

Eran Ketter / Yoel Mansfeld / Eli Avraham

# The role of marketing in tourism planning: Overplay, underplay or interplay?

## Abstract

Marketing has a key role in tourism planning. Yet, the tourism planning literature offers a range of roles that marketing should take, extending from a secondary planning component to a leading factor that guides the entire planning process. To understand better the relative role of marketing in tourism planning, an exploratory study was conducted, looking at the interplay between tourism marketing and tourism planning in the context of regional planning. Using a quantitative content analysis of regional tourism master plans, this study aims to unveil the exact role of marketing in the tourism planning process. The study's empirical results indicate that marketing plays a dynamic role in tourism planning, and that the specific contribution of marketing to tourism planning changes with the region's level of development and planning needs. Based on these findings, a tentative theoretical model is proposed, portraying the dynamic relations between tourism performance and the level of marketing integration in tourism planning. This model replaces a prevailing theoretical notion, treating the role of marketing in tourism planning as a static, 'one-size-fits-all' process.

**Key words:** tourism planning; tourism marketing; regional planning; responsive planning; dynamic planning

## Introduction

International tourism is one of the largest economic sectors in the world, and is estimated to grow every year by more than 4% (UNWTO, 2014). The global growth of international tourism in the last decades has led to two evident phenomena. The first is the growing competitive environment in which this industry operates (Avraham & Ketter, 2016), and the second is the growing need for tailor-made tourism products designed to meet the needs and expectations of tourists from different market segments (Murphy, 2013). These two trends should have brought tourism marketing much closer to the heart of tourism planning practices. However, a detailed inspection of the tourism planning literature reveals a broad range of perspectives regarding the role of marketing in tourism planning and the exact interplay between tourism marketing and planning. In order to clarify this ambiguity the current study aims to explore to what extent marketing considerations have indeed been introduced into regional tourism planning, to what extent they have been playing a key role in planning processes, and at what stage they were introduced to assure compatibility between market needs, product design and tourism development. These questions form the basis for an exploratory study that conducts a quantitative content analysis of regional tourism master plans, and investigates the role of marketing in regional tourism planning.

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**Eran Ketter**, PhD, Kinneret College on the Sea of Galilee, Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Jordan Valley, Israel;  
E-mail: [ek@eketter.com](mailto:ek@eketter.com)

**Yoel Mansfeld**, PhD, University of Haifa, Department of Geography & Environmental Studies, Haifa, Israel;  
E-mail: [myoel@univ.haifa.ac.il](mailto:myoel@univ.haifa.ac.il)

**Eli Avraham**, PhD, University of Haifa, Department of Communication, Haifa, Israel;  
E-mail: [eavraham@com.haifa.ac.il](mailto:eavraham@com.haifa.ac.il)

## Literature review

The current research sets to explore the role of marketing in regional tourism planning. Consequently, the literature review will overview the themes of tourism planning and its spatial levels, the role of marketing according to the tourism planning literature, and the role of marketing according the tourism marketing planning approach.

### Tourism planning and its spatial dimensions

Tourism planning is a comprehensive process involving the place's characteristics, development strategy, competitive advantages, resources, tourism performance, stakeholders' interests, target markets, competitors, sustainable development considerations, and other external and internal factors (Inskeep, 1991; Cooper & Hall, 2008). According to Hall (2008), the need for systematic planning to guide tourism development stems from the complexity of the development process, and from the aspiration to limit damages incurred from careless expansion of tourist spaces. Consequently, the rapid pace of tourism development, the commercialization of the tourism industry, and the involvement of various stakeholders, all require systematic and well-organized planning procedures (Lew, 2014).

The tourism planning process may relate to three major spatial levels: destination, region and country (Gunn & Var, 2002; Hall, 2008). Regional planning is an 'offspring' of the macro-national system, and the level of regional planning is the most common and is regarded as the most efficient planning unit (Hall & Page, 2014). According to Ndivo, Waudu and Waswa, (2013), numerous attempts have been made to define a region yet a satisfactory definition has not been formulated. However, an accepted working definition regards tourist regions as priori regions which have existing boundaries, which are part of a geographical region, have internal interaction and can be packed and marked as a unified tourism product.

