

The Challenges of Strategic Management in the Tourism Sector of the Analamanga and Itasy Regions: Local Issues and Adaptation to Specific Contexts.

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Highlighting and studying the particular difficulties linked to strategic management for tourism companies in these two regions.

How can tourism businesses in the highlands cope with external constraints?

Theory: It is possible to apply the theory of strategic adaptation or the theory of resources and capabilities to study how local companies adapt their strategies to specific contexts such as infrastructure and natural resources.

Summary:

This article examines the obstacles associated with strategic management in the tourism sector in the Analamanga and Itasy regions, two areas with different but mutually complementary socio-economic and environmental realities. This study examines how local tourism companies adapt their strategies in the face of challenges such as weak infrastructure, natural resource management and socio-political instability, using strategic adaptation theory and resource and capability theory. This article looks at effective management methods and offers suggestions for improving the competitiveness and sustainability of tourism businesses in these regions.

1- Introduction

Worldwide, tourism plays a key role in growth and job creation. Every year, it achieves exceptional results. Globally, in 2018, the number of visitors increased by 6%, reaching 1.4 billion visitors. According to the World Tourism Organization, the tourism sector contributes 10% of global GDP, 7% of international trade and 30% of service exports. Tourism is the world's third-largest export category, behind fuels and chemicals, and ahead of the food and automotive industries. In many emerging countries, the tourism sector accounts for the lion's share of exports. In fact, it provides both foreign currency and human resources.

Throughout its history, tourism has demonstrated that it is a constantly evolving field that adapts to contemporary societies. In general, the development of tourism on a national and international scale has been seen as a beneficial phenomenon, having a significant impact both economically and socially. In this way, the tourism sector can contribute to reducing poverty and promoting socio-economic development.

The tourism sector is constantly growing, and needs people to manage it.¹

International tourism is a sector in perpetual motion. To succeed and break through, there's no set recipe: you have to keep your eyes and ears open, keep an eye on niche markets, and be highly adaptable: in terms of services, offers, experiences, destinations, and so on.²

Today, international tourism is defined as tourism with a sustainable dimension. Sustainable tourism is a key trend in international tourism, now defined by the UNWTO (World Tourism Organization) as "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, by meeting the needs of visitors, professionals, the environment and host communities".

The importance of this activity is increasingly felt in developing countries like Madagascar, which have great economic, natural and cultural potential. With this in mind, the government and tourism experts are striving to promote Madagascar as a destination on the international market. To this day, the Big Island conveys the image of a "treasure island", assimilated by the luxurious ruins that have become world heritage sites, the island's indigenous flora and fauna or Madagascar's culture in its own right.

At the same time, this sector is one of the most vulnerable. According to global news reports, the tourism sector has been the most impacted by COVID 19. "In 2019, more than 375,000 tourists visited Madagascar, spending nearly \$900 million. Tourism represents more than 5% of the country's GDP and, with the closure of borders, 641,000 local tourism-related jobs are at risk." (<https://www.naturevolution.org/madagascar-epidemie-covid/>).

¹ <https://atlas-institute.com/tourisme-management-8-choses-a-savoir-pour-etre-au-top/>

² <https://fr.textmaster.com/blog/6-conseils-tourisme-international/>

Since the start of the pandemic, the government has provided no assistance to the tourism sector, which has been devastated. “Every time a curfew or regional closure is announced, the problem grows... 90% of workers are out of work”. (https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2021/07/13/a-madagascar-le-secteur-du-tourisme-est-lamine-par-la-crise-sanitaire_6088177_3212.html).

However, other tourism operators have managed to survive despite the crisis. One of them announced the following statement during his interview: “The landscape has changed, a lot of places have closed in the space of a year. We survived because we had cash.”

Work organization and corporate relations have been turned upside down by this crisis. As a result, leadership and management skills are needed to ensure a company's long-term survival.

Tourism is one of the key sectors for the government of Madagascar, as a vehicle for economic growth and job creation in both urban and rural areas, as indicated in the Politique Générale de l'Etat (PGE) and the Plan Emergence Madagascar (PEM). Following this plan, the Ministry of Transport, Tourism and Meteorology (MTTM) initially set growth targets, including reaching 500,000 international visitors and USD 1.5 billion in tourism revenues by 2023, by diversifying the market, particularly the tourism offer, promoting and facilitating investment in accommodation and transport infrastructures, spreading out the seasonality and developing domestic tourism. These ambitions were revised to 2025 with the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected international tourism in general.

