

LANGUAGE TRAVEL SUPPLY: THE CASE OF IDEALOG

Montserrat Iglesias¹

Yue Feng

Abstract

This paper presents the case of Idealog, a language tourism provider located in Castelldefels (Spain). A research project was conducted to study this company's language tourism offer. This general objective was broken down into five specific objectives: contextualise Castelldefels as a language tourism destination, map Idealog as an educational institution, examine its language tourism products, analyse the promotion of its language learning packages for study abroad sojourners, and suggest possible improvements in terms of language travel product configuration and promotion. First, this destination's environmental and social resource base -i.e. the local culture, geographical context and current situation- was described through a DESTEP analysis so as to pinpoint the main demographic, economic, socio-cultural, technological, ecological and political factors. Next, Idealog's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats were depicted by means of a SWOT analysis. Moreover, this company's inbound and outbound language tourism offer was explored, identifying its learning programmes before examining how Idealog promotes its language tourism services. Finally, recommendations were made so as to enhance Idealog's offer in order to maximise the language tourism experience. As well as carrying out the above mentioned analysis, primary data were collected by means of surveys and in-depth interviews to Idealog's principals and users. The results highlighted the need to address some features related to the study abroad packages (e.g. food arrangements) and marketing (e.g. the use of social media). A detailed account of the outcomes of this project will be reported and future lines of action and research avenues will be put forward.

Keywords: Language tourism, study abroad, international mobility

¹ Escola Universitària d'Hoteleria i Turisme CETT-UB (Universitat de Barcelona). Corresponding author.

E-mail: Montserrat.iglesias@cett.cat

1. INTRODUCTION

In an article published by Hosteltur (Porrás, 2016) it is stated that language tourism arouses increasing interest among destinations because of its impact on the economy. This is largely due to the long stays it generates and its capacity to reduce seasonality. In Spain educational institutions receive foreign students all year round, and although most of the language tourism activity takes place in the summer, it usually starts in May and ends in October, which is a longer period than the standard sun and beach peak season.

Within the Spanish tourism industry language tourism is gradually becoming a relevant subsector, since learning Spanish ranks among the main motivations to visit Spain, particularly in combination with other drivers, such as the local cultural heritage and the traditional appeal of sun and beach. This is the reason why in 2016 Turespaña (this country's NTO) undertook more activities in order to promote language tourism, mostly in combination with other related products.

Some key figures provided by Turespaña show that 955,697 language students visited Spain between January and September 2015, and the expenditure they generated was close to 2 billion euros, an increase of 37.7%. The language traveller is usually a young, long-term tourist who is willing to visit again Spain in the future and highly recommends this destination. Language tourists are very interested in the Spanish culture and they are potential ambassadors of Spain, so fostering language travel is of strategic importance.

According to the annual report produced by the Federation of Schools of Spanish as a Foreign Language (FEDELE), in 2015 they welcomed about 90,000 students with an average stay of 2.9 weeks, mostly females (65%). The majority were between 18 and 25 years old, followed shortly by adults aged between 25 and 45, and by juniors ranging from 12 to 18. The main outbound markets were Italy, Germany, the United States, France and the United Kingdom, but the Asian region is steadily becoming a considerable source of international mobility.

After English, Spanish is the most popular language in China (Marca España, 2016). The volume of learners of Spanish in that country has boomed and there is a growing interest among Chinese youngsters to study in Spanish-speaking countries, so the opportunity for Spanish business and language schools and universities is obvious. In the past the Spanish language was almost exclusively taught in Chinese universities, but the situation has changed since the Cervantes Institute settled down in Beijing in 2006.

The role of Instituto Cervantes (<http://www.cervantes.es>) since it was set in Madrid in 1991 has mainly focused on teaching and promoting the Spanish language and the culture of Spanish-speaking countries not only in Spain, but also all over the world. This institution offers the possibility to obtain the Diploma in Spanish as a Foreign Language (DELE). This official certificate is issued by the director of the Instituto Cervantes on behalf of the Spanish Ministry of Education. More than 45,000 candidates take DELE exams every year in 500 examination centres based in over 100 countries worldwide.

The Instituto Cervantes located in China boasts that every year 4,000 students enrol in its Spanish courses, and claims that 22,300 students learned Spanish in Chinese universities in 2015. Nowadays, more and more Chinese students wish to learn Spanish abroad. In fact, China is the first outbound market in higher education, and Spain is the

first option for Chinese university students willing to spend an academic year in a Spanish-speaking higher education context (Marca España, 2016). In 2013 about 6,000 Chinese students were enrolled in Spanish universities.

Language tourism is, therefore, a business not to be disregarded, as it not only benefits notorious, international study abroad organisations, but also modest local providers and the destinations where they are located. This was the departing point of our study, which aimed at exploring Idealog, a small language school situated in Castelldefels, a Spanish coastal town near Barcelona. The general objective -study this institution's language tourism offer- encompassed five specific objectives: contextualise Castelldefels as a language tourism destination, map Idealog as an educational institution, examine its language tourism products, analyse the promotion of its language learning packages for study abroad sojourners, and suggest possible improvements in terms of language travel product configuration and promotion.

