

TOURISM PRODUCT CLUB IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF OUTDOOR TOURISM – BAŠKA MUNICIPALITY¹

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of the research is defining the theoretical determinants of tourism product club and analysing the possibilities for creating a tourism product club which would increase competitiveness and allow the development, reconception and repositioning of Baška on the dynamic market. The paper analyses a new business model for balancing the dynamic interaction of stakeholders and entrepreneurial initiatives, aiming to transform resources into competitive products, using the example of Baška Outdoor Festival, both in the present and the future.

Methodology – The research synthesizes and updates the theoretical and applied knowledge about the development of tourism product clubs. Using questionnaires and interviews, it examines the level of awareness of tourism management and all destination stakeholders about the possibilities of developing and utilizing tourism product club, relying on the example of Baška Outdoor Festival (research limitations: small sample size and the lack of stakeholders' awareness about the possibilities of forming a tourism product club).

Findings – The research results will be based on the development of theoretical and applied knowledge about the possibilities of creating a tourism product club (uncharted territory in Croatian theory and practice) with the goal of achieving the affirmation of outdoor offer.

Contribution – The contribution of the research will be based on the dissemination of new scientific knowledge about the possibilities of cooperation and joint appearance on the market in order to create an innovative and distinctive product, with concrete implementation on Baška outdoor tourism. The originality of the work stems from theoretical determinants, the authors' attitudes, and the results of destination stakeholders research.

Keywords: tourism product club, development strategy, entrepreneurship, Baška Outdoor Festival

INTRODUCTION

New tourism trends indicate a growing interest in spending free time in the open, which opens up a whole range of possibilities in the development of new tourism offers. The existing natural preconditions represent a fundamental element which, in terms of the creation of a specific tourism offer, requires constant development and improvement. This, in turn, raises a number of questions concerning the direction and type of required development, as well as the ways of forming such synergy of stakeholders in the creation of specific tourism products with the goal of generating competitive advantages and market repositioning. Community entrepreneurial initiatives, coordinated and focused on the creation of a tourism product club and a joint

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appearance on the market, can develop a successful and specific tourism product with multiplicative benefits for all stakeholders, destination and tourists.

1. THEORETICAL DETERMINANTS OF TOURISM PRODUCT CLUB

Since cooperation and collaboration of business entities allows for the creation of a specific, competitive destination product, recent tourism business practice and theory introduced the concept of tourism product club. There are very little relevant scientific works and authors that deal with the subject. Viewing it as part of an integral tourism product of the destination, the Canadian Tourism Commission's Product Club (1996) perceives it as an "instrument" created to help small businesses and organizations offer tourists new experience (Club de Producto Turistico). It is a partnership built with industry participant who share a common vision for the development of a specific tourism product or niche (Cooper and Hall 2008, 239). It promotes Canada as a four season destination of nature, diverse cultures and communities (Diamantis 2004, 212). The term "tourism product club" should not be confused with the terms cluster, destination management companies, value chain, networking... Theoretical determination includes the evolution of terms through time and different authors' views. The concept of tourism product club is the closest to the concept of cluster, with cluster being directed at the destination (Beni 2003, 27), and tourism product club at a particular product (may include multiple destinations). The role of tourism clusters is to relate individual companies through the element of added value production chain and network relations in order to create a complex tourism product which would appeal to tourist and grant the competitive advantage (Ferreira and Estevillo 2009, 39). The key attributes of tourism product club are collaboration and cooperation, and the key to success lies in the interest and synergy of all stakeholders, as well as management (level of responsibilities and benefits). One essential precondition is the awareness of the common interests of stakeholders in the vertical and horizontal cooperation and in recognizing competitors as potential partners in the creation of a unique product and the optimization of the value chain (stakeholders' objectives can be better achieved through joint action, i.e. common interests are the guarantee for the realization of individual interests). The questions that arise are how to differentiate the interests of stronger and weaker participants, and how stakeholders participate in the organization and decision-making, risk and profit management... Tourism product club provides multiplicative benefits for all stakeholders (better negotiating position, exchange of experiences and knowledge, joint market performance, profit increase), tourists (a unique experience and personalized service) and tourist destination (rejuvenation, branding and repositioning). The general objectives of creating a tourism product club are (European Commission): diversifying tourism products and services, enhancing the quality of products and services, increasing competitiveness, strengthening links between tourism network participants, promoting trade associations, building business networks between different tourism companies through new forms of cooperation and networking.

