tourism seasonality is usually the number of visitors" presents a comprehensive summary of the different seasonality measures.

It seems that no general guidelines exist of how seasonality or demand fluctuations in the wider sense can and should be measured and which available data sources should be used. The resulting lack of standards in quantification methods, in turn, makes comparisons of demand fluctuations between different regions or sectors particularly difficult. The number of in-depth studies of measures of seasonality and associated conceptual models, which allow tourism managers and policy-makers to translate theory into practice, is still very limited (Koenig and Bischoff, 2005).

6. Policies and strategies

Despite widespread attempts to reduce seasonality in tourism, Bar On (1975) was forced to conclude that, in many respects, general trends suggest increasing seasonal concentration rather than the reverse. Butler (1994) points out that increased off-season visitor numbers have been swamped by the overall rapid growth of domestic and international tourist arrivals in many destinations. In fact, the seasonal range has increased in many countries with the rapid growth of tourism and tourism expansion often means an expansion of the main season.

Approaching seasonality in tourism, it is evident that this phenomenon appears a difficult problem to overcome (Butler, 1994). However, although it will never be totally eliminated (McEnniff, 1992) there are different strategies to even out the peaks and troughs (Yacoumis, 1980; Snepenger et al., 1990; Owens, 1994; Baum and Hagen, 1999). Butler (1994, p.335) states that in literature there have been few approaches to counteract seasonality, such as:

"including trying to lengthen the main season, diversifying markets, using differential pricing and tax incentives on a temporal basis, encouraging the staggering on holidays, encouraging the domestic tourism in off season, and providing off-season activities such as festivals and conferences".

Weaver and Lawton (2002, p.211-213) identify six basic supply/demand matching strategies in order to change the features and impacts of seasonality: increase demand outside peak season, reduce demand in peak season, redistribute demand, reduce supply, redistribute or restructure supply. In this study, the strategies are grouped in two main categories: policies and strategies' demand-side, and policies and strategies' supply side.

Within policies from demand-side, product and market diversification appears one of the more "traditional" strategies to attract additional visitors to destinations. Yacoumis (1980), studying the case of Sri Lanka, points out that "there seems to be a direct relationship between the product/market mix and the degree of seasonality" (p.89) and states that the wider product/market mix of an area or sector, the lower its seasonality. Product and market diversification includes strategies such as special interests markets, conference and incentives travel, festival and events. Its efficacy depends on spatial characteristics of destinations. In fact, Yacoumis (1980, p.94) referring to special interests, states "Special-interests markets will create a relatively small volume of additional demand, the positive effect of which will be felt by Colombo City and the circuits. They will not have any impact at all where it is most needed - the west and east coast beach resorts".

Baum and Hagen (1999) enrich the original concept of product/market mix by analysing market and product diversification strategies. The simplest market diversification strategy is one, and seeks to identify new demand for existing products and facilities. For example, Mediterranean beach resorts sell hotel and apartment accommodation to long-stay, generally elderly Northern European

visitors during the winter months, by advantageous pricing and reducing the range of services and attractions on offer to guests. New or alternative sources of demand can, for example, be business travellers, incentive and conference market travellers, short break holidaymakers and affinity group, as these are most able and willing to travel in the shoulder seasons (McEnniff, 1992). Baum and Hagen (1999, p.308) clarify that: "Effective market diversification into shoulder and off-season periods must be accompanied by the recognition that different seasons create demand for different products, with alternative presentation, packaging and, indeed, pricing".

Product diversification requires different products. The resort, which provides year round activity-based opportunities for a number of market segments, such as families, can be considered as an example of product diversification, especially in peripheral locations.

The most common strategy to counteract seasonality is based on events and festivals (Andersson and Getz, 2009; Baum, 1998; Baum and Hagen, 1999; Brännäs and Nordström, 2002; Getz, 1991, 1997, 2008). These can either be traditional or artificially created events, design to attract visitors in the main season (e.g. the Edinburgh Music Festival during August) or in the off peak season. In this second case, an example is the Oktoberfest in Munich, which has created a "mini-season" in its own (Allcok, 1989). Events and festivals take many forms and are of different size and duration (Getz, 1991, 1997, 2008) but what they have in common is a finite duration when the community and visitors engage in individual activities of a cultural, religious, sporting or common interest nature (Baum and Hagen, 1999). Events and festivals may have long standing tradition within the community, which are "opened up" to permit external participation or observation. Alternatively, they may be a contemporary creation, designed to meet a specific need within the community, or to respond to possible visitor demand in a particular area. Events can also be specific to a particular location and return there on annual basis (e.g. the Edinburgh Hogmanay festival) or may rotate among a number of different locations within the country (e.g. the British Open Golf Championship).