This small-scale project is part of a research line in language travel as a subsegment of cultural tourism. Before reporting on the approach and the outcomes, the conceptual framework underlying it will be presented in the next section.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Language tourism and the market system in which language travel experiences take place have been dealt with in previous studies (Iglesias, 2014, 2016a). The demand features have been analysed in depth, namely consumers' demographics (Iglesias, 2015a), perceptions (Iglesias, 2015b), motivations (Iglesias, 2015c) and travel behaviour (Iglesias, 2015d). On the other hand, some aspects related to the supply have also been examined, such as the language tourism product composition (Iglesias, 2016b) and the marketing and management structures (Iglesias, 2017). This article will focus on one of the key elements in the configuration of the language tourism supply: the language tourism destination's environmental and social resource base. Following Ritchie's model of the educational tourism market system (Ritchie, 2003) and adapting it to the language tourism niche, the main components of the inbound destinations' resource base are the local culture, the host community, the geographical context and the current situation (see Table 1).

Table 1. The destination's environmental and social resource base

1. Local culture	1.1. Tangible assets	1.1.1. Cultural 1.1.2. Natural
	1.2. Intangible assets	1.2.1. Oral traditions and expressions 1.2.2. Performing arts 1.2.3. Social practices, rituals and festive events 1.2.4. Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe 1.2.5. Traditional craftsmanship
2. Host community	2.1. Supportive	
	2.2. Unsupportive	
3. Geographical context	3.1. Climate	
	3.2. Location	
	3.3. Setting	
4. Current situation factors	4.1. Political	
	4.2. Economic	
	4.3. Social	
	4.4. Technological	
	4.5. Environmental	
	4.6. Legal	

UNESCO (1995) distinguishes between culture as artistic production and culture as a way of life. The World Commission on Culture and Development specifically states that culture is considered as “ways of living together” (UNESCO/World commission on Culture and Development, 1995, p. 14). For UNESCO, “culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs” (UNESCO, 2001, p. 4).

Eriksen (2001) argues that UNESCO's concept of culture focuses on what differentiates groups of people, as culture belongs to a specific group and is related to their heritage. UNESCO emphasizes the uniqueness of the local, and even though external influence and globalization are also viewed as cultural phenomena, the main focus is on tradition and roots of groups that share basic values and customs.

According to the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), “heritage is a broad concept and includes the natural as well as the cultural environment. It encompasses landscapes, historic places, sites and built environments, as well as biodiversity, collections, past and continuing cultural practices, knowledge and living experiences. It records and expresses the long processes of historic development, forming the essence of diverse national, regional, indigenous and local identities and is an integral part of modern life” (ICOMOS, 1999, p. 1).

A community’s cultural heritage symbolises and at the same time contributes to create the cultural identity of a self-identified group, i.e. a nation or people. It is not just related to the past, but also to contemporary living cultures that can reinterpret themselves. Thus, they may play an essential role in the expression, production and consumption of culture by taking part in continuous co-creation processes (Campreciós et al., 2014).

UNESCO distinguishes between tangible and intangible cultural heritage. The former “refers to physical artefacts produced, maintained and transmitted intergenerationally in a society. It includes artistic creations, built heritage such as buildings and monuments, and other physical or tangible products of human creativity that are invested with cultural significance in a society” (Campreciós et al., 2014, p. 33). On the other hand, intangible cultural heritage includes “the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their Cultural Heritage” (UNESCO, 2003). Intangible heritage can foster sustainable development and is a source of cultural diversity, as it can be found in the following domains: oral traditions and expressions (including language), performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, and finally traditional craftsmanship. UNESCO acknowledges the interdependence between intangible cultural assets, and tangible cultural and natural assets.

Preserving the local culture’s assets is of vital importance for tourist destinations not only for the success of the tourism industry but also and most significantly for the host community’s identity and sustainability. Tourism development can have a number of economic, environmental and social consequences for destinations (Andereck et al., 2005; Kwon & Vogt, 2010). For sustainable tourism to take place the active support and involvement of the local population is required (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004), so taking into account the host community’ attitudes toward tourism development is fundamental in policy making and planning (Ritchie & Inkari, 2006).

The way local residents perceive the impacts of tourism on the inbound destination and their support vary as the destination evolves from one stage of its life cycle to the next (Gursoy et al., 2010). For the World Tourism Organization (WTO) sustainable tourism development basically depends on meeting the current needs so as to cater for the future, and it must be necessarily developed taking in consideration local initiatives which are coherent with the local environment, community, and culture. Therefore, all stakeholders should take part in the tourist destination’s planning, development and management to ensure permanent benefits globally (Andereck et al., 2005; Choi & Sirakaya, 2005).

The host community’s involvement is a key factor in sustainable terms, and most of the research carried out to date seems to indicate that local residents’ attitudes towards tourism are rather favourable, since they view it as an opportunity for economic

development (Gursoy et al., 2010). However, the development of the destination can bring along negative aspects which, coupled with unmet local residents' expectations, can originate unfavourable attitudes towards tourism.

Social Exchange Theory (SET) is one of the most popular theoretical frameworks used in research studies on host communities' attitudes (Byrd et al., 2009; Gursoy et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2010). Following Ap, SET is "a general sociological theory concerned with understanding the exchange of resources between individuals and groups in an interaction situation" (Ap, 1992, p. 668). Within a tourist context both the visitors and the local residents take part in an exchange and expect to obtain something out of it. From that point of view, SET entails that the locals' support will be influenced by their perceived expected gains and costs deriving from tourism (Andereck et al., 2005). Consequently, the host community members will support an exchange with the tourism industry if they consider that there will be more positive than negative effects (Gursoy & Kendall, 2006; Gursoy et al., 2010).

