

CHALLENGES IN DEVELOPING WELL-BEING TOURISM – LIFECLASS TERME SVETI MARTIN

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to identify new trends in wellbeing tourism, as a combination of experiences, relaxation and recreation, focused on creating a unique experience through rethinking the development of LifeClass Terme Sveti Martin and the Sveti Martin destination. Based on an analysis of the current situation, objectives are set and ways of innovating operational strategies are defined to reposition the destination on the market.

Methodology – The paper condenses existing theoretical determinants and builds on positive examples through the authors' understanding of present-day challenges and the active creation of the future of well-being tourism within the settings of market dynamics. Applied research is based on in-depth interviews and surveys targeting the destination's tourism managers, to carry out situation analysis and scenario analysis of wellbeing tourism.

Findings – The paper establishes the need to rethink the present and future of well-being tourism at LifeClass Terme Sveti Martin, based on original and innovative elements and a one-of-a-kind product, indigenous values, creative solutions and sustainable development to ensure differentiation and repositioning.

Contribution – The paper provides a critical analysis of the present state and generates original solutions for developing the wellbeing offering with concrete applications at the enterprise level (LifeClass Terme Sveti Martin) and the destination level (Sveti Martin).

Keywords development concept, well-being tourism, LifeClass Terme Sveti Martin, innovation, repositioning

INTRODUCTION

Because the major factor of tourism development in Croatia continues to be grounded in the dominating elements of the sun and sea, coastal tourism still has the upper hand over continental tourism. Even though preconditions to its development exist, continental tourism remains sluggish, inert, and without a vision, while tourism stakeholders and, in particular, residents have no perception of the opportunities for development tied to tourism. One of the important elements shared by coastal and continental tourism is that vacationing is based on rest, relaxation and recreation, brought together in the concept of well-being. Sveti Martin na Muri is a destination with great potential for developing this form of tourism through its major stakeholder LifeClass Terme Sveti Martin. The purpose of this paper is to identify trends in well-being, and carry out situation and scenario analyses of LifeClass Terme Sveti Martin to foster the development, rejuvenation and repositioning of the Sveti Martin destination as an innovative and competitive well-being destination.

1. THEORETICAL DETERMINANTS OF WELL-BEING TOURISM

Tourism of the twenty-first century is transforming into an industry of entertainment, activity holidays, and animation. Mass tourism has evolved into different special-interest forms of tourism based on a personalised relationship that would make it possible to satisfy the needs of each individual tourist. Although tourists are increasingly turning towards experiences, activity holidays and the outdoors, they are also focusing on relaxation and themselves. The importance of well-being tourism is steadily growing because it's offering centres on health and relaxation based on physical, mental and spiritual treatments. Well-being has been described in numerous ways such as an individual's optimistic assessment of their lives including contentment, positive emotion, engagement and purpose (Diener and Seligman 2004, 17, Konu 2015, 8). In recent years, the term *well-being perception* has been widely used in a variety of service settings, such as luxury cruise vacations, hotels, restaurants and other types of hospitality services (Hyeon-Cheol et al. 2016, 1217). The well-being offering is based on the synergy of natural preconditions, location, intellectual capital and the built offering (Little 2012, 263, Emir and Sarack 2014, 74). It provides a sensory experience geared to all the senses (Dong&Siu 2013, 543). It has emerged from the need of tourists for self-development and self-awareness and their desire for holistic anti-stress programmes. Well-being has a positive effect on quality of health and happiness (quality of life) (Moscardo 2009, 163). By embedding a health and well-being philosophy for tourist destinations, it is hoped that more individuals will potentially engage in tourism and the economic benefits will follow (Brown and Alcoe, 2010, 25, Pyke et. al 2016, 98).

