



Pescatourism, a sustainable tourist experience



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ABSTRACT

Pescatourism is a relatively new development in sustainable tourism, becoming established in the early 1990s in Italy. It consists of a day trip on a fishing boat with local fishermen who take tourists on board. Tourists take part in fishing operations by casting and pulling in the nets and performing other tasks, such as eating freshly caught fish cooked on board and visiting fishing villages. In the last two decades, Pescatourism has involved an increasing numbers of tourists, attracting the attention of other European countries, and succeeded in creating potential from coastal areas, embracing the fishing industry in the strict sense, and more generally the landscape, culture and local economic activities. Such potential is able to attract tourists and generate income through a process of more sustainable exploitation of local resources. This study represents the first scientific contribution that analyzes the satisfaction of pescatourists. A sample of 105 pescatourists was surveyed with a structured questionnaire in Sardinia, an Italian island in the central Mediterranean. Based on attribute based customer satisfaction measurement technique, results suggest that pescatourists are highly satisfied about this touristic experience. The greatest part of the interviewees (82%) assigned the maximum score to the global satisfaction. *Demonstration of fishing* (activities carried out linked to fishing); *land excursion* (activities carried out not linked to fishing); *traditional recipes used to prepare the fish for lunch* (food experience) are the most significant attributes in shaping overall satisfaction level. Intrinsic service attributes, such as *vessel characteristics*, result not statistically significant.

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1. Introduction

Excessive pressures of tourism on coastal locations could lead to conflict between different economic activities operating in the same area. In this context, the natural ecosystem may be subject to degradation, caused not only by the infrastructure built to accommodate tourists, but also by the increase in the number of residents in the bathing season (Holder, 1988; Shaalan, 2005; Battilani, 2007; Fortuny et al., 2008). The need for more sustainable coastal tourism has been reaffirmed recently by the European Commission, who stressed that new forms of coastal tourism not closely related to demand for 3S (Sun, Sea and Sand) should be encouraged. The need for lower environmental impact of coastal tourism arises from the role it plays in Europe. Among the various activities of the blue economy, it is the most important in terms of turnover and people employed. According to the European Commission, more

sustainable recreational activities should be supported such as visits to protected areas, tasting of typical products, and interaction with the local culture (European Commission, 2012).

One such activity, called Pescatourism, arose in Italy in 1992. It may be considered a new way to preserve natural resources whilst giving artisanal fishermen extra income. The Pescatourism experience usually consists of a day trip on a fishing boat, with local fishermen who take tourists on board. The latter take part in the fishing operations by casting and pulling in the nets and performing other tasks, such as eating fish "just caught" and cooked on board according to traditional recipes, visiting fishermen's villages and experiencing a day in the life of an artisanal fisherman. Through this touristic activity, could be created the conditions for a common vision among tourists and local people. The latter have a greater incentive to conserve the environment they live in: in terms of environmental, economic and social goods, defending them from the negative impacts that may result from the development of tourism. Tourists, on the other side, have the opportunity to learn about places and culture of an area, directly participating in an activity, such as traditional fishing practiced by Mediterranean

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coastal societies. Additionally the Cultural Routes Program,¹ aimed at preserving the diversity of European culture and heritage, suggests the importance of Pescaturism (Khovanova-Rubicondo, 2011). The strategies of heritage management are changing to incorporate new elements, which could help local communities to draw more obvious benefits from their cultural legacy while preserving and maintaining its uniqueness. Creating a new culture in tourists helps them to be more respectful of the environment, of the natural and cultural heritage and of local traditions. For this reason Pescaturism, which has grown substantially over the last two decades in Italy, is now viewed with increasing interest in other Mediterranean countries. It is a blend of fishing and tourism that gives visitors the chance to learn more about an economic and cultural activity at risk of extinction, while reducing the impact of fishing on the environment and increasing the income of artisanal fishermen.

This paper analyzes the reasons for the increasing success of this new form of tourism, through a customer satisfaction measurement on a sample of 105 tourists interviewed just off the boat at the end of the recreational experience. The interviews were conducted in the summer of 2012 on the Italian island of Sardinia, where this form of tourism commonly occurs.

The customer satisfaction technique used in this paper was proposed by Cicia et al. (2010). This method is an extension of MUSA (Multicriteria Satisfaction Analysis) based on administering a questionnaire, which explores the consumer's satisfaction with the service as a whole and with its specific characteristics hierarchically structured (Siskos and Grigoroudis, 2002). Compared to the original MUSA, the referred model used in this study, analyzes the data through three econometric models rather than mathematical programming. The first econometric model tests the consistency of the answers given by the interviewees, while the other two identify service characteristics that most influence customer satisfaction.

