

CULTURE IN TOURIST PRODUCT AS A MAJOR ASSET FOR MARKET COMPETITIVENESS

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Abstract

From the economic point of view, we can't determine tourism as an integral and separate integrity. It's a diverse compositum, which spreads over different elements like: hotel industry, restaurant industry, tourist agencies, transportation, services and facilities, amusements, attractions, gift shops and large number of other enterprises. Tourism is much more than an industry. Tourism is more like a “sector” that impacts a wide range of industries.

Tourism products are specific and have some characteristics which made them quite different from industrial products. Tourist product is original creation with high complexity which emerged from the complexity of the tourism industry and usually can't be predicted and controlled. The final shape of the product almost always is made by the consumers. But in all of these approaches we find one very subtle element of human existence which spreads over whole human history like culture.

The growing relationship between culture and tourism is stimulated because of the number of reasons. One of the main reasons is the development of tourism which creates jobs and income. In the most of the cases the element of culture improve the tourist product quality which is seen as an integration of total products features which characterize their ability to satisfy specific consumer's needs. In this intercommunication between tourism and culture new technologies have been played great role through growing accessibility of information on culture.

In this paper we will also use the example of the Ohrid tourist products and the interpolation of culture element as an opportunity for competitiveness and quality improvement.

Key words: *tourist product, culture, quality, information, consumers, competitiveness*

Introduction

One of the most remarkable characteristics of the modern world today is the phenomenon called tourism. Starting with the “pre-tourist epoch” or “epoch of analogue tourist phenomenon” till “epoch of modern tourism” it evaluated in a part of our everyday living, in a phenomenon of contemporary life and the future reality.

The development of tourism is closely connected with the transport, communication and industry inventions. This development results in high complex tourism product which spreads over different elements. The complex structure of the tourist industry and tourist product today can't be imagined without element of culture.

Tourism and culture are connected through their synergies and their growth potential. The benefits of this partnership are mutual. Through developing of tangible and intangible cultural assets tourism centers, regions and countries can create comparative advantages and local distinctiveness.

The first part of this paper is the overview of the theoretical approaches towards tourist product and its complex structure as well as the complexity of the tourist industry.

The second part of the paper examines the relationship between tourism and culture, the opportunities for creating more valuable tourist products through interpolation the culture content in tourism product and quality improvement.

In the third and last part of the paper are presented ICT technologies as important conditions for the development of tourism, especially of cultural tourism.

1. The complexity of the tourism industry and the tourist products

Contemporary tourism today is a polyvalent phenomenon and the concept with numerous effects implicated in different spheres.

Hunziker and Krapf in 1942, defined tourism as “the sum of the phenomena and relationships arising from the travel and stay of non-residents, insofar as they do not lead to permanent residence and are not connected with any earning activity.”¹

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the major intergovernmental body concerned with tourism, has led the way in establishing a set of definitions for general use. The International Conference on travel and Tourism Statistics convened by UNWTO in Ottawa, Canada, in 1991, reviewed, updated, and expanded on the work of earlier international groups. The Ottawa Conference adopted a set of resolutions and recommendations relating to tourism concepts, definitions and classifications. The UNWTO has taken the concept of tourism beyond a stereotypical image of “holiday making”². The accepted definition is: Tourism comprises the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for no more than one consecutive year for leisure, business, and other purposes. This definition excludes trips within the area of usual residence, trips between the domicile and the workplace, and other community trips of a routine character. The UNWTO definitions also explain the various types of visitors, travelers, tourists etc. But unfortunately in context of these very basic definitions, still exists confusion, because different countries use different definitions for data gathering and statistical purposes.

From the economic point of view, we can't determine tourism as an integral and separate integrity. It's a diverse compositum, which spreads over different elements like: hotel industry, restaurant industry, tourist agencies, transportation, services and facilities, amusements, attractions, gift shops and large number of other enterprises. Tourism is much more than an industry. Tourism is more like a “sector” that impacts a wide range of industries. It is a collection of industries.³

Because of the extent of tourism activities across the globe as well as the number of people who travel, this phenomenon is described as one of the world's largest industries. UNWTO's Tourism 2020 Vision projects that international arrivals expected to reach nearly 1,6 billion by the year 2020.⁴

Tourist products are specific and have some characteristics which made them quite different from industrial products. Tourist product is original creation with high complexity which emerged from the complexity of the tourism industry and usually can't be predicted and controlled. The final shape of the product almost always is made by the consumers.

¹ W. Hunziker, K. Krapf: *Grundriss der allgemeinenn Fremdenverkehrslehre*, Polygraphischer Verlag AG Zurich, Zurich, 1942, p.21. cit. Ante Cievairic, *Turizam i privredni razvoj Jugoslavije*, „Zagreb”, Zagreb, 1984, p. 24

² Charles R. Goeldner, J.R. Brent Ritchie, *Tourism, principles, practices, philosophies*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., New Jersey, 2009, p.7

³ Thomas L. Davidson: *What are travel and tourism: are they really an industry?*, In William F. Theobald (Eds), *Global Tourism*, Elsevier Inc., Burlington USA, 2005, p. 31

⁴ UNWTO *Tourism Highlights 2011*, p.11. Retrieved from www.unwtohighlights

The attitudes about tourist product definition in the literature are different. They can be classified like:⁵

- Definitions which define the tourist product from the consumer's point of view, like composite of different elements: attractions, accommodation, environment. The common characteristic of these definitions is the role of consumers during the tourist product assembling.