According to a survey carried out by the Ministry of Tourism, only 7.3% of tourists stay in the highlands, which is the least visited region in the whole of Madagascar. Resources are little or poorly exploited by the tourism industry. Some 90% of tourism offers are focused on provincial destinations, justifying the 80% of the population surveyed who do not feel the impact of tourism. This is exacerbated by the lack of infrastructure for tourism in the area.

Not only has Madagascar been adversely affected by the pandemic, but the highlands still have a very low visitation rate compared with other regions of Madagascar.

The Analamanga and Itasy regions: geographical and socio-economic characteristics

The Analamanga region, which includes the capital Antananarivo, is the country's main economic hub, while the Itasy region is more rural. The two regions have different issues at stake in terms of tourism management, but share certain common challenges, such as access to resources and the attractiveness of tourism in the highlands.

The ITASY Region comprises just three Districts: Miarinarivo, Arivonimamo and Soavinandriana.

With a surface area of 6,570 km², ITASY is one of Madagascar's smallest regions. It comprises three Districts divided into 51 communes and 513 Fokontany.

In the Analamanga and Itasy regions, the tourism sector faces certain challenges, such as the geographical isolation of certain areas and restricted access to modern infrastructure. According to Rasolofo (2016), surrounding areas like Itasy need a better governance framework to maximize the economic benefits of tourism. In addition, Randrianarivelo (2019) stresses the importance of maintaining fragile ecosystems, particularly in the Itasy region, rich in lakes and mountains, while strengthening local resources. In these areas, strategic management must integrate the cultural specificity and expectations of the local population to minimize conflicts of use and maximize the benefits of sustainable tourism.

Issues and objectives of the article

The central issue of this article is to analyze the specific challenges faced by tourism companies in these two regions, and to understand how strategic management can be coordinated to meet these challenges. We draw on strategic management theory, in particular the theory of strategic adaptation and the theory of resources and capabilities.

Madagascar's tourism sector: A developing sector

Tourism in Madagascar represents an important sector for economic development, with cultural and natural riches attracting national and international visitors every year. However, the sector suffers from a number of challenges, notably in terms of management, infrastructure and governance. According to Raharijaona et al (2018), tourism in Madagascar, while offering considerable potential, management often fragmented between different local

stakeholders encountering obstacles related to the slow evolution of infrastructure. Research by Rakotoarison (2017) highlights the difficulty of coordinating actions between local authorities, private companies and communities, often disconnected from overall tourism development strategies.

Adapting to a Specific Context: Challenges and Management Strategies

Tourism management strategies need to be adapted to the local context, particularly to meet visitor expectations while respecting the socio-economic dynamics of the local community. According to Fontenelle et al (2020), adapting tourism marketing strategies to specific destinations, such as Analamanga with the capital Antananarivo, requires a fine-tuned understanding not only of the expectations of different customer segments, but also of local realities (infrastructure, safety, etc.). Furthermore, Rakoto (2021) argues that community integration in tourism management, including through training programs and direct job creation, is essential to ensure the sector's sustainability and prosperity.

Strategic management challenges in an uncertain environment

Strategic management in the tourism sector must navigate an environment full of uncertainties, including economic conditions, health crises (such as the COVID-19 pandemic) and environmental issues. Bertaux (2019) and Mamy (2020) stressed that managers need to be agile, able to react quickly to unexpected changes and have a long-term vision of tourism development. On the other hand, Rakotoarivelo (2022) called for the need for strategic planning, including elements of resilience, particularly in the face of the natural disasters that regularly affect Madagascar. This is the first time we've been able to do this.

Future prospects and sustainability issues

The main challenge for the strategic management of the tourism sector in the Analamanga and Itasy regions lies in the balance to be maintained between economic development, environmental preservation and improving the living conditions of the local population. According to Raso (2021), a sustainable tourism model that incorporates responsible practices and rational use of natural resources is essential to ensure the sustainability of tourism activities. Razanamasy (2020) discusses the importance of public-private partnerships to improve infrastructure and promote a diversified tourist offer, but respects the ecological limits of the region.