The diversification, intensification and linkage of tourism products can be crucial for the competitiveness and sustainable development of destinations (Benur and Bramwell 2015). The profiling of a tourism product club is based on the promotion of entrepreneurship and innovation of operational strategies in the creation of an integral product (the possibility of connecting the accommodation, catering services, selective contents, events, recognition of local values). Its importance comes to full expression in the development of selective forms of tourism (cultural, creative, sporting, gastronomic...) and the totality of the sustainable development of a destination (example - Product Clubs are programmes established by the Catalan Tourist Board to group together companies and organisations that specialise in the field of the Cultural Tourism, Active&Nature Tourism, Gastronomic Tourism and Golf Tourism).

However, tourism product club has not yet been recognised in Croatian tourism. According to Vlahov (2014, 53), there is poor business practice of association in Croatia in general and, in some cases, joint action did not bring significant benefits because of the small number of interested entities and a low level of awareness about the importance and possibilities of collaboration and cooperation. Tourism product club provides an opportunity for qualitative transformation the tourist offer, including outdoor offer.

2. NEW TRENDS IN OUTDOOR OFFER

Outdoor offer is one of the most competitive and fastest growing forms of tourism originating from the desire for an active holiday in nature. It correlates with sports tourism, adventure tourism (aerial, aquatic, terrestrial) (McKerchner 2016), and ecotourism. Outdoor offer is developing increasingly fast, making it difficult to predict its future forms (e.g. in 2015, the EU generated 44 billion EUR from cycling tourism only). Demographic changes, consumer behaviour and the increasingly mobile and connected lifestyles of European citizens have produced trends for outdoor recreation preferences and for broadening travel horizons (Bell, S., Tyrvaianen, L. and Sievanen, L. 2007). The overall offer on the tourism market is moving towards a healthier lifestyle and better quality of life, aiming at replacing the everyday stressful modern lifestyle. Therefore, outdoor offer emerges as the result of new tourists' requirements. Natural, cultural and created destination resources are the main foundation of a sustainable tourism industry and outdoor tourism; an opportunity for stakeholders to develop innovative product in order to satisfy the needs of modern, environmentally sensitive tourists. This can be achieved by taking actions that will activate potential drivers of innovation to create integrated and sustainable tourism product and outdoor tourism (Ribarić 2015, 326). Inventiveness and aspirations towards experiencing something new, different and previously unknown will set up new tourism supply and demand criteria (Stipanović, C. and Rudan, E. 2013). The development of outdoor offer must be directed toward the engagement of stakeholders and their cooperation via tourism product clubs. Outdoor tourism opens up possibilities for extending the season, increasing consumption, opening new jobs for the local population, cooperation of local entrepreneurs, introducing the tourists to the cultural and natural heritage of destinations and orientation toward healthy living. The development of outdoor offer requires spatial planning, valorisation of intact nature and prevention of saturation,

urbanization and apartmentisation that destroy natural resources in the process of pursuing individual self-interests. Outdoor recreation as public interest carries very high rhetorical value, but both spatial planning practice and planning legislation carry notable weaknesses in defence of these interests (Petersson Fornberg 2014).

As shown at the international tourism forum “Kvarner 365”, outdoor offer represents an essential element of the offer throughout the Kvarner Bay and its micro-destinations. The aim is to develop the outdoor offer in such a way that would connect all the elements of the tourism offer and result in multiplying the consumption of tourists. Unfortunately, Kvarner outdoor offer is based on individual entrepreneurial initiatives in individual micro-destinations, rather than on a deliberate conception of outdoor tourism development. Among Kvarner destinations, Baška is the one that has made significant progress in the development of outdoor offer.

3. CONCEPT OF OUTDOOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN BAŠKA MUNICIPALITY

Baška is a destination located on the island of Krk, in Primorje-Gorski Kotar County. The analysis of the current situation indicates a pronounced seasonality during the summer months, when tourist traffic reaches the upper limits of accommodation capacities. In 2015, Baška had 159,409 arrivals and 917,931 overnight stays, which is a significant increase compared to 2014 (146,797 arrivals and 837,820 overnight stays).²

The analysis of the current situation in (outdoor) tourism in Baška can be shown through SWOT analysis, the assessments of destination management as creators of the offer, and through authors’ opinions.