Brännäs and Nordström (2002) present an approach for evaluating the effects of festivals. Econometric models are used to examine the impact of festivals and special events on tourist accommodation. The models incorporate spare capacities, displacement effects and the costs to the visitors. It was found that the festivals analysed had a positive net effect, as average visitors stayed longer during festival periods.

Within strategies and policies that can impact on the demand side, is the attempt to stagger school holidays over a long period, such as a change in the UK from the traditional three-term year to a five-term year. Batchelor (2000) also analyses successful implementations of geographical staggering of holidays in other European countries. Strategies for spatial redistribution of demand at peak season include developing and publishing of alternative routes to holiday

destinations or the promotion of alternative transport possibilities (Fitzpatrick Associates, 1993).

The boundaries between demand and supply side strategies appear blurry. For example, the events and festivals are strategies that aim to attract demand but, at the same time, these aim to provide services and organization in supply patterns. In fact, these strategies can require increasing the number of the service and facilities, or providing new services. The diversification of product, for example the adaptation of hotel accommodation and facilities to the requirements of business tourists, is a strategy from a supply side that is strictly related to strategies for achieving demand segments (diversification of demand). The relation between demand and supply patterns is very close. A specific and common strategy to reduce supply during the off season can be the closure of part of the tourism enterprises in order to overcome the problem of underutilization of resources and facilities. As Weaver and Oppermann (2000) note, this radical measure for reducing costs is generally employed when it is not possible to increase demand outside the peak season.

The success and the efficacy of strategies and policies, have to be related to the geographical (specific spatial characteristics of location) and to the socio-economic patterns of destinations. For example, remote and peripheral areas may encounter difficulties when trying to develop an all-year season tourism product (Allcok, 1989). The reasons are well known: these can depend on physical constrains (snow, strong wind) and on rigidity in supply patterns (weak in infrastructure; lack in transport; scarce availability of accommodation services). The final suggestion that arises from these considerations is that policies and strategies need to be embodied to a specific context in which they are applied and for doing this, a deep knowledge about the patterns of destination market is required.

Conclusions

Seasonality is a “congenital” characteristic of tourism which consists of temporal and spatial variations of demand during the year that can be observed in many and different destinations of the world. Causes of seasonality depend on natural and “institutionalised” factors. Seasonality causes ecological, social and economic impacts but if it has to be considered as a problem to counteract or such as a phenomenon to accept *sic et simpliciter*, depends on the researcher’s point of view, on the specific study aims. Managers of touristic enterprises and policymakers may consider seasonality as a “disgrace”, especially when they have to tackle consequences in terms of unemployment, migration, less income, disinvestment, etc. If, for instance, the seasonality consequences can be absorbed by other sectors of socio-economic activity, they might be treated by local authorities as a non problematic issue.

The main part of academic literature deals with some key concepts, such as the explanation of causes and impacts, and measurements. Policies for seasonality

seem to be relegated as a first draft of analysis, rather than having been explored in deep. The academic contributions seem to be weak in analysing and evaluating the effects of policies and strategies. In particular, there are studies that try to explore the effects of policies, for instance in the accommodation sector, but it seems that there is a lack of longitudinal studies. Moreover, seasonality is a phenomenon that has received much attention in the past, until the last decade, but in recent years appears a secondary issue in tourism analysis, perhaps because seasonality has been implicitly absorbed in the flourishing field of events and festivals. Nevertheless, there are many areas that remain unexplored and do not fit into a theory on seasonality, but theoretical contributions which derive from empirical observations and actions that mainly can be grouped into four areas: causes, impacts, measurements and policies. On the one hand, the types of policies, the spatial variations and configurations of policies effects and the evaluations of policies and strategies appear to be investigated in a limited manner; on the other hand, they seem to be interesting areas to be explored for further contributions.

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