Several studies have confirmed this theory (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011), since generally speaking they show a correlation between the locals' higher support to tourism and their expected benefits (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004; Lee et al., 2010; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2010), while lower support is correlated to the perceived disadvantages associated to tourism development (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004; Gursoy et al., 2010; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2010).

SET is the theoretical framework underlying a study conducted by Gursoy and Rutherford (2004). In their model the mediating variables for the host community's support for tourism development are the residents' concern for their community, their emotional community attachment, their environmental awareness, the extent to which they use the same resource base that tourists use, and the state of the local economy, as well as their perceptions of social costs and economic, social and cultural gains.

According to Andereck, Anshell, Knopf and Vogt (2005), community attachment has been seen by most scholars as length of time living and/or having been born and/or grown up. On the other hand, research seems to suggest that, in general, demographic features are not clearly linked to the host community members' attitudes. Employment as a measure of dependency has been examined and the results show that business owners are more in favour of tourism than other groups, probably because they receive direct benefits.

Nunkoo and Ramkissoon's investigation (2011) draws on some studies on host community's support for tourism that have also integrated community satisfaction in their conceptual models (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2010). Trust and power are two variables included in Nunkoo & Ramkissoon's model, according to which the local's trust in tourism institutions, the degree to which they think they have the power to influence tourism development, and their satisfaction with neighbourhood conditions are factors that determine their perceptions of tourism-related impacts and their level of satisfaction with the community. Global community satisfaction is linked to the perceived gains and costs, and all these factors determine the local residents' support. Thus, a higher degree of satisfaction with the community correlates with more perceived positive impacts of tourism development, while the perception of negative impacts is also correlated with less satisfaction (Nunkoo and Ramkissoon, 2010). The residents' satisfaction with their neighbourhood is based on physical, social and economic aspects such as crowding and noise level, quality of environment, landscape, crime level, street lightning and outdoor play spaces (Nunkoo and Ramkissoon, 2011).

Despite the fact that SET has been widely used to analyse host community support its predictability has not always been conclusive, as stated by Nunkoo and Gursoy (2012). These authors have examined the role of individuals' self-identity in supporting tourism development, as they believe that the community members' attitudes regarding the impacts of tourism do not fully account for how they actually behave in this respect. Their model postulates that the locals' support is determined by the resource-based occupational identity, environmental identity, and gender identity. For them "attitudes may not always be influential in the process by which the different facets of a person's identity affect his/her support. Identity theory may be considered as a more general theory than attitude-based ones. It has the potential of explaining a wide array of behaviors across situations, including a host's support for tourism." (Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2012, 247).

All in all, what the research conducted up to date shows is that a wide range of variables come to play when trying to understand the reasons behind host community members' supportive or unsupportive attitudes and behaviours with respect to local tourism. Obviously, the same can be said as for the tourists' choice of the target destination, which can be influenced by a myriad of factors, like the geographical context. The climate may be a feature taken into account by those travellers looking for specific weather conditions. The setting can also be determining, as an urban area might be an attraction in itself for visitors living in a rural area, and vice versa. Last but not least, the location certainly is decisive in many ways, for instance when considering that holiday periods are linked to the hemisphere of residence.

Other key factors to consider are the basic facilities and resources available at the language tourism destination, as well as its current situation, for example in terms of political stability, social conflicts, economic crisis or environmental safety. One way of diagnosing such elements is through a PESTEL analysis.

In order to have an overview of the macro-environmental factors that need to be considered for business strategic management or market research, a widely used tool is PEST analysis. The PEST framework looks at external political, economic, social and technological factors, and it can also include legal and environmental aspects (in PESTLE or PESTEL analysis) or demographic and ecological aspects (in DESTEP analysis), among other variants.

This method has been applied to many fields, including the tourism and hospitality industries (Okumus & Wong, 2005; Tribe, 2010), since the impacts of macro-environmental forces must be evaluated both in terms of competitiveness and sustainable tourism development. Although it is usually used at a corporate level, this tool is increasingly mentioned in country or destination branding literature (Bivolaru et al., 2009; Moilanen & Rainisto, 2009), sometimes in combination with SWOT analysis (Mayaka & Prasad, 2012; Chong, 2014).

The SWOT matrix evaluates the internal aspects (strengths and weaknesses) and external aspects (opportunities and threats) of a project or business venture in relation to a given product, industry or place. By means of a SWOT analysis these four types of factors are identified as conducive to the achievement of set objectives (strengths and opportunities) or as interferences (weaknesses and threats) that must be taken into account. Organisations can use this useful information to have a global overview so as to plan ahead and take the necessary steps to maximise their potential and efficiency.

The above mentioned theoretical premises have constituted the conceptual ground of the project that will be reported in the next sections.