- Theories concretized on the analysis of the tourist product's elements. Usually these theories equal tourist product with some single tourist products like – hotel's product or with tourist's packages.

- Some attitudes start from the basic tourist offer factors. Because tourist offer is consisted of the three basic sums of factors: attractive, receptive and communicative, it's necessary to have at least one represent of these elements to create tourist product.⁶

- There are definitions where tourist product is viewed like partial and integral. For example: hotel products are integral and are constituted from several elements which are also integrative totalities.

The general conclusion is that tourist product is a complex integrity whose creation started with partial tourist products by the tourist offer single holders who use the tourist factors complex system and it ended with every single tourist experience which formed the shape of the final integrative tourist product.

Some authors speak about tourist product's levels: the core product, the facilitating product, the supporting product, and the augmented product.⁷ This complexity of tourist product supplemented with the necessity of the consumers' presence in the service system usually creates obstacles for tourist product quality improvement and innovation. But in spite of this, the interpolation of culture in tourism products through decades is ongoing process and it's considered as a major driving force for quality improvement and market competitiveness.

2. The element of culture in tourist products

Culture and tourism have a mutually beneficial relationship which can strengthen the attractiveness and competitiveness of destinations, regions and countries.

Culture in tourist product gives ideal opportunities for creating distinctiveness in crowded global market through differentiating regional identities and images, as well as using of wide range of cultural elements for branding different regions.

The satisfied tourists are the most valuable promotional factor for strengthening the desire for repeated visit and spreading the positive publicity and propaganda. In this context the interpolation of culture in the tourist products creates positive differentiation of the whole tourist offer. Enriched offer in this way represent some kind of promotional forms.

The growing articulation between culture and tourism was stimulated by a number of factors:⁸

➤ Demand

- Increased interest in culture, particularly as a source of identity and differentiation in the face of globalization
- Growing levels of cultural capital, stimulated by rising education levels
- Aging populations in developed regions

- Postmodern consumption styles, emphasizing personal development rather than materialism
- A desire for direct forms of experience ("life seeing" rather than sight seeing)
- Growing importance of intangible culture and role of image and atmosphere
- Increased mobility creating easier access to other cultures.

➤ Supply

- Development of cultural tourism to stimulate jobs and income
- Cultural tourism was seen as growth market and "quality" tourism
- An increasing supply of culture as a result of regional development
- The growing accessibility of information on culture and tourism through new technologies
- The emergence of new nations and regions eager to establish a distinct identity (e.g. the impact of newly-independent states in Central and Eastern Europe).
- A desire to project the external image of regions and nations
- Cultural funding problems related to increasing cultural supply.

Culture can be viewed as an applicable tourism. There are examples of hotels which create the whole hotel product on the base of culture.⁹ For example: the hotel "Mohonk Mountain House", in New York State offered hotel products which included universities professors lectures, learning of foreign languages, music programs – theoretical classes and practical classes with music professors and professionals. Then – Shakespeare World – learning roles and performing some of the Shakespeare's dramas with professors of literature and professional actors etc. In this case guests – tourists take active part in culture events. They are actors, musicians, painters...

On the contrary, the cultural events like: festivals, concerts, visits of cultural and historical monuments, museums, galleries, give opportunities for the tourists to be a listeners and observers. Of course this doesn't limit the promotional significance of the cultural element for the tourists, except the more active role of the visitors in the first case.

All this kinds of activities and contents in tourist products increase the pleasure and convenience during the stay in some tourist destination. In this way the tourist product get out of the trivial relation bed-food – rest. Only in this way tourist destination can create symbols of recognition and attractiveness for their products and services

As a result of this ongoing process in tourism – culture relationship, culture is almost always integrated in tourism development strategies. In Macedonian National Strategy for tourism development 2009-2013, the element of culture is seen as priority factor for tourist product development. The tourist product of Macedonia is a rich combination of cultural and natural heritage. In center of this offer is the unique Ohrid Lake and Ohrid city which are under UNESCO protection. The Ohrid Lake is one of the oldest lakes in the world and the city of Ohrid originally was a neolith settlement and represents the longest permanent settled place dated since 7000 years B.C.¹⁰

The element of culture in Macedonian global tourist product is represented through rich culture heritage, scene sciences, museums and galleries, etc. Macedonia has huge number of religious monuments. Some of the monasteries offer accommodation for the tourists. Then numerous archeological localities spread all over the country. The scene sciences are represented with theatres and festivals. The Ohrid Summer Festival is one of the largest and most important music and drama festivals in Macedonia. The first concert took place in 1961 in the church St. Sophia,

⁵ Ognjen Bakic, Slobodan Unkovic, Marketing u turizmu, Ekonomski Fakultet, Beograd, 1991, p. 97