2. Pescaturism a sustainable form of coastal tourism

Pescaturism is a tourist experience following more or less a standard format: a day trip, half-day trip or night trip on a fishing boat with local artisanal fishermen. It can differ in terms of the place visited, dishes served for lunch (sometimes no lunch is offered) and, of course, price. In general, the possible leisure activities offered during the trip are:

- a) casting and pulling in the net. During these activities fishermen involve tourists, explaining traditional fishing techniques to them (only traditional methods are allowed), describing the different fish species caught, and illustrating the ecosystem in the specific fishing areas;
- b) lunch prepared on board by cooking fish just caught according to local recipes;
- c) swimming or scuba-diving in the open sea or close to beaches that can usually be reached only by boat;
- d) visiting characteristic fishing villages or sites of historical-natural interest.

Pescaturism is a very different leisure activity from fishing tourism where tourists are first of all anglers and their main interest is in active fishing (Ditton et al., 2002; Pawson et al., 2008). Lloret et al. (2008a) have shown that fishing tourism in the

Mediterranean areas generates competition, giving rise in some cases to discontent between tourists and artisanal fishermen. The impact of this activity on littoral resources is not negligible. The authors estimate that fishing tourism amounts to 40% of the fish stocks extracted annually by artisanal fishing (Lloret et al., 2008b) while the economic impact of this activity on the local coastal community is quite limited (Font and Lloret, 2011). Pescaturism, on the contrary, is geared to such tourists willing to learn about the culture of the place that they are visiting. At the same time, this kind of tourist recreation can increase the income of local artisanal fishermen whilst respecting and preserving the environment. Indeed, during the experience in question, fishermen use traditional fishing techniques, resulting in a lower catch which is just enough for the preparation of lunch on board.

Pescaturism was officially approved by the Italian Ministry of Merchant Marine in June 1992 (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 1992). A well-defined legal framework, within which anglers can operate, is fundamental to the development of this form of sustainable tourism (Grigoli, 2000). Indeed, in most countries, primarily for safety reasons, no one except for the crew is allowed to board fishing vessels (Pawson et al., 2008).

Under Italian law, Pescaturism can be practiced by fishing vessels weighing less than 10 tons with a maximum of 12 tourists per trip. In other words Pescaturism is an activity involving small-scale fishing. It can be carried out throughout the year subject to some limitations: for example, it can be done during the winter (November 1 to April 30) if the boat is equipped with removable covers, allowing tourists to find shelter under adverse weather conditions. If the fishing boat is provided with appropriate facilities, Pescaturism can also be done at night.

In 1997, five years after the enactment of the Ministerial Decree, there were 144 vessels engaged in Pescaturism in Italy, mostly concentrated in three regions: Tuscany, Sardinia and Liguria (Mamone et al., 1998). By 2011 according to Lega Pesca, the largest Italian fishing cooperative, the number of vessels involved had risen to 700, generating a turnover of 35 million Euro from about 500,000 trips, concentrated almost exclusively in the summer months (July and August). The average market price of an excursion is about 70 Euros, with prices varying from 20 to 90 Euro depending on the services offered (Lega Pesca, 2011). Italian fishermen participating in the fishing cooperatives are predominantly involved in the practice. Indeed, major drivers behind this form of tourism have been the Associations of Italian Fishing Cooperatives, that have strongly urged their members to invest in this new activity, seen as an important source of supplementary income, which at the same time reduces the fishing effort, protects the marine environment and enhances the culture of the fishermen.

Bellia (2011) using the traditional economic-social-environmental triangle of sustainability (Kleine and Von Hauff, 2009) suggests this form of tourism is sustainable for several reasons. First, a day of Pescaturism is able to generate a higher profit with just 20% of standard catches, hence far fewer fish caught compared to the normal fishing day (*Environmental Sustainability*). Secondly, it creates additional income for artisanal fishermen through a tourist product (*Economic Sustainability*). Thirdly, it raises awareness and recognition of the profession; it develops and promotes the heritage and tradition that artisanal fishing and its history and techniques represent in the area; it puts fishermen at the heart of efforts to preserve fish stocks and maintain an economic activity that without tourism would likely go extinct (*Social Sustainability*).

In the Mediterranean Sea, overexploited marine resources and ecosystems due to overfishing constitute a major problem (Severini, 2013). In addition, the sharp reduction in available prey is also reducing the marine megafauna such as dolphins (Piroddi

¹ The Cultural Routes program was launched by the Council of Europe in 1987. Its objective was to demonstrate, by means of a journey through space and time, how the heritage of the different countries and cultures of Europe contributes to a shared cultural heritage (Khovanova-Rubicondo, 2012).

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