Clara Benevolo / Riccardo Spinelli

The quality of web communication by Italian tourist ports

Abstract

Nautical tourism is a growing form of tourism, and the Mediterranean Sea is a major destination. Italy has a long tradition in nautical tourism, as its large number of tourism ports reflects. Ports are core actors in nautical tourism systems, devoted to meeting increasing and complex demand by nautical tourists; marketing communication is consequently a critical activity, for tourist ports, where websites play a crucial role. However, despite its importance, the evaluation of tourist ports websites is an almost unexplored research field, where a large research gap exists. Our paper evaluates the quality of 51 Italian tourist ports websites using the 2QCV3Q model, a multi-purpose qualitative evaluation tool. The overall quality of Italian tourist ports websites was assessed on the basis of comparison to a group of benchmark ports in the Mediterranean Sea and worldwide. Results suggest that Italian tourist ports websites require improvement, especially of their content and the services provided. In this respect, our methodology provides an exhaustive assessment of the quality of a port's website and its determinants, helping to support managers in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of their website and prioritizing related actions.

Key words: nautical tourism; yachting tourism; pleasure boating; tourist ports; web communication; website quality; Italy

Introduction

Tourism is a growing phenomenon, both in size and impact (World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2016). Marine tourism – and especially nautical tourism – is a particularly interesting form of tourism, due to its economic and environmental implications (Kovačić, Gržetić & Bosković, 2011; Lee, 2001; Needham, 2013; Orams, 2004). Nautical tourism deserves attention thanks to: the increasing number of people performing leisure activities on the sea with a pleasure boat (Lück, 2007); as an international socio-economic phenomenon (Stone, 2000); its relevance for coastal regions, especially in the Mediterranean Sea where climate and natural beauty have always been strong tourism attractions (Luković, 2013; World Travel & Tourism Council, 2015).

Tourist ports play a crucial role in nautical tourism and this is reflected in their evolution in recent years. No longer only a shelter or a vessel park, such ports provide a wide set of services for, both, vessels and boaters (Jugović, Kovačić & Hadžić, 2011; Mill, 2007). Tourist ports have also begun to be considered as tourist destinations in their own right (Paker & Vural, 2016), attracting tourists thanks to the wide range of facilities and services offered, and are quickly becoming "all-inclusive entertainment centers" (Stone, 2000, p. 2).

Our approach is to consider tourist ports as a "hospitality" destination offering structures and services to boaters (including crew, if any) and vessels (Raviv, Yedida Tarba & Weber, 2009). A market-oriented

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approach in the management of tourist ports is consequently needed (Haass, 2011). Here, communication policies can play a key role, especially through web-based marketing tools and this motivates our interest in evaluating how tourist ports communicate through their website and assessing whether websites are used effectively as a tool for interaction, commercialization and the sale of port services. Our work provides a detailed analysis of the quality of Italian tourist ports websites and its determinants, together with comparative benchmarks of similar ports based in the Mediterranean Sea region and other major destinations for nautical tourism worldwide. A comprehensive and detailed assessment tool is also proposed of interest to both practitioners and researchers.

The paper is structured as follows. In the first section, nautical tourism is introduced, the role of tourist ports specified, and the relevance of marketing communication activities for tourist ports is also explored. Then nautical tourism in Italy and Italian tourist ports' features and peculiarities are explained; the need for an investigation of their web-based communication activities is justified with reference to the strong international competition that these ports are facing. A methodological section follows where the evaluation tool is introduced and a selection process of sample and benchmark websites is described. The main findings are then reported and discussed. Finally, a conclusions section recaps the research outcomes and explores its implications for practitioners and researchers.

An overview of nautical tourism and the role of tourist ports

Nautical tourism is part of the broader concept of marine tourism, which includes "those recreational activities that involve travel away from one's place of residence and which have as their host or focus the marine environment" (Orams, 1999, p. 9). Many definitions of nautical tourism have been provided (Jovanovic, Dragin, Armenski, Pavic & Davidovic, 2013), where concepts such as sea tourism, water tourism or yachting tourism are often mixed up (Lück, 2007; Lam González, de León Ledesma, León González, 2015; Mikulić, Krešić & Kožić, 2015). In this paper, we define nautical tourism as a set of tourism activities performed on the sea and on the coast with a pleasure boat (regardless of the legal title under which the boat is available), which is used both as a means of transport and for self-accommodation (Benevolo & Spinelli, 2016).

