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WHY IMPLEMENT A CO-COUNTRY- BRANDING STRATEGY IN THE EUROPEAN MEDITERRANEAN?: ANALYSIS OF SOME OF THE MAIN BENEFITS

Mercedes Jiménez García^a

Facultad de Ciencias Económicas y Empresariales, Universidad de Cádiz
mercedes.jimenezgarcia@uca.es

Cristina María Puertas Hernández^b

ISLA Campus Lisboa, Universidad de Lisboa
cristina.hernandez@lx.isla.pt

RESUMEN

El turismo es un sector que ha ido, progresivamente, adquiriendo importancia en el seno de países como España, Francia, Italia y Grecia, los que denominaremos a efectos de esta investigación “el Mediterráneo europeo”, y en los que se ha observado una serie de características turísticas comunes como la ralentización de su crecimiento junto al incremento de la competencia. Esta situación lleva al planteamiento de una nueva estrategia de comercialización turística para este territorio, denominada Co-Country-branding, cuyo fin es la adaptación a las nuevas exigencias de un demandante de turismo multimotivacional y con acceso a una gran cantidad de información, al objeto de fomentar la competitividad de estos países tradicionalmente turísticos. Los beneficios y ventajas procedentes de la aplicación de esta mencionada estrategia son los que se tratan en este artículo entre los que se mencionan: la diferenciación frente a otros países Mediterráneos y otros destinos, la revitalización de las marcas nacionales, la penetración en mercados lejanos o la paliación de la estacionalidad turística, entre otras muchas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: turismo-marketing-Country-branding-Mediterráneo europeo.

^a Licenciada en Administración y Dirección de empresas y Doctora en Economía (mención de doctorado europeo). Máster en economía y desarrollo territorial. Ha publicado artículos en Economic Analysis Working; Estudios Turísticos o Cuadernos de Turismo, entre otras. Ha participado en numerosos Congresos, como la XIV Reunión de Economía Mundial o el XXIV Congreso Internacional de Economía Aplicada. Premios obtenidos: Premio Tartessos 2003, 1er premio de Estudios Económicos 2007 y 1er premio del II Concurs de Comunicacions Científiques & Posters (INTO IV).

^b Licenciada en Derecho y TIT en Turismo. Doctora en Lingüística Aplicada. Ha participado en numerosos Congresos como el VII Congreso Estatal de las Escuelas Oficiales de Idiomas, Facoltà di Lingua e Letterature Straniere. Dipartimento di Scienze del Linguaggi. Lost in Translation 2. L'altro (Sassari), o Jornadas Estudio da Linguagem. Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, entre otros. Experiencia como formadora de español para el turismo y los negocios. Dominio de 5 idiomas: español, portugués, holandés, inglés y alemán.

SUMMARY

Tourism is a sector that has been gradually gaining importance within countries such as Spain, France, Italy and Greece, which, for the purpose of this investigation we will call "Mediterranean Europe," and in which there have been a series of common tourist features such as slowing growth along with increased competition. This approach leads to a new tourism marketing strategy for this area, called Co-Country-Branding, designed to adapt to the new demands of a group in search of multi-motivational tourism and with access to a wealth of information in order to promote the competitiveness of these traditional tourist countries. The benefits and advantages from the implementation of the above strategy are discussed in this article, which include: the differentiation from other Mediterranean countries and other destinations, the revitalization of national brands, penetration in remote markets or alleviation of seasonal tourism, among many others.

KEYWORDS: tourism-marketing-Country-branding-the European Mediterranean.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The slowdown of growth with regard to the rate of incoming international tourism in the large traditional tourist territories in relation to the rapid increase of the same in other emerging destinations ³ is an indicator that requires a dynamic and active sector response by affected countries such as Spain, France, Italy and Greece.

Finding these four among the top tourist countries according to the ranking prepared by the World Tourism Organization (WTO 2006) - both in terms of arrivals and international tourism revenue – we focus our analysis on these territories, which we will call, as a whole, "The European Mediterranean."

In addition to the aforementioned slowdown in the rate of growth in tourism, we can also note a number of characteristics common to all of them, such as increasing competition, mainly from countries such as China, Southeast Asia or Eastern European countries, changes in tourism demand, mostly a shift to a more demanding tourism in terms of quality, concentration of tourism demand in other Member States of the European Union and in domestic tourism, compared to a reduced number of non-EU tourists, the preponderance of the type of sun and beach tourism and the subsequent seasonality of tourism, and the existence of important centers of concentration of tourism, among others.

Thus, given these observations, the Mediterranean countries of Europe should develop a strategy and implement actions to ensure they retain their competitiveness in tourism, by adapting what they offer to the requirements of demand.

In this sense, as a performance measure we propose establishing a joint Country-Branding strategy (creating the term Co-Country-Branding or CCB). This innovative strategy will be focused on promoting an attractive tourist product, of high quality, able to adapt to the needs of tourists, allowing, in turn, attracting new segments, the deepening into distant markets and a level of satisfaction that will encourage loyalty and increased spending at the destination.

Doing so, the goal is to respond to the current situation and requirements that define the tourism sector so as to facilitate to the Mediterranean countries the capacity to respond to new challenges and market changes.

By implementing the joint Country-Branding strategy in the European Mediterranean, the countries belonging to this area can achieve several advantages that will improve their current tourist situation. Throughout this article we will discuss some of the main benefits derived from it.

2 DIFFERENTIATION FROM OTHER MEDITERRANEAN COUNTRIES: SECURITY

Some authors, among which we can mention Montaria (1995) or Pechlaner (2000), use the term Mediterranean destination referring to all the countries bordering the sea in question, a total of 24 - and not just to those in the southern part of the European Union. Among the main difficulties in profiling and understanding the Mediterranean area as a global tourist destination, Pechlaner (2000, 412-413) cites differences in tourism development between countries:

"The Mediterranean region is undoubtedly one of the largest and best known destinations worldwide. However, its popularity is based on individual products belonging to the countries of this region; the different situations from which tourism parts in each of these countries constitutes a major factor with regard to the problems of global development as a homogeneous destination due to the different levels of development of market-oriented products."

This difficulty, raised by Pechlaner, will cease to exist in the case of the Co-Country-Branding strategy proposed in this study, as it is defined only for four Mediterranean countries of the EU, which have similar levels of development that will enhance, in turn, with the implementation of this strategy.