Table 1: SWOT analysis of tourist destination Baška

INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT	
STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • long tradition in tourism • geographical position • diverse offer • pleasant and mild Mediterranean climate • natural, cultural and historical heritage • numerous events • infrastructure for outdoor activities – hiking trails, mountain bike routes, climbing areas • Outdoor Festival as destination brand • safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • structure of accommodation facilities, prevalent private accommodation • seasonality (summer) • insufficiently differentiated offer • insufficient development and branding of catering offer • insufficient offer for young people and children • poor offer of package tours - local agencies do not follow the requirements of the market • insufficient awareness about the importance of local products in tourist offer • destination promotion only on close emissive markets

² Official Baška Municipality Tourist Board data

EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT	
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • trend for destinations that provide active vacation and experiences • trend for outdoor offer and sustainable development • increased number of environmentally-friendly tourists • “Croatia 365” project • EU membership • pronounced interest of the Scandinavian market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • economic crisis • unfavourable climate (rainy periods during summer months) • legislation that does not encourage small and medium enterprises • lack of coordination between local tourist boards • competitive Croatian coastal destinations (Istria, Dalmatia) • competitive outdoor destinations

Source: Authors

Assessing the quality of tourism offer in Baška, on a scale from 1 to 5, destination management gave the average mark of 3.5. The competitiveness of selective forms of tourism in Baška is ranked as follows: tourism based on summer vacation, outdoor tourism, cultural tourism, event tourism (Baška Municipality Tourist Board has recognized the importance of event tourism - in 2015, 112 events were held (60 organized by the Tourist Board) as compared to 2014, when the Tourist Board organized 15 out of 54 events), and eco-tourism.³

A key new element of tourism development in Baška is its outdoor offer, valorising the natural environment that offers attractive paths, hiking trails, gravel and stone roads, and one educational trail with breath-taking views of Velebit and the surrounding islands. Baška Outdoor includes 19 marked trails, 6 cycling and 6 mountain bike trails, climbing areas Bunculuka, Portafortuna and Belove Stene, educational trail (the project was completed in 2015, together with Public Institution “Nature” and Primorje-Gorski Kotar County) and diving (Squatina Diving) (Municipality of Baška Tourist Board). The destination offers a multilingual outdoor guide (Baška Municipality Tourist Board and Punat Municipality Tourist Board), with marked hiking and biking trails. Furthermore, Baška has a real possibility of developing various types of outdoor tourism (biking, hiking, trekking, mountaineering, sea kayaking, surfing, free climbing ...). Baška also has a distinctive accommodation offer, adjusted to outdoor tourists - Adria Bike Hotel Zvonimir⁴ (Baška joint-stock company, part of the Valamar Group). The most competitive elements of its outdoor offer are the following events: two thematic weekends (Baška Hike Weekend and Baška Bike Day), Adria 4 Islands MTB Stage Race - a unique race consisting of four stages on four Kvarner islands (Krk, Rab, Cres and Lošinj) and Outdoor Festival.

Destination management evaluated the following elements and gave the following average marks: outdoor offer - average mark 3.9; outdoor offer management -3.7; the importance of outdoor offer in recognition and branding of Baška municipality – 4.4. The problems related to the creation and development of outdoor offer are ranked in

³ Baška Municipality Tourist Board data.

⁴ Hotels united under the Adria Bike Hotels licence offer the highest standard of services for cyclists: bike routes, secure storage for bicycles, licenced cycling guides, energy packages and quality of bicycle service.

order of importance as follows: limited financial resources, orientation toward mass tourism, stakeholders' conflict of interest and communication problems, insufficient involvement and interest of stakeholders, spatial saturation, negative political-economic-legal-administrative influence, insufficient adjustment to new trends in outdoor offer. Management indicated other problems as well: lack of initiative, resignation of the local population, lack of financial benefits for the community, poor marketing, and insufficient destination recognition.

The most significant event was Baška Outdoor Festival, which included:

- 16.–18. 10. 2015 - Female only MTB Camp (female cycling weekend) - 22 participants divided into three groups;
- 17. 10. 2015 - Garmin Krk Trekk & Trail - 3 categories: Light (13 km), Challenger (26 km) and Ultra (55 km) – 700 participants from 7 countries;
- 18. 10. 2015 - Krk MTB Marathon - 38 km trail through the “Lunar plateau”, hiking trip from Baška to Vela and Mala Luka, climbing on Portafortuna.