There are several key advantages to tourism planning at the regional level: The first - regional planning is more attentive to local needs, and has the potential to redistribute tourism and its benefits in more equitable ways throughout the region. The second - regional planning allows better integration of the community and the private sector within the planning process (Marzuki & Hay, 2013). The third advantage is the importance of regional information for tourism decision-making as national level information may not apply to the specific needs of each region. The fourth and last advantage - resulting from differences in stakeholders' views, regional tourism goals and vision - may differ from those based on a national perspective (Inskeep, 1991).

Another important spatial distinction is made between developed and developing nations. In recent decades, a growing number of countries from the developing world have joined the global tourism arena (Marzuki & Hay, 2013). For developing destinations, which are slowly joining in, tourism holds a 'magic potential' in regional development, creating new commercial and industrial enterprises, stimulating demand for local goods and providing a market for agricultural products (Ndivo et al., 2013). While most countries aim to maximize tourism benefits, tourism planning processes differ among countries of various development levels. This dynamic planning process is influenced by national contexts of politics, economy, society, technology, and ecology, and by regional issues such as local identity, community, tradition, class and/or race (Reid, 2003). As a consequence, tourism planning and development should be assessed differently when comparing regions of variable levels of development.

## Tourism planning and the role of marketing

Gunn and Var (2002) list four key stages in the tourism planning process. In the first stage, representatives of the public, private and the not-for-profit sectors set goals to produce a balance between economic, social, ecological and other interests. Subsequently, conducting an in-depth analysis of local and regional tourism resources, includes natural and cultural resources, tourism infrastructure, the tourism market and the target audiences. In the third stage, several planning alternatives are designed, examined and evaluated in pursuit of the optimal development solution. This solution is expected to set a balance between the initial development goals, set in the first stage, with the tourism resources identified in the second stage. The final stage involves a preparation of a detailed tourism development plan, specifying the selected development strategy and guidelines for implementation.

The role of marketing in tourism planning stretches along between two poles. On one end of the continuum is physically-driven planning, focusing on the physical and functional aspects of tourism regions, and downplays the role of marketing to a level of a secondary component (Gunn & Var, 2002; Mason, 2008; Mill & Morrison, 2012). On the other end of the continuum is market-driven planning, putting the market environments in the focal point of the planning process (Cox & Wray, 2011). Anything between those poles is a regional tourism planning process that accommodates marketing aspects with the physical and functional ones, in a way that is supposedly balanced and initiates the desired interplay between physically-driven planning and market-driven planning.

The physically and functionally-driven development approach is illustrated by Mill and Morrison (2012), who suggest that the development of tourism destinations should include five major elements: attractions, facilities, infrastructure, transportation and hospitality. The choice of these elements emphasizes the physical aspects of the development, laying a foundation to host the anticipated tourists and visitors. A slightly more balanced view is offered by Gunn and Var (2002), who argue that the tourism supply system contains five major components: attractions, services, transportation, information and promotion. According to their view, the physical aspects are concentrated into three components, and two more elements are included. These additional elements relate to communicating with the tourists, either before they arrive - via marketing, or during their stay - through information. A further balanced viewpoint is presented by Mason (2008), stating that the tourism planning and development environment includes six major components: three physical components - attractions, services and transportation, and three additional components - the local community, the tourist market and information and promotion. In comparison with previous perspectives, this approach adds the factors of host population and culture, and the tourist market.

Having screened the different levels of marketing integration along a physically and functionally-driven development approach, two patterns can be identified. The first is that the basic components that are repeated in all the different approaches are the physical elements of attractions, services (facilities) and transportation. This demonstrates the key role of internal physical development in tourism. The second observable pattern is that the components are presented in a rather balanced manner, placing equal emphasis on each element. The various components thus work together, without pointing to one dominant factor that may lead the development process. In combining these two patterns, tourism development stresses physical development, and fails to attribute greater importance to marketing, in spite of the ability of tourism marketing to better guide development that enhances competitiveness, stimulate demand, increases value and boosts revenues (e.g., Kotler & Armstrong, 2010; Kozak & Baloglu, 2010). These patterns correspond to the claim made by Murphy and Murphy (2004) that the tourism planning process works in three hierarchical environments: the internal environment, the

task environment and the general environment. This approach models an 'inside-out' perspective, in which the destination and tourism products come first, and the audience and market come at later stages. Thus, tourism planning and development are proactive, shelving 'prefabricated' tourist products for the consumer to choose.