3. METHODOLOGY

The approach used in this multimethod small-scale research was mainly qualitative as it did not constitute a detailed, representative account of the current status of inbound language tourism in a specific destination, but rather a preliminary exploratory study. Different research instruments were employed for data collection and processing:

-a DESTEP analysis to identify the main demographic, economic, socio-cultural, technological, ecological and political factors related to the host destination's environmental and social resource base, i.e. the local culture, geographical context and current situation of Castelldefels. The basic information was obtained through different online sources, namely the websites of the town hall (<https://www.castelldefels.org>), the tourism office (<http://castelldefelsturismo.com>), the labour market observatory (La guaita, 2016) and the Mediterranean Technology Park (<http://www.pmt.es>);

-a SWOT analysis of Idealog as a language learning provider to pinpoint the company's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats based on different sources of online and off line information, such as conversations with Idealog's director and staff members, this institution's website (<http://www.idealog.es>), its main competitor's website (<http://forumidiomes.com>), and the website of Castelldefels' town hall;

-a content analysis of Idealog's inbound and outbound language tourism offer, its language learning programmes and marketing tools. Data were gathered from this company's online and printed promotional materials;

-a semi-structured in-depth interview to the company director so as to become familiar with a wide range of corporate aspects, such as Idealog's foundation, development, products, human resources and customer profile. This two-hour interview was conducted on 17 June 2016;

-a consumer satisfaction survey. A structured questionnaire was distributed among 32 Italian students who purchased a study abroad package to study Spanish at Idealog and enjoyed a two-week home-stay in Castelldefels in July 2016. A set of 11 closed and open questions were formulated in order to know the respondents' opinion concerning their classes, teachers, host family, food, transport, geographical context and services.

Primary data were processed by means of categorisation and descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were carried out. Once primary and secondary data were obtained and analysed, recommendations were made in order to enhance Idealog's provision of language tourism experiences.

4. RESULTS

A summary of the main findings will be organised in different subsections in order to offer different perspectives, which will be eventually combined and contrasted for triangulation purposes.

4.1. DESTEP analysis

Let us begin with an overview of the ecological factors. The Spanish town of Castelldefels is located to the south of Barcelona, between the Llobregat river delta and the Garraf massif. It is just 18 km far from Barcelona and 9 km from El Prat airport, and is well served by motorway, train and bus networks. This town reaches an average of almost 300 days of sunshine a year, and the mild temperatures range from 10°C in winter to 26°C in summer.

Castelldefels has a 6 km long sandy beach, with the Mediterranean Sea bathing the south of the city and the Garraf Natural Park to the north and west. The beach has five different tourism and environmental quality certifications. It is equipped with a wide range of night leisure and restaurant options, sporting facilities, play areas for children, lookout posts and seats, sanitary cubicles, showers, sunbeds and other beach services, but also with ten selective waste disposal areas for recycling and five environmental information points spread along the promenade. The town hall fosters several ecological awareness-raising actions through a specific environmental activities centre, and public transport and transportation by bicycle are also encouraged, with several bike parking areas scattered throughout the town. Thanks to its harmonious urban design, Castelldefels allows for the enjoyment of peace and quiet in combination with leisure pursuits. Water sports lovers can also have fun in the nearby artificial channel built for the Olympic Games in 1992, which has been complemented with other sports facilities.

When it comes to cultural heritage, the most outstanding tangible asset is the castle, situated at the highest point of this town. It dates back to the 16th century, although its church already existed in the 10th century and was built on Iberian and Roman remains. Castelldefels was actually named after its castle, where special events are held at present. This tourist attraction has been preserved as an iconic place which can be visited nowadays to learn about the local history and culture.

With respect to the demographic factors, in 2015 the total population was 64,567 (32,688 women and 31,879 men) segmented in the following age ranges: 27% aged 30-44, 27% aged 45-64, 17% aged 0-14, 15% aged 15-29, and 14% aged 65 or older. Therefore, the vast majority of the local residents are less than 45 years old, and the presence of young couples with children is noticeable. As for their origin, 20.7% of the total population are foreign and the rest are Spanish. Among the foreign inhabitants, 52% come from a European country, 17% from South America, 14% from North and Central America, 11% from Asia and Oceania, and 6% from Africa.

Thanks to improved transport connections, in the mid-20th century the wealthier classes of the neighbouring Barcelona opted for Castelldefels as their holiday destination, and the first second homes were built. The population continued growing, supported by migration from the rest of Spain. At present, the good location, convenient transportation and good weather have turned Castelldefels into one of the most popular second-residence investment destinations in Spain.

In economic terms, Castelldefels has traditionally been a very relevant tourist destination, mainly because of its natural resources. The tourism office promotes it as a certified family tourism destination and as one of the top 9 business tourism destinations in Catalonia, offering exceptional facilities for conferences and events. However, this enterprising town does not exclusively rely on tourism. The bulk of the local economy is based on the tertiary sector, which employs 73.2% of the working population, even

though there is also room for the manufacturing and metal industries. The local economy is fundamentally based on the provision of services, such as those related to commerce, leisure and catering.

The unemployment rate dropped from 12.9% in March 2016 to 11.4% in August 2016. In that month 3,166 residents were unemployed (57.8% women and 46.94% residents aged less than 45). The service sector accounted for 92.6% of the contracts in August 2016, and 82.54% of the contracts were temporary.