Table 2: **Destination management's assessment of Outdoor Festival elements' quality and attractiveness**

Offer elements	Mark
Female only MTB Camp	4.0
Garmin Krk Trekk & Trail	4.6
Krk MTB Marathon	4.1
Hiking Excursion Baška	3.9
Overall Outdoor Festival offer	4.2

Source: Authors' questionnaire results

Likewise, the participants in the event “Female only MTB Camp” gave high marks to all elements of both the event and the overall Baška offer (on a scale 1-10).⁵

Table 3: **Female Only MTB Camp participants' assessment**

Offer elements	Mark
Quality of Female only MTB Camp offer	9.4
Content and event attractiveness	9.5
Technical elements and training ground	9.7
Organised common ride	9.6
Accommodation and food	9.8
Event manager's expertise	9.8
Entertainment factor	8.9
Baška – destination	9.8

Source: HD Navigatio Ltd.'s research

⁵ The research was conducted by HD Navigatio Ltd., event organiser. The questionnaires were answered by 16 out of 22 participants.

The event was rated as one of the top three on the island and will be promoted as such in 2016. The promotion of the event is done through a variety of media, the Internet, banners and information points throughout the Kvarner region.

Future development of outdoor tourism in Baška needs to be related to the quality of the offer, especially outside the summer months. Through introduction of new contents, outdoor activities, active holidays and innovation of marketing activities, a destination can become recognizable in a relatively short period of time. According to the Oslo Manual (2005), it is necessary to promote innovation in four key areas: product, process, marketing and management. In order to achieve quantitative result multiplication and qualitative sustainable development, continuous innovation of operational strategies is crucial:

- research and development – exploring new trends in outdoor supply and demand with the goal of actively shaping the future;
- marketing strategy – defining a new target segments of outdoor tourists, repositioning Baška as an outdoor destination and parallelly innovating the tourism product and marketing mix;
- supply strategy – enhancing and enriching the outdoor offer and connecting it to other selective forms of tourism;
- human resource strategy – encouraging a new generation of managers and a new business culture based on knowledge, learning and cooperation;
- financial strategy – attracting new entrepreneurs and new sources of financing.

The development of tourist destination must be sustainable not only economically, but also in terms of social policy, technology, nature, ecology and nature (Malakauskaite and Navickas 2010, 150). Tourism in Baška should not compete on price but rather create competitive advantages based on innovation, synergy of all stakeholders and qualitative improvement of destination development and management. The future of outdoor offer should be based on establishing a tourism product club, generating new ideas and innovations to improve the offer.

4. TOURISM PRODUCT CLUB IN PROFILING BAŠKA OUTDOOR FESTIVAL

The development of tourism on the island of Krk and in the municipality of Baška is based on a vision and creativity of individual entrepreneurs without cooperation and synergy. The creation of tourism product club must facilitate the creation of innovative outdoor products and development of promotional strategies.

Baška Outdoor Festival is made possible by: Outdoor.hr (organiser of Rab Trekk, Velebit Ultra Trail, Garmin Krk Trek & Trail); Adria Bike Group – HD Navigacija - Navigatio (organiser of cycling events - 4 Island MTB Stage Race, Adria Bike Marathon Plitvice powered by Husqvarna), PD Obzova, Baška Municipality, Baška Municipality Tourist Board and Baška Hotels. The tourist boards of Primorje-Gorski Kotar County and the island of Krk only advertise the festival in the events calendar. Local agencies are mostly concerned only with intermediary activities and renting

accommodation facilities, rather than being directed towards integration in the process of creating new products. Local population has trouble accepting new trends in tourist demand. Destination management assessed the cooperation of stakeholders in the creation of outdoor offer with an average mark 2.9.