Nautical tourism is experiencing significant growth, sustained from both the demand and supply side. On the demand side, nautical tourism is driven not only by the typical motivations of tourists (Crompton, 1979, Kozak, 2002) but also by specific motivations that match contemporary trends in tourists' preferences: the passion for the sea and nature, the search for adventure, the taste for risk, hedonism and exclusivity, as well as independence and self-organization (Orams & Lück, 2014; Van Der Merwe, Slabbert & Saayman, 2010). In turn, growing and evolving demand has strongly influenced the supply side, stimulating a more tailored offer from the boating industry. Shipyards have improved and innovated in terms of quality, design, materials, furniture and accessories; boat dimensions have increased to follow the shift in the demand towards upscale segments; innovative solutions have been developed for propulsion with low environmental impact; alternative forms of boat ownership developed such as leasing, co-ownership, etc.; yacht management and maintenance services have also grown and improved (International Council of Marine Industry Associations [ICOMIA], 2015). Increasing nautical tourism has also highlighted important deficiencies in port accommodation, in terms of both capacity (number of ports, size, available berths – overall and for very large vessels – ratio between registered vessels and available berths, etc.) and offered services, both core (refueling, water supply, etc.), and value-added services for vessels (maintenance, refitting, etc.) and boaters/crew members (restaurants, hotels, shops, etc.).

Tourist ports are key players in the nautical tourism industry, influencing the success of a nautical destination (Kovačić et al., 2011); consequently, a much more managerial and market-oriented approach is required to allow them to fully play their propulsive role (European Consortium for Sustainable Industrial Policy [ECSIP], 2015; Haass, 2011; Stone, 2000). Marinas represent the most advanced form of tourist ports as they are infrastructures expressly built for nautical tourism in well-protected areas. Together with berths and ancillary technical services, marinas offer a wide set of accommodation, dining, shopping, entertainment and leisure facilities, essentially providing a kind of "resort atmosphere" (International Marina Institute, 1998; Osservatorio Nautico Nazionale [ONN], 2013). However, the strategic management models for marinas are almost unexplored. Consequently, marina managers lack academic guidelines relevant to their specific industry (Raviv et al., 2009), especially to do with a client and service oriented culture (ECSIP, 2015). Critical aspects of marketing policy are often overlooked, such as customer segmentation (Paker & Vural, 2016); creating a unique value proposition (Heron & Juju, 2012); designing technical and leisure services, including also provision of land-based experiences (Buratti & Persico, 2008; Lam González et al., 2015); and evaluating customer satisfaction (Mikulić et al., 2015).

Marketing communication is certainly a very important challenge for tourist ports managers. As Stone (2000:3) notices, "it is not enough to advertise that there is wonderful opportunity for boat related recreation in your country. Boaters will have trouble finding it unless you can give them cruising directions to the area's destination marinas; even if they know where the marinas are, they will be anxious to know what kind of facilities and services they can provide before traveling all the way there". Internet-based communication, through mobile devices especially, play a major role here (ECSIP, 2015). As for most tourism companies, the tourist port's website represents a very powerful marketing tool (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Chiou, Lin & Perng, 2011), a platform for information, communication, interaction, promotion, sale and distribution, capable of reaching a wide international audience with rich and adaptable content (Benevolo & Morchio, 2015). Reflecting this, web communication is replacing (or more often integrating with) traditional communication tools used by tourist ports, such as adverts in yachting magazines or in port directories. Tourist ports find this process challenging because boaters usually rely on personal sources of information (including other boaters, captains, etc.), or on very close networks of consolidated and trusted partners (including agents, charterers, etc.), with whom a personal interaction is the norm. Consequently, as Ehrlich et al. (2017) observe, successfully adopting digital customer journeys through the port's website requires effort, especially in terms of "pooling relevant content and creating a delightful experience". Despite its importance, the evaluation of tourist ports websites is an underexplored research field, where a large research gap exists justifying our interest in assessing the quality of tourist ports websites.