As for political factors, Castelldefels is located in the Spanish region of Catalonia, which nowadays is the scene of controversial political conflicts. The Catalan separatist movement is rooted on nationalism and seeks the independence of Catalonia from Spain. Following this nationalist ideology, grounded on the cultural identity of Catalonia, a considerable percentage of the Catalan population and the Parliament of Catalonia support this movement. At present, Catalonia enjoys a high degree of law enforcement autonomy, and the Catalan language has official status in Spain. The official languages in Catalonia are Catalan and Spanish.

After the last municipal elections, which took place in 2015, the majority of the local authorities have a rather centre-right political ideology and are not pro-independence. As a significant percentage of the local families do not have a Catalan origin or even come from a foreign country, Catalan and Spanish coexist as common languages for daily communication. Therefore, the language is not an obstacle for tourists or learners of Spanish as a foreign language, who have the opportunity to get to know both the Spanish and the Catalan cultures.

From a socio-cultural perspective, the town hall actively promotes a number of social initiatives and services in different areas, including citizenship coexistence and mediation of conflicts, solidarity and peace, international relations and immigration, social inclusion, gender equity, disability benefits, elderly care, youth policies, training and education, local entrepreneurship, economy and employment, commerce, tourism, cultural heritage, artistic and cultural programmes, sport, health, consumer attention and even animal protection. A wide range of municipal equipment and facilities are available, and more than 40 civic entities and neighbours' associations of different nature exist, e.g. related to sports, arts and culture, education, welfare and cooperation. The community seems to be socially inclusive, open, welcoming and used to dealing with foreigners, both residents and tourists, probably because of the benefits deriving from them.

The leisure and cultural offer comprises local festivals, theatre, music, dance, exhibitions, cinema and gastronomic activities. Outreach efforts to share the local history, traditions and cultural expressions are constantly made, and special cultural projects have also been undertaken, for example to develop the residents' reading habits.

Concerning the technological factors, since the local economy is mainly based on services and tourism, social media and online channels are actively used by the tourism office. It offers the latest local news and information regarding the activities and events that take place in Castelldefels by means of Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Youtube, LinkedIn and Instagram, as well as through the town hall's website.

To finish with, some years ago Castelldefels welcomed the establishment of the Mediterranean Technology Park, a science and technology park that was set up by the Autonomous Government of Catalonia, the Regional Council of Baix Llobregat,

Castelldefels City Council and the Technical University of Catalonia. The Mediterranean Technology Park aims to create links with educational institutions, research centres, high-technology companies and technology-based spin-off firms in the following areas of knowledge: information and communication technologies, aeronautics and space engineering, bioengineering, agri-food engineering and biotechnology, optical and photonic sciences and technologies, geo-information technologies, environmental technologies, and numerical methods in engineering.

4.2. SWOT analysis

Idealog S.L. has been in the language teaching business for 25 years, not just in Castelldefels, but also in Marrakech. This extensive experience is perhaps one of this company's main strengths, together with the cooperation of a professional team of 53 highly qualified teachers from different countries. Furthermore, the school offers complementary facilities and services, such as car park, wi-fi, cafeteria, library, 13 fully equipped classrooms with natural day light, a wide range of class schedules, outdoor terraces and a swimming pool.

As the school is based in Castelldefels, the location is another asset. The school premises actually consist of a country house with garden in this town's upper area surrounded by pine trees, with a relaxing atmosphere. The natural surroundings and convenient setting, next to Barcelona and the beach, allow for the perfect combination of language learning and leisure activities for study abroad sojourners.

The learning programmes on offer are very varied: online courses, regular courses for children, youngsters and adults from October to June, individual lessons, lunch conversation classes, intensive group courses, in-company courses, professional language courses, individual immersion programmes, courses by phone or skype, official exam preparation courses, summer camps for children, and study abroad stays both for outbound students and inbound students. Idealog's customers can learn English, French, Dutch, German, Italian, Portuguese, Chinese, Japanese, Catalan and Spanish. Idealog has been accredited by the University of Barcelona and Instituto Cervantes, and it also offers translation, proofreading and interpreting services in several languages.

Idealog is the only study abroad provider in Castelldefels for foreigners wishing to learn Spanish, as its main competitor (Forum Idiomes Language School) just organises language stays in Ireland. The language stay packages for young people arranged by Idealog are promoted highlighting several relevant elements for parents. To start with, the safe family environment in which these stays take place, in a small town free from the dangers associated to large cities. Secondly, the relaxed learning atmosphere and the facilitation of enhanced target language exposure through interaction with the host families, cultural and leisure activities, apart from the classroom context. Thirdly, the availability of full packages composed of classes, accommodation and activities and adapted to the needs and preferences of each group of students. Special emphasis is put on the fact that class content and after-class activities are tailor-made to suit the age and language level of the students so that they feel at ease and they can have an enriching experience.

Language stays are available throughout the year and are specially recommended to learners aged between 12 and 17 for a minimum period of one week. Classes of levels A1 to C1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages are scheduled from Monday to Friday, from 9:30 to 13:00, and the number

of students in each group is between 4 and 9. The students need to do a placement test at least one week before classes start in order to have homogeneous groups, are provided with a backpack containing learning materials, and their oral and written language skills are assessed at the end of the course.