Strategic management and adaptation in the tourism sector

Strategic management in tourism has been extensively theorized in terms of adapting to local conditions, managing natural resources and responding to competition. Tourism businesses need to adapt to the ever-changing external environment, so they require flexible, dynamic management.

The theory of strategic adaptation and the theory of resources and capabilities

- Strategic adaptation theory: This theory suggests that companies need to adjust their strategies in response to changing conditions in their external environment. In the case of tourism in Madagascar, this includes adapting to challenges related to governance, the natural environment and tourist expectations.
- Resource-Based View (RBV): According to this theory, companies derive their competitiveness from their unique resources and their ability to exploit these resources strategically. This approach is particularly relevant to Malagasy tourism businesses, which need to maximize the use of their natural and human resources.

Specific challenges facing the tourism sector in Madagascar

Madagascar presents unique challenges for the tourism sector, such as insufficient infrastructure (transport, accommodation), environmental degradation (deforestation, loss of biodiversity), and obstacles linked to human resources management.

Infrastructures

The lack of adequate infrastructure, particularly in terms of transport and accommodation, is a major obstacle. Roads are often in poor condition, making access to tourist sites difficult and dangerous. In addition, there is a shortage of hotels meeting international standards, limiting visitors' options.

Environment

Environmental degradation, particularly deforestation and loss of biodiversity, is seriously affecting Madagascar's appeal as a tourist destination. The loss of forests and natural habitats threatens the endemic species and unique landscapes that attract tourists.

Human Resources

Human resource management in the tourism sector is also a challenge. There is an urgent need for training and skills development to improve the quality of services offered to tourists.

"The contemporary challenges of tourism in Madagascar - Political Review, June 15, 2024. Despite Madagascar's immense potential, the tourism sector is facing several problems that are holding back its development. These challenges include lack of resources, poor infrastructure, a tarnished international image, precarious road safety and growing crime."

2- Research Methodology

Choice of method

This study uses a mixed methodological approach that combines qualitative and quantitative analysis to collect data on the management practices of Analamanga and Itasy tourism enterprises. Its objective is to understand the nuances of regional management strategies and to examine how they are adapted to the cultural, economic and geographical specificities of each region.

Data collection

The qualitative analysis is based on semi-structured interviews with key players in the tourism sector, such as hotel owners, travel agents and representatives of local authorities. These interviews allow us to gather deep and subtle perspectives on these specific regional issues and management strategies.

The quantitative analysis is based on structured surveys distributed to representative samples of local tourism businesses as part of the survey. The quantitative data collected are analyzed statistically to identify trends and correlations between management practices and the economic performance of enterprises. This dual approach triangulates data and strengthens the validity of results, providing a comprehensive and integrated understanding of the strategic management challenges of the tourism sector in these regions.

Questionnaires : A questionnaire was distributed to a sample of tourism business managers to analyze challenges and policy adjustments in both regions.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using statistical software (JASP) for quantitative data and a thematic analysis for qualitative data from interviews.

The questionnaire was created using the Epi Info 7 tool.

3- Results and analysis

Challenges faced by tourism businesses in Analamanga and Itasy

- Infrastructure: Analamanga's tourism businesses benefit from better infrastructure such as paved roads, hotels with international standards and efficient transport services. But they must constantly navigate saturated markets and face increased competition. At Itasy, the infrastructure is more basic, but companies are harnessing nature and adventure tourism to attract audiences in search of authentic outdoor experiences. "The Confederation of Tourism of Madagascar highlights the importance of improving infrastructure to support sustainable tourism development, stressing the need for well maintained roads and quality accommodation."

- Natural resources: Both regions hold precious natural treasures, including national parks that protect unique biodiversity and majestic lakes that attract eco-tourists. But the sustainable use of these resources is essential to sustain these assets for future generations. Resource management, particularly in the areas of water and biodiversity, is a huge challenge that requires innovative strategies and public-private cooperation. "The Confederation emphasizes the preservation of natural resources, promoting sustainable management practices to protect Madagascar's unique biodiversity and attract eco-tourists."