Nautical tourism and tourist ports in Italy

Italy is one of the top-five destinations by international tourist arrivals (UNWTO, 2016) and has a variety of tourism attractions. Italy is a traditional destination for beach and marine tourism – and, more recently, for nautical tourism (Piccinno & Zanini, 2010), thanks to its position in the Mediterranean Sea, with more than seven thousand kilometers of coastline, a mild climate and a rich endowment of landscapes and marine attractions. Italy also has a significant specialization in the boating industry, catering to an important internal market (Ivaldi, 2014). Reflecting this, Italy is the fourth country in Europe for the number of registered vessels, with almost 600 thousand vessels (9.8 per thousand inhabitants, compared to an average of 13.6 in Europe) (Censis, 2015).

The development of tourist ports in Italy dates to 1997, when a specific legislative measure simplified the administrative process required to build port infrastructures. An important rise in the number of available berths followed, as existing ports expanded and new ports were constructed (sometimes by leading shipyards). At present, Italy hosts 546 ports available to tourist boats, 77 of which are marinas exclusively dedicated to yachting tourism (ONN, 2013); more than 40% of the ports are capable of hosting vessels longer than 24 meters. Available berths are more than 150,000 (+15% on 2007), of which 2.5% are suitable for vessels longer than 24 meters; on average, every tourist port has around 280 berths. Nonetheless, the registered boats/berths ratio in Italy is significantly higher than elsewhere: in Italy one berth is available for every 3.7 boats (with values over 5 in the most "nautical" regions), while countries such as Turkey, Spain or France have values around 2.7 (ONN, 2013). Similarly, Italy hosts a port every 14.2 km of coastline, versus 8 km in France and 6.4 km in Spain.

Italian ports differ based on the kind of yachting tourism demand that they cater to (Benevolo, 2011). Ports in the North Tyrrhenian and North Adriatic Sea are mainly home or departure ports, where boats are "parked" for most of the year and receive a large set of services (maintenance, refitting, etc.); from those ports, vessels head out to sea for daily or longer cruises. In contrast, ports in Southern Italy and the islands are mostly transit or destination ports, a leg or the endpoint of a cruise; a stop in those ports is motivated by both technical reasons (such as refueling) and natural or environmental attractions, including fashion-related factors and upscale social life.

Overall, the lack of port infrastructures is generally regarded at the most important obstacle to the further development of nautical tourism in Italy. However, the limited attention that this form of tourism has traditionally received in public policies has also played a role: nautical tourism has not been considered strategic within the national tourism policy probably because it is only associated with an elitist lifestyle. Same-day short-range yachting by Italian boaters has received much more attention, to the detriment of 'proper' nautical tourism – yachting requiring at least an overnight stay – where the proportion of foreign boaters is significantly higher (Benevolo, 2010). The financial crisis has also led to a significant contraction of demand for nautical tourism that many ports have addressed by shrinking their costs, often at the expense of the quality of the offered services. Italian tourist ports face strong international competition, from both traditional destinations (France, Spain, Greece) and new players (Croatia, Turkey) that have heavily invested in the development of nautical tourism by constructing modern, high-quality, marinas with an expanding variety and quality of services (Jugović et al., 2011; Kovačić & Luković, 2007; Paker & Vural, 2016). In this competitive scenario, Italian tourist ports need to develop as hospitality structures for nautical tourists and vessels. In this light, they need to speed up the evolution towards a "resort model" by adopting a managerial and more market-oriented approach.

Within this framework, our attention is focused on communication activities by Italian tourist ports', with specific attention to web-based communication. In our research, we sought to answer the following research questions:

• how do Italian tourist ports use the website as a communication tool, to present their offer, commercialize their services, and interact with actual and potential tourists?

• how are Italian tourist ports' websites positioned compared to international benchmarks?

Methodology

The evaluation tool

The evaluation of website quality has been widely explored in literature, although neither a definition (Law, Qi & Buhalis, 2010) nor standard methods (Ip, Law & Lee, 2011) are globally accepted. Many models have also been proposed to evaluate tourist websites (Baggio, Mottironi & Antonioli Corigliano, 2011; Chiou et al., 2011; Hashim, Murphy & Law, 2007; Law & Bai, 2006; Law et al., 2010; Morrison, Taylor & Douglas, 2005; Park & Gretzel, 2007; Tsai, Chou & Lai, 2010), which Law et al. (2010) classify into five groups according to the techniques adopted: counting, user judgment, automated, numerical computation, and combined methods.