Another element that poses a significant obstacle to the tourist vision of the Mediterranean as proposed by the previous authors, and that on the other side reinforces the vision adopted throughout this research, is the existence of similarities between the touristic offer of the countries bordering the Mediterranean (due to the fact that they share similar traits as

³ The average annual growth rate from 1990 to 2005 in terms of international tourist arrivals to Europe stood at 3.45% vs. 6.55% in Asia and the Pacific and 9.78% in the Middle East (WTO 2006).

geography, climate, culture, etc.), with the difference that the emerging destinations in this area are in a position of competitive advantage, being able to offer lower prices than the traditional destinations discussed. To address this situation, the proposed Co-Country-Branding strategy reinforces other aspects in which the southern European Mediterranean countries are in an advantageous position compared to countries on the other side of the sea, using it as an element of differentiation, and of connection and similarity between them, such as the transmission of a sense of "security" to tourists.

The strengthening of this image, the perception of these four countries as a safe destination for the tourist, through a country-brand strategy will:

- Add an additional element of differentiation - enhancing one of its main distinctive features, the quality of its offer - with respect to others in the Mediterranean area with similar supply and lower prices (such as Croatia, Bulgaria, Egypt, Turkey, Tunisia and Morocco) in which the political situation, social instability or terrorism⁴ (as was the case with the Casablanca bombings in Morocco in 2003 or in Algeria, where terrorist groups directly threaten foreigners visiting the country) have a negative effect on their chances of attracting potential tourists.

Authors like Tresserras or Valls refer to this phenomenon conceptualizing tourist destinations as described below:

"In times of war, tourist destinations are divided into critical (heavily penalized for it) and shelter (picking up the tourists that are afraid to go to the affected areas)." (Valls 2005, 164)

"The European countries of the Mediterranean have become international shelter destinations due to the instability caused by conflicts in recent years (such as in the Balkans and more recently Afghanistan and Iraq), terrorist attacks and the crisis caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), which has hit both the sender and the receiver market in Southeast Asia and certain American cities." (Tresserras 2003, 157)

In short, with the integration and transmission of the element of security through the "Mediterranean Europe" country brand, its strength is in one of the possible weaknesses of competing brands, emphasizing safety and differing from other areas toward which tourists can have an attitude of "brand animosity" arising from conflicts, instability, terrorism, etc..

- Addressing the concerns of the tourist-focused elements such as quality and safety of destinations, since, although increasingly there is a stronger tendency toward the "search for the exotic," the tourist will not give up comfort and safety of travel to get it.

According to the Country Brand Index (CBI 2006), among the practical conditions (needs), that people prioritize when choosing a country to visit, in first place we find security, which has experienced a notable increase since 2005.

Along this same line of thought, writers such as Gonzalez-Soria and Moreno de la Santa (2004, 13), Capacci (2000, 21), Gilmore (1996, 10) or Smith et al. (1995), refer to the importance of the element of "security" of destinations, reinforcing the idea presented in this research about the integration of this feature in the country brand strategy.

In short, through the CCB strategy the goal is to differentiate holiday tourism, sun and beach, that the tourist can enjoy in the four Mediterranean countries studied, from the one that can be found in the other countries bordering the Mediterranean. Throughout the Mediterranean basin tourists seeking sun and sand can find a similar offer, differentiated by lower prices and the extension to the "all inclusive" concept, mainly in the countries of North Africa. Given this circumstance, the CCB strategy states that the trademark "Mediterranean Europe" emphasizes elements such as area security, political and social stability and so on, conveying a sense of tranquility to the tourist. The perception of these countries as a safe area endows them with added value, highly appreciated by tourists and important differentiator from other Mediterranean countries that offer a similar product.⁵

⁴ Referring to both terrorist acts committed directly in the destination in question and the indirect effects of terrorism; in this sense as an example we may cite: *"The effects of the attacks of September 11, 2001 were noted during the whole of 2002, especially in the early months of the year, with a significant decline in tourist arrivals in various Mediterranean countries, especially Egypt, Israel, Morocco, Tunisia and Cyprus."* (Tresserras 2003, 157)

⁵ The element "security" as a component and a notable factor in the CCB strategy not only allows the differentiation of the area under study compared to the other Mediterranean countries, but also to other emerging countries, for example, some of those in Southeast Asia, which, in addition to "sun and beach" tourism at very competitive prices, also offer other unique products, little known and appealing at relatively low prices - due to lower-cost factors of production such as labor or the price of land. -

3 DIFFERENTIATION WITH RESPECT TO OTHER DESTINATIONS: MULTIMOTIVATIONAL OFFER

Identity marks differentiation in this global market in which we are currently immersed (moving toward the homogenization of tastes, consumption patterns, etc.),⁶ and it is on this element that the practice of the Mediterranean Co-Country-Branding strategy is based.

With respect to the traditional holiday destination for tourists seeking sun and beach, the Mediterranean's main competitor is the Caribbean. Under this brand image we understand a series of destinations close to each other and very similar⁷, which use the brand "Caribbean" as a common denominator. This way, an image is created in a particular geographic area composed of different countries with a very similar offer that allows recognition and product differentiation over its competitors, facilitating the positioning and brand recall associated with certain characteristics and allowing an increase in its tourism value and competitive advantage. Through analysis of different country-brand rankings published in the CBI, we can see how the four countries associated with the EU's Mediterranean with a multiplicity and variety of features ranging from the beaches, rest and relaxation until ideal place for business. However, this wealth of supply is not identified with other brands such as Bahamas, Cuba or the Dominican Republic (members of the so called "Caribbean"), which relates to features that can be called "single-issue," referring exclusively to tourism of sun and beach holiday as: beaches, hotels and resorts, sports, outdoors, rest and relaxation. This richness in the variety and multiplicity of supply available in the European Mediterranean area (multi-motivational supply) is a fundamental element of added value and comparative advantage and competitive with these other sun and beach destinations.

One of the important elements in promoting tourism to many countries without an attractive complementary offering of non-hotel facilities, as is the case in the Caribbean, is the "all-inclusive," which is directed mainly to lower market segments to purchasing and on which Cows (2005) states that a formula is not appealing to anxious travelers and explorers, but it is for those who take advantage of hotel facilities such as families or lovers of deck chairs and beach. However, the diversification of the offer that the European Mediterranean has is an important source of differentiation that allows us to not having to focus exclusively on this kind of "all-inclusive," but also to address other market segments⁸ to which it provides a vast complementary offer, which, in addition to acting as a differentiator, will generate wealth, development of non coastal areas, extend the multiplier effect of tourism to inland regions, and so on.

Similar reasoning can be applied to the case of cruise tourism in the Caribbean, one of the main destinations with regard to the above mentioned type of tourism. According to Capacci (2000): *"Among the distinctive elements [referring to the elements of differentiation from the competition] in the case of the cruise, the elements concerning the environment are of particular importance."* (p. 9)

"The demand for Mediterranean cruises, cultural motivation is still, at least in most cases, the main element in the choice of routes, although they may present attractive elements common to other areas such as nature, landscape and living environment." (p. 12)

The same idea was presented by Drysdale and Gilmore at the Interministerial Tourism Conference of 1996, when both authors, separately, referred to the richness of the Mediterranean offer, including both coastal beauty and historic and cultural attraction. However, in the case of the Caribbean it is the ship itself that makes the difference, authentic floating hotels, compared on the basis of their "all-inclusive" offers; as this area does not have such a large number of ports of call with historical and cultural richness as the Mediterranean have, it is on the ship that the differentiation is based.

