

## RESEARCH NOTE

### A TOUR OPERATOR WITH A GLOBAL, INNOVATIVE SPIRIT: THE CASE OF ALPITOURWORLD

ELISA GIACOSA,\* CHIARA GIACHINO,\* MARGHERITA STUPINO,\*  
AND ALBERTO MAZZOLENI†

\*Department of Management, University of Turin, Turin, Italy

†Department of Economics and Management, University of Brescia, Brescia, Italy

---

In this study, our research goal is to identify the organizational and operational approaches that a tour operator could adopt with the purpose of offering clients a comprehensive tourist product, increasing its competitive advantage. The research was conducted using the qualitative case study method. We selected AlpitourWorld, a leader in generalist holidays in the Italian market. AlpitourWorld may be considered as a best practice in its sector: It is based on an integrated management of the various company processes, through a divisional organizational structure. Each stage of the product creation and commercialization is controlled internally: This improves the control of the product quality as well as the level of efficiency and effectiveness of the activity carried out.

**Key words:** Tourism sector; Tour operator; AlpitourWorld; Comprehensive tourist product

---

#### Introduction

The tourism, free-time, and communication sections belong to the macro service sector. This is made up of a variety of companies that deal with tour operating, hotel management, incoming, catering, travel agency, and other related services.

In this study, our research goal was to identify the organizational and operational approaches that a tour operator could adopt with the purpose of offering clients a comprehensive tourist product, increasing its competitive advantage. The research was conducted

using the qualitative case study method. We selected AlpitourWorld because it is the undisputed leader in generalist holidays in the Italian market and because it represents a top-of-mind company in the tourist sector for 90% of Italians.

The motivation of this study is related to an observation of the profound changes that have affected the tourist market in Italy over the past 20 years. In fact, although in the past tourism was considered a niche product, it has now become a phenomenon that is accessible to a much wider clientele. Furthermore, the entry of large groups into the sector

has increased competition, making it necessary to adopt a highly competitive strategy. Therefore, it is important to observe a tour operator approach to increase its competitive advantage.

In this article, we provide an outline of the research method, illustrating the qualitative method adopted. Then, we analyze the theoretical background with reference to the main issues at stake in our article, and we present and discuss the findings of the results. Finally, the conclusions and implications of the study are provided, within the limitations of the research.

### Research Methodology

As stated earlier, our research goal was to identify the organizational and operational approaches that a tour operator could adopt with the purpose of offering clients a comprehensive tourist product. To achieve the research goal, a research question was formulated:

**Research Question:** In response to the constant and frequent changes in the tourism sector, which organizational and operational approaches can a tour operator adopt to offer clients a comprehensive tourist product?

The research methodology was structured around the following phases: After a framework on the literature dealing with the topics of the research in the first phase, the second phase was dedicated to an individual case study (George, 1979; George & McKeown, 1985; Gillham, 2001; Gummesson, 2006; Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Platt, 1992; Stake, 1998; Thiengnoi & Afzal, 2009). The case study selected—the AlpitourWorld Group—is representative (Patton, 1990; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1984, 2003) because it is characterized by a series of variables that can be analyzed only through the use of a set of interconnected data. This has also made it possible to outline a contemporary phenomenon even when the limits or boundaries between this phenomenon and its context are not clearly defined (Re, Giacosa, Giachino, & Stupino, 2014; Yin, 1984). In addition, this case study was used because it is highly specific, allowing us to formulate some particular conclusions that other companies would not allow (Siggelkow, 2007). Finally, the analysis of this case study required the

use of reference theories that guided our analysis and comprehension of the company case (Yin, 2003).

We chose to carry out the case study using a double tool, which brought to light several information sources (Eisenhardt, 1989). First, we used the information sources made available by the company, both through the website and through other information materials. Furthermore, we consulted several data banks of daily financial newspapers and marketing magazines, which brought to light a series of information on the case study. Second, we used the interview technique. In particular, the informants included the following: (1) a sales manager responsible for the north Italy area (ASM), (2) the marketing manager responsible for communication strategy (CMM), (3) an information and communications technology manager (ICTM), (4) an employee of the commercial area (CE), and (5) an employee of the strategic team staff (SE). These informants were interviewed more than once. We conducted 15 interviews with five different individuals. These interviews were conducted in 2012, 2013, and 2014. The interviews were of a qualitative nature, with a semistructured character (Alvesson, 2003; Alvesson & Deetz, 2000; Corbetta, 2003; Potter & Wetherell, 1987), and they were prepared by all the authors. Each interview was structured as follows: The first part focused on the history of the company and its activities; the second part focused on the organizational strategy and/or the commercial strategy (it depends on the role of the informant) adopted by the company, and through which Alpitour is able to offer a comprehensive global tourist product. The interview was conducted by one of the authors and lasted approximately 2 hr. We then analyzed the interview results autonomously, so as not to influence one another (Atkinson & Shaffir, 1998; Jönsson & Lukka, 2005). Finally, we compared the results that we had each obtained. This comparison brought to light the salient features of the company's approach.

