

Cruise-port destination

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Cruise-port destination

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A cruise-port destination is a bundle of tangible and intangible assets which transform a port into a cruise destination. Tangible assets include cruise terminal facilities, infrastructures and sovrastructures which make destinations accessible for both cruise ships (sea-side) and cruise tourists (land-side). Besides, the natural heritage (e.g., flora, fauna, beaches, seas, hills and mountains), as well as man-made constructions (e.g., buildings, roads, museums, theatres, and markets) and other typical cultural highlights constitute pivotal tourist resources for any cruise-port destinations. Intangible assets deal with the cultural heritage and the peculiarities of destinations. These include local customs and traditions, events, languages, food and beverage products, and all intangible resources which can enrich the overall service experience of the cruisers.

The combination of tangible and intangible assets can stimulate the desire of tourists to buy a cruise and visit these port destinations. Therefore, the attractiveness of cruise-port destinations is strongly interrelated with the strategic decisions and success of cruise companies, especially when planning itineraries.

Cruise-port destinations are commonly clustered and categorised according to three key strategic dimensions: i) localisation and function; ii) the main service provided; iii) governance settings of cruise terminals.

The first strategic dimension (i) deals with the localisation and function of each cruise-port. Gui and Russo (2011) provide four typologies of cruise-port destinations in line with their different function in managing regional tourist flows:

- *Blackhole*. Tourist flows are concentrated in the surrounding area of the cruise-port which is gifted by significant tourist attractions.
- *Gateway*. The cruise-port is only a gateway to reach the tourist attractions in the hinterland. The main benefits of tourist flows tend to move from the cruise-port destination to the port-hinterland.
- *Semi-gateway*. The cruise-port exploits its geographical location for promoting local potentially marketable attractions. Although the cruise-port is still more oriented toward a “gateway function”, it can attract greater tourist flows and improve its visibility in the international tourism market.
- *Balanced*. Tourist flows of passengers are balanced between the cruise-port and hinterland destinations.

When it comes to the main type of services provided by cruise-ports (ii) and the related terminals, four main categories can be identified (Rodrigue and Notteboom, 2013):

- *Homeport*. It is both a port of departure, which ensure easy access to the piers (e.g., international airport, parking areas for embarking cruisers' cars, ground transportation linked to the city centre), a passenger terminal for check-in operations, and a provider of a wide spectrum of services for cruise ships (e.g., fuel supply, ship handlers and stevedore activities).
- *Semi-home port*. It supports the cruise industry by providing partial turnaround operations, including at least easy access to the piers and a modern passenger terminal for check-in operations.
- *Port of call*. It is an intermediate stop in a cruise itinerary. This port destination offers an appropriate berthing facility, water supplies and parking areas for tour buses.
- *Call*. It is an intermediate stop in a location (e.g., a desert island) without any harbour or docking facility. Cruise ships stand off and cruisers are transported on-shore with tenders.

Finally, cruise-port destinations may differ with respect to the type of governance settings characterizing cruise terminals and facilities (iii). Public, private or hybrid organizations in charge to manage cruise terminals can develop and promote cruise tourism and related local tourist activities in different ways. The uninterrupted growth of cruise passengers' volumes until 2019 and the development of naval gigantism in the cruise business lead cruise-ports to respond to the changing needs of their users (both cruise lines and cruise passengers). Cruise-ports were called to upgrade existing facilities and develop new terminals (Lekakou et al., 2009). To safeguard the public budget, several port authorities (PAs) have started engaging private investors to plan, finance, construct, operate, and/or commercially manage cruise terminals. Cruise lines, cruise terminal operators, local private stevedores and other types of private operators have been growingly investing in ashore assets to develop new services and promote cruise-port destinations (Pallis et al., 2017).

The public, private or hybrid nature of cruise terminals may also affect the planning and management of the tourist activities experienced by cruisers during excursions and other onsite activities. The societal integration of cruise tourism with the surrounding urban area and communities may be harder when the public intermediary is lacking. Whereas the private involvement in financing and managing specialized cruise terminal is considered pivotal to generate added value for cruise passengers, some phenomena, such as the development of "private island" destinations (e.g., in the Caribbean region) or the overcrowding of cruise-port destinations, are determining social and environmental concerns related to the underlying governance settings of cruise terminals.

The success of cruise-port destinations and the sustainability of cruise tourism are expected to benefit from the involvement of both public, private and hybrid entities in the development of cruise port and related tourist activities. This can strengthen the volume of cruise tourists as well as the prestige and brand awareness of cruise-port destinations thanks to private capital injection and managerial approach. Moreover, the actions and policies of public authorities, jointly with a more conscious approach towards green and sustainable strategies by cruise companies can mitigate the externalities generated by this form of tourism, allowing the cruise business to reach wider consensus by local communities.

Figure 1. Cruise-port destinations: a conceptual framework.

INSERT FIGURE HERE

Source: authors' elaboration

The conceptualization and the categorization of different cruise-port destinations describe to what extent cruise tourism in port destinations can generate both benefits and risks for local communities and territories. The increasing operational scale of cruise tourism before the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic and its capacity to create wealth and related business opportunities have triggered several academics to study the benefits of the industry on local economies. Parola et al. (2014) argue both direct economic (monetary) impacts (i.e., job creation, expenditures from passenger, crew and cruise operators' procurements, capital expenditures for cruise terminals, development of cruise tourism and transport facilities) and indirect economic impacts, namely Word-of-mouth (WoM) effect, must be considered. Cruise business can generate added (non-monetary) value for port destinations, by "showcasing" the destinations to visitors who are expected to recommend their experiences to relatives, friends, and colleagues (Bahja et al., 2019). WoM effect is pivotal in the long run for the mutual success of both cruise companies and port-destinations (Satta et al., 2015).

However, academics also stress the negative spill-overs of cruise tourism on port-destinations. These mainly include environmental impacts, including water consumption, wastewater treatment, emissions from engines/auxiliary systems, effluents, solid waste, impacts on biodiversity and conservation. Besides, socio-cultural implications are emerging as a huge potential concern, especially for the so-called "people pollution"

which refers to the implications on local inhabitants for overcrowding and issues associated with traffic congestion (Klein, 2011).

Although the inherent structural limits to the growth of cruise tourism and potential issues related to environment and social equity, cruise-port destinations seek to incorporate tourism in their investment, development, and sustainability strategies for the significant opportunities it can provide to local economies (Papathanassis, 2019).

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