## Tourism marketing planning

Marketing is the organization's activity to identify the needs of selected market segments, create products and services to satisfy those needs, generate awareness of the destination and its products and promote consumption (Pender & Sharpley, 2005). Marketing can therefore be regarded as a comprehensive process that accompanies the destination throughout the different stages of value creation. As noted in the introduction of this paper, the global tourism industry is highly dynamic, easily influenced by changing trends, and faces fierce competition due to a growing number of destinations and constant expansion of the global tourism supply system (Middleton & Clarke, 2012). In this highly competitive arena, tourism marketing is an essential tool to attract tourists and visitors, maintain and increase market share and enhance the destination's competitive advantage (Cox & Wray, 2011). The major goal of tourism marketing is to successfully position the destination in an environment with a constantly growing supply and competition. Other important objectives include promoting the destination and its tourism products; attracting tourists and visitors; and communicating the destination's unique image and identity (Kozak & Baloglu, 2010; Avraham & Ketter, 2016).

According to Cooper and Hall (2008), strategic tourism marketing provides the destination with a common structure and focus, with the customer at its heart. Similarly, Middleton and Clarke (2012) noted that strategic tourism marketing offers a direction, a business framework and a competitive strategy for the destination's development and management. According to these points of view, strategic tourism marketing represents a holistic, comprehensive, competitively-oriented, dynamic and ongoing process for managing a destination. The transition from tourism marketing to strategic tourism marketing reflects the growing importance of the marketing paradigm in the field of tourism, its crucial impact on destination management and its contribution to the development of a long-term competitive advantage (Avraham & Ketter, 2016). In the regional tourism context, Cox and Wray (2011) note that successful marketing of tourism regions require destination stakeholders to foster a cooperative and strategic approach. This approach should be integrated vertically into all levels of the planning and development, starting in the planning process and continuing through the various management tasks taken by the region (Fyall & Garrod, 2004). These multiple roles may have led Kozak and Baloglu (2010) to state that: "Strategic approach and marketing planning are a necessity rather than an option" (p. 13) and, hence, should be regarded as an uncompromised imperative.

Although strategic marketing should play a prime role in destination management, tourism marketing is often over-simplified, ignoring the factors of destination-choice and consumer behavior (Anholt, 2007). Many destinations follow this pattern and tend to focus on marketing communications, and overlook more profound layers of strategic marketing (Avraham & Ketter, 2013). According to Avraham and Ketter (2008), focusing on superficial marketing and neglecting the strategic aspects of it can adversely affect marketing and the destination's success.

In order to establish a competitive advantage already at the planning phase, enhance the tourist experience and maximize value, destinations must incorporate marketing research tools (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010; Murphy, 2013). Marketing research is the systematic and objective identification, collection and analysis of information for improving decision-making related to the identification and

solution of problems and opportunities in marketing (Malhotra & Birks, 2000). Tourism marketing research examines the interests and needs of key markets; identifies market segments whose interests would match the destination's image and offerings; and develops tourism products and services to meet the audiences' expectations and provide a satisfactory experience (Murphy, 2013). By researching these variables, destinations can assess whether they can fulfill their mission, in terms of resources and capabilities and generate critical insights for tourism planning and development (Tribe, 2005).

The above overview of the tourism planning and the tourism marketing literature acknowledges the role of tourism marketing in tourism planning. However, the literature reflects on two different perspectives regarding this role: product-based planning and marketing-based planning. The first treats the marketing component as one-of-many planning factors, taking it into consideration alongside other planning variables. The second, on the other hand, places marketing planning at the heart of the planning process, tailoring tourism products and services to meet the observed needs and expectations of selected market segments. The remaining question, though, is how the gap between physically-driven planning and market-driven planning takes place in practice. This paper aims to explore this gap with an exploratory study of regional tourism plans.

## Research design

The tension between product-based planning and marketing-based planning is investigated through an exploratory study of regional tourism master plans. The leading research question is: *What is the relative role of marketing in tourism planning?* which examines the interplay between the two theoretical perspectives presented above, and attempts to shed light on the relative role of marketing. Is it underplayed, overplayed or rather equally played? The study underlines three main hypotheses; the first hypothesis (H1) refers to the relationship described in the theoretical section between a country's level of development and the relative role of marketing in tourism planning. It is argued that there is a significant relationship between a country's level of development and the level of marketing integration in the inspected tourism plans. Thus, the higher the country's rank on the Human Development Index, the higher the levels of marketing engagement in planning will it perform. This hypothesis is based on Gunn and Var (2002), who suggested that some of the factors that affect tourism planning processes are the prevailing level of infrastructure, availability of resources and overall level of development.