The use of the case study did not require a statistical generalization of the results. On the contrary, an analytical generalization of the phenomenon was carried out (Yin, 1984).

### Literature

Many scholars have focused on the company means to satisfy the human needs. It emerged that

companies should not be focused on the product but rather on the client (Grönroos, 2006). This makes it possible to improve the quality perceived by the consumers themselves (Gale, 1994) and, as a result, customer retention, also through a valorization of the brand (Gordon, Di Benedetto, & Calantone, 1994). It follows that the client is perceived as central to the company choices (Giacosa, 2011, 2012), both for the strategy activities and in all levels of the organizational structure as well as all various functional areas (Brusa, 1986, 2004; Mintzberg, 1979). This ensures that the positioning choices (Solomon, Marshall, Stuart, Barnes, & Mitchell, 2009) meet the client's needs (Trout, 2012). In searching the best positioning choices, the product has been considered as a combination of tangible and intangible elements (Bruce & Hines, 2007; Farneti, 2007; Giunta, 1993; Kotler & Scott, 1993; Pellicelli, 2005).

A series of characteristics of tourism company service has been identified to be competitive. In particular, the following distinctive features have emerged (Grönroos, 2006; Page, 2009): the dynamism, as the tourism market is highly changeable because of consumption crisis; an aging population and new technologies, which influence the demand for tourist services and their supply; the immateriality (Giacosa, 2003), as the tourism is a service without material consistency, which can also be commercialized through electronic channels; the personalization, as the services offer greater scope for customization, and clients play a central role in the company's commercial approach (Vargo & Lusch, 2006); and the emotional charge, as the enjoyment of a tourist product is perceived as being equal to an experience, which must affect the consumer emotionally (Kotler & Scott, 1993).

Many studies have focused on the choices of tourism companies in terms of the vast scope of the production range, the effective communication policy, the level of personalization of the commercial offer, and the highlighting of the cultural aspects associated with the region in which the tourism takes place (Casarin, 1996; Cohen, 1979; Costa, 2002; Martinengo & Savoja, 1998; Saracco, 2008). In particular, the communication policy is understood as a tool used to enhance brand visibility (De Chernatony & McDonald, 2003), strengthen the distinction between the

product and competing products (Kapferer, 2002), and highlight the values of the brand itself (Aaker, 2002; Aaker & Biel, 1993; Kapferer & Laurent, 1992; Michel, 2000).

The company growth prospects in the tourism sector have been analyzed in relation to the matching of supply and demand (Holloway & Robinson, 1994; Pencarelli, 2001; Sciarelli & Della Corte, 2006). In particular, company investments have been analyzed both in terms of the breadth and quality of the product range and of the capacity to offer a highly ad hoc service in relation to the target range (Gartner, 1989).

The impact of new technologies has significantly affected how the tourist service is supplied. Thanks to Internet (Gamble, 1990; Giacosa, 2003), a plethora of information is now available to multiple individuals at a low cost, irrespective of time or place, and can be updated in real time. It means that an e-tourism phenomenon takes place (Addis, 1999; Bing & Fesenmaier, 2000; Buhalis, 1998; Marcussen, 2001; Missikoff, 2001).

The literature has focused extensively on the question of innovation (Abernathy & Clarke, 1985; Damanpour, 1991; Re, 2013; Tidd, Bessant, & Pavitt, 2001). Many branches of studies have described innovation from a product and process perspective (Adner & Levinthal, 2001; Bonanno & Haworthb, 1998; Re et al., 2014; Sood & Tellis, 2009; Tushman & Anderson, 1986; Utterback & Abernathy, 1975), also with an eye to affecting every phase of the company's business (Drucker, 1954). Scholars have also concentrated on the effects caused by the implementation of innovative policies by companies operating in the tourist sector (Hijalager, 2010). Nonetheless, few studies have captured the practical complexities that characterize innovation in this sector (Tejada & Moreno, 2013).

This study sets out to fill a gap in the literature conducted through case studies in relation to the tour operator management of a global tourist product. It is our intention to provide a starting point to identify the organizational and operational approaches that a tour operator could adopt with the purpose of offering clients a comprehensive tourist product. This identified approach could then be tested on other establishments to test its validity.

### Case Study: An Italian Tour Operator With a Global Spirit

#### *The Company's History*

AlpitourWorld is one of the main Italian groups operating in the tourist sector, offering a comprehensive tourism package (see <http://www.alpitourworld.com>). It was first established in Italy in the late 1940s through the organization of group transportation services for large events. The company profited from the economic boom, which led to a staggering rise in the demand for both individual transportation (including cross-border services) and family holidays.