The sojourners are transferred to Castelldefels from the airport by bus upon their arrival on a Sunday. Two different lodging options are on offer: homestay or shared apartments. Homestay is particularly recommended for young students it enables them to live with Spanish families, who are experienced in hosting up to 3 foreign students simultaneously of different ages and nationalities. The guests are treated like a family member and share their daily lives, including meals and excursions. They speak in Spanish at all times so as to improve their language skills and get to know the local culture and gastronomy.

The host families usually live near Idealog, accessible on foot (a 30-minute walk, maximum) or public transport, and they accompany their guest students to the school on the first day. The students can have half-board or full board and stay in individual or double rooms with their own wardrobes and desks. The laundry and the cleaning of the room are included on a weekly basis, and the students can always move to another house if they wish.

Those preferably adult sojourners (and their family or friends) who desire to have more independence can share an apartment with other students. The apartments always overlook the beach and are supposedly located 15 minutes far from Idealog by public transport. They can accommodate up to 4 people and are fully furnished and fitted with TV, washing machine, wi fi, a double room, a dining room, a sofa-bed, a fully-equipped kitchen, a bathroom with shower and a terrace.

After the morning classes, young foreign learners usually have a 30-minute lunch break at Idealog and spend the afternoon taking part in cultural activities and games with the instructors. They have dinner with their host families and later they can also participate in evening activities with their instructors up to midnight. Afternoon activities can encompass paella cooking lessons, Spanish songs workshops, Zumba classes, beach games, beach volley tournaments, sports in the Olympic channel (e.g. kayak, archery or golf), excursions to Barcelona to visit Gaudi's works, Barça stadium, Ramblas, the Gothic Quarter, etc., or a guided tour of the neighbouring, picturesque town of Sitges. Evening activities can consist of welcome and farewell parties with local students to foster their integration, bowling, cinema or season-related events, like Halloween parties.

Idealog's website is informative and has a clear design. In contrast to Forum Idiomes Language School's website, the information is available in Spanish and also in English (although some translations need revising), and it offers testimonials from users, as well as an extensive list of companies that have used Idealog's services, such as Nissan Iberia S.A. or AkzoNobel. In addition, the school's Facebook account (IdealogCastelldefels@IdealogCastelldefels) is also well designed and dynamic.

Moving on to the weaknesses displayed by Idealog, the fact of the matter is that the train station, the beach and the downtown are not next to the school, so the access on foot is not so convenient and it actually takes almost 20 minutes walking uphill. On the other hand, the classroom space is limited and cannot accommodate several large groups at the same time.

Idealog does not have a marketing department, so the promotional tasks carried out by the administration staff are time-consuming and not always easy to manage because of the workload. Marketing strategies are currently a must for any company, and the increasing influence of social media in this respect is out of the question, particularly among young people. Idealog's activity can be followed through Facebook, but not through Twitter or Instagram.

As for opportunities, the demographic trends in Castelldefels show that young couples with children are a significant target with potential needs, for example in terms of language activities to be carried out by parents and children together. Besides, the global market trends indicate that the Asian outbound market also offers many business opportunities for Spanish course providers.

Foreign companies based not only in Castelldefels but also in the surroundings and in Barcelona are interesting prospective customers as well, since the employees and also their families may require language teaching services. The proximity of Barcelona is a factor not to be overlooked, not only in terms of what this city can provide to Idealog's users, but also in relation to how Idealog can stand out from the extensive offer available in Barcelona in order to attract and retain new customers looking for something different, e.g. a relaxing learning environment away from a urban area.

Conversely, other language learning institutions in Castelldefels or Barcelona may pose a threat for Idealog when it comes to classroom capacity, prices or transportation. Trains from and to Barcelona are not very frequent.

Forum Idiomes Language School offers similar products and it is also accredited by well-known educational institutions, e.g. Trinity College, University of Cambridge University ESOL Examinations, Alliance Française and Goethe Institut. In fact, Yelp's website (<https://www.yelp.es>) depicts Forum Idiomes Language School as the top language school in Castelldefels even though it is not accredited by Instituto Cervantes and the Spanish learning offer is much poorer than Idealog's.

At a global level, terrorism uncertainty in Europe is a considerable threat, particularly from a US perspective. Another concern for some prospective outbound destinations is related to changes in government policies with respect to increased taxes or restrictive regulations, for example in terms of student visas.

4.3. In-depth interview

The interview to Idealog's director mainly dealt with four different topics: the origins of this company, products and employees, development and marketing, and language tourism packages.

Idealog's original owner and director was French, but instead of setting her business in France she decided to settle down in Castelldefels for it was cost-saving. The current director (also a French woman) used to work for Idealog as a teacher and was offered the opportunity to take over the business, so she became the new owner and director in 2008. She struggled to obtain the accreditation from Instituto Cervantes, which she considered a worthy investment.

At present, 53 teachers from all over the world work for Idealog. Only qualified, experienced teachers who love teaching are hired. There is no marketing department because initially the main clients were local companies, e.g. the Japanese car manufacturer Nissan. Nissan eventually left Castelldefels and the loss for Idealog was remarkable. There was therefore a need for product diversification and customer

attraction through different sources. Nowadays, the wide range of languages, courses and class arrangements cater for all sorts of target customers

Language stays for foreigners usually consist of a package of Spanish lessons for 4-6 hours a day plus after class activities, like sports or sightseeing around Castelldefels or in Barcelona. Idealog has accommodation agreements with local host families and also arranges the transport from the airport. Generally speaking, Idealog's director believed that the foreign sojourners' main interest is having fun during their language stay and practicing their Spanish, but they do not really have high learning expectations. In summer 2016 two groups of foreign students purchased the language stay product. One of them was from France, and they were recurrent customers who had used Idealog's study abroad services several times in the past. The second group was from Italy, and we will be focusing on their views in the next section.

