

## **COLLABORATION AS A KEY DRIVING FORCE FOR INNOVATIONS IN TOURISM – MULTIPLE CASE STUDIES ANALYSES OF TOURISM PRODUCTS**

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### **Abstract**

Market circumstances have led some stakeholders to faster, and some to slower market adjustments. Integration and other forms of cooperation are part of business strategies of various actors in tourism. The result of such cooperation is often innovation. In economic growth theory, both exogenous and endogenous, innovations are recognized as a key factor for sustainable long-term economic development.

Authors have critically analyzed the selected case studies. Therefore, the qualitative research method was applied.

The cooperation between various stakeholders in tourism can be the basis for achieving market competitiveness by offering innovative tourist products in accordance with consumer needs.

Cooperation with stakeholders is a prerequisite for innovations of tourism products and for designing the more customized experience and should be further explored.

**Keywords** collaboration, stakeholders, tourism, tourism product, innovations in tourism

### **INTRODUCTION**

The tourist product is heterogeneous and complex. Unlike classic, patentable products, it is not possible to apply such protection in the case of a tourist product, since it is primarily a service. Copying practice is not a rarity, which results in a similar offer of tourist products (Hall and Williams, 2008).

Competition in tourism is sharper, and tourists are more demanding, picky and fickle (Middleton and Clarke, 2001) so the economy forces productivity and innovation (Križman Pavlović, 2008). It is well-known that innovations are proportionally related to the size of the enterprise (Orfila-Sintes et al., 2005, Sundbo, Orfila-Sintes, Sorensen, 2007) while tourism is dominated by a small entrepreneurship on the supply side (Scott, Parfitt, Laws, 2000).

Tourists, even though they buy more products from different bidders, perceive their travel journey as a unique experience (Muhcina, 2008). All said implies the necessity of cooperation among stakeholders of the tourist destinations in the creation of tourism products.

The main hypothesis (H1) therefore is formulated as: *Adapting to market demands, through the development of innovative tourism products in partnership with stakeholders, is a precondition for achieving competitiveness in a turbulent tourism market.*

Besides satisfying the demand, tourism products must be cost-effective along with a sustainable use of tourist destination resources.

This paper will present various case studies with the aim of critically review the application of co-operation in the creation of innovative tourist products in the practice of stakeholders.

The literature review explores the topics of stakeholder collaboration and the tourism product and its creation. The third chapter provides the descriptions of initiatives whose collaboration resulted in innovative tourism products. The fourth and last chapter summarizes key findings.

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1.1. Stakeholder collaboration

We start the chapter by presenting the main stakeholders in tourism and their role respectively (Table 1).

Table 1: Stakeholders in tourism

	<b>INTERESTED STAKEHOLDERS</b>	<b>THE ROLE OF INTERESTED STAKEHOLDERS</b>
<b>PRIVATE SECTOR</b>	tourism offer holders (tourism suppliers)	They are main employers and they impact the complete tourism value chain.
	intermediaries	They influence market accessibility through setting conditions to tourism offer holders (tourism suppliers) and tourism destinations.
	transport business	They influence the market and financial sustainability.
	private sector (excluding tourism businesses)	They assure revenues and prosperity.
	professional associations	They lead and direct sectoral developmental activities.
<b>PUBLIC SECTOR</b>	public (government) sector	They define the direction and influence sustainability through public politics, plans and financial support.

	<b>INTERESTED STAKEHOLDERS</b>	<b>THE ROLE OF INTERESTED STAKEHOLDERS</b>
	local and regional government	They influence the sustainability of tourism through planning on the local and regional level (lower level plans), they impact the infrastructure development and support the local economic development.
	tourism organizations	Directly related to tourism, primarily responsible for stimulating market demand through destination marketing.
<b>CIVIL SECTOR</b>	NGOs	They influence sustainable tourism development and facilitate cooperation of interested stakeholders.
	vocational education	They help in tourism market research and in strengthening competences in tourism.
<b>LOCAL COMMUNITY AND CUSTOMERS</b>	local community	Tourism employees and other subcreators of hospitable tourism destinations.
	tourists	By making their decisions, they influence the sustainability and profitability of tourism products.