The company created the all-inclusive package to offer the dream of a totally stress-free, relaxing holiday. This package provided clients with all the elements required for their holiday, from their airline ticket to the hotel, tour guide, and even a translation service if they were going to a destination where a foreign language was spoken. In the 1970s, to encourage Italians to undertake long-distance holidays, the company incorporated direct charter flights into its offer. The aim was to offer Italians a "luxury holiday at half the price" (CMM).

Shareholders were opened up to Ifil in 1992, an investment holding company owned by the Agnelli family (now Exor), which became the parent company in 2001 and "improved the capital structure" (SE). This constituted a significant driving force in terms of company growth prospects, also on an international scale. Subsequently, a series of acquisitions of important rival firms were made. These included Francorosso, Karambola, and, finally, Viaggidea—a small tour operator in the luxury market. The four brands were later integrated, thereby creating AlpitourWorld. The group currently employs 3,500 staff members who operate both in the central headquarters in Italy and in the branches and assistance centers worldwide. Its turnover in 2012 amounted to 651 million euros.

#### *An Innovative Spirit, as "Leaders Without Borders"*

"The AlpitourWorld Group adopted a *formamentis* characterized by innovation at all levels of the organizational structure, involving the various functional areas" (SE). Boasting more than 2.5 million clients, the company's philosophy is directed

at representing a "leader without borders" (CMM). This is not only a question of numbers but also of client satisfaction, thanks to a combination of quality, reliability, and personalization. It is "the constant quest for increasingly high-quality levels and for an ever wider offer tailored ever closer to changing demands" (ASM). The innovation charter concerns both the product and the process levels.

*Product Innovation.* Product innovation involves offering a global product or satisfying client demands for tourism in a comprehensive manner: "from selecting the destination, to organizing the flight and all other transfers directly managed by the company, to overseeing the reception, onsite assistance, and organizing the time during the holiday itself" (SE). To this end, the group's structure is subdivided into separate divisions: "Each division deals with a specific activity along the production and distribution chain" (SE). In particular, these divisions (which are analyzed in the Process Innovation section) are responsible, respectively, for tour operating, aviation, hotel management, incoming, and travel agency services.

The various targets are managed with a series of ad hoc solutions: low cost offers for young people, package holidays in tourist resorts for families, and high-luxury trips for connoisseurs. This is possible thanks to the variety of brands, "which are all managed with a clearly recognizable identity" (CE). This range of brands has been made possible thanks to a series of acquisitions of important rival brands (e.g., Francorosso, Karambola, and Viaggidea), each of which deals with a different target. Alongside the general holidays provided by the brand Alpitour, a series of market specializations have been added to "offer the ideal response to every holiday request" (CMM): The brand Francorosso brings sophisticated, chic exoticism; Villaggi Bravo offers a focus on fun; Viaggidea offers exclusive tourist products; and Karambola focuses on freedom and flexibility.

The company manages its brands thanks to a strong commercial strategy, which plays a central role: The famous advertising message *Ahi! Ahi! Ahi!* (which stresses how wrong it would be to organize a holiday without using Alpitour) is intended to state that Alpitour is a serious tour operator that "offers peace of mind to anyone going away" (CMM).

In all the served targets, Alpitour has many competitors, such as Costa Crociere, the leading player in the cruise market in Italy and Europe. Other competitive operators include the following: Eden Viaggi, the tour operator that specializes in the sale of short-medium range products with a commercial offer comprising hotels, tourist resorts, residences, and apartments, both in Italy and abroad; Valtur, a leading company in the tourist resort segment, predominantly those resorts with an Italian style of management; Club Med, a French tour operator with a commercial offer distinguished by a multi-channel service on various markets; and MSC Crociere, an operator that provides cruises on multiple market target ranges and, as such, operates in strict competition with Costa Crociere. In addition to these, there are other digital operators that operate exclusively online or by telephone—such as Expedia.it, Lastminute, and E-Dreams—which use the web as a communication and sales channel; thanks to their greater operational flexibility, they attain a competitive advantage by focusing on the provision of tourist products at a lower cost than their traditional competitors.

*Process Innovation.* The aspects related to process innovation in Alpitour are presented next.

*Organizational Process.* As stated earlier, the company philosophy is translated into an organizational structure characterized by several divisions. Each division deals with a specific activity along the production and distribution chains (see Fig. 1). The divisions are presented next (see <http://www.alpitourworld.com>).