4.4. Consumer satisfaction survey

In July 2016 a group of 32 Italian teenagers spent two weeks in Castelldefels. Their Italian school had contacted Idealog and a language stay package had been arranged for them including Spanish lessons in the morning, leisure activities and accommodation. They had an intermediate level of Spanish and were asked to fill in a questionnaire in Spanish to express their opinions on a number of aspects.

To answer the first question *Q1. What made you choose this language package with Idealog?* the respondents were given four different options, and they could choose as many of them as they wished. As a result, 91% stated that the school had arranged it and 13% said that their friends or relatives had recommended it to them.

As for the second question *Q2. Is this the first time that you have taken a language course abroad?* this was the first experience for 59% of the respondents, which could influence both their current perspectives and their future expectations.

The respondents could choose from different options in *Q3. What did you expect to get from your language stay?* The results showed that 94% wanted to learn the language, 53% wanted to know the local culture, 34% wanted to have social interpersonal relations, 13% hoped it would benefit their professional development and 6% were interested in leisure and enjoyment. This contradicts the impressions expressed by Idealog's director during the interview. It also has some implications concerning the elements that provide added value to the learning experience, namely cultural events and activities that foster the interaction with the local community, besides meaningful educational tasks in and outside the classroom (already included in the package).

In order to process the outcomes of *Q4. Which have been the effects of your language stay taking into account Q3?* the answers to this open question were categorised. The findings indicate that 72% of the respondents thought that their language skills had improved, 13% had become more familiar with the local culture, 13% liked the experience and 6% met new people. This seems to suggest that the main expectation of the student, i.e. improve their Spanish level, was actually met.

The respondents were asked in *Q5. What do you think about your relationship with the local community?* and were instructed to choose as many options as they wished among the three given: 1) *I interacted with them in Spanish;* 2) *I felt integrated;* and 3) *It was difficult to adapt.* Nobody opted for the third reply, which is in itself very positive. As for the first option, 66% of the respondents interacted with their host families, 53% with their teachers or other staff members and 16% with local residents. On the other hand, only 11 students out of 32 chose the second option and felt

integrated at school (64%) in their host families (45%) and among other local residents (36%). It must be born in mind that even though this was the first language study abroad stay for most of the students, the fact that the Italian, the Spanish and the Catalan cultures have many aspects in common is a facilitating factor, particularly in short periods of time.

In relation to *Q6. Which aspect(s) of Castelldefels do you value the most?* the respondents could choose more than one option. The vast majority preferred the weather (84%) and the location (69%), either because of its closeness to Barcelona, which makes it very convenient to visit that city, or because Castelldefels is not so “complicated” as Barcelona and it is less crowded. In addition, 47% liked geographical features (e.g. the sea), 47% were fond of tourist attractions (e.g. the castle and the beach), 13% loved the local residents and host families, and 9% mentioned cultural aspects. In sum, tourism related features were obviously the most highly valued.

When asked *Q7. Are you generally satisfied with the services provided by Idealog?* the respondents had to rank four different aspects from not satisfied at all (1) to very satisfied (5): the way they had been welcome, the food, the facilities and the activities. Similarly, in *Q8. Are you generally satisfied with the accommodation/family?* they were supposed to rank three different items from not satisfied at all (1) to very satisfied (5): the accommodation facilities, the approachability of the host family and the homestay meals. Table 2 shows the results for both questions.

Table 2. Degree of satisfaction

Idealog services	Total score	Mean values	SD	Mode
Welcoming	143	4.5	0.7	5
Food	65	2.0	1.0	1
School facilities	129	4.0	0.8	5
Activities	145	4.5	0.6	5
Host family	Total score	Mean values	SD	Mode
Accommodation facilities	138	4.5	0.8	5
Approachability	149	4.8	0.5	5
Homestay meals	145	4.7	0.7	5

All in all, it is evident that the degree of satisfaction with the above mentioned elements was very high, except from one service: the food provided at Idealog. Thus, while the most repeated value for the rest of the items was 5 and the mean values ranked from 4.0 to 4.8, the food at Idealog obtained a mean value below average and the lowest repeated value, although the standard deviation was the highest. In spite of the lack of unanimity, what this indicates is the existence of a problem that needs to be addressed.

On the other hand, it must be highlighted that the respondents seemed to be very satisfied with the way the host families treated them, as the mean value for this item was the highest and the standard deviation was the lowest. The respondents also expressed their satisfaction with the meals they had with their families, perhaps in contrast with the food they were provided with at the school. As for the services supplied by Idealog,

the after class activities arranged by the school obtained the highest total score and the lowest standard deviation.

In order to analyse the students' satisfaction in more depth, they were asked Q9. *Would you recommend Idealog to potential users?* and were required to give their opinions, from not recommendable at all (1) to highly recommendable (5). On the whole the results seem to correlate with the above mentioned findings, since Idealog was considered averagely recommendable (6%), quite recommendable (34%) or highly recommendable (60%), and there were no negative perceptions at all in this respect.