Table 4: **Involvement and efficiency of destination stakeholders in the creation of outdoor offer**

Destination stakeholders	Mark
Baška Municipality Tourist Board	4.6
Local government	3.8
Tourism offer holders	4.2
Local residents	2.2
Krk Island Tourist Board	2.7
Primorje-Gorski Kotar County Tourist Board	2.8

Source: Authors' questionnaire results

In future development of Baška Outdoor Festival, it is necessary to develop awareness about the possibilities of a tourism product club. This requires a more direct approach to the whole outdoor potential, including: market research; research and analysis of the competition, comparative and competitive advantages and disadvantages; product development; inclusion of new stakeholders; and strategic development plan. When planning a new outdoor offer, it is important to identify potential collaborating organizations, and to integrate and coordinate the expectations of those organizations as early as possible. In order to balance the varying interests, it is helpful for managers (Carmichael, C. and McCole 2014):

To categorize potential collaborators based on the nature of their relationship with the initiating organization as these classifications are typically characterized by different motivations and expectations;

- To understand individual preferences and agendas of each of the respective future partners;
- To emphasize the increasing efficiencies associated with cooperation;
- To increase their awareness of both benefits and costs anticipated by the potential partners;
- To consider the various types of potential contributions, beyond financial support, that partners can provide.

The key issue is the level of motivation of each stakeholder, i.e. the tourism product specialization and diversification policies. What is required is innovation based on research and transformation process data – information – knowledge, under the guidance of specialized agencies (smart specialization - the highest level of knowledge and experience) and the municipality tourist board - leadership and management in bringing down resistance to change and building a common future. In the creation of a complex tourism product club, institutional support is of the utmost importance, and all stakeholders should gain the promotional benefits and presentation through other stakeholders' promotional channels.

Outdoor and festival offers can develop through different contents (e.g., triathlon, windsurfing, canoeing, sailing, fishing...). In the trail & trekking sector (the most prominent outdoor segment), it is necessary to harmonize the trails / maps with international standards, introduce new trails (micro-destinations on the island of Krk) and develop trail running routes (on the existing trails, but with higher standards). In addition to the basic outdoor offer, it is necessary to include spa offer, local cuisine, indigenous products and, in particular, cultural offer (race routes that include cultural monuments - the church of St. Lucy and Batomalj sanctuary)... Outdoor Festival offer should also be directed toward the competitors' family members. Baška should follow the positive European examples and strive for continuous improvement in dynamic benchmarking (rivals: Pohorje, NP Paklenica, Zrmanja, Istria). Outdoor offer development management can be further improved by participating in other outdoor events and by direct contact with their visitors. Furthermore, in product development, it is necessary to include the tourists, whose thoughts and needs can create new trends of development (not just copying and transferring solutions, but rather including indigenous elements and resources in the process of differentiation). Parallely, it is necessary to innovate the promotional strategy by: increasing investments in promotion on target emissive markets; including well-known experts and journalists; taking part in specialized fairs (Chamonix); enhancing Internet promotion (e.g. Google AdWords etc.); cooperating with specialized marketing companies etc. Creating a strategic marketing plan would bring out the communication plan and media plan as well. Marketing communication must be integrated, consistent and recognizable (visual identity, brand architecture, look & feel communication). It is necessary to innovate the promotional message with the goal of valorising the positive experiences of the participants (examples: with its natural surroundings, Baška is the real kingdom of outdoor sports; Baška as a unique outdoor destination; Outdoor Festival – no limits).

Tourism product club, in the process of expanding, needs to encompass, connect and synergetically mobilize all micro-destinations on the island of Krk in order to improve the tourism offer with clear objectives, budgets, financing models and accountability for results. In profiling the tourism product club and outdoor offer, control and monitoring are essential for obtaining feedback and for permanent innovation and development of all stakeholders - tourist satisfaction equals the satisfaction with the weakest element of the offer.

CONCLUSION

The municipality of Baška complements its basic seasonal offer (sea, sun, sand) with selective forms of tourism, with particular emphasis on outdoor offer, events and experiences based on sustainable development. Through valorisation of natural resources, outdoor offer can extend the season, attract new target segments, and lead to destination rejuvenation, repositioning and branding.

Establishing a tourism product club opens up opportunities for the development of outdoor offer and Baška Outdoor Festival (continuous improvement, enrichment and innovation, and the inclusion of new elements of the offer); a new business policy and culture of linking and cooperation based on the realization of individual interests, but

with a primarily synergetic effect (relationships between the members of the tourism product club) in the development of the offer, marketing mix innovation and tourist satisfaction. In assuming the leading position and recognition, tourism product club should encourage and connect the stakeholders in order to achieve development based on knowledge and research, led by destination management (TB transformation) and specialized agencies.

The limitations of this research are small sample size and the lack of stakeholders' awareness about the possibilities of forming a tourism product club. The research results can be theoretically built upon and practically applied to the creation and development of tourism products in each destination, emphasizing their uniqueness.

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