The second hypothesis (H2) suggests that experience in operating a tourism destination increases the perceived importance of tourism marketing and its relative role in tourism planning. Consequently, it is suggested that a country's tourism performance indicators (tourist arrivals, tourism receipts and the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index) will correlate positively with the level of marketing engagement in planning. This hypothesis is based on the wide-ranging social, cultural and other influences of tourism on host communities (Murphy, 2013).

The third hypothesis (H3) looks at the temporal dimension of tourism planning and the consequences of growing competition over time (UNWTO, 2014). It is suggested that the year in which the tourism plan was published correlates with the level of marketing engagement in planning, so that newer tourism plans will lay more emphasis on marketing. This hypothesis is based on studies showing the growing engagement of marketing in the planning process (e.g., Li & Petrick, 2008; Cox & Wray, 2011).

## Research tools and variables

In order to examine the above research hypotheses, the following variables were used:

- a. **A code-sheet score** - The level of integration of marketing into tourism planning was measured using a code-sheet. The code-sheet score was obtained by summing up the plan's score for each item on the code-sheet, excluding six items that were used to analyze the plan's characteristics. This left 26 items ranked on a quasi-interval scale of five levels. Accordingly, the total possible code-sheet score was in the range 0-104. In addition to the total score, the analysis also related to the different parts of the code-sheet, and to the accumulated score in each of them: *planning framework*, relating to fundamental tourism planning constructs; *planning-related studies*, relating to marketing-analysis tools; and *marketing tools*, relating to tourism marketing variables. The code-sheet's constructs and items are further detailed in the 'research methods' section below.
- b. **Human development index (HDI)** - Indicating the level of development of the countries included in this study. The HDI is a comparative measure of life expectancy, literacy, level of education and standards of living for countries worldwide, and is used to distinguish between developed, developing and under-developed countries (UNDP, 2010).
- c. **Tourism performance indicators** - The level of tourism performance in this study was measured using three main variables:
  1. **Tourist arrivals** - The most common variable used to quantify the number of arrivals in any given destination country from non-residents travelling to that destination, and staying overnight (UNWTO, 2011).
  2. **Tourism receipts** - International tourism receipts are the receipts earned (in USD) by a destination country from inbound tourism (UNWTO, 2011).
  3. **Travel & tourism competitiveness index (TTCI)** - The TTCI aims to measure the drivers of travel and tourism competitiveness, and the factors and policies that make a destination attractive to tourism development. The overall index is composed of 14 variables of travel and tourism classified into three sub-indexes: (1) regulatory framework; (2) business environment and infrastructure; and (3) human, cultural, and natural resources (World Economic Forum, 2009).
- d. **Year of publication of the tourism plan** - The year of publication of each plan was taken from the plan's cover or, if not available, from the plan's technical data. The sampling in the current study was restricted to plans published in the years 2000-2010.

## Method and case selection

In pursuit of empirical evidence of the level of integration of marketing in tourism planning, the study analyzed regional tourism master plans from around the world. As an exploratory study, the empirical corpus included 40 regional tourism master plans from 24 countries in seven different global geographical regions; Table 1 presents the list of tourism plans used in this study. The case selection was based on two principles: Firstly, that the large variety of geographical locations helps to establish the study's external validity and generalization capability. Secondly, the differences between the characteristics of various countries are used to gain deeper understanding and to further increase internal validity. Since some of the research variables are related to the countries' level of development, half of the cases were selected from countries with a high Gross National Income per Capita (over \$10,000 a year), and the other half were obtained from countries with a medium and low Gross National Income per Capita

(less than \$10,000 a year), in accordance with World Bank criteria and data (World Bank, 2008). The plans were collected through an online search for official planning documents in the websites of selected tourism regions, based on the two selection criteria detailed above. Being an exploratory study and due to availability constraints, the study's results may not fully represent the complete situation in the field. However, the wide-range of cases provide indicative results which allow some preliminary insights into this issue.