Q10. *Which have been the best two services of your Idealog language package?* was an open question which was analysed by categorising the respondents' answers. The top service for them was the teachers and the classes (59%), a vital feature for any educational institution. According to the director, she always pays special attention to teachers' selection before hiring them, and the fact that she herself used to be a teacher may also contribute to the success in meeting the students' needs. Other characteristics considered the best were the facilities (25%), the activities (6%) and the welcoming (6%).

Concerning the second top service, 53% of the respondents mentioned the facilities and materials used, followed by the activities (22%), the welcoming (16%), the classes (6%) and the location (3%). These results are mostly in line with those deriving from Q7 and Q8 and can be regarded as a positive outcome in general terms.

To finish with, the students made some suggestions in reply to the last open question Q12. *What improvement suggestions would you make? Please write your comments. You may consider different characteristics in terms of marketing & promotion, language learning, location, local community, accommodation, transport, leisure activities, meal arrangements, cultural & social aspects, etc.* A massive response from 94% of the respondents referred to the need to reorganise the food arrangements, which is consistent with the drawback identified in Q7, so some readjustments should have been made in this respect. Moreover, 6% of the students referred to the need for bigger classrooms and 3% raised the issue of the distance from the train station and the limited access through public transport. These two weaknesses have already been denoted in the SWOT analysis.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The preliminary analysis of Idealog that has been presented in this article can be considered a first step towards a more detailed study and the foundation of future research on other related aspects of language travel. The objectives set at the beginning of the project were achieved, and some related suggestions will be made in this section.

The local culture's tangible and intangible assets, the geographical context, the hospitable host community, and the current situation factors seem to be favourable to language tourism. The DESTEP analysis of Castelldefels has brought to light some factors that may have a positive effect on Idealog's business activity. For instance, the abundance of young couples with children who are potential target customers may result in an increased demand of language learning products, not only on a regular basis, but also with respect to summer programmes, such as outbound study abroad packages. On the other hand, the Mediterranean Technology Park can attract professional individuals and companies who may be willing to use Idealog's language learning services. Castelldefel's natural and cultural resource base, coupled with the socio-

economic and political factors that have been highlighted in the DESTEP analysis make of this town a prosperous, attractive destination, which offers eco-friendly, varied urban equipment and facilities and a stable society who seems to be supportive to tourism. In this safe environment both the tourists and the residents can benefit from the wide range of opportunities that the proximity of Barcelona offers. In other words, they can enjoy the best of both worlds, which is an advantage, particularly for young foreign learners who wish to travel to this region in order to study Spanish.

The SWOT analysis of Idealog has provided an overview of issues that need to be addressed and/or capitalised. On the whole, it can be stated that the positive aspects outweigh the negative. It has been already mentioned that the teaching quality and language learning programmes in and outside the classroom is first class, and the selection of local host families in language stays seems to contribute to their success. In addition, the webpage is really clear and supportive, and can cater for the students of different nationalities. The school counts with optimal facilities, generally speaking. But of course the weaknesses cannot be ignored, as the classrooms can accommodate a limited number of big groups simultaneously. Moreover, the absence of a marketing department does not allow for the development of enhanced marketing strategies, like maximised use of social media for promotional purposes. A suggested solution for Idealog might entail the cooperation with business schools. Systematic agreements with them might enable Idealog to offer internships to students keen on becoming operationally familiar with the business. In exchange, the trainees might take care of the marketing tasks and update the information in their social media so as to attract more young people. In order to attract Asian prospective customers a platform like WeChat provides the possibility to post information on the school and its learning offer. Idealog's website might also specifically include useful information for students of different nationalities, e.g. American or Chinese, who would like to enjoy a language tourism experience in Spain.

The opinions of the 32 students who purchased a language tourism package from Idealog in July 2016 are very relevant as they have helped to identify strengths and weaknesses in practical terms from the users' perspective. According to the questionnaire results, the students' views were mostly positive, as they expressed their satisfaction with the services they had hired from Idealog. There were very few drawbacks, but they need to be dealt with. The respondents thought that the food provided by Idealog was not good enough, the school was a bit far from the train station, and the transportation in Castelldefels was not that convenient. A solution for Idealog may involve looking for a new catering supplier on the one hand and offering bike renting on the other. The survey findings also showed that the students mostly interacted with the teachers and host families, but not so much with locals. It is suggested that the school organises more ice breaking events for study abroad sojourners and local students, to encourage them to mingle and foster their integration. This would serve a double purpose, since both the locals and the visitors may be able to take advantage, not only in terms of language learning.

Obviously, the small-scale survey that has been presented in this article has a very narrow scope and does not allow for extrapolation. This is one of the limitations associated to this research, since it cannot be regarded as very representative. Nevertheless, the qualitative insight it provides makes it valuable. On the other hand, the DESTEP and SWOT analysis could have been carried out in more depth and be more far reaching from a strategic point of view.

Further research may explore different topics that have been dealt with tangentially. The host community's perspective and its relationship with visiting language tourists, the different impacts of language travel for the town in practical terms, the potentiality of the Asian or the American outbound markets, and Castelldefels as a source of outbound language tourism are some of them.

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