

ECONOMIC INTELLIGENCE:

A SPRINGBOARD FOR THE DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION OF TOURISM IN CAMEROON

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ABSTRACT

It's proven that tourism is an emergent market. Nonetheless, for some countries, conquering and maintaining important market shares is problematic. Innovation is a determining factor in ensuring competitiveness and productivity and, to the end, client satisfaction or loyalty. This brief, aims to contribute to understanding the necessity of elaborating and implementing *stricto sensu*, a tourism intelligence public policy as springboard for the development of tourism.

INTRODUCTION

The restructuring and reconfiguration of the world's functioning has given economic information a strategic importance to nation-states. Economists who study the dynamics of territories have that. Nowadays, it is pertinent to consider territories or States to be the result of the interactive process of creation and not as a point of departure ¹.

The context of economic intelligence² is simultaneously that of globalisation, inequalities and the development of an information society in an economy of international competition which demands competitiveness both at the level of nation-states and enterprises ³. This questions the validity of organisational approaches to long-term planning, suggesting the need for organisations to make contingency plans and adopt processes which incorporate flexibility and adaptability ⁴. Hence, it is imperative to redefining policies, strategies and, to some extent, models of development in order to stabilise the sector in a competitive environment.

Opening to international markets is simultaneously, promising and threatening for the tourism sector which, the majority of the countries agree, has much to offer to their social and economic development. Consequently, pertinent information can reasonably be considered as one of the most important factors to boost performance.

EXPERIENCES FROM OTHER REGIONS

The practice of economic intelligence has little or nothing to do with the size of the industry, it is amoeboid. Investigations of the Chambers of Commerce and Industry in France show that: SE and SME are often more effective than big groups on the matter, because they are imaginative, nimble, flexible, innovating and intuitive. Also, 15 to 20 % of the French companies of less than 200 people practise economic intelligence; more than one third practices surveillance or monitoring (technological, legal, commercial, competitive); and half of the SE and SME are already showing interest with these practices ⁵.

a) The experience of "Réseau de veille en tourisme de Montréal" ⁶

Initiated by the tourism chair of the Science of Management College at the University of Quebec in Montreal, the "Réseau de veille en Tourisme" (RVT) literally translated "the Tourism surveillance network" officially saw the light on the 30th of January 2004.

The RVT is a specialised body with main objectives: the continuous dissemination of targeted up to date

¹ Driss G. & Xavier R. (sous la direction de), *Intelligence économique et veille stratégique; défis et stratégies pour les économies émergentes*, Paris, 2005, pp. 86.

² According to the Martre Report, Economic intelligence is the totality of coordinated actions of research, treatment and distribution for the exploitation, of information useful to economic actors. These various actions are carried out legally with all the guarantees of protection necessary to safeguarding the patrimony of the company, under the best conditions of quality, time and cost « (from Henri M., (groupe présidé par), rapport du Commissariat au Plan consacré à « l'intelligence économique et la compétitivité des entreprises », La documentation française, 1994, pp. 11). It underscores "useful information needed by the various levels of decision of the company or the community, to work out and implement in a coherent way the strategy and the tactics necessary to the attainment of objectives defined by the company with an aim of improving its position in its competitive environment «. Its ramifications includes: knowledge management, protection of strategic information, risk management and influence.

³ Driss G. & Xavier R., op cit. pp.143.

⁴ Brooks. I., Weatherston J. & Wilkinson G., *The international business environment*, England, 2004, pp. 105.

⁵ Philippe G. (dir), *Le Guide du Routard : le guide de l'intelligence économique*, Paris, 2012, pp 153.

⁶ Réseau de veille en tourisme- <http://www.veilletourisme.ca>, Chaire de tourisme (ESG/UQAM)- <http://www.chairedetourisme.uqam.ca>



and analysed information; and know how developed both with (in/out) Canada; sensitizing the milieu on the value of strategic information in decision making; and the importance of surveillance even within their companies. Occasionally, collaborators and recognised international experts in diverse sectors of activities of tourism comment on these analyses. They bring in a prospective vision while underscoring future implications for the entire tourism industry. The fruit of their labour is published in a bi monthly electronic bulletin (le globe veilleur) which is distributed to over 12,500 subscribers.

RVT is a relatively recent and innovative project among others with a permanent team of analysts in charge, with surveillance backed by a Ministerial budget of over CND 18 million ⁷. Its notoriety is having a snow ball effect in many countries that have actually contacted the RVT for counsel on their own approach. They include:

- France through its ministry of tourism has created a virtual community of practice aimed at consolidating and maintaining their position as first touristic destination in the world
- In Morocco the tourism industry is second in order of importance. It is not surprising that the tourism development policy launched about three (3) years ago is a real social project.

b) The province of Namur economic bureau: strategic surveillance for tourism development ⁸

The province of Namur (Belgium) equipped itself

with a guiding scheme for the development of the tourism sector laying down the priority actions aimed at increasing the level of the quality of existing supply and to develop innovating domains/products that can meet the expectations of consumers/clients. Within this framework, the economic bureau/tourism department proposes to every operator of the sector, private or public, lodging operators, attractions, eventorganisers, and tourism development associations an information surveillance unit. Indeed, given the atomic nature of this sector, wherein everything evolves faster than ever, active surveillance of the environment is indispensable to enable tourism operators grab the opportunities brought with increasing diversification, innovation, partnership, implementation of new products, and a quest for new markets.