Table 1  
List of tourism plans

No.	Country	Region	Year	No.	Country	Region	Year
1	Australia	Victoria	2009	21	Egypt	South Sinai	2008
2	Australia	Kakadu	2009	22	South Africa	Umzimkhulu	2008
3	Australia	North Coast	2004	23	South Africa	Koukamma	2008
4	Canada	St. Albert	2007	24	South Africa	Khomani San	2010
5	Canada	Northwest Territories	2006	25	Chile	Cantillana	2008
6	Canada	Newfoundland	2006	26	Argentina	Jujuy	2006
7	USA	Juniata River Valley	2003	27	Peru	Ayabaca	2010
8	USA	Hickory	2006	28	Armenia	Jermuk	2008
9	Poland	Babia Gora	2008	29	Albania	Kukes	2010
10	Ireland	Shanon	2008	30	India	Chadigarh	2003
11	Bosnia	Jahorina	2006	31	India	Haryana	2003
12	UK	Durham	2009	32	India	Valley of Flowers	2005
13	UK	Isle of Wight	2005	33	Tanzania	Zanzibar and Pembe	2003
14	UK	East Midlands	2003	34	Uganda	Kabarole District	2006
15	Croatia	Karlovac and Lika-Senj	2007	35	Uganda	Kasese District	2006
16	Israel	Golan Heights	2001	36	Democratic Republic of Congo	Virunga Massif	2005
17	Israel	Fassouta	2002	37	Namibia	Bwabwata, Mudumu and Mamili	2009
18	Israel	Eshkol Region	2006	38	Belize	Hopkins	2010
19	New Zealand	Coromandel	2004	39	El Salvador	Jiquilisco	2004
20	New Zealand	Nelson Tasman	2007	40	El Salvador	Conchagua	2006

## Research methods

Krippendorff (1980) defines quantitative content analysis as a research technique for making replicable and valid references from data to their contexts. The quantitative content analysis tool used in this study is based on a code-sheet. The choice of this tool was based on the presumption that a tourism plan is a text that different people can interpret in a similar manner, and that can be translated into quantitative data. Although coding may cause a certain loss of data, it also makes it possible to aggregate separate data units into a single variable and to increase the impact of the analysis (Blumberg, Cooper & Schindler, 2008).

The objective of the code-sheet in the reported study was to provide a reliable and valid quantitative tool for examining the relative role of marketing in tourism planning. The code-sheet was based on a preliminary pilot study of several tourism plans and the literature review (e.g., Cooper & Hall, 2008; Murphy, 2013). The code-sheet included a total of 32 variables, divided into four different segments:

1. **Plan characteristics** - six variables were used to analyze the characteristics of the tourism plans: year of publication; country of origin; geographical location (continent); the type of plan; language; and number of pages.

2. **Planning framework** - six variables were used to examine the use of key planning tools: vision; goals; sustainability; attractions; transportation; and services.
3. **Planning-related studies** - the code-sheet examined the use of six analytical tools: product analysis; image analysis; competitors' analysis; market analysis; audience segmentation analysis; and audience behavior analysis.
4. **Marketing tools** - The assessment of marketing tools used in the tourism plans was conducted according to 14 variables: product planning; destination marketing organization; distribution; online distribution; pricing strategy; pricing tactics; marketing techniques; marketing channels; public relation tools; Internet tools; campaign tools; information tools; information services; and brand tools.

All the variables in the *planning framework*, *planning-related studies* and *marketing tools* use a quasi-interval scale of five levels. A code book was designed to define the scale for each variable, ranging from 'no use at all' to 'high level of use'. In order to ensure the code sheet's reliability, a pre-test was conducted using Krippendorff's  $\alpha$  - a reliability coefficient developed to measure the agreement between coders in content analysis (Krippendorff, 2007). The pilot resulted in Krippendorff's alpha  $\alpha=0.81$ , which represents an acceptable level of inter-coder reliability (Klenke, 2008).