- Socio-political instability: Enterprises in both regions are very sensitive to political fluctuations and social instability. Regime changes, social movements and political crises can have devastating effects on the tourism industry, directly affecting visitor flows and the local economy. "The Confederation of Tourism of Madagascar recognizes that socio-political instability can have a significant impact on the flow of tourism, and calls for enhanced security measures to protect visitors and local businesses."

Strategic adaptation of tourism businesses

- Analamanga: Local businesses focus on diversifying their offerings (urban, cultural tourism, etc.), modernizing their infrastructure and managing online reputation.

The Analamanga region, which mainly encompasses the capital Antananarivo, is a major economic and tourist center of Madagascar. Analamanga's tourism businesses face increasingly diverse demand while responding to the specific challenges of urban management and increased competition in a globalized environment.

Diversification of Tourist Offers

Analamanga's tourism businesses focus primarily on diversifying their offerings to meet a wide range of demands, including domestic and international tourists. Urban tourism, which includes cultural visits and heritage discoveries, is particularly developed. Antananarivo, with its historic sites, local markets, museums and monuments, is an important hub for cultural tourism.

- Example of local initiative: The Association of Hotels and Restaurants of Analamanga (AHORA) has set up programs to promote local cultural wealth. In 2020, several hotels and agencies launched tours around the city, including guided tours of the Queen's Palace or the Rova, to meet a growing demand for cultural experience (source: AHORA, interview, 2021).

- Analysis: This diversification strategy makes it possible not only to capture specific market segments, but also to increase Antananarivo's attractiveness vis-à-vis other more exotic or rural tourist destinations.

Infrastructure Modernization and Online Reputation Management

Infrastructure is a major challenge for Analamanga's tourism businesses, especially hotels and restaurants that are looking to modernize their services to meet the expectations of international travelers, often influenced by online platforms (Tripadvisor, Booking.com, etc.).

- Example of a local initiative: In 2021, the Colbert Hotel, a major player in the sector, undertook a renovation of its facilities to offer luxury services while integrating sustainable practices such as water management and renewable energy. This has helped to better position the international tourism market (source: Interview with the manager of the Colbert hotel, 2021).

- Online reputation: Tourism companies in Antananarivo have understood the importance of online rating platforms. Many hotels have invested in online reputation management services to respond to guest reviews, which is crucial to attracting international guests. A study conducted by Madagascar Tourism in 2020 found that 70% of international tourists check online reviews before choosing accommodation in Antananarivo.

Scientific references and recent studies

- Rabeharisoa et al. (2020) explored the impact of diversification in Antananarivo's tourism sector and found that diversifying cultural and heritage services helps increase the average length of stays.

- Randriamanantsoa and Rasoanirina (2022) analyzed modernization efforts in the hotel sector and online reputation management in Madagascar. They conclude that hotels in Analamanga, especially in the capital, are undergoing a significant change in their management practices in order to adapt to the new expectations of tourists.

- Itasy: Itasy businesses focus on sustainable tourism, exploiting local natural resources (agritourism, eco-tourism) and offering authentic experiences far from traditional tourist circuits.

Strategic Adaptation to Itasy

The Itasy region, which is more rural and known for its natural wealth and spectacular landscapes, takes a different approach in the tourism sector. Itasy's tourism businesses focus on sustainable tourism, harnessing local natural resources to attract a clientele seeking authenticity and unspoiled nature.

Sustainable Tourism: Agrotourism and Ecotourism

Itasy's businesses focus on developing sustainable tourism, which not only preserves the environment but also creates synergies with local communities. Agri-tourism and ecotourism are key strategies in this region.

- Example of a local initiative: The project "Voyage Vert Itasy" was launched in 2020 by local actors to promote tourism circuits that include visiting agricultural farms, discovering sustainable cultivation techniques and staying in eco-friendly lodges. These experiences allow visitors to better understand local agriculture while reducing the ecological footprint of tourism (source: Interview with project manager Voyage Vert Itasy, 2022).
- Natural resources: Lake Itasy, the area's main natural attraction, has become a center for outdoor activities such as kayaking, hiking and bird watching. Local businesses, such as Itasy Evasion and Eko-Lodge, have built green infrastructure around the lake to offer authentic and environmentally friendly tourism experiences (source: Itasy Evasion, 2021).