Source: modified according to Duanesrt: "Unit 2. Responsible tourism development",  
<https://www.slideshare.net/duanesrt/responsible-tourism-product-development> (5.3.2018.)

Stakeholders can be grouped into (World Wildlife Fund, Ecoregional Conservation Strategies Unit, Research and Development 2010, 14-15):

- (1) *Primary stakeholders* – include those who, because of power, authority, responsibilities, or claims over the resources are central to any activity. They are always affected by the outcome of any activity in the tourism destination. They can include: local community, tourism offer holders (suppliers of tourism product), tourists, local, regional and national government, politicians and other officials and donors who have the capacity to influence collaboration outcomes, but who may not themselves be directly affected by them. These officials can have control over policies, laws or simply can have funding resources (specifically important in protected natural areas).
- (2) *Secondary stakeholders* – their interest in outcome is often indirect. In the example of the tourist destination these can be NGOs, media, vocational education institutions, transport businesses, private sector (excluding tourism businesses) etc. Their role is peripheral to that of primary stakeholders, so they may need to be involved only periodically.

Tourism is a highly fragmented industry, involving lots of stakeholders in sustainable tourism development. In this respect, Bramwell and Lane (2000) elaborated the importance of collaboration and partnership. Collaboration among different actors is a paramount and the sole route (Kuenkel, 2015) to successful creation of tourism experience and effective destination planning. Collaboration is an important determinant for a sustainable development of tourism destination. (Baggio, 2010) Stakeholder collaboration leads to constructive dialogue, deep negotiations and potential consensus. It also means dealing directly with different priorities. (NERRA, 2017) Partnership promotion in tourism by different stakeholders can have and often has different final aims (political, economic, conservation) as detected in the work of Buckley (2004) or demonstrated on the example of analysis of ecotourism definitions from China and abroad (Donohoe and Lu, 2008) or Kontogeorgopoulos, and Chulikavit (2010) by arguing the supply-side perspectives on ecotourism in Northern Thailand. Bearing in mind the notion that tourism development affects the quality-of-life of various stakeholders, understanding diverse perspectives of stakeholders and how they are affected by tourism development is critical for constructively engaging stakeholders in planning as pointed in the work of Chase, Amsden and Phillips (2011). However, it is not easy to design an effective strategy. Harmonization stakeholders' interests should be seen as a priority when it comes to effective destination planning due to strong positive correlation between the level of stakeholder cooperation and implementation of a tourism destination plans (Pjerotić, Rađenović and Tripković-Marković, 2016).

Multi-stakeholder collaboration is particularly evident in developing sustainable supply chain management. Furthermore, collaboration and cooperation of different stakeholders facilitate the development of tourism product clubs. (Stipanović, Rudan and Kovačić, 2016). Tourism product clubs optimize the value chain and logistic processes thus enabling constant innovations of tourism product. (see more in: Stipanović and Rudan, 2016). Liu et.al. (2017) have underlined three types of contributor: drivers, facilitators and inspectors. They consider them important in designing, implementing and evaluating sustainable supplier development programs through active collaboration. Partnerships are seen as a more effective way of delivering policy interventions than state-led or 'top-down' approaches. (Kelly, 2012) Stakeholders can also have an influence on the level of hotel participation in environmental management practices (Tang, Amran and Nee Goh, 2013).

Stakeholders are important in shaping tourism-policy framework but because of the diversity of opinion among stakeholders, it is difficult to reach common tourism policy. (Anastasiadou, 2008). Collaborative management and planning among public organizations was investigated further in the work of Petrova and Hristov (2014). Schmitz and Lekane Tsobgou (2016) underline that proper tourism development also requires the participation of stakeholders acting at different spatial scales.