It is difficult to make a distinction between the various forms of the offering (wellness, well-being; health-care, sports and recreational services and facilities) in generating new value. Different authors interpret the trends in certain forms of tourism in different ways. The main difference between wellness and well-being is that wellness encompasses both well-being, focused on physical and mental relaxation, and fitness, as physical activity. The concept of wellness includes elements of lifestyle; physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing; and one's relationship to oneself, others, and the environment (Smith and Puczko 2009, 27, Pesonen et al. 2011, 307, Voigt et al. 2011, 18, Koncul 2012, 528, McKercher 2016, 200, Roque and Felicen 2017, 7). Hettler's model distinguishes six dimensions of wellness tourism: physical, spiritual, intellectual, social, emotional and occupational dimensions (Printz and Horvath 2017, 832). Essentially, there is no off-season for wellness and well-being tourism, the average length of stay is longer, tourist expenditure per day is higher than average, it provides comprehensive service packages, and it attracts all age groups (Marković et al. 2012, 52). It can be a primary or additional motivation to travel. Well-being and wellness tourists are motivated by a desire to experience a destination, interact with residents, and relax and escape from a stressful life (Težak Damijanić and Šergo 2013, 7). Rejuvenating body, mind and spirit and cost saving are said to be the most important motivators of the well&illness travellers (Genc 2015, 43), that further highlight the association between wellness, well-being and health tourism.

In the future, there will be no boundaries in creating novel, innovative services and facilities to achieve excellence and gain competitive advantages. The well-being market is experiencing quantitative growth (growing numbers of supply providers and tourists,

increased revenue and profit) and qualitative development (the development of new forms of the offering and innovative services and facilities, specialisation, adjusting to increasingly more specific market segments). The well-being offering needs to be combined with other forms of the tourism offering into an integrated destination product (Sheldon and Park 2008, 154).

The development concept of well-being tourism has to overcome or limit barriers such as lack of perception; undistinctive brand; low level of collaboration, networking and integration; lack of financial resources; environmental dynamics; and lack of infrastructure construction (Pyke et al. 2016, 102). The problems of well-being tourism are limited infrastructure development, lack of financial resources and a questionable level of services and marketing (Kiss 2015, 100). The development of well-being tourism needs to be based in open innovations and in fostering entrepreneurial initiatives. It cannot be viable without a clear vision and concrete objectives and without establishing a position in the market where demand matches the basic resources of a well-being destination.

The possibilities of developing well-being and wellness tourism to reposition the Sveti Martin tourist destination are examined in the case of LifeClass Terme Sveti Martin.

2. METHODOLOGY

The applied research of well-being tourism development is based on the interview and survey methods, which were used to question five key respondents (a hotel manager, the managers of two Tourist Boards, a mayor, and the manager of a local family farm). The respondents were chosen based on their importance to tourism of the destination Sveti Martin na Muri. Although the destination has only 2,605 inhabitants (2011 Census, Croatian Bureau of Statistics) and is located in Međimurje County that is poorly valorised in terms of tourism, it boasts the competitive well-being offering of LifeClass Terme. Research was conducted in November 2017.

For the purpose of this research, 17 groups of questions were compiled, of which five were rating questions using a Likert scale of 1-5, three were ranking questions, one was a level of importance question regarding stakeholders, and eight were open-ended questions. Average scores were calculated using the arithmetic mean, elements were ranked by value, and responses to open-ended questions were used as a starting point for situation and scenario analyses of well-being tourism in the destination of Sveti Martin na Muri and LifeClass Terme. The first question of the questionnaire focused on understanding trends in well-being tourism. Four questions focused on current state analysis of the Sveti Martin destination; two, on competitiveness analysis of LifeClass Terme; six, on the perceived future development of the Sveti Martin destination; and four, on the future development of LifeClass Terme Sveti Martin.

The main limitation of the research is the respondents' poor awareness of both the opportunities of tourism development and the multiplicative effects of tourism on the economy and residents (The quality of the offering of LifeClass Terme places it considerably above the destination's offering. Other stakeholders in the destination,

residents in particular, have a poorly developed perception of present and future tourism and of their active involvement as stakeholders in developing an integrated product. In the competitiveness analysis, the attitudes of respondents are supplemented by the opinions and suggestions of the authors and active forecasting of the future.