Authenticity and Local Experiences

Itasy companies are positioning themselves in niche segments such as ecotourism and authentic experiences away from traditional tourist circuits. This includes immersions in local culture, where tourists can participate in activities such as craft workshops or gastronomic discoveries with local producers.

- Example of a local initiative: The cottage Le Relais d'Itasy offers immersion stays in local villages where visitors learn to cook traditional Malagasy dishes with locals while staying in ecological bamboo houses (source: Interview with managers of the Relais d'Itasy, 2021).

Scientific references and recent studies

- Rakotondramanana et al. (2022) examined agritourism initiatives in the Itasy region and found that sustainable tourism activities not only preserve local ecosystems but also generate additional income for rural communities.
- Ramaroson and Ravaozanany (2023) studied ecotourism practices in the Itasy region, and highlighted that the region is uniquely positioned to attract an international market segment interested in authentic experiences and nature conservation.

Capacity and Resource Analysis

Using resource and capacity theory, it appears that companies in both regions are trying to capitalize on unique resources, such as Madagascar's unique biodiversity. However, they face limitations in terms of qualified human resources and access to funding for large-scale projects.

Resource and capacity theory (RBV) applied to the tourism sector

The theory of resources and capabilities (Barney, 1991) suggests that a firm's competitiveness depends largely on its internal resources and its ability to exploit them effectively. In the context of Madagascar's tourism sector, this theory is particularly relevant, as it helps to understand how local businesses can use unique resources, such as biodiversity and cultural heritage, to differentiate themselves and create a sustainable competitive advantage.

Tourism companies in Analamanga and Itasy are trying to capitalize on Madagascar's exceptional biodiversity, a major natural asset that can be seen as a unique strategic resource. According to a study by Rasolofo (2020), Madagascar is recognized worldwide for its rare flora and fauna, which represents a major competitive advantage for tourism businesses. This type of intangible resource (biodiversity) is difficult to emulate and is a key success factor for local businesses in both regions. Ecotourism, which promotes nature conservation while allowing visitors to enjoy authentic experiences, is part of this dynamic (Rakotondramanana et al., 2022).

Skilled human resources: a major challenge

However, although companies have unique natural resources, they face limitations in terms of qualified human resources. The lack of trained staff in specific areas such as hotel management, tourism marketing, or foreign languages is a major obstacle to the development of the sector.

A study by Rasoanirina and Rakotoarivony (2021) on management challenges in Malagasy tourism businesses reveals that one of the main challenges

Access to funding for large-scale projects

In parallel, another major challenge is access to finance for large-scale projects, including those requiring investments in green infrastructure or modernization of services. Vohitry et al. (2021), the majority of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Madagascar's tourism sector face difficulties in accessing adequate financing,

notably due to the lack of guarantees, the lack of adequate financial instruments and the economic uncertainty surrounding the tourism sector in Madagascar.

Itasy businesses, for example, that are embarking on agritourism or ecotourism projects, have capital needs to finance the construction of eco-lodges or the implementation of conservation programs. However, these projects require considerable funds that many local businesses cannot obtain without external support. The Agence Française de Développement (AFD) and some nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) support these initiatives, but coverage remains partial and often insufficient for large-scale projects.

Physical and technological resources

In addition to human and financial resources, companies also face limitations in terms of physical and technological infrastructure. In Antananarivo, hotels and other tourism stakeholders need modern infrastructure, including internet connectivity, hotel management systems, and online booking technologies. However, such equipment is often expensive and inaccessible to local SMEs.

A study by Raveloarison et al. (2020) highlights that digitalization in Madagascar's tourism sector remains a challenge, particularly in rural areas such as Itasy, where internet coverage is limited. This lack of technological infrastructure restricts the ability of businesses to adapt to global tourism trends, including in the areas of online booking and digital reputation management.

4- Discussion

Interpretation of results

The results show that tourism businesses in both regions have adopted adaptive strategies to address the specific challenges of the local environment. However, the lack of infrastructure and the vulnerability of human resources are major obstacles.