To assess the quality of Italian tourist ports websites, we chose the 2QCV3Q model (Mich, Franch & Cilione, 2003; Mich, Franch & Martini, 2005), a multi-purpose qualitative evaluation tool based on the judgments of experts. To analyze tourist ports websites, Benevolo and Spinelli's (2016) specific version of the tool was adopted, with minor adaptations. This tool includes six dimensions:

- identity: the capability of the website to properly communicate the owner's corporate identity to the user;

- usability: how efficiently and effectively the site's content and services are made available to the user;

- content: the completeness, correctness, and accuracy of the contents, consistently with the goals of the site and the needs of the users;

- services: the extent to which the website functions support both the service provider (in reaching its corporate goals) and the users (to satisfy their needs);

- location: the website reachability and the possibility for the user to interact with both the website manager and other users;

- maintenance: activities related to the proper functioning and operability of the site;

Every dimension includes weighted attributes that receive a score according to the presence and quality of a given feature in the website. Each attribute's weighted score contributes to the total score of the corresponding dimension, while the average score of the dimensions, in turn, returns the overall score of the website. Attributes and weights were minimally adapted from Benevolo and Spinelli's (2016) proposal, following a focus group discussion with the managers of three major Italian marinas.

Table 1 introduces the dimensions and the weighted attributes reflecting the characteristics of the website to be assessed; an explanation is also included that was provided to the evaluators. Please refer to Benevolo and Spinelli (2016) for further details on the tool's structure.

Table 1
The assessment tool's structure

Dimension	Attribute	Weight	Explained attribute
Identity	Brand / Logo	0.34	Does the website have a strong brand identity?
	Graphics and functionality	0.33	Does the website have a nice and functional graphic layout?
	Tale of the territory	0.33	Does the website tell and communicate the port and the local area?
Usability	Simple and exhaustive menu	0.20	Is the website menu complete and exhaustive but at the same time clear and simple?
	Load time	0.10	Is the website load time short enough?

Table 1 **Continued**

Dimension	Attribute	Weight	Explained attribute
	Mobile version	0.10	Is a mobile version of the website available? Alternatively, is the PC version easy to surf with a smartphone or tablet?
	App	0.10	Is an app for mobile devices available?
	Accessibility for disabled people	0.05	What is the output of the website validation on validator.w3.org?
	Search	0.05	Is a search function available? Is it working and easy to find?
	Map or navigable menu	0.15	Is a website map available and/or is it possible to view sub-menus?
	Languages	0.25	Is the website available in other languages rather than English and the local one?
Content	Breadth and depth of the texts	0.15	Are contents exhaustive? Do they provide deep and useful information?
	Updated rates	0.15	Does the website show updated seasonal rates?
	Information on commercial activities	0.15	Does the website provide relevant information on local commercial activities?
	Information on port services	0.15	Does the website provide relevant information on port services?
	Information on events and shows	0.10	Does the website provide relevant information on feasts, cultural events, shows, concerts and other happenings in the local area?
	Information on inland locations	0.10	Does the website provide relevant information on inland locations?
	Webcam	0.10	Does the website have a frequently updated webcam on the port?
	Images and multimedia	0.05	Does the website provide images and other multimedia contents?
	Links	0.03	Does the website provide useful and easy to reach links to other relevant sites?
	Documents	0.02	Is it possible to download relevant documents (brochures, regulations, etc.)?
Services	Weather forecast	0.20	Does the website provide a reliable and highly visible marine forecast service?
	Access (flights, routes, parking)	0.20	Does the website provide information on how to reach the port and on parking availability?
	Maps	0.20	Does the website provide maps of the port and the local area? Are they interactive?
	Booking form	0.20	Is it possible to book a berth from the website?
	Online booking and payment	0.20	Is it possible to book and pay completely online?
Individuation	Intuitive domain name	0.20	Is the website URL intuitive and easy to remember?
	Contact data	0.30	Is it easy to contact the website manager? Are contact data clear and easy to find?
	Social networks	0.30	Does the port have a Facebook page and/or a Twitter account? Does the website link to these accounts?
	Newsletter and guestbook	0.10	Is it possible to subscribe to a newsletter or leave a comment in a guestbook?
	Interaction among users (community)	0.10	Can website visitors interact with each other?
Management	Website maintenance	0.50	Is the website maintenance good? Are all the links working?
	Updated information	0.50	Is information up to date? Is the last update date available?