A boundary-spanning role of a DMO implies a greater need to engage stakeholders both within the destination and external to the destination at the same time acting as an intelligent agent of the destination that is able to identify, engage and learn from disparate stakeholders both within and outside the destination. (Sheehan, L. et.al., 2016) Alongside above mentioned, collaboration among DMOs is also beneficial in terms of cost reduction and market penetration (Wang, Y. et.al., 2013).

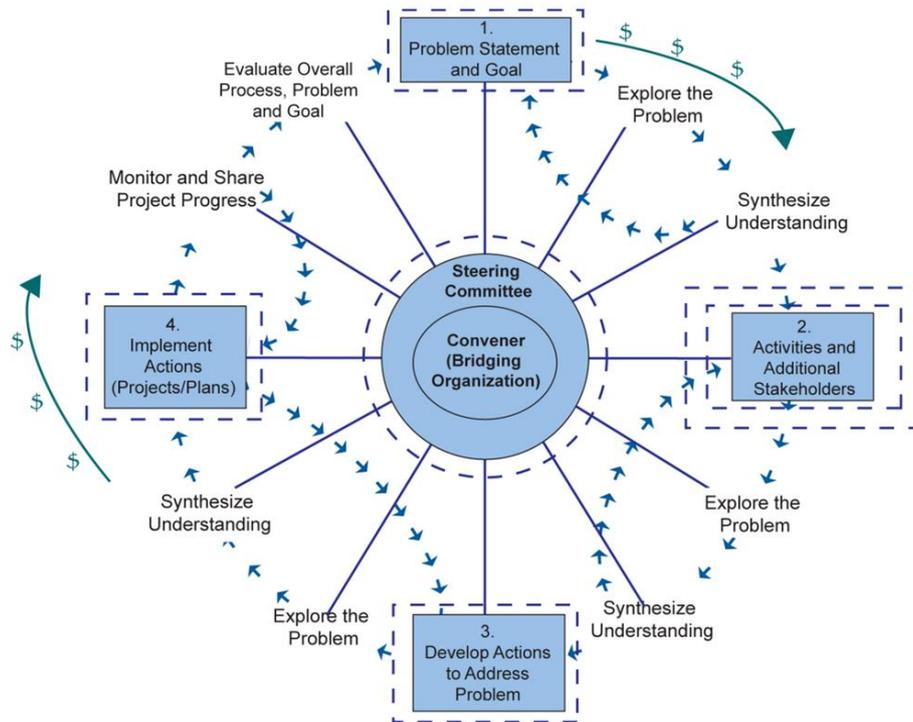
Rosa, Carvalhinho and Soares (2017) advocate that a more complete understanding of stakeholder profiles is an important aspect beyond processual features in defining destination image. For instance, heritage sites are shared by tourists and local residents, who may have different motivations, preferences and experiences. The results of a research show that tourists and local residents differ in their use patterns but generally share motivations, perceptions and experiences. (Ming Su and Wall, 2014) Chiabai, Paskaleva and Lombardi (2011) presented a 'bottom-up approach' for cultural tourism management, based on the development of an e-participation website for an Italian city, where the stakeholders are placed at the center of the decisional process. There is still a lack of consensus and limited research on the stakeholder engagement process for niche areas such as active tourism, adventure tourism (Kent, Sinclair and Diduck, 2011), ecotourism, cultural tourism and other forms of special interest tourism. But, there is a lack of research on the level of importance of stakeholder collaboration for innovation in tourism.

The following are the main steps assuring successful cooperation and partnership of interested stakeholders (Australian Government, Department of Environment and Heritage 2004, 18):

1. identifying what key partnerships will help you to achieve your goals
2. identifying the people who are or should be involved
3. building the relationships (using this document is a good start)
4. developing mutual understandings of issues and the natural and cultural heritage
5. involved
6. jointly developing goals and objectives
7. expressing commitment to the partnership, and to implementing agreed future actions.

The effective process of stakeholder engagement can be presented using the wheel-model (Scheme 1).