Thus, the Co-Country-Branding strategy highlights these differentiating features (variety of tourist typologies linked to unique experiences and feelings) which respond to a multi-motivational demand, making use of the area's situation and providing differentiation from other tourist areas already concentrated under a common brand like "the Caribbean", but also from

⁶ "... the main goal of any brand should be its differentiation ..." (Ollé et al. 2004, 25); to Peters (2002), those who cannot differentiate in the market will inevitably disappear. Branding has to mean credibility and make a difference, "... it's not about provide quality anymore – that is already assumed - one must take things a step further and offer something different." Words by José Luis Zoreda, compiled by Hernandez (2005) – http://www.elpais.com/articulo/economia/Vuelta/turismo/sol/playa/elpepueco/20050424elpepieco_2/Tes

⁷ The Bahamas, Barbados, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Haiti and Jamaica, among others.

⁸ The CBI (2007) mentions as leading emerging trends; adventure travel, medical tourism, semi-permanent vacation, spa and eco-tourism.

other currently emerging tourist countries that are profiling themselves as major competitors, such as China or Turkey.⁹

4 REVITALIZATION OF NATIONAL BRANDS

The CCB strategy and the name "The European Mediterranean" proposed in this research, refers to four countries - Spain, France, Italy and Greece - which currently constitute as "powerful", traditional or already consolidated trademarks in the tourism market, in the opinion of the experts involved in drafting the CBI (2007),

- * "France remains a priority in the list of destinations because of its enduring romantic image and style." (P. 5)
- * "There is an attraction and an extremely strong brand value in Italy." (P. 5)
- * "Greece has great assets as a country, but needs to be firmer in its branding efforts." (P. 6)
- * "Spain stands out because it communicates its attributes and attractiveness in a consistent and professional manner." (P. 6)

However, in this same document, CBI (2007), France and Italy are depicted as stable country-brands,¹⁰ and Greece as a country-brand in decline¹¹, we can find much more exotic destinations in the list of emerging brands¹², such as Cuba, Poland, Russia and Iceland, and among the brands in fashion Mozambique, Bulgaria, UAE (Dubai) and Montenegro¹³ are listed. Therefore, and according to Morgan et al. (2004), we require the implementation of active actioning strategies and the what the authors in question call "refreshing" of these brands to stay competitive in the market.

This is one of the objectives of the implementation of this macro-strategy for innovative branding: the revitalization of these traditional already consolidated Mediterranean brands, adapting them to the new features of today's constantly dynamic market. In this regard, Memelsdorff (1998, 75) refers:

"Today a service management based on the pure and simple sale is doomed in the short term, and is being replaced by strategies that link attraction, sales, satisfaction and customer retention."

Therefore, this new Country-branding methodology is oriented toward meeting the needs of tourists, serving different market segments and niches, through a multi-motivational offer and boosting its image toward distant markets which are a lot more accessible through the cooperation of these countries in the integration of the region and brand we call "the European Mediterranean".

This way, the creation of a strong country brand that acts as an umbrella for the individual brands of the different territories of which it is comprised, will help achieve the revitalization of the individual brands and support the same, which, in turn, entails:

- * The attraction of increased tourism demand (reflected in the number of visits), this way answering to the situation of slow growth in international tourist arrivals in the Mediterranean area.
- * Better position on global trade.

⁹ The importance of these destinations as major touristic competitors are exalted in the following documents: Barometers of the UNWTO of World Tourism: Volume 3, No. 1 January 2005 and No. 2 June 2005. And "Basic data of Tourism". 2006 Edition. WTO.

¹⁰ "The maintenance phase is typically a period of stability difficult to maintain between the phases of Emerging and Declination." (CBI 2007, 32)

¹¹ "The country brands enter this last phase when they fail to effectively promote their advantages or when their actions become unpopular or dangerous." Ibidem.

¹² "A country brand entering the emerging phase typically does so because it clarifies the essential image and begins to communicate it in order to attract attention and resonate with audiences." Ibidem.

¹³ These brand positionings within the life cycle are consistent with trends published by the WTO (2002). By region, the top three receiving regions will be Europe (717 million tourists), East Asia and the Pacific (397 million) and the Americas (282 million), followed by Africa, the Middle East and South Asia. However, taking into account the average annual growth rate of international tourist arrivals, it's the European and Americas regions, ie, the most mature regions, which are projected to fall below the world average (with rates of 3 and 3.9 percent respectively for the period 1995-2020), and while Europe continues to position itself as the region of greatest market share in tourist arrivals, it is projected to fall until 2020 by 14 percent from 1995. It is estimated that the remaining regions will grow above the world average of 4.1 percent, even reaching 7.1 per cent for the Middle East.

- * Advantages of synergies resulting from the aggregation of individual countries under a common brand.
- * The possibility to benefit from cross-selling.
- * A boost to the traditional sun and sand tourism, not so competitive in recent years. ¹⁴
- * Working in a more successful way toward meeting the needs of a new tourist typology, which profiles itself as a more dynamic tourist with a multi-motivational demand.

5 ACHIEVEMENT OF THE NATIONAL MARKETING OBJECTIVES

As in the design of a national strategy, the proposed Co-Country-Branding strategy has been configured from the observation of the changes in the tourism market and the projected trends as well as the current situation in which the European Mediterranean and each of its countries find themselves. That is why it is twofold, making it an "approximation/differentiation" strategy. In other words, through the sun and sand tourism an image of the European and Mediterranean countries as a common area is being transmitted, strengthening the image of quality these destinations already possess, while simultaneously emphasizing the characteristics of each country that makes it unique, exotic and, in other words, different from the rest.

Thus, the CCB not only allows for the obtention of benefits from synergies of collaboration (networking between destinations, exchanges of experience and know-how, ...) and the creation of a stronger brand through a joint effort by the countries, but it also contributes to reaching the individual objectives of national marketing strategies.

In this sense, the design of the CCB strategy allows for the unification of the efforts that each of the European Mediterranean countries currently carries out to achieve common goals to all of them, such as better positioning, access to distant markets ¹⁵, selling their country as "singular" and "authentic," and the promotion of their different identities, among others.