Sample and benchmark selection

We decided to focus our attention on web communication to international boaters as they represent the most interesting (and demanding) segment for Italian tourist ports, especially given the contraction of national demand as discussed earlier. During the sample selection process, we faced the problem that, as Luković (2012) states, "it is hard to give specific data on the size, type and capacities of the marina industry in Europe because there is no professional association that would collect, process,

research and unify the data, and encourage the development of the industry" (p. 405). Consequently, a comprehensive and comparable data source was searched for.

In selecting Italian ports the Yachting Pages Superyacht Directory (*Mediterranean, Europe Africa & Middle east* 2015-2016 edition) was used, a catalogue of suppliers and services for super yacht freely distributed in ports worldwide that claims to be "onboard 97% of super yachts". Eighty-one Italian tourist ports were listed in the directory but only 76 had an active website at the time of the survey. To focus on international communication, the selection was refined by specifying as an inclusion criterion, the presence of a complete English version of the website. Therefore, our final sample includes 51 ports, that offer more than 22,000 berths.

As previously mentioned, a functional benchmarking exercise (Elmuti & Kathawala, 1997) was also performed, to compare Italian ports' websites with a group of world-class non-Italian tourist ports, both on the Mediterranean Sea and worldwide. Following Anand and Kodali (2008), we first looked for external published information sources for collecting pre-benchmarking information. To maintain consistency, the three 2015-2016 editions of the Yachting Pages Superyacht Directory (*Mediterranean, Europe Africa & Middle east*; *Australasia*; *USA & Caribbean*) were chosen as data sources. Thirty ports were selected based on reputation (Bhutta & Huq, 1999) for the quality of their websites. Their quality was assessed with this evaluation tool and those that did not show excellence in at least one dimension – 'excellence' here defined as receiving a 5/5 score – were excluded. Twenty-one ports passed this step and were used as a reference when evaluating Italian ports websites. A post-evaluation selection excluded reference ports with overall scores lower than the average overall score of the Italian ports in the sample. This resulted in a final list of 15 benchmark ports that cover all major geographical areas for nautical tourism in both the Mediterranean Sea (Spain, France, Croatia, Greece, Turkey, and Cyprus) and worldwide (Portugal, USA, New Zealand). The list of sample and benchmark ports is available on request.

Results and discussion

The sample and benchmark websites were analysed in April-May 2016 by three expert researchers (including one of the Authors) with broad competencies in nautical tourism and the boat industry. Each evaluator independently examined the websites giving each attribute a score from 1 (not present or very bad) to 5 (very good); the mean of the three scores was used as the final score. Common guidelines were given to the evaluators on how to apply the 5-point scale, especially for some potentially controversial attributes. Interclass correlation coefficients (McGraw & Wong, 1996) were calculated to assess the agreement between evaluators and returned very good values (85% for sample ports and 92% for benchmark ports) confirming the robustness of the scores. Table 2 shows the aggregate final scores for sample and benchmark ports in the six dimensions and the final overall score, together with the range of variation for each value. Results for each port are available on request.

Table 2
Dimensional and overall scores for sample and benchmark ports

	Identity	Usability	Content	Services	Individu-ation	Manage-ment	Overall evaluation
Italian tourist ports							
minimum	1.89	1.78	1.75	1.13	1.80	1.50	1.85
maximum	5.00	4.03	4.64	4.67	4.53	5.00	4.23
average	3.81	2.97	2.94	2.93	3.19	3.91	3.29

Table 2 **Continued**

	Identity	Usability	Content	Services	Individu-ation	Manage-ment	Overall evaluation
Benchmark tourist ports							
minimum	3.67	2.75	2.51	2.13	2.60	4.67	3.40
maximum	5.00	3.85	4.29	4.73	4.40	5.00	4.23
average	4.24	3.19	3.50	3.36	3.56	4.96	3.80