## Findings and discussion

The current study analyzed 40 regional tourism development plans for the years 2001-2010 (M=2006.3; Sd=2.42). The plans were taken from 24 countries in different continents: eight plans from Europe; eight plans from Sub-Saharan Africa; six plans from Central and South America; five plans from North America; five plans from the Pacific Rim; four plans from Middle East; and four plans from Asia. In order to examine the research hypotheses, a linear simple regression using the explanatory variables above was conducted, and its results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2  
Key correlations within the research hypothesis

Hypothesis	Independent variable	Dependent variable	Correlation (r)
H1	HDI	Code-sheet total	0.09
H2	Tourist arrivals	Code-sheet total	0.33**
		Code-sheet marketing	0.48*
	Tourism receipts	Code-sheet total	0.41**
		Code-sheet marketing	0.57*
	TTCI	Code-sheet total	0.34**
	Tourist overnights	Code-sheet total	0.71*
No. of hotel rooms	Code-sheet total	0.39**	
	Code-sheet marketing	0.41**	
H3	Year	Code-sheet total	0.21

\*p<0.01

\*\*p<0.05

As indicated in Table 1, the key findings of the quantitative analysis support the hypothesis claiming a positive correlation between the country's tourism performance indicators and the level of integration of marketing into the tourism plans. In particular, the independent variables of tourism performance correlated positively with the code sheet components of *marketing tools*. Thus, **tourist arrivals** were correlated with planning a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) (r=0.41, p<0.05), pricing



tactics ( $r=0.32$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), marketing techniques ( $r=0.47$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), campaign tools ( $r=0.49$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and branding tools ( $r=0.38$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). **Tourism receipts** correlated positively with the planning of a DMO ( $r=0.47$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), distribution channels ( $r=0.34$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), pricing tactics ( $r=0.33$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), marketing techniques ( $r=0.46$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), campaign tools ( $r=0.48$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and branding tools ( $r=0.43$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Likewise, **tourist overnights** were positively correlated with the planning of distribution channels ( $r=0.56$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), pricing tactics ( $r=0.61$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), marketing techniques ( $r=0.52$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), campaign tools ( $r=0.66$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and branding tools ( $r=0.69$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Hence, having a developed tourism industry with more tourist arrivals, tourism receipts and tourist overnights correlated with the use of marketing tools in tourism planning, such as the planning and development of DMOs, distribution channels, information services, online marketing, pricing tactics, marketing techniques, public relation tools, campaign tools and branding tools.

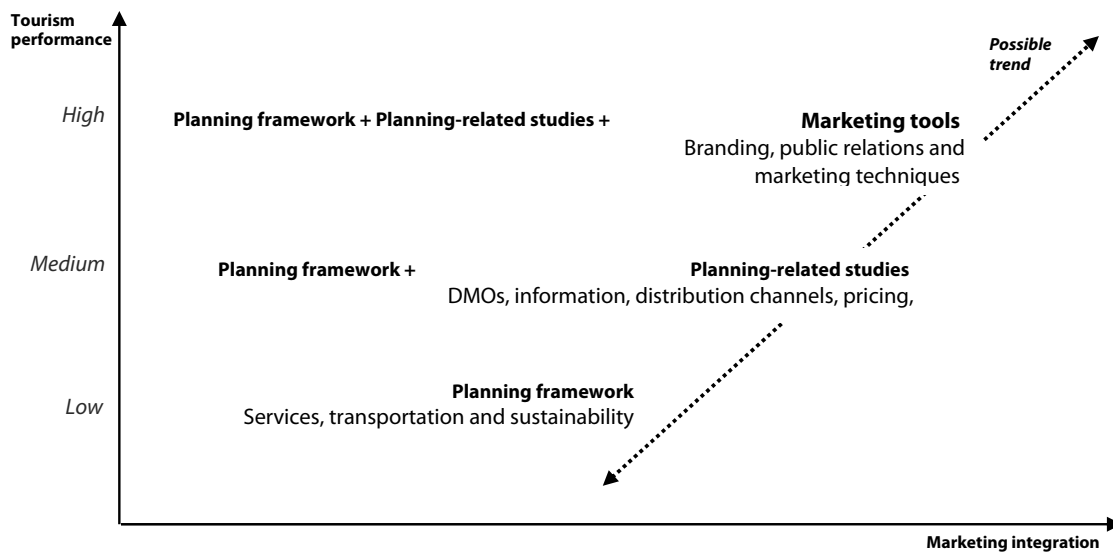
A second key finding is that the use of *planning frameworks* correlates negatively with the level of the country's development. More specifically, it was found that the country's HDI rank negatively correlated with the planning components of: sustainability ( $r=-0.35$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), transportation ( $r=-0.35$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and tourism services ( $r=-0.39$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Consequently, as tourism regions develop - improving their development level and their tourism performance indicators - the use of *planning frameworks* decreases, and the use of *marketing tools* increases.