Scheme 1: Stakeholder Engagement Wheel



Source: Mott Lacroix, K. E. Megdal, S. B. (2016) Explore, Synthesize, and Repeat: Unraveling Complex Water Management Issues through the Stakeholder Engagement Wheel, *Water*, Vol. 8, No. 4, 118. Available at: <http://www.mdpi.com/2073-4441/8/4/118/htm> Retrieved: 26/12/2017

The stakeholder collaboration process can help a range of stakeholders to develop a better understanding of the issues and challenges in creation of successful tourism product – tourism experience.

## 1.2. Tourism products

The tourist product is the object of exchange on the tourist market and one of the elements of the marketing mix. (Kotler, Bowen, Makens, 1999; Bakić, Unković, 1991). It is primarily made up of services which represent its intangible and dominant component (REDACTED). It is usually defined very widely and abstractedly, such as in this definition from a marketing perspective: „a set, in a certain time, of functional, interactive units, related to real or experienced physical, service, economic and psycho-social elements which ensure satisfaction of users regarding the fulfilment of their tourism needs“ (Mrnjavac 1992, 122).

Tourists perceive tourism products from a horizontal perspective: as the sum of several products consumed during their stay, provided by different tourism providers. The offer side however adopts a vertical perspective of the product, taking as a reference point, the

satisfaction of the visitors and their specific needs, while focusing on the manufacture and supply (Muhcina, 2008). Thus, according to this bi-dimensional understanding the tourism product (TP) (Middleton, Clarke, 2001), can be distinguished:

- **The integral or overall TP** – the total experience of the tourist from the beginning till the return of the trip
- **The specific TP** – tourism providers have a narrower understanding of the tourism product and primarily focus on the tourism products they sell themselves e.g. excursion, flight etc.

TP is not a simple combination of certain elements, but the result of synergistic interaction of all of its components. The components of the integral tourist product are (Medlik and Middleton, 1973): availability, attractions, capacities, prices and image.

When it comes to a specific tourist product, Norman (1984) differs in its dual division: the main product (e.g. flight) and the secondary or peripheral product (e.g. check in, meal during the flight, staff service etc.). Likewise, referring also to a specific tourist product, Lewis and Chambers, (1989) suggest this classification:

- **Formal product** (e.g. dinner in a restaurant)
- **Core product** (e.g. appetizer, main dish, dessert, beverages)
- **Augmented product** (e.g. service, atmosphere, entertainment program)

Smith (1994) reconciles the two dimensions of observation tourism products as his proposed division can be applied on both the integral and specific tourism product, as he distinguishes:

- Physical base
- Service
- Hospitality
- Possibility of choice
- Involvement of the customer

The three key principles of creation of tourism products are: "DIY - do it yourself", "package" and "networking" (Bencardino and Marotta, 2004). With the DIY concept customers independently combine a variety of simple tourism products into a single unit where they contact with different tourism offer providers, unlike in the other two concepts. Thanks to the help of ICT, with dynamic packaging it can be done in real time. The tourism product created as a "package" corresponds to semi-integrated tourism products, which include a high level of standardization of the products, while the concept of networking is characterized by the interaction of companies specialized in the provision of different or same tourism products, that cooperate to ensure the delivery of tourism products of a certain standard of quality and price.

Co-creation is a new construct where the initial stimulus is done by the producer who incites customers to take part in the creation of tourism products (Grönroos & Voima, 2013). The phenomenon of the sharing economy is meritorious for the creation of various tourism products – whether new or modified ones.

Limitations to the development of tourism products include (Beacham, 2006):

- Non- acceptance of innovative ideas of the academic community and research institutions
- Fail to recognize changes, threats and opportunities in a global society
- Lack of organizational ambitions and vision
- Aversion towards risk
- Lack of understanding of the market
- Lack of expertise regarding their own products, services and related processes
- Lack of finances.

In the second section of the paper authors will argue the importance of cooperation and innovation creation mechanisms on the selected case studies based on mainly product but also process innovation in tourism.