6 BRAND IMAGE AS A DESTINATION'S VRIO RESOURCE

In the field of strategic management within the context of the Theory of Resources and Capabilities (Resource-based view), we refer to the creation of the brand "Mediterranean Europe" - employing a CCB strategy – as a VRIO resource ¹⁶ of the tourist destination. In this sense, through the creation of this joint brand for Spain, France, Italy and Greece we seek:

- a) To address the new threats posed by the sector (new competitors, emerging countries with lower costs and therefore with a competitive pricing advantage) and at the same time to seize the opportunity to reach more distant market segments in which an individualistic positioning is more difficult to achieve and to adapt the image of the destination to the new requirements and incentives of tourists (multi-motivational demand).
- b) To create a new resource against that of its competitors, due to the innovative nature of this strategy and its differentiation from other forms of marketing carried out in many areas, such as destination marketing. There are various experiences with regard to places subsumed under a common brand, as is the case of "the Caribbean", a destination that does not have the same resources as the European Mediterranean, which has not carried out a Country-branding strategy, but destination marketing and therefore is almost exclusively geared to mass tourism of sun and sand, despite recent efforts to diversify its offer.
- c) To achieve a competitive advantage by making the brand a unique and inimitable resource with respect to the competition. This uniqueness finds its origin in the self-definition of the destination through the brand. Meaning that the consumer perceives the image not through the physical characteristics of the product, but through the

¹⁴ Some authors speak of the exhaustion of this offer - (Valls 2005, 165); (Borrell Merlin 2005, 308-309) - compared to others who point to a slowdown of growth typical of mature destinations or for other reasons such as the increase in residential tourism or depletion of land resources - (Planells 2006), (Iranzo collected in Caparrós 2004)

¹⁵ Coinciding, in turn, with one of the desirable objectives at European level to encourage joint tourism promotion in Europe - the increase in market share in world tourism - as stated by Porras Olalla (2002).

¹⁶ To configure a resource as a source of competitive advantage it must have four characteristics: Valuable, Rare, Inimitable and integrated into the Organization (VRIO resource) (Rodríguez et al. 1999).

experiences, values and meanings he can obtain from it. In other words, value is placed on the intangible elements of products that offer unique experiences to tourists. For example, the sensation of watching Paris from the highest point of the Eiffel Tower.

- d) The exploitation and full use of all existing tourist typologies in the four countries integrated into the brand "The European Mediterranean", because it not only values their main typology common to all of them (sun and beach), but it also emphasizes the specificities and peculiarities existent in each country. In other words, through this comprehensive brand image the entire spectrum of the offer in the area in question is covered.

Ultimately, we can say that the creation of the common brand "The European Mediterranean," employing a Co-Country-Branding strategy, constitutes a VRIO resource for the countries involved, giving them a competitive advantage in the tourism market through better positioning and differentiation (allowing them to offer "something more", an extra added value achieved through the policy of the country-brand).

7 REACTION TO THE GLOBAL TREND

Another benefit of implementing the Co-Country-Branding strategy in the European Mediterranean may be mentioned starting with the quote of a phrase by Memelsdorff (1998, 73):

"In what we call the «Western World» there increasingly exists a huge tendency toward symmetry. The democratization of technology and speed of communication make that the vast majority of products and services resemble each other more and more."

This trend toward homogenization of the global market itself, has led to the appearance of new emerging destinations with an offer of sun and beach holidays very similar to that of the European Mediterranean countries, such as Malaysia and Thailand (Southeast Asia), Croatia, Bulgaria and Turkey (Eastern Mediterranean) or Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco (North Africa):

"In addition to the European Mediterranean coasts, we should pay attention to «the other shore», especially the beaches of Morocco and Tunisia, which are also very popular, thanks to the wonderful climate and the sea." (Cutuli 2007) ¹⁷

However, it is not only in the sun and beach segment where we can see an extension of this tourism to other destinations: following Tresserras (2003, 159), nautical tourism, a market already well established in the four countries under study, "... is developing in both the Adriatic coast (Slovenia, Croatia) and North Africa (Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt)."

Therefore, this is one of the factors driving the implementation of a Co-Country-Branding strategy that enhances touristic differentiation, along with the adaptation to demand and the scope of a variety of market segments, which choice of holiday destination responds to multiple motivations and that require opting from an increasingly diversified offer.

The CCB strategy gives value to an enriched and quality offer and enhances the peculiarities of each country (in addition to the supply of sun and sand that can be found elsewhere in the world like in the Caribbean or more recently Southeast Asia), contributing to the "de-standardization" and "de-seasonality" of the touristic offer, which is complemented with alternative types of tourism such as cultural, rural, ecological, urban and congressional tourism, among others.

Thus, considering the current trend that characterizes the tourist as "multi-motivational demander" and the need for differentiation in the global market, we need to pass from a "mono-touristic offer" to the offer of an "integrated product" (a strategy of differentiation and diversification). In this sense, it is necessary to develop a country specific multi-product ¹⁸ offering to satisfy the expectations of this tourism and to attract strategic market segments (such as tourism with high incomes, young tourists and seniors ¹⁹).

In response to these market developments, the Co-Country-Branding strategy, in addition to the overall tourism product common to the four countries studied, as well as to many other destinations as seen in the preceding paragraphs, - the sun and beach – practices the branding

¹⁷ <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/turismo/9-1057-2007-06-03.html>

¹⁸ "The multi-motivational demand forces us to think in multi-product offering." (Ayala et al. 2003)

¹⁹ An ever growing market segment due to increasing life expectancy, and more accustomed to travel through the promotion of tourism in this social group by different agents, both public and private, interested in its "off season" demand as an alleviation of the seasonality of tourism.

of other unique products that are increasingly gaining importance, denoted by the number of tourists. This way, it responds to the multi-motivational demand by adding additional items to the main motivation for travelling. Some examples are:

- In Spain: sun and beach tourism constitutes the main product of its tourism. However, also gaining importance are other types that diversify the classic product and cater to other demand segments such as rural tourism (which allows the development of inland areas in comparison with the coastal tourism of sun and beach) and cultural and metropolitan tourism (since it is one of the most important countries in the world in terms of monumental heritage, counting with important historical cities).

The TURESPAÑA 2008 Operating Plan sets out a segmentation of markets to which to direct different products such as cruise and gastronomic tourism in the U.S. market, golf in the Scandinavian countries, and cultural and city tourism in distant emerging markets, among others. Among the wide range offer, we can also find much more specific products with an own brand, either for specific destinations or interregional brands like for example "Green Spain" or the touristic product "Camino de Santiago" with expectations for the Jacobean Holy Year 2010. In this case, brands have been created related to specific products that one wants to value through the granting of certain attributes that contribute to their repositioning to the ultimate consumer.