1. *Tour operating.* In line with the motto “specialists in organized holidays” (CE), this represents the core of the company business, because Alpitour is the leading tour operator company on the Italian market. The company operates through a series of major brands (Alpitour, Francorosso, Villaggi Bravo, Karambola, and Viaggidea), each of which is directed at a different and precise target. Through its wide-spread presence in Italy, the company publishes more than 13 million catalogues, which are distributed in 10,000 travel agencies. Travel agencies choose Alpitour

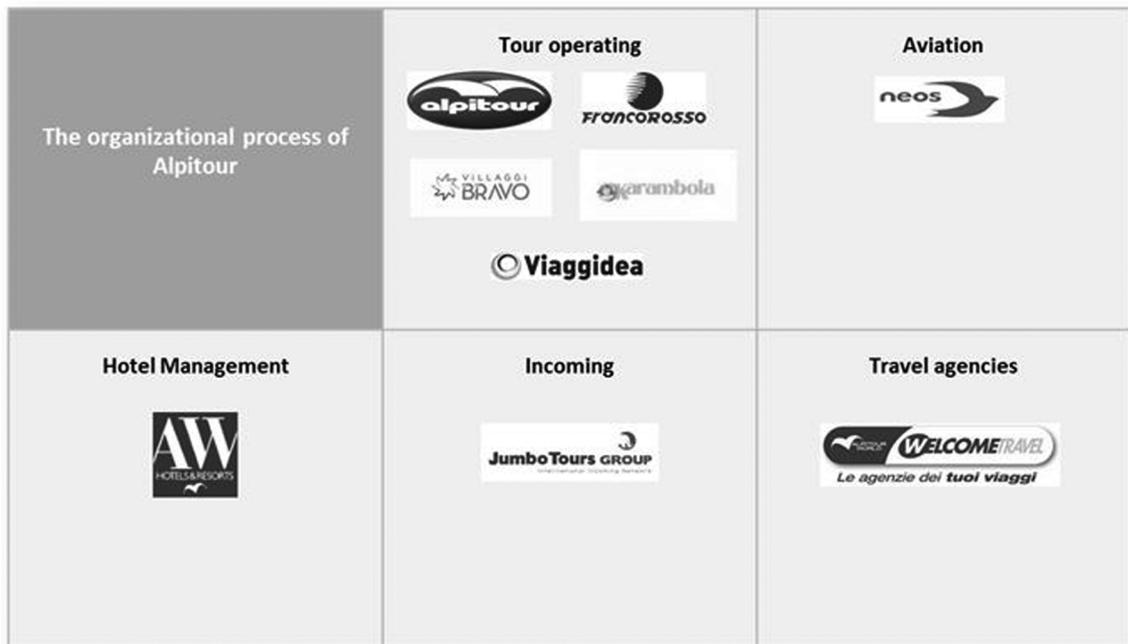


Figure 1. The brands of Alpitour in each division (source: interviews with managers).

“on the strength of its strong brand identity, which is synonymous with the prominence, quality, flexibility, and efficiency that distinguish its publishing and distribution systems” (ASM).

2. *Aviation.* Following the motto “fly in good company” (CE), this division is responsible for offering an air service on short-, medium-, and long-range routes to create a global tourist product that also incorporates air travel. The company Neos was created by Alpitour in 2002, and it boasts its own fleet of Boeing aircraft. This makes it possible to internally manage all the service quality standards—namely, services provided on-board, comfort, security, attention to detail, punctuality, flight flexibility, and cost levels. Established as a charter company for the AlpitourWorld Group, it currently also supplies a charter service to other tour operators, a series of scheduled services, as well as rentals for private clients and aircraft brokers. Thanks to a series of positive acknowledgments—both from consumers, in terms of customer satisfaction levels, and from the Boeing company, in terms of aircraft maintenance—Noes flights have come to represent the first winning stage of the holiday.
3. *Hotel management.* In line with the motto “welcome to a new level of hospitality” (CE), this division deals with hotel and resort management, both in Italy and abroad. It is therefore able to directly control every stage of its clients’ holidays to obtain the desired quality standard. Through the chain AlpitourWorld Hotels and Resorts, the Group operates in the most prestigious sea and cultural settings in Italy and abroad, offering a stay in perfect Italian style and dealing with multiple target ranges. The group is strengthening its presence in the business sector by offering the ideal location for company meetings.
4. *Incoming.* To guarantee its clients “a secure, constant, valuable presence” (CE), this division deals with incoming-accommodation activities in Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean. Driven by the awareness that “being directly onsite always makes the difference” (ASM) in terms of quality, the group works with Jumbo Tours—an important Spanish company in the incoming field. Through its network of offices and branches located in the most important destinations, it

maintains a relationship with the accommodation facility and local authorities in relation to hotel negotiations, accommodation management, as well as client transfers and excursions.

5. *Travel agencies.* In line with the motto “set off on the right foot” (CE), this division oversees the largest Italian travel agency network, comprising a thousand agencies (Welcome Travel Group), of which 70 are proprietary and 900 are associated, operating on the national territory. It also promotes its products through 10 million promotional magazines per year. Alpitour chose to manage a large travel agency network for two reasons: First, from an operative perspective, the company thereby achieves greater control of the service production and supply process, because it oversees staff training, commercial assistance, and the creation of commercial initiatives. Second, from an economic perspective, the group wields considerable contractual force vis-à-vis its suppliers (hotel chains; tour operators; airlines; surface, sea, and car hire transportation companies), thanks to the tourist business organization that it manages. This makes it possible to guarantee the best commercial conditions for the travel agencies on the network.