⁶ Boris Vukonic, Turizam i razvoj, Skolska knjiga, Zagreb, 1987, p.32

⁷ Philip Kotler, John Bowen, James Makens, Marketing for Tourism & Hospitality, Prentice Hall, NJ, 1996, p.308

⁸ The Impact of Culture on Tourism, OECD, 2009, p. 19, 20

⁹ Ognjen Bakic, Slobodan Unkovic, Marketing u turizmu, Ekonomski fakultet, Beograd, 1991, p.179

¹⁰ National strategy for tourism development 2009-2013, retrieved from: www.economy.gov.mk

with its exceptional acoustics.¹¹ The festival has international flavor because of the participation of a large number of leading musicians and ensembles from the best known European and world music centers. The performances usually take place in historic buildings or monuments. In this way festival with solid reputation and member of The European Festival Association become significant asset for Ohrid and Macedonian tourist product quality.

3. The ICT technologies and cultural tourism

The impact of information technology and internet based cultural tourism is of paramount importance and priceless treasure. Most travel offers are placed online.

Potential tourists from anywhere can see what awaits them in the desired country through appropriate pictures, video materials, and even a virtual walk through that destination. Simultaneously through various websites and blogs they can read about previous experiences of tourists, and leave their impressions on the visited destination.

By using the websites of hotels and tour operators, travelers are becoming more informed and experienced decision-makers. The possibility of direct access to information, service availability 24/7, allows you to compare prices of tourist packages, the ability to compare the advantages and disadvantages of the facilities, etc.

The quality, availability and effectiveness of traditional promotion tools such as brochures, can be significantly improved through the use of ICT tools and services.

ICT helps firms in the tourism industry to be sure that all their processes such as reservations and conditions will be available for their customers. The application of ICT in the tourism industry provides for a very short time to multiply the effects.

3.1. Web (www) – a global medium for global tourism product

Tourist agencies in the world long discern the advantage of Internet marketing presentation. The availability of vast amounts of information, search by different criteria, and finally booking and payment arrangements, makes this medium easier and faster to use. As the Macedonian tourism can exploit this potential to attract tourists?

Traditionally there are international tourist fairs and advertising world TV channels like CNN, BBC, but they are still reserved for a narrow circle of the big tour operators and representation of different cultures or cultural tourism in a particular state.

For those who do not have big budgets like small and medium tourism companies, internet advertising can be a real choice. The only availability for this medium in the world, but also because of the excellent opportunities for the presentation of tourist offer on web sites. Of course, in order to even begin to think of Internet advertising, it is necessary to have a good web site. For the tourist agency that means – what better presentation of the offer, with as much information and most importantly – current and accurate information. Web-enabled offers travel products to show considerable detail – a text description, picture, even with the videos so that potential tourists can pretty much know everything that interest to decide for the travel. Also desirable is that the parties have browser offers several important categories – cost, duration of travel, choice of departure dates, number of persons traveling, and the ability to sort the results. Sure, ideally and no ability to pay through the Internet.

Internet sales of package holidays in the world is a real hit. The Internet is credited for the emergence of the phenomenon “last minute” in the tourist offer. The formula is quite simple – when you get closer to departure date, the agency (or the hotel or airline company) pay to sell arrangements after a rather lower price than regular – because that way you will cover at least part of its costs.

More and more people are looking for travel information online, so if you want to attract attention of foreign tourists on their web site, it makes sense to advertised pages to be visit by tourists. If you know where they come from, your visitors, you can be advertising on local parties in foreign countries. For example, visits of the Macedonian tourism portal www.exploringmacedonia.com are 90% people out of Macedonia. Usually this travel portals or search engines in a single country can be advertised through the global search engines, which often prove to be efficient and practical because, for example, a search engine like Google.com can go to all your potential visitors. Everyone that visits Google and other search engines worldwide can even change their language, because some browsers have a multitude of language versions.

ICT have a numerous effects for small and medium tourist businesses and the development of all types of tourism in a country, especially information about the cultural heritage which has encouraged the development of cultural tourism.

Conclusion

During its evolution tourism evolved from only bed and food services to global industry with high entertainment flavor, which differs from season to season. Tourist destination in order to succeed in tourist market must adjust according changeable tourists desire and demand. In this context the element of culture in complex tourist product has invaluable significance in winning tourist's loyalty.

The approaches toward tourist product definition are different, but the main conclusion is the high complexity and diverse which means specific methods for quality improvement for market competitiveness.

The forms of culture which can be built within this complex structure are different. They vary from hotels animation as a part of hotel product to tourist destination offer and wider as a country or region cultural offer. In this process the cooperation between the tourism and cultural sectors is very important, but also cooperation between different levels of government and private sector is necessary.

One of the most important ways in which public authorities can assist in the development of culture and tourism products is through marketing activities. Regional products often need national and international market exposure.

The tourist product of The Republic of Macedonia is an example for great opportunity for cooperation between tourism and culture. Macedonia possesses huge cultural heritage and other forms of culture which can be used in tourism purpose. This is recognized in Macedonian National Strategy for Tourism Development.

ICT technologies and internet can really help each country to promote own cultural heritage through various virtual tools and so to contribute for the development of cultural tourism.

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