- In France, as in the case of Spain, we have identified a variety of strategic and significant tourist types from the point of view of value creation and participation in the turnover of the sector. Foremost and among others; the arts and cultural tourism, urban tourism and tourism related to leisure areas and theme parks.
- In Italy there is a preponderance of historical, urban-cultural and artistic tourism, composed by classical cities such as Rome, Florence, Milan and Venice. In addition, there is also an important religious tourism that concentrated primarily in the Vatican, a place of pilgrimage from all over the world.
- In Greece: besides the importance of sun and beach tourism, benefiting from the many islands that form part of the peninsula, also favoring cruise tourism, the country stands out because of its historical and cultural attraction, of archaeological nature specifically.

In general, Tresserras (2003, 159) records that,

"According to the WTO, the four major market segments of tourism in the Mediterranean are the sun and beach tourism, cruise tourism, nautical tourism and cultural tourism."

Within these four macro-types in the country-brand strategy, each country celebrates elements, experiences and emotions only produced in its destination. Thus, the experience of cultural tourism in Greece is different from the experience of that same type of tourism in Spain because in each case different and unique cultural aspects dominate: archaeological sites, museums, monuments, traditional festivals, cultural events²⁰ etc.

In addition to identifying the four segments put forward by Tresserras (2003), all European Mediterranean destinations have also developed other tourism products that do not enjoy such a large number of tourists but that, by contrast, cater to emerging market niches, provoking the loyalty of specific consumers. These are, for example, golf tourism, wine tourism, tourism related to parks and gardens, health or welfare tourism (Bessy 2001, 104-113) (Santassusana 2001a, 114-118), gastronomic and shopping tourism, etc.

8 DISTANT MARKETS PENETRATION

The majority of tourists visiting the Mediterranean can be classified as community or domestic tourists (WTO 2007).²¹ The sales and marketing strategies at EU level and that of each of the individual European Mediterranean countries are in line with this observation, identifying common goals, including the achievement of a greater promotion in distant markets.

²⁰ With regard to cultural events, Tresserras (2003, 159) mentions them as one of the "... strategies followed by the Mediterranean cities to position themselves in the international market." By way of example, this author mentions in Greece: Athens as host of the 2004 Summer Olympics; in Italy and France: Genoa and Lille as European Capital of Culture 2004 and finally in Spain: the Universal Forum of Cultures 2004 in Barcelona.

²¹ Identified in the Spanish Tourism Plan 2020. Phase I (p. 46) as "new untapped emerging demand from the BRIC countries (China, India, Brazil, Russia) and Eastern Europe."

In turn, this is one of the main objectives in the approach of the joint Country-branding strategy, in order to, through this single framework of action, integrate the efforts realized by the individual countries, all serving the same purpose, thus obtaining the advantages of collaboration and cooperation, as repeatedly proposed in the different European documents on tourism.

Authors like Apostolopoulos et al. (2000) already referred to the importance of the tourist's perception of quality, price, destination image, security, etc., when making their choice, especially with regard to long-haul tourists - those from countries like the USA, Canada, Australia, Japan ... -. All of these are aspects valued and strategically addressed through the CCB strategy, benefiting all tourist types, including cruise tourism because:

"The Mediterranean cruise market addresses an almost entirely European demand, formed by customers who mostly come from Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands and Switzerland" (Capacci 2000, 13)

Thus, through the proper implementation of the proposed Co-Country-Branding strategy, we would strengthen the brand image of individual countries and would, in parallel, create a joint image of the area so as to facilitate penetration or growth in distant markets (which tourists, up until now, have only made a small number of visits to Mediterranean Europe). The benefits of this action do not only focus on attracting different segments, therewith increasing market share - quantitative growth - but also on access to markets that make the greatest tourist spending when they travel abroad (tourists from Nordic countries, the U.S. and China ²² are among those with the highest average daily spending while traveling) - qualitative growth -.

In the specific case of China, according to estimates by the WTO, in 2020 China will be the main source of tourists in the world. The study "Chinese Outbound Tourism" (WTO, 2003) notes the following groups of Chinese tourists wishing to visit Europe:

1. Intellectuals who are familiar with the European culture.
2. Rich people who already know Southeast Asia and the Pacific and now want to travel to more distant destinations.
3. Savers who want to fulfill their dream of a trip to Europe.
4. Young people influenced by western science, technology and fashion.

We do therefore detect the importance of the implementation of this strategy (CCB) to especially attract the Chinese tourism ahead of competing countries to gain an adequate position representing a competitive advantage in a market with such growth potential. In addition, the European Mediterranean is in a strong position to achieve this end because, according to TURESPAÑA (2007, 15), the most attractive European destinations for Chinese tourists are primarily France and Italy, and immediately after those we would find Spain along with other parts of Europe. Following the same source, *"travel agents report that Greece is positioning itself well and competes with Spain."*

Action has already been taken in the EU framework to attract tourists from this country, such as the EU/China Agreement on the status of approved tourist destination, signed on February 12th 2004 and implemented from September 1st of that same year. This agreement allows Chinese tourists to travel in groups to European countries member of the Schengen Area.

9 REVITALIZATION OF TRADITIONAL SUN AND BEACH TOURISM

Another benefit presumably achievable by the use of a CCB strategy in the European Mediterranean, is the revitalization of the offer of sun and sand tourism in the countries in question, which, in the opinion of some authors like Caparrós (2004) or Valls (2005), has shown signs of exhaustion or slowing growth. The WTO also makes mention of this fact:

"The lifecycle of tourism products [referring to the sun and beach tourism] in the Caribbean and Hawaii (for tourists from North America), the Mediterranean Sea (for European travelers), and Guam and Hawaii (for Japanese tourists) are reaching a stage of maturity or saturation." (WTO 2002, 71)

²² Chinese tourists are currently one of the biggest spenders when they go abroad, because for now those who can afford to travel outside the country are those belonging to the upper classes (Hosteltur 2007). *"The European Commission Delegation in Beijing puts the spending of a stay of 10 nights between 800 and 3000 euros, with an average of between 1400 and 1500 euros."* (TURESPAÑA 2007, 7).

It is interesting to analyze how the WTO highlights the maturity or saturation, with respect to the European market, of the sun and beach tourism in the Mediterranean. Therefore, the Co-Country-Branding strategy raised regarding this tourist typology is intended primarily to distant markets - through its joint sale -. Moreover, to enable this "repotentialization" of the holiday offer, we must associate additional experiences promoted by a wide range of complementary offers and variety of activities that attract the different interests of each market segment, as indicated by Ayala et al. (2003).