Comparison with other tourist regions

Businesses in Analamanga and Itasy face similar challenges as other developing tourism destinations. But cultural differences and regional particularities (environment, regional policy) dictate a clear strategy.

Practical implications for strategic management

Businesses need to build resilience not only in terms of infrastructure, but also in terms of human resource management. In addition, they must incorporate sustainability principles into their strategy to meet the demands of modern travelers while preserving their environment.

5- Conclusion

Tourism businesses in Analamanga and Itasy face considerable challenges, but they are developing appropriate strategies to address these obstacles. The theories of strategic adaptation and resources and capabilities provide a useful framework for understanding their responses.

However, the study was limited by the sample size and the variety of types of tourism businesses analyzed. In addition, the changing socio-political context may have influenced some data.

Perspectives and Recommendations

To ensure the sector's sustainability, it is recommended that local businesses strengthen their collaboration with public and private actors to improve infrastructure. It is also essential to promote sustainable management of natural resources and develop training tailored to the specific needs of the tourism sector.

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7- Annexes

- Questionnaire for tourism businesses

Questionnaire for Interviews

I. General information on the Tourist Enterprise

1. Company Name:

Open Response

2. Type of main tourist activity (Check the appropriate box(es)):

- Hotels
- Travel agency
- Adventure tourism
- Ecotourism
- Restore
- Tourist transport
- Other (please specify): _____

3. Year the company was founded:

Open Response

4. Total number of employees in the enterprise:

- Less than 10 employees
- 10-50 employees
- 51-100 employees
- More than 100 employees

5. Company location:

- Analamanga Region
- Itasy Region
- Other (please specify): _____

II. Management Strategies and Challenges

6. How would you describe your current management strategy?

(Open response, encourage interviewee to elaborate on the company's strategic vision)

7. What are the main challenges your business currently faces in the tourism sector?

(Examples: accessibility, seasonality, competition, quality management, etc.)

- Lack of market visibility
- Financial difficulties
- Human resources management issues
- Lack of facilities
- Increased competition
- Other (please specify): _____

8. In terms of human resources management, what are the main challenges for your company?

Open Response

(Example of sub-questions: recruitment, training, talent retention)

9. What are the main strategies put in place to overcome these challenges?

Open Response

(Example of sub-questions: strategic alliances, diversification, continuing training, digitalization, etc.)

10. Have you observed any significant differences between tourism management in your region (Analamanga or Itasy) and other tourist regions in the country?
- Yes
 - No
 - If so, can you explain? Open Response

III. Adaptation to Local and Specific Contexts

11. To what extent does your company take into account local specificities (culture, environment, traditions) in its strategic management?
- Very important
 - Quite important
 - Not important
 - Not at all important
12. What cultural or environmental aspects of the region directly influence the management of your tourism business?
- Open Response

13. Have you developed partnerships with local stakeholders (local authorities, other companies, associations) to improve your tourism offer?
- Yes
 - No
 - If so, what kind of partnership have you established? Open Response

14. Do you think that local and national regulations sufficiently support the development of the tourism sector in your region?
- Yes
 - No
 - If not, what improvements would you suggest? Open Response

IV. Impact of the External and Environmental Context

15. How has the health crisis (COVID-19, for example) affected the management of your tourism business?
- Major negative impact
 - Moderate impact
 - No impact
 - If impact, can you describe the actions taken to adapt? Open Response
16. How does your company manage seasonality and fluctuations in tourism demand?
- Open Response
- (Examples: off-season promotions, diversification of activities, price management, etc.)

17. What current trends in the tourism sector, such as ecotourism or sustainable tourism, influence your management strategy?
- Open Response

V. Vision and Future Prospects

18. What is your development plan for the next 5 years?
- Open Response
- (Examples: expansion, diversification of offerings, digitalization, etc.)
19. What do you think are the main levers that could improve the competitiveness of the tourism sector in your region?
- Open Response
20. If you were to give advice to another tourism business manager in a neighboring region, what would it be?
- Open Response

VI. Supplementary Questions (Optional)

21. Do you want to add information or details about the management of your tourism business that we have not discussed?