Unlike these significant correlations, some of the research hypotheses were not supported by the empirical data. The first hypothesis to be rejected focused on the possible correlation between the country's rank on the Human Development Index (HDI) and the tourism plan's code-sheet score. One possible reason for the absence of a significant correlation between the two is that some developing countries with a low HDI rank have a prosperous tourism industry, which results in high tourism performance indicators and a high level of tourism planning. To illustrate this point, while the HDI rank of Egypt is only 0.62, the country has a highly-developed tourism industry that attracted over 9 million tourists in 2013 (UNWTO, 2014). A second hypothesis to be refuted examined the correlation between the year in which the tourism plan was published and the level of marketing integration. One possible explanation for the absence of significant correlation in this case is that not all regions respond in the same manner to global changes in the planning culture. Acknowledging these differences, some regions quickly adopt changes, while others have been taking a slower pace.

## Discussion

Looking back at the fundamental research question of the current study, the research findings provide an answer regarding the relative role of marketing in tourism planning. The study's empirical results suggest that marketing plays a dynamic role in tourism planning. For destinations with relatively low tourism performance, marketing tends to focus on the *planning framework*, contributing to the fundamental aspects of infrastructure planning and supporting physical development. For destinations with relatively high tourism performance, marketing tends to focus on the *marketing tools* components and their direct use to attract tourists and visitors. Thus, marketing as a planning component appears across all the examined plans. However, its relative role and specific contribution to those plans vary according to the region's tourism performance and planning needs. These findings suggest that there are dynamic relations between marketing and planning, mediated by the level of the region's tourism development. As tourism performance indicators increase, the focus of the marketing components within tourism planning shifts from the *planning framework* to *marketing tools*. This proposed format of relations is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1  
The dynamic relations between tourism performance and level of marketing integration in regional tourism plans



The suggested interrelations presented in Figure 1 describe tourism marketing planning as the interaction between tourism performance and the level of marketing integration in tourism planning. The trend line in this figure demonstrates that the role of marketing within the tourism planning process tends to change as tourism performance increases or decreases. Hence, causal relations exist between regions' tourism performance and the level of use of the three groups of marketing components - as tourism performance increases, the level and focus of tourism marketing planning shifts. In this process, earlier marketing functions are still maintained, but in a less dominant manner. On the other hand, in situations where tourism performance decreases (following a tourism crisis or enhanced competition, for example), the level of marketing integration decreases, and there is a shift in focus on the tourism marketing components. Such regions may set aside the *marketing tool* components, and revert their focus to *planning-related studies* and *planning frameworks*, in order to redesign a high quality, attractive and competitive tourism product.

The dynamic integrated role of marketing in tourism planning, as portrayed in Figure 1, stems from the actual empirical findings and can also be linked to the tourism planning literature. When compared with previous research findings, the outcomes of this study goes in two directions. On the one hand, portraying tourism marketing planning as a dynamic and responsive process challenges the existing work of many scholars, describing marketing as a 'one-size-fits-all' process and as a secondary planning component (i.e., Inskip, 1991; Gunn & Var, 2002; Mason, 2008; Mill & Morrison, 2012). On the other hand, the research findings goes hand in hand with scholars who portray tourism marketing as a dynamic and responsive process that has a major impact on the tourism planning process. For example, Avraham and Ketter (2008, 2016) highlight the importance of tourism marketing and argue that destinations with different levels of development and on different stages in the tourism life-cycle, require different sets of marketing strategies.

## Analyzing the role of marketing in different tourism development stages

According to the suggested interrelations mentioned earlier, in early development stages, where tourism performance is relatively low, marketing planning tends to focus on tourism services, transportation and fundamental sustainability issues. In the early phase, the region designated for tourism takes its first steps, including an internal focus on creating an adequate tourism infrastructure (Butler, 1980; Reid, 2003). As the destination deals with physical development, the role of marketing is to support the *planning framework* - i.e. providing a market perspective for the development of attractions, transportation and services that are best suited to the needs of the target audiences. In the case of tourism regions where tourism performance decreases, this may represent regions that have undergone large scale tourism crises and are now focusing on reestablishing the tourism infrastructure and superstructure.