For them, it is a matter of benefiting from, and using, key information in order to anticipate the evolutions of their activities. The proposed service is not limited to the acquisition and dissemination of information for operators, it equally ensures the active management of information. The collected information oftentimes goes beyond the immediate segment of activity within which an operator is situated. Most of Namur's touristic operators' sizes do not permit them to develop information surveillance by themselves. It requires the mobilisation of means and human resources whose profits aren't immediately apparent. They are in network with Europe Direct (a European Union commission put in place for local authorities, associations and federations working in the

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⁷ Vincent R., Rapport au Premier Ministre sur l'attractivité des stations de sports d'hiver, Décembre 2006, pp. 47.

⁸ Observatoire du Tourisme Wallon, « la veille touristique », Les dossiers de l'observatoire, no 1, juin 2006, pp. 13.

tourism sector, development of patrimony, culture and events). The tools placed at the disposal of Europe Direct network enables it to widen its spectrum of investigation notably on European financing opportunities, on projects and initiatives undertaken by the commission in the said domain and partnering opportunities proposed by operators in other European countries. Presently, 38 councils and over 50 operators do freely benefit from this surveillance.

STATE OF THE ECONOMIC INTELLIGENCE (EI) PUBLIC POLICY IN CAMEROON

Diversity, in the best practices of EI, stems from every economy's objective or will, to setup, and operate a system which is well adapted to its geopolitical and geo-economical realities.

JUNIOR SAGNE shows that, economic intelligence is corollary to the globalisation of trade which tend to exacerbate competition between companies and between States⁹. He highlights that, nowadays, a determining factor for the survival of economies is the control of strategic knowledge. According to SAGNE, Cameroon's economic intelligence policy is based on structures through which EI per sector could be developed and organised. Also, he brings forth intellectual, normative and institutional references in addition to suggesting a framework for understanding Cameroon's public action on economic intelligence through its operational models.

AZEUMO STEVE WILLIAM further complements that, in the likes of Quebec, Cameroon, presents ambivalent and multicultural realities¹⁰. This characterises its economic intelligence experts that have to go through both Anglo-Saxons and Francophone cultures in matters of EI best practices. Cognizant of this; he refutes copying an

already existing model whose references will not be harmonious with Cameroonian realities.

While, insisting that 'touristic intelligence' is a willing and winning approach for public/private actors to engage in, he corroborates with the claim that, 'different actors of the sector will be in phase concerning the strategic value of information in decision making'. By this, the sector will be

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more competitive, stay informed on innovations susceptible to influencing it, reinforce its capacity to adapt and promptly react to events both at the national and international level, and putting in place mechanisms that would enable the vulgarisation of the concept¹¹.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Quality and timely market intelligence is vital for our tourism industry; to inform decision-making and investment choices, provide insight for the SMEs which make up a large part of the industry, and to measure the economic and social impact on the wider economy. The impending changes to tourism structures with emphasis on leadership and facilitation at national level, delivery and management at the local level, provides the context

⁹ Junior S., La Politique publique d'Intelligence Économique du Cameroun, Saarbrücken, 2013, pp. 102.

¹⁰ Steve W. A., l'intelligence économique Camerounaise, Paris, 2013, pp. 35.

¹¹ Ibid. pp 46 – 47.

for future delivery and coordination of research and intelligence. The resulting realignment of roles and responsibilities presents the industry with challenges and opportunities, including reassessing needs, investment, and delivery.

There is also the need for an innovation-oriented tourism policy at destination's level. The destinations must become more competitive on the national and international marketplaces. In the context of the destination, better use must be made of the possibilities offered by endogenous growth. Above all, tourism companies must make the best possible use of all the advantages of internal growth. Research and development should be a fundamental part of tourism development and promotion. As earlier mentioned, it can inform appropriate policy formulation, product development, changing consumer trends, marketing strategies and an understanding of the impacts of tourism

development and how to manage them.

Last but not the least; we have noted that innovation in tourism is an accumulation of a determined and purposeful mode of governance, effective implementation of designed policies as much as involvement and reliance on research. This brings in: innovativeness (in procedures, products and services; conception, incubation, birthing etc.), competitiveness of tourism sector (in terms of norms and standards), improved management/tourism governance (through procedures, regulations, and legislature), and the protection of peculiar products/services (through brevets, patents, copyrights etc). Everything being equal, Cameroon can enhance the performance of this sector by adopting this mode of functioning. Yet, due diligence, requires that it should be a function of/or be directly proportional to the rigor and working margins and/or resources allocated to it.

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