3. SITUATION ANALYSIS OF WELL-BEING TOURISM AT SVETI MARTIN NA MURI AND IN LIFECLASS TERME SVETI MARTIN

Sveti Martin na Muri is the northernmost municipality of Croatia, located in Međimurje County (MC), a county poorly developed in terms of tourism. The situation analysis is based on a comparison of quantitative and qualitative indicators of the present state of the destination Sveti Martin na Muri and LifeClass Terme Sveti Martin. Although tourists primarily choose the destination, LifeClass Terme with the Hotel Spa Golfer**** is the most attractive supply provider, accounting for most of the performance results in tourism.

The quantitative indicators of supply in the destination include one hotel, eleven holiday flats and four holiday homes. The hotel accounts for 58% of the total of 826 accommodation units (official data of the Tourist Board and LifeClass Terme). The quantitative indicators of demand underline the importance of LifeClass Terme.

Table 1: **Tourist arrivals and overnights at Sveti Martin na Muri, in the period 2014 – 2016**

Sveti Martin na Muri								
	Arrivals	Base index	Chain index	Share of arrivals in MC* tourism	Overnights	Base index	Chain index	Share of overnights in MC* tourism
2014	32 321	100		67%	77 299	100		70%
2015	37 833	117	117	67%	89 306	116	116	70%
2016	28 622	89	76	62%	75 297	97	84	68%

*MC – Međimurje County

Source: Official data of Sveti Martin na Muri Municipality

Table 2: **Tourist arrivals and overnights at LifeClass Terme, in the period 2014 – 2016**

LifeClass Terme Sveti Martin								
	Arrivals	Base index	Chain index	Share of arrivals in Sveti Martin tourism	Overnights	Base index	Chain index	Share of overnights in Sveti Martin tourism
2014	17 459	100		54%	40 714	100		53%
2015	20 506	117	117	54%	45 334	111	111	51%
2016	24 192	139	118	85%	56 892	140	125	76%

Source: Official data of LifeClass Terme Sveti Martin

The quantitative analysis clearly shows that while the number of arrivals and overnights in Sveti Martin na Muri dropped in 2016 relative to 2015 and 2014 (the chain indices indicate an increase in tourist numbers and overnights in 2015 and a decline in 2016, and the base indices indicate a drop in performance indicators in the period 2014 – 2016), LifeClass Terme Sveti Martin recorded steady growth (increase in chain and base indices). In 2016 Sveti Martin na Muri accounted for 26.7% and 68% of the total number of accommodation facilities and total number of overnights, respectively, in Međimurje County. In 2016, Međimurje County claimed a 0.3% share of overall arrivals to Croatia and a 0.1% share of overnights in Croatia, and was ranked 15th of all 21 counties.

Qualitative analysis is based on the scores and attitudes of the surveyed managers in the destination, the opinions of the authors and SWOT analysis. The average score (given by the surveyed managers) of the quality of the tourism offering of the destination Sveti Martin na Muri was 4.2 on a Likert scale of 1-5, while the average score of LifeClass Terme Sveti Martin was 4.4. The score of the destination offering is dependent on the score of LifeClass Terme as the destination's most important stakeholder (tourists travel to the destination because of the offering of LifeClass Terme). The most competitive and most important forms of special-interest tourism in Sveti Martin na Muri are leisure and medical tourism, recreational tourism, well-being and wellness tourism, cycling tourism and excursion tourism. The lowest ranked were event tourism and team-building tourism. The tourism offering of the Sveti Martin na Muri destination is part of Project Croatia 365. Among the attractions, services and facilities that the destination offers to tourists are the Mill on Mura River, the Miller's House, an ethno collection, the visitor centre of the Mura Ecomuseum, Mura Regional Park, a wine road, a variety of events, hiking and biking trails, rural tourism and several family run farms (*OPG*)¹. Together with neighbouring destinations, it won the European Destinations of Excellence (EDEN) award in 2015, the theme of the award being tourism and local gastronomy. It has also received the silver flower award of the European association Entente Florale Europe and has, on multiple occasions, been singled out as one of the best-kept towns of continental Croatia.