In more developed stages, where tourism performance is of a relatively medium level, tourism marketing plays a greater role in the planning process, and focuses on *planning-related studies*. In order to plan, manage and execute all marketing activities in a professional manner, the basic elements of the marketing mix should be developed - *Product, Place, Price* and *Promotion* (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). In the *Product's* perspective, the physical aspects of supply are supported by information tools and information services, to enhance the visitors' experience (Inskip, 1991; Gunn & Var, 2002). Regarding the *Place*, the destination is made accessible through the development of distribution channels. As for *Price*, pricing strategies and pricing techniques are tailored and implemented. Lastly, the destination's *Promotion* is based on the campaign tools - designing a logo, a slogan and a visual symbol. An additional promotion component that may be highly effective at this stage consists of online marketing and Internet tools. On the supply side, this results from the vast potential of the Internet to gain direct access to customers in an effective and low-cost manner (Ketter & Avraham, 2012). On the demand side, this is based on the growing importance of the Internet in researching and planning a vacation (Li & Petrick, 2008; Xiang, Magnini & Fesenmaier, 2015). In the case of tourism regions where tourism performance decreases, this stage may suggest destinations that have become less popular and now need to redesign their unique selling proposition and marketing mix in order to reverse the decline and achieve rejuvenation (Butler, 1980; Brau, Scorcu & Vici, 2009). Similarly, tourism regions that have experienced a major crisis may need to revert to the stage of planning in order to rebuild the tourism infrastructure and remodel the tourism supply system.

In advanced stages, where tourism performance is relatively high, marketing planning focuses on maintaining growth, sustaining a competitive advantage and staying 'in fashion'. In pursuit of these goals, the complete arsenal of marketing tools is employed: including the use of various marketing techniques, public relations tools and branding the tourism region. While some of these tools may have been used in earlier stages, in the current stage they are employed to their fullest extent. This suggested pattern is consistent with Kotler and Armstrong (2010), who stated that products in an advanced life stage should invest more resources in marketing, to extend their lifetime and to prevent a decline in demand. In the tourism industry, this gains even more support, as tourists consistently seek new, fresh and innovative destinations and resorts (Mill & Morrison, 2012).

## Conclusions

To conclude, the integration of marketing within tourism planning establishes a new form of integrative and dynamic relations between tourism marketing planning and tourism regions. The three-phase relationship adopts a dynamic planning perspective, and uses it to integrate marketing in a way that is responsive and adjustable to the changing needs of the tourism region. From this viewpoint, tourism

marketing planning is not a 'one-size-fits-all' method, but rather a dynamic process that offers a different focus for regions with different levels of tourism performance. This dynamic role of tourism marketing planning can ameliorate the tourism planning process and, as a consequence, the tourism performance of the region.

In addition to its theoretical contribution, this exploratory study also offers several potential contributions to tourism and marketing practitioners. Firstly, the answer to the fundamental research question clearly suggests to practitioners that marketing is an important component that should be an integral component of the overall tourism plan. Due to this importance, a marketing perspective should be included in the plan's goals, supply system development, *planning-related studies* and in other parts of the plan, representing the audiences and the market. Secondly, tourism marketing plays a dynamic role that changes as regions progress through different life stages. Based on this dynamic state, regions in different life stages should employ different tourism marketing practices, which reflect on their different situations and needs. It should be emphasized here that marketing contributes even to regions which are in their very early stages, and marketing integration into planning should be a prerequisite, ensuring an effective, competitive and economically successful performance during the operational stages.

The findings and conclusions of the current research were based on the systematic analysis of available regional tourism plans. However, it should be taken into account that this was an exploratory study, based on a limited number of plans that were collected from online databases. As a potential constraint, it is possible that plans that are available online have different characteristics from those that were not published on the Internet, and this may influence the validity of the analysis. An additional limitation relates to the broader context of political economy. According to Webster and Ivanov (2012) different political economy systems result in different levels of governmental intervention/ regulation, and different planning cultures. As an outcome, it is possible that the various levels of marketing integration are also effected by political economy factors, and cannot be fully related to the tourism performance level. Resulting from these limitations and others, it is suggested that the study's outcomes should be used mainly within the context of this research.

It is expected that the findings of this study and those of future studies, will shed a more comprehensive light on the relative role and contribution of marketing to regional tourism planning. It may also lead to enhanced understanding of the dynamic and integrative relations between the constructs of tourism planning on the one hand, and tourism marketing planning, on the other. In so doing, actual tourism processes may become more responsive, more market-oriented and, hence, serving tourists and tourist communities more effectively.

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