Ultimately, the CCB increases the added value of traditional products (sun and sand) that is reinforced by its complementarity with alternative products that allow the satisfaction of the requirements of demand. This "improvement" or "restructuring" of the sun and sand offer is seen as a country response to the changes and transformations in the tourism market in recent years in which there is a new demand profile where the tourist is interested in, motivated by and cares about values like environmental quality, multiplicity of activities (products that combine health tourism with sports, etc.) or emotions and experiences of the holiday.²³

In addition, this strategy also favors both the de-standardization of the holiday offer -linked only to certain benefits that consumers could obtain from this type of travel such as relaxation, rest, activities and water sports, etc. – and the differentiation with respect to other similar offers of highly attractive coastal countries – the Caribbean or emerging countries such as Croatia, Tunisia, Egypt, etc. -.

10 THE “UNBIASED” USE OF THE BRAND "THE EUROPEAN MEDITERRANEAN"

Today, the brand "Mediterranean" is used by tour operators and travel agents in the sale of so-called "tourist packages" and cruise tourism, mainly. This use, more like an advertising slogan than as a formally constituted brand, implies:

- ▶ On the one hand, the recognition of the area, this because today's tourist associates the idea of "Mediterranean" with countries like Italy or Greece, although the association also implicates emerging and touristically attractive North African countries, because the travel agencies and tour operators also promote touristic packages to these destinations or cruises with stops at the same, under this "Mediterranean" denomination. Pechlaner (2000, 413) refers to this situation:
*"... Currently the Mediterranean region is not being publicized as a product evenly set. Items only at destinations such as cruise tourism, contribute significantly to the popularity of the Mediterranean region."*²⁴
- ▶ On the other hand, today, when one thinks of the Mediterranean one thinks of the tourist typologies that are offered under this label, in other words, it is traditionally identified with the sun and beach tourism, and lately also with cruise and package tourism, despite of the rich spectrum of varieties available in the different tourist countries bordering the Mediterranean.

Thus, by creating the brand image "The European Mediterranean" using Co-Country-Branding and referring exclusively to Spain, France, Italy and Greece, a distinction with the offer of northern Africa is made, and the diversity of tourism in these four countries is encompassed, this way avoiding conveying a "biased" image, as happens at present (when associating the Mediterranean brand only with certain types of touristic typologies such as the sun and beach or cruise tourism).

The implementation of this integrating country brand strategy is important in order to avoid deepening the identification of the Mediterranean with sun and beach or cruise tourism and mass tourism packages, this because once this association has been established, more efforts will be required at all levels - economic, marketing, institutional, etc. - to change this limited perception and adapt it to the reality of the offer.

²³ According to Ayala et al. (2003), the major trends in tourism demand are, in the opinion of many authors: 1. Increased participation in programs, including trips for other activities (sports, courses, environment trips...). 2. Increased liaison with cultural tourism to achieve an improvement in training. 3. More demanding requirements with respect to sensations: both from the standpoint of active participation and in the consideration of the developed tourism model (overcrowding and environmental friendliness), etc.

²⁴ In the opinion of this author, the "Mediterranean region" is composed of all the countries bordering the sea in question.

11 ALLEVIATION OF TOURIST SEASONALITY

The alleviation of the seasonality of Mediterranean tourism, concentrated mostly in the summer months because of the mass tourism of sun and sand, can be mentioned as another advantage attributable to the implementation of the CCB strategy that arises in this research. Moreover, at Community level, the "de-seasonalization" of tourist flows is one of the action lines referred to by the Economic and Social Council.

The diversity of the European Mediterranean tourist types, valued through the CCB, deconcentrates the population overload produced in the Mediterranean coastal areas toward rural areas (rural, health and sports tourism) (Santanusana 2001, 114-118), historic towns (archaeological or cultural tourism), relevant shopping or meeting points (congress and incentive tourism, nautical, skiing and mountain tourism), etc., which can be enjoyed in any season.

Thus, it promotes tourism outside the high season, with all the benefits that entails, such as greater job stability or reducing the environmental impact, contributing to a more sustainable development.²⁵

In addition, we can currently see a tendency toward market diversification and recent changes in the motivations of tourists when making their journey, with an increase in demand with regard to travel for religious or health reasons, archaeological tourism, etc. This demand is benefiting from the division of holidays, which causes a greater amount of travel throughout the year but for shorter durations, and contributes to touristic de-seasonalization.

It is the wide range of choice of the European Mediterranean proposal which seeks to respond to this trend, especially in order to satisfy new market segments or segments whose interests have changed in the immediate environment (European countries) during the short periods they enjoy in relation with work and school holidays or four day weekends, etc. The latter in addition to capturing the interest of the distant markets that will be attracted to these tourist typologies with the idea of enjoying them for a longer period of stay.

Ultimately, the Co-Country-Branding strategy responds to the observed trends because tourists demand the satisfaction of multi-motivational interests during their trip, which, as discussed above, are increasingly enjoyed "off-season".

The countries of which the brand "The European Mediterranean" is composed can also benefit from this in order to try to alleviate the seasonal tourism through a holiday image transmission toward seasons other than the summer (complementary to the classic product diversification strategy), like the individual strategy carried out by the Maison de la France, called "*Printemps littoral*" (coastline spring).

This strategy is aimed at those market segments whose purchasing power does not allow them to enjoy a sun and beach tourism in high season, referring to, for example, much of the population of countries in Central and Eastern Europe (where the average income of workers is still below European standards) or the idea of social tourism, which affects the social strata of modest means, such as the elderly (a growing segment due to changes in the demographic structure and, therefore, presenting an opportunity to carry out a proper "capturing strategy" of this population in order to lead them to devote their time to tourism in other months of the year out of high season).

According to the report: A "partnership" to promote social tourism in the European Union (2005, 7):

"Right now it is already a fact that a significant number of pensioners in Northern Europe are moving south in the autumn and winter."

In addition to promoting the alleviation of seasonality, the CCB strategy would also be a beneficial strategy to the overall of tourist activity within the European Union as "... *intra-European tourism contributes to the knowledge of European cultures and heritages, reinforcing the feelings of common identity and common destiny among EU citizens.*"²⁶

²⁵ An extensively discussed idea at the International Conference on Sustainable Tourism in the Mediterranean and the participation of civil society, held in Barcelona in 1998.

²⁶ Draft Report of the European Parliament on the new prospects and new challenges for sustainable European tourism (2004/2229 / (INI)) (p. 3).

12 ATTENTION TO DEMAND: THE EXPERIENTIAL CONSUMPTION

Country-branding is the marketing strategy that best fits the characteristics of today's consumers as they, when choosing their travel destination, are strongly driven by motivational elements, by sensation seeking, unique experiences, and so on, which can be called an experiential consumption, as well as individualized and personalized.

As reported by Valdez Munos et al. (1997), understanding of consumer behavior is the key to the design and implementation of marketing plans. These elements form the basis of the CCB strategy, contrary to destination marketing, currently "obsolete" or "maladjusted" to the characteristics of today's market. In this respect, mention may be made of the statement made by Kotler et al. (2004, 42):

"Most countries images are stereotypes, extreme simplifications of reality that are not necessarily accurate."