## **2. SELECTON OF CASE STUDIES**

a) C taste restaurant, Amsterdam – cooperation between people with disabilities and catering industry.

C taste restaurant started operating in 2007. based on specific business concept to provide customers with unique experience as well as to prove that disabled person can do the work with high performance. Today the restaurant employs 11 blind and visually impaired waiters whose service performance achieves grade 9 (in a scale from 1 to 10). In such business environment disabled people feel very useful and above all socially included. The restaurant offers gastro effect in complete darkness, thus providing customers with unique experience in which they focus on taste, sound and touch. The business concept is based on several important steps. First, when customers arrive at the restaurant, a hostess provides detailed explanation about the service concept and information about the restaurant. In a lighted area customers leave their coats and bags and then the appointed waiter escorts them to the table located in the dark room. Guests are serviced by the blind or visually impaired waiters who received specific education to provide such service. They promptly correspond to each inquiry imposed by the guests, such as toilet services, drink order, etc. Upon finishing the dinner, the waiter walks the guests back to the lighted room where a hostess explains them what did they dine. The food menu is very diversified – from fish and sea food to meat and vegan plates as well as surprise menu suggested by the chef. A complete menu consisting of appetizer, main course and deserts costs 39.50 €. Furthermore, the restaurant also offers additional services such as specific programs for cheese or beer affectionates.

b) Astro Andalus Travel Agency – cooperation between travel agency and science community.

It started operating in 2016 and it is located in Andaltec, the largest scientific center of Spain that has the largest observatory in Continental Europe. It offers specially designed tourist packages devoted to science, gastronomy and culture. More specifically, they organize exclusive tours to scientific locations in Andalusia by combining stargazing experience with gastronomy and culture. Their internet site offers creative packages for

different scientific locations in combination with cultural sightseeing and gastronomy choices. The price ranges from 50€ to 300€ per person per night.

c) MOBI parking system - model of sharing economy between private company and different business and public entities with parking spaces.

It is Dutch based company that operates in eight European countries by offering affordable parking spaces at different locations in big cities. They utilize unused parking spaces from various private and public entities, such as hospitals, universities, small and big businesses to parking places owned by households or individuals. Every parking owner can rent its parking place via Moby park application which, on the other hand, represents user-friendly platform for customers to book their parking. Besides spending less time and facing less stress, customers could save up to 70% of overall costs in comparison to the regular parking places.

d) Thematic park EcoAlberto, Mexico - cooperation between government and local community.

As any other natural park it is located in beautiful and clean natural environment but it offers mock experience of an illegal border crossing between Mexico and USA. At first this unique idea was only used for educational purposes but soon it became true tourist attraction. The park's specialty is „ La Camina Nocturna“, a four-hour guided tour through the rugged countryside. There is no actual boarder and no laws are broken but the landscape and experience is designed to be as realistically as possible with a potential for injury or various confrontations with number of natural or human predators along the way. The price per peson is around 20\$.

e) Bibelib, Intelligent luggage cover – cooperation between fashion industry, IT sector and insurance companies.

Bibelib is startup from France that offers integrated tracking system for the luggage along with luggage insurance for up to \$500. In addition to traceability system, in its website customers can also buy personalized suitcase covers, sleeping masks and padlocks. This user friendly Lost and Found application allows customers to track their luggage on real time basis.

## CONCLUSION

Collaboration increases opportunity for innovative solutions in tourism. Tourists have become more demanding so the traditional top-down approach has been replaced with collaborative networks of different stakeholders who offer unique tourist products. Through the analysis of selected case studies, we detected how collaboration of different stakeholders generates the development of innovative tourism products and ultimately creates competitive advantage in the market. Other related findings include following; (a) the principles of co-creation are rarely used in tourism; (b) the sharing economy revolution has huge potential for its expansion since huge chunk of the tourism services are still not legally regulated; (c) ICT represents the key driving force for development

of many tourism products. Future research should further investigate the formation of various types of networking and collaboration.

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