Through the combination of these divisions, it is possible to provide a wide-reaching offer spread across five continents. “This is also facilitated through a commercial network of proprietary offices positioned in the most representative markets, along with strong international partnerships” (ASM). The client receives a reliable service standard, with no unpleasant surprises. This is also made possible thanks to the high capital, financial, and economic standards, which allow for investments directed at company growth.

*Commercial Process.* The commercial sphere boasts “a vision as large as the world” (CMM). The company has an international action sphere. Indeed, the company, which was established through the merger with Francorosso in 1998, is now one of the largest European groups operating in the tourism sector. A series of partnerships in the production, accommodation, distribution, and financial sectors also allow for continuous development on the international scale.

Nowadays, the group is the only multibrand tourism specialist on the Italian scene. An expansion of its borders led to the acquisition of distribution channels, with the addition of the website *alpitourworld.com*. This website provides a dialogue window with clients, offering a range of products labeled Alpitour, Francorosso, Villaggi Bravo, and Karambola. On the strength of the quality of the services, the user-friendly technology, and the simple search process, it now represents a reference point for more than 5 million visitors: both independent travelers, who are looking to organize their holiday independently, and surfers seeking information. Furthermore, e-tourism is offered through the websites of the five individual brands owned by the group.

*Productive Process.* The production function is responsible for perfecting the tangible and intangible features of the tourist product, through a continuous quest for high product quality. The group carefully selects its suppliers so that the “raw materials used to put together the trip or holiday guarantee high quality overall” (CMM). The group uses an “advanced computer system to ensure excellent automation of the computer processes both across and within the various divisions” (ICTM).

### Discussion

A global product is made possible because the product is entirely created, managed, and supplied directly by the group itself. Its divisional organizational structure (tour operating division, aviation division, hotel management division, incoming division, and travel agency services division; Brusa, 1986, 2004; Mintzberg, 1979) permits the offer of each activities internally: The control of the product quality (Gale, 1994) is then favored as well as the level of efficiency and effectiveness of the activity carried out and a reduction of the sales price.

The product comes to constitute a combination of tangible and intangible elements (Bruce & Hines, 2007; Farneti, 2007; Giunta, 1993; Kotler, Bowen, & Makens, 2007; Pellicelli, 2005). In tangible terms, a varied product is created to offer the consumer multiple choices. Furthermore, careful customer relationship management fosters a constant improvement of the existing product. Thanks

to its strong focus on intangible elements, Alpitour even tends to transform the intangible into the tangible to ensure potential customers of the quality of the service they are purchasing. This is ensured through the communication of a series of information that makes the service more tangible. One might cite, for instance, a hotel’s decision to use a similar style for its communal areas worldwide: This bestows a tangible aspect on the service. Alpitour places great importance on intangible elements because they improve client perception and encourage their loyalty. For these purposes, the commercial policy plays a central role in its strategy (Aaker & Biel, 1993; De Chernatony & McDonald, 2003; Kapferer & Laurent, 1992): The advertising message is intended to boost the company’s image as a serious, reliable tourist operator that provides holidays with no nasty surprises.

The company offer varies depending on the specific target range (McCharty, 1964; Pellicelli, 2005). This is why each brand has its own style: To complement the many different types of holiday (think of low-cost trips for young people, package family holidays, and top-luxury holidays for wealthy clients and connoisseurs), the group offers a range of different types of holiday.

Thanks to its customer-centric approach (Giacosa, 2011, 2012; Trout, 2012), the commercial offer is managed in an innovative manner. In line with the motto “holidays chosen by you,” clients play a central role in all the company choices to ensure that the product meets their requirements as best as possible. This creates a product that reflects different holiday styles, depending on the target client. The brands’ common denominator is a capacity to anticipate market trends so that consumer tastes and demands always come first. If their requirements change, the client can simply choose a different brand from within the group rather than abandoning it altogether. Thanks to the presence of offices and branches both in Italy and on the main foreign markets, Alpitour ensures that, far from feeling abandoned, the client is supported throughout his or her holiday.

The quality level is sought in every target range (Gale, 1994; Gartner, 1989): Even when it comes to low-cost trips geared at young people, suppliers are carefully selected, and, depending on the type of accommodation chosen by the client, the product offered is rigorous, high-quality, and extremely

competitive. Naturally, the quest for the highest quality is amplified when it comes to luxury holidays, where clients are extremely demanding and attracted by the intrinsic and aesthetic characteristics of excellence. Thanks to the high-quality product, the company succeeds in standing out from its competitors, attracting the attention of consumers, and rising above rival firms. Generally, this market niche is much less affected by the consumption crisis, providing the company with greater scope to create a high-quality product.