The Co-Country-Branding strategy tries to remove the stereotypical image of the four Mediterranean European discussed and to value other tourist types and attributes linked to them, therewith meeting the current demands of the consumer of tourism.

In this sense, Spain, Greece, France and Italy possess many touristic advantages (good weather, the quality of the beaches, the variety of complementary services to traditional tourism, their position as member countries of the EU and the Euro Zone, benefiting from the use of the single currency and a situation of stability and security in the country, etc.) that should be highlighted in their Country-branding strategy, relating them to intangible experiences and elements, providing identity to each zone and influencing the attractiveness of the destination in question to the tourist.

This way, we enable the adaptation of the touristic offering to different market segments consisting of tourists with different attitudes and motivations and the strengthening or improvement of the positioning of these countries.

13 CONTRIBUTION TO THE EUROPEAN REGIONAL CONVERGENCE OBJECTIVE

The tourism sector, like other sectors, is embedded in the functioning of the economic entity, perhaps even more broadly for its strong cross-cutting character.²⁷ Therefore, the important multiplier effect of tourism implies that the effects in this area extensively affect the whole economy (Sinclair 1998) (Goeldner et al. 2005) (Vanhove 2005). Some authors mention these relationships²⁸:

"One of the most recent experiences of a country brand – Malaysia - (with the slogan Malaysia truly Asia), has allowed the Asian country to sell an image of innovation and quality in its products, and additionally to sell the country as a tourist destination and place of investment under the same brand and image." C. Mercado & P. Bernal (2007, p. 10)

"The idea of a country brand is not merely a marketing wrapper, but a value proposition that changes perception and preference, drives usage and increases the economic interests of the country." (CBI 2006: 39)

In this sense, the proper formulation and implementation of the Co-Country-Branding strategy will affect benefits beyond the tourism sector, affecting the entire region's economy through job creation, regional development, the drive of growth of other economic sectors such as construction or distribution, revenue intake that contributes to GDP and Balance of Payments, etc.

²⁷ UNWTO General Assembly in Sofia (1995), letter of tourism and tourist code: "Recognizing the importance of tourism in the life of the people for its direct and positive impact on the social, economic, cultural and educational sectors of national societies..."

²⁸ However, we can also see the benefits of a country-brand strategy beyond the tourist scope. An example is provided by Casado (2006, 8) in different statements: *"If the assessments are positive for the country of origin this may lead to a favorable perception of the brands of products manufactured in that country."* *"Developing the image of a country can provide a significant and sustainable competitive advantage for products or services of national brands with international ambitions."* *"Companies can benefit from a country brand that gives them a positive global framework to enable them to obtain higher benefits from competitiveness for their products or services. It is therefore considered that a brand associated with certain specific attributes will add something to each product or service exported without compromising its personality or characteristics. For example, France glamour, Italy sensuality, Germany quality, Brazil joy, Japan technological innovation, etc.."*

Furthermore, the strategy raised also results beneficial for the growth and development of other areas away from the coastal areas of the countries in question (traditionally benefited from the income from sun and beach tourism), and that of large inland urban centers attractive to tourism. Thus, the CCB will contribute to the diversification of rural areas, the revival of declining industrial areas, the development of cultural heritage of towns and cities, and so on. These areas, traditionally less benefited from tourism, create value through the touristic typologies complementary to the holiday tourism, many of them tending to develop in inland areas (rural, sports and food and wine tourism ...) and even in areas up until now unattractive touristically but valued due to certain circumstances attractive to tourism (construction of golf courses, amusement or theme parks, etc.).

Ultimately, one of the objectives to be achieved is what can be called "rebalancing" or a better distribution of income from tourism throughout the country, integrating into the global strategy, inland territories and regions which traditionally play a "secondary role" when compared to the coastal areas or major urban centers.

Furthermore, this overall objective coincides with one of the goals outlined in the national tourism strategies of the European Mediterranean countries. To this respect, Molina (2008), for example, highlights with regard to the Spanish case that:

"... 90.6% of foreign tourist arrival is concentrated in only six Autonomous Communities: Catalonia, Valencia, Madrid, the Balearic Islands, the Canary Islands and Andalusia (...) therefore the 2020 project studies the creation of 'touristic packages' that serve to attract tourists to other more unexploited destinations making use of oenology (La Rioja), gastronomy (Granada) or architecture (Toledo)."

From a community standpoint, through the implementation of the strategy of CCB, Spain, France, Italy and Greece will benefit from the advantages of cooperation (financing, knowledge sharing, synergies, etc.) between countries, entities and agents in different areas, creating a strong brand that will contribute to extending the benefits of tourism more evenly between regions, promoting the goal of European regional convergence.

In terms of cohesion policy within the EU, there are numerous structural funds which pursue convergence and economic integration between its regions. Forming part of the European Regional Policy, we can highlight the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Cohesion Fund.

The ERDF is the only one with intervention capacity in tourism. According to Regulation (EC) No. 1080/2006²⁹, in order to reach the goal of convergence, we quote from paragraph 6 of Article 4:

"tourism, including promotion of natural assets as potential for the development of sustainable tourism; protection and enhancement of natural heritage in support of socio-economic development; aid to improve the supply of tourism services through new higher added-value services and to encourage new, more sustainable patterns of tourism..."

Continuing in the context of European Regional Policy, during the period 2000-2006, the most disadvantaged regions were called "regions of Objective 1," and corresponded to the regions whose GDP per capita (pc) was less than 75 percent of the EU average, the regions in Finland and Sweden with very low population density (less than 8 inhabitants per km²), and the outermost regions (French overseas departments, the Canary Islands, Azores and Madeira).

The regions classified as Objective 1 in this period (2000-2006) for the geographical area under study were (Annex I):

- Greece: Anatoliki Makedonia, Thraki, Kentriki Makedonia, Dytiki Makedonia, Thessalia, Ipeiros, Ionia Nisia, Dytiki Ellada, Sterea Ellada, Peloponnisos, Attiki, Voreio Aigaio, Notio Aigaio, Kriti (ie the Greek territory in its entirety).
- Spain: Galicia, Asturias, Castilla y León, Castilla-La Mancha, Extremadura, Valencia, Andalusia, Murcia, Ceuta and Melilla, the Canary Islands.
- France: Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyane, Reunion.
- Italy: Campania, Puglia, Basilicata, Calabria, Sicily, Sardinia.

There are also other regions benefiting from the so-called "transitional assistance"³⁰ -regions considered Objective 1 in the previous period (1994-1999) but not from 2000 – in order to avoid possible negative consequences of a sudden withdrawal of EU funds . These regions in the European Mediterranean are:

- Spain: Cantabria.
- France: Corsica and the districts of Valenciennes, Douai and Avesnes.