The overall quality score of the 51 sample websites is 3.29 out of 5. The distribution of the scores has a standard deviation of 0.56 and shows: three sites (6% of the sample) with a score above 4; thirty-four sites (67%) between 3 and 4; thirteen sites (25%) between 2 and 3; and one site (2%) below 2. Identity and Management have the highest scores, while Usability, Individuation, Content and Services are the most problematic areas. These results paint a picture of nice and technically robust websites that give ports a strong brand identity and link them with the image of the local territory; while at the same time, they are not very user-friendly and fail in providing visitors with expected information and services (Stone, 2000). As for Usability, for example, apps by ports are almost totally absent, quite a serious lack considering that boaters are users who are in transit and so prone to using mobile devices for Internet access (McCabe, Foster, Li & Bhanu, 2015). Partially compensating the lack of apps, the quality of the mobile version is, in most cases, acceptable. Opportunities for users to interact with each other (Individuation) are also limited: very few websites host a community for users, while most have a good presence in social networks. Nevertheless, this aspect requires more attention because of the growing importance in tourism marketing of communication through "Travel 2.0" tools (Leung, Law, van Hoof & Buhalis, 2013; Sigala, Christou & Gretzel, 2012). With respect to Contents and Services, less than 40% websites provide updated rates. Although more than 60% allow e-booking for berths, only one website offers a complete e-commerce experience to book and pay for berths and other services. Less than half of the websites introduce and promote local attractions, events, gastronomy or inland destinations. Finally, less than a quarter of the sample show images of the port through a webcam.

Sample and benchmark ports were compared with a t-test for equality of means, interpreted in accordance with the output of the Levene's test for equality of variances. Benchmark ports are, as expected, statistically better than sample ports at $p<0.05$, both overall and in most dimensions; for Usability and Services, differences are significant at $p<0.1$. The overall score for benchmarks is 3.80, due to a good level of quality in all dimensions. Web communication by Italian tourist ports still has significant room for improvement, with foreign best practices available as a benchmark. It is worth noticing that sample and benchmark ports share the same profile as for the scores of the various dimensions: although on a higher absolute level, benchmark websites too are well managed and succeed in reflecting the port identity but encounter similar problems to the sample websites for ease of use, as well as content and service quality. To give some examples, only one benchmark port has an app and only such four ports offer some (limited) opportunities for user-user interaction; furthermore, only two benchmark ports have a fully working webcam and four of them offer an e-payment system for booking berths.

Conclusions

Italy is a major player in the nautical industry, with respect to both boat production and nautical tourism. As for nautical tourism, it enjoys an important endowment of natural resources (sea, coastline, and climate) and infrastructures (number of ports and berths, especially for large vessels). However, Italy encounters strong competition from many valuable players, both in the Mediterranean Sea and worldwide. Italian tourist ports are consequently struggling in a difficult competitive arena where the variety and the quality of the offered services are critical success factors. The services offered by tourist

ports are becoming more and more comparable to a hospitality service and ports themselves are evolving towards a "resort on the sea" model. Reflecting this, Italian tourist ports are adopting managerial and marketing approaches of the modern hospitality company model, as a response to the ongoing international competitive pressures and to a serious and ongoing crisis.

A core activity for tourist ports adopting such an approach is competence in web-based marketing tools and communication policies more generally. In our study, we focused on Italian tourist ports' websites and assessed their quality. According to our results, Italian tourist ports lack capability in fully exploiting their websites as a key tool in their communication mix: e-commerce or even e-booking for berths is very limited; social media presence is not significant and opportunities for user-user interaction sparse; boater-friendly apps for mobile devices were found to be almost totally absent. Furthermore, ports in the sample appeared disconnected from each other, lacking in any form of cooperation or coordination with each other. This represents a significant disadvantage compared to other countries, such as Croatia, where a shared approach by multiple ports is common, supporting not only the activities of individual ports but also the development of the whole country as a destination for nautical tourism. Comparison with the benchmark ports indicates that Italian ports have significant room for improvement, with foreign ports showing a more effective and market-oriented approach in web communication.

Our work has significant implications for ports managers. The proposed methodology provides managers with a detailed and comparative analysis of the main determinants of website quality, which supports the identification of priority areas and actions. Over time, the performance of the observed website compared to competitors or benchmarks could be tracked. Turning to research implications, the comparative analysis of website quality in core areas for nautical tourism worldwide – such as the Mediterranean Sea or the Caribbean – can help to identify best practices and laggards, clusters of homogeneous websites and possible country-based differences (Benevolo & Morchio, 2015). This would also help to strengthen and contextualise the Italian case from a comparative point of view. Finally, the evaluation tool may be adapted to assess other aspects of internet-based communication of tourist ports such as social network presence, online reputation, and forms of cooperation and integrated communication by groups of ports.

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