The commercial strategy also has the goal of establishing a dialogue window between the company and the client to always be aware of the client's requirements and to meet them as best as possible (Gordon et al., 1994; Grönroos, 2006): Travel agencies represent a key location where holidays begin, offering the highest quality services, well-trained personnel, and customer satisfaction. Alpitour products, and those of other tour operators, are promoted and commercialized in the travel agencies themselves, offering the highest quality levels. Product innovation also serves to strengthen the group's scope and commercial reliability, rendering it particularly robust in the face of rival firms (Kapferer, 2002), which are somewhat aggressive on both the national and foreign markets.

Alpitour's commercial formula demonstrates the validity of the literature concerning the characteristics of tourism company service (Grönroos, 2006; Kotler & Scott, 1993; Page, 2009; Vargo & Lusch, 2006): As a result of a drastic change to the context in which companies operate and consumers live, the dynamics of supply and demand of Alpitour are highly changeable. In addition, being a service, the product range is also commercialized through electronic channels. As a result of their immateriality, the services may be customized, and clients are actively involved in the service production and supply procedures. Finally, the tourist product is considered as a shopping experience, affecting the consumer emotionally, for which the company must be able to emphasize the tangible and emotional aspects of the experience.

#### Conclusions, Implications, and Limitations

The AlpitourWorld Group is organized in a divisional manner, wherein each individual division

deals in an integrated way within the production and distribution chain. Consequently, Alpitour is present directly in all phases (tour operating, aviation, hotels, incoming, and travel agencies), and it internally manages all the steps of the industry thanks to its brands. The activities carried out by the individual divisions are strictly monitored by the management to ensure that the high-quality objectives are met.

"Fly, host, organize, sell, boost": All of these activities are managed in an integrated manner within a single group. The group therefore constitutes a complete production and supply chain. This is the only way that each stage of the creation and commercialization of the product can be overseen to offer the highest levels of customer satisfaction.

To offer a comprehensive tourist product, Alpitour adopts a highly innovative approach both in terms of the products and of the organizational, production, and commercial processes that it uses. With its innovative approach, the plethora of sector-specific expertise that it has built over more than 60 years in business, and its diversified brand portfolio based on client requirements, the company boasts a winning formula for attaining, and retaining, a position of market leadership.

The philosophy of innovation goes hand in hand with traditional values. For Italians, Alpitour is the symbol of a serious, reliable operator that has been taking Italians on holiday for years. It still upholds its traditional values: In spite of market developments and the subsequent change in consumers' tastes and requirements, the company retains its traditional focus on anticipating market trends, according a central role to the client in the process and always striving to offer a holiday free from unpleasant surprises. Nonetheless, to get the most out of innovation without neglecting the values of tradition, the two values must necessarily go hand in hand. As a result, although they might seem like antithetical principles, tradition and innovation are not contrasted. On the contrary, it is only through a strong interaction between past and future that a competitive advantage can be maintained.

An operator removed from traditional values, however, would bring about great confusion for consumers, who have always identified the group's brand as a serious, reliable operator that pays close attention to their requirements, often in a personalized

manner. Equally, an exclusively traditional approach not open to the values of innovation would lose the advantage, in terms of efficiency and effectiveness, that derives from the adoption of an innovative approach. The combination of innovation and tradition represents a winning strategy for tackling the effects of clients' changing tastes and expectations as well as the consumption crisis. Alpitour adopts a strategy of enriching the old with the new. For all these reasons, AlpitourWorld may be considered as a best practice in its sector: The divisional organizational structure, where each stage of the product creation and commercialization is controlled internally, ensures the increase of the customer satisfaction level and of competitive advantage.

The implications raised by this study reflect the results obtained. The research results illustrate that an integrated management of the production and supply chains in the tourist sector can provide a winning approach, making it possible to control each stage of the process and to create a highly satisfactory product for the client. Moreover, product and process innovations play a central role in the various phases of this chain and should be carefully combined with traditional values.

In this study, we chose to adopt the single case study method. Although this is sufficiently representative, as illustrated in the methodology, the research boundaries should ideally be expanded through an analysis of other entities operating in the sector on an international scale to analyze their approach and to assess the extent to which Alpitour's integrated management model could be replicated or even improved. Moreover, particularly in relation to the interview technique, for the continuation of our research, we intend to increase the number of interviews, investigating individuals operating in various functional areas and at various organizational levels.