²⁹ DO n° L 210, 31.7.2006. p.0001.

³⁰ Commission Decision of 1 July 1999

- Italy: Molise.

Performing an analysis of GDP pc for each of the four countries of the European Mediterranean, according to Eurostat, in 2004 the regions that had the highest and lowest GDP pc were, respectively (Annex I):

- Spain: Madrid - Extremadura.
- France: Île de France - Guyana.
- Italy: Lombardy - Calabria.
- Greece: Athens - Dytiki Ellada.

When making a comparison between the main tourist regions of these Mediterranean countries and their regions with highest or lowest GDP pc (Objective 1), we can say that there is a remarkable dichotomy in this relationship:

- On the one hand, the region with the highest GDP pc in each of the four countries under study (Madrid in Spain, Île de France in France, Lombardy in Italy and Athens in Greece) is among the main areas of tourist concentration of their respective countries.
- On the other hand, other regions also framed in a category of importance taking into account the parameter tourism, are found in the list of Objective 1 regions in the European Union. This is the case for example of Andalusia in Spain, Campania in Italy and the Peloponnesus in Greece.
- However, none of the regions of lowest GDP pc (Extremadura in Spain, Guyana in France, Calabria in Italy and Dytiki Ellada in Greece), classified as Objective 1 regions, are among the top tourist destinations in their respective countries.

Ultimately, from the above observations and considering that tourism is a sector with an important dynamic and economic multiplier effect, encouraging the development and structuring of territories; the implementation of a Co-Country-Branding strategy in the European Mediterranean will contribute:

- * To draw new segments to the main tourist areas, mainly from more distant markets, which have a higher spending level during their travels, thus contributing to the maintenance of these regions as centers of tourist concentration as well as that of regions with higher GDP pc.
- * To strengthen the tourism in those regions that already are touristic but have an Objective 1 rating in the EU. These regions are mostly areas where tourism has consisted primarily of mass sun and sand tourism following the concept of tourist destination marketing. Thus, through the Co-Country-branding strategy, we propose the development from other areas of these regions, less developed as tourist destinations (such as historic towns of the interior with a rich artistic heritage, the mountain to practice sports or for the realization of a rural tourism, etc.) creating value through a wide variety of offer differentiated from the sun and sea tourism (congress tourism, ecotourism, rural tourism, food and wine tourism, etc.). Therewith, the population pressure on the Mediterranean coast could be reduced, spreading part of the tourism in question to other areas and tourist typologies, encouraging thus, the development of these territories and their infrastructures, communications, the improvement of the economy and the generation of wealth and jobs and, ultimately, contributing to economic recovery, growth and development of the region as a whole.
- * To attract tourists to the regions identified as Objective 1 but not considered tourist regions (integrated in this category both coastal regions - the Italian region of Calabria or the Greek region of Dytiki Ellada - and landlocked regions - the region of Extremadura in Spain -) and where an encouragement of this sector through a strategy of CCB would lead to the activation and revitalization of its economy, promoting capital flows and interactions within and outside the territory as well as with other sectors.

Ultimately, these actions will contribute to a more equitable distribution of tourism income throughout the country and to an approximation to the goals of European convergence, increasing GDP pc from tourism and helping the Objective 1 regions to lose that qualification. Moreover, the diversification and development of these areas thanks to tourism would permit the redirection of possible EU funds they receive for this objective (ERDF, ESF, Cohesion Fund, ...) to other projects or territories and enable the transformation of the areas in question to providers of funds rather than beneficiaries thereof, generating not only a direct positive impact on these countries and localities but also on the whole Community.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the promotion of regional development, benefiting from income and a multiplier effect produced by the tourism sector, is an idea that has already been

proposed by various authors (Calderón 2005, 21), as well as within the EU ³¹ and in numerous international meetings (Med Forum, 1998). However, this research introduces a new component, the use of tourism in achieving the goal of community convergence between regions, using a Co-Country-Branding strategy as the instrument of choice.

14 CONCLUSIONS

The concurrence of a number of common tourism elements shared by France, Spain, Italy and Greece characterizes them as traditionally touristic but mature countries in this sector which require active and dynamic action strategies to meet the new challenges of the tourism market like globalization, increased competition due to the rise of emerging countries, changes in fashion, tastes and demands of consumers, etc.

In the face of this situation, we propose the implementation of a Co-Country-Branding strategy. That is, individually these countries, leaders in tourism in Europe, apply marketing strategies called Country-branding strategies, focused on the multi-motivational characteristics of the consumer. Throughout this paper we have proposed a strategy of collaboration between these countries that form a homogeneous clearly identified area, which has been called "The Mediterranean Europe." Through the implementation of this strategy, numerous advantages and benefits would be obtained that would alleviate, improve or prevent some of the touristic drawbacks and limitations to which Spain, France, Italy and Greece are currently subject. Some of the key benefits mentioned include:

1. The differentiation from other Mediterranean countries, through increased tourism development and an offer characterized by security for the visitor.
2. The differentiation from other destinations, thanks to a high quality multi-motivational offer.
3. The revitalization of national brands, already mature within the tourism sector.
4. The attainment of national marketing objectives: better positioning, attracting distant markets, etc.
5. The use of the brand as a strategic asset (VRIO resource), increasing the values associated with the destination.
6. The brand as an element of differentiation and response to the trend of touristic homogenization boosted by globalization.
7. Penetration of more distant markets thanks to the wider reach of the macro-brand and the transmitted image.
8. The revitalization of the traditional Mediterranean sun and beach tourism, already mature, associating it with new experiences and the possibility of complementing it with other typologies of tourism.
9. The use of the trademark "Mediterranean Europe" which integrates the wide range of the Mediterranean touristic offer.
10. Alleviation of seasonal tourism offering attractive tourist typologies in non-summer seasons, promoting off-season holiday tourism and addressing strategic market segments.
11. Adapting to the needs of touristic demand, offering an experiential consumption of the touristic product by using a marketing strategy based on motivations, feelings and unique experiences.
12. The contribution to the achievement of the objective of European regional convergence, through the promotion of tourism in regions and localities with lower levels of GDP.

Taking all the above into account, it is clear there are many benefits and positive effects to be attained with the implementation of the innovative Co-Country-Branding strategy for tourism in the European Mediterranean countries. Therefore we urge all stakeholders involved in tourism and, above all, the decision-makers to act before it's too late. Given the fact that we have already observed the first signs of exhaustion of the touristic model and marketing strategy in these traditional European Mediterranean countries, we cannot stand by waiting for the rapid increase of competition to gradually take away market share and finally the position of major tourist countries that we hold today.

³¹ DO n° C 317, 06.11.2000. p. 0040-0046 (p. 41).

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