#### References

- Aaker, D. A. (2002). *Building strong brands*. London, England: Simon & Schuster.
- Aaker, D. A., & Biel, L. (1993). *Brand equity and advertising*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Abernathy, W. J., & Clarke, K. B. (1985). Innovation: Mapping the winds of creative destruction. *Research Policy*, 14, 3–22.
- Addis, M. (1999). *Internet e tecnologia per il turismo* [Internet and technology for tourism]. Milan, Italy: Centro Studi TCI.
- Adner, R., & Levinthal, D. (2001). Technology evolution and demand heterogeneity: Implications for product and process innovation. *Management Science*, 47(5), 611–628.
- Alvesson, M. (2003). Methodology for close up studies—Struggling with closeness and closure. *Higher Education*, 46, 167–193.
- Alvesson, M., & Deetz, S. (2000). *Doing critical management research*. London, England: Sage.
- Atkinson, A. A., & Shaffir, W. (1998). Standards for field research in management accounting. *Journal of Management Accounting Research*, 10, 41–68.
- Bing, P., & Fesenmaier, D. R. (2000). A typology of tourism related web sites: Its theoretical background and implications. In D. R. Fesenmaier, S. Klein, & D. Buhalis (Eds.), *Information and communication technologies in tourism* (pp. 381–395). New York, NY: Springer.
- Bonanno, G., & Hawththb, B. (1998). Intensity of competition and the choice between product and process innovation. *International Journal of Industrial Organization*, 16(4), 495–510.
- Bruce, M., & Hines, T. (2007). *Fashion marketing: Contemporary issues*. New York, NY: Elsevier.
- Brusa, L. (1986). *Strutture organizzative d'impresa* [Corporate organizational structures]. Milan, Italy: Giuffrè.
- Brusa, L. (2004). *Dentro l'azienda: Organizzazione e management* [Inside the company: Organization and management]. Milan, Italy: Giuffrè.
- Buhalis, D. (1998). Strategic use of information technologies in the tourism industry. *Tourism Management*, 19(5), 409–421.
- Casarin, F. (1996). *Il marketing dei prodotti turistici* [Marketing of tourism products]. Turin, Italy: Giappichelli.
- Cohen, E. (1979). The sociology of tourism: Approaches, issues, and findings. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 10, 373–392.
- Corbetta, P. (2003). *La ricerca sociale: metodologie e tecniche, le tecniche qualitative* [Social research: Methods and techniques, qualitative techniques]. Bologna, Italy: Il Mulino.
- Costa, N. (2002). *I professionisti dello sviluppo turistico locale* [The professionals of local tourism development]. Milan, Italy: Hoepli.
- Damanpour, F. (1991). Organizational innovation: A meta-analysis of effects of determinants and moderators. *Academy of Management Journal*, 34(3), 555–590.
- De Chernatony, L., & McDonald, M. (2003). *Creating powerful brands*. Oxford, England: Elsevier.
- Drucker, P. F. (1954). *The practice of management*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- Eisenhardt, K. M. (1989). Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review*, 14, 532–550.
- Farneti, G. (2007). *Economia d'Azienda* [Of company economics]. Milan, Italy: Franco Angeli.

- Gale, B. T. (1994). *Managing customer value: Creating quality and service that customers can see*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Gamble, P. R. (1990). Developing an information technology strategy for hospitality organizations. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 19, 18–29.
- Gartner, W. B. (1989). Some suggestions for research on entrepreneurial traits and characteristics. *Entrepreneurship: Theory and Practice*, 14(1), 27–38.
- George, A. (1979). Case studies and theory development: The method of structured, focused comparison. In P. Lauren (Ed.), *Diplomacy: New approaches in history, theory, and policy* (pp. 42–68). New York, NY: Free Press.
- George, A., & McKeown, T. (1985). Case studies and theories of organizational decision making. *Advances in Information Processing in Organizations*, 2, 21–58.
- Giacosa, E. (2003). *L'economia delle aziende della net economy* [The economy of the net economy companies]. Turin, Italy: Giappichelli.
- Giacosa, E. (2011). *L'economia delle aziende di abbigliamento* [The economy of the clothing companies]. Turin, Italy: Giappichelli.
- Giacosa, E. (2012). *Mergers and acquisitions (M&A) in the luxury business*. Milan, Italy: McGraw-Hill.
- Gillham, B. (2001). *Case study research methods*. New York, NY: Continuum.
- Giunta, F. (1993). *Economia aziendale* [Business administration]. Padua, Italy: Cedam.
- Gordon, G., Di Benedetto, A., & Calantone, R. (1994). Brand equity as an evolutionary process. *The Journal of Brand Management*, 2(1), 47–56.
- Grönroos, C. (2006). Adopting a service logic for marketing. *Marketing Theory*, 6(3), 317–333.
- Gummesson, E. (2006). Many-to-many marketing as grand theory: A Nordic school contribution. In R. F. Lusch & S. L. Vargo (Eds.), *Toward a service-dominant logic of marketing* (pp. 339–353). New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe.
- Hijalager, A. (2010). A review of innovation research in tourism. *Tourism Management*, 31(1), 1–12.
- Holloway, J. C., & Robinson, C. (1994). *Marketing for tourism* (3rd ed.). London, England: Longman.
- Jönsson, S., & Lukka, K. (2005). *Doing interventionist research in management accounting*. Gothenburg, Sweden: University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg Research Institute.
- Kapferer, J. N. (2002). *Ce qui va changer les marques* [What will change brands?]. Paris, France: Editions d'Organisation.
- Kapferer, J. N., & Laurent, G. (1992). *Sensibilité aux marques, Marché aux marques, marché sans marques* [Sensitivity to brands, market brands, markets without brands]. Paris, France: Editions d'Organisation.
- Kotler, P., Bowen, J., & Makens, J. (2007). *Marketing del turismo* [Tourism marketing]. Milan, Italy: McGraw-Hill.
- Kotler, P., & Scott, W. G. (1993). *Marketing management*. Turin, Italy: Prentice Hall.
- Marcussen, C. H. (2001). *Trends in European Internet distribution of travel and tourism services*. Bornholm, Denmark: Research Centre of Bornholm.
- Martinengo, M. C., & Savoia, L. (1998). *Sociologia dei fenomeni turistici* [Sociology of tourism phenomena]. Milan, Italy: Guerini e Associati.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2005). *Qualitative research design—An interactive approach* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- McCharty, E. J. (1964). *Basic marketing: A managerial approach* (2nd ed.). Homewood, IL: Irwin.
- Merriam, S. B. (1988). *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Michel, G. (2000). *La stratégie d'extension de marque* [The brand extension strategy]. Paris, France: Vuibert.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Mintzberg, H. (1979). *The structuring of organization*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Missikoff, M. (2001, November). *Turismo ed innovazione tecnologica Verso il Web semantico* [Tourism and technological innovation toward the semantic web]. Paper presented at the Italian Conference on Innovation and Information Technologies for Tourism, Trento, Italy.
- Page, S. J. (2009). *Transport and tourism: Global perspectives*. New York, NY: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Pellicelli, G. (2005). *Il marketing* [Marketing]. Milan, Italy: Wolters Kluwer.
- Pencarelli, T. (2001). *La diffusione di Internet e del commercio elettronico nell'industria turistica nell'esperienza delle imprese alberghiere marchigiane* [The spread of the Internet and electronic commerce in the tourism industry in the experience of the Marche hotel business]. Paper presented at the *Atti del Convegno su Il commercio elettronico dei servizi, Sessione 1* [Conference on Electronic Trade in Services, Session 1].
- Platt, J. (1992). Case study in American methodological thought. *Current Sociology*, 40, 17–48.
- Potter, J., & Wetherell, M. (1987). *Discourse and social psychology: Beyond attitudes and behavior*. London, England: Sage.
- Re, P. G. (2013). *La gestione dell'innovazione nelle aziende familiari* [Innovation management in family businesses]. Turin, Italy: Giappichelli.
- Re, P. G., Giacosa, E., Giachino, C., & Stupino, M. (2014, January). *The management of innovation in the wine business*. Paper presented at the Business Systems Laboratory 2nd International Symposium “Systems Thinking for a Sustainable Economy: Advancements in Economic and Managerial Theory and Practice,” Rome, Italy.
- Saracco, A. (2008). *Ristorazione e cultura del territorio* [Catering and culture of the area]. Milan, Italy: Franco Angeli.
- Sciarelli, M., & Della Corte, V. (2006). *Risorse, competenze e vantaggi competitivi: manuale di strategia* [Resources, competencies, and competitive advantages: Strategy manual]. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

- Siggelkow, N. (2007). Persuasion with case studies. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(1), 20–24.
- Solomon, M. R., Marshall, G. W., Stuart, E. W., Barnes, B., & Mitchell, V. (2009). *Marketing: Real people, real choices*. Harlow, England: Pearson Education.
- Sood, A., & Tellis, G. J. (2009). Do innovations really pay off? Total stock market returns to innovation. *Marketing Science*, 28(3), 442–456.
- Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Stake, R. (1998). Qualitative case studies. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of qualitative inquiry* (pp. 119–150). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Tejada, P., & Moreno, P. (2013). Patterns of innovation in tourism: “Small and medium-size enterprises.” *The Service Industries Journal*, 33(7–8), 749–758.
- Thiengnoi, P., & Afzal, S. (2009). *A comparative analysis of CSR strategies, implementation and outcomes—A qualitative case study of IKEA, Starbucks and H&M* (Unpublished master’s thesis). Faculty of Economics Sciences, Communication and IT, Karlstad University, Sweden.
- Tidd, J., Bessant, J., & Pavitt, K. (2001). *Managing innovation: Integrated technological, market and organizational change*. Chichester, England: Wiley.
- Trout, J. (2012). *Positioning myopia*. Retrieved from <https://archive.ama.org/archive/aboutama/documents/ama-75th/75th-jack-trout.pdf>
- Tushman, M., & Anderson, P. (1986). Technological discontinuities and organizational environments. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 31, 439–465.
- Utterback, J. M., & Abernathy, W. J. (1975). A dynamic model of process and product innovation, *Omega*, 3(6), 639–656.
- Vargo, S. L., & Lusch, R. F. (2006). Service-dominant logic: What it is, what it is not, what it might be. In R. F. Lusch & S. L. Vargo (Eds.), *The service-dominant logic of marketing: Dialog, debate, and directions* (pp. 43–56). New York, NY: M.E. Sharpe.
- Yin, R. (1984). *Case study research*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Yin, R. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3rd ed.). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