The elements of the offering of LifeClass Terme were likewise evaluated. The most competitive and most important form of special-interest tourism at LifeClass Terme is leisure tourism, followed by recreational tourism, well-being and wellness tourism, medical tourism and cycling tourism, business tourism, team building and excursion tourism. The offering is based on activity holidays together with healthy food. LifeClass Terme operates according to the standards of the international medical tourism certificate. Its offering includes thermo-mineral swimming pools, a wellness and beauty centre, Sauna World, the Lumbalis Health Centre, medical wellness and a summer waterpark. Tourists can choose from a variety of packages such as Active 365, Family Holiday, Sport and Fit, Wine & Gastro, Romantic Weekend for two, as well as enjoy a variety of excursions that LifeClass Terme organises. There is also a small tourist train. LifeClass Terme is a Cyclist Welcome hotel, catering to the needs of cycling tourists.

¹ An *OPG* or *obiteljsko poljoprivredno gospodarstvo* (family-run farm) is a physical person or group of physical persons, members of a common household, who are engaged in agricultural activities on a private farm, using their own or leased production units – Act on Agriculture (Article 2), Official Gazette 30/2015, p. 1.

The development problems identified are: inadequate involvement and lack of interest on the part of stakeholders, a failure to recognise new trends in tourism, stakeholders lacking in expertise, limited funding, and adverse political, economic, legal and administrative impacts. A special problem is that residents, who should act as drivers of small entrepreneurship and interpreters of the indigenous local offering, are insufficiently involved in creating a tourism offering. Stakeholder networking and collaboration is poorly implemented in managing the tourism development of the destination. The managers ranked the stakeholders by importance as follows: LifeClass Terme Sveti Martin, the municipality Tourist Board, the local government and self-government, the providers of accommodation and catering offerings, associations, societies and clubs, and residents. The destination's competitiveness and challenges of the environment can be assessed by SWOT analysis.

Table 3: **SWOT analysis of well-being tourism in the Sveti Martin na Muri destination**

STRENGTHS		WEAKNESSES	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geographical position • Natural resources • Local culture and tradition • Infrastructure for outdoor activities – hiking and biking trails, forests, meadows • The well-being offering of LifeClass Terme • Position of LifeClass Terme in the market • Wine and food offering • Local food • Organic food production • Personal safety 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents' attitude and awareness • Education of personnel • Limited financial resources • Lacking quality of accommodation facilities (with the exception of the hotel) • Poorly developed offerings of other stakeholders • Poorly exploited potentials and deficient promotion • Tourist Board's inferior offering of vacation packages • Weak destination distinctiveness • Poorly implemented strategic approach to tourism development • Inadequate stakeholder networking and integration 	
OPPORTUNITIES		THREATS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upward trend in demand for well-being tourism • Upward trend in demand for food and wine tourism, cycling tourism, wellness tourism and leisure tourism • Growing awareness about healthy living • Focus of tourists on continental tourism • Desire for new destinations • Financing from EU funds 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourism offering of neighbouring regions • Rapid growth of competition • Inability to fully identify the needs of well-being tourists • Low purchasing power of domestic tourists • Adverse macro-economic environment • Under-efficient administration and legislation 	

Source: By the authors

Changes in the environment should be as opportunities to marshal strengths and minimise weaknesses in creating new value for tourists and in repositioning on the tourism market. Situation analysis and active forecasting are the starting points for the scenario analysis of the destination and LifeClass Terme.

4. SCENARIO ANALYSIS OF WELL-BEING TOURISM AT SVETI MARTIN NA MURI AND IN LIFECLASS TERME SVETI MARTIN

Well-being tourism of the destination Sveti Martin na Muri and LifeClass Terme Sveti Martin needs to be based on the key determinants of responsible, sustainable and community-based tourism. Interaction between the destination and stakeholders should result in faster rates of innovation aimed at creating excellence for tourists and market repositioning. Scenario analysis is used to set quantitative and qualitative objectives and put forward concrete ways to innovate operational strategies.

The quantitative objectives of supply at the destination level and the LifeClass Terme level focus on increasing the number of accommodation capacities, the number of tourism services and facilities and the number of stakeholders (the destination level), while the quantitative objectives of demand involve increasing the numbers of tourists, overnights, and primary revenue and profit based on greater tourist spending. The aim of the destination is to increase the number of overnights to 100,000 by 2020 (as a result of the growing share of renters of household accommodations).

The qualitative objectives of the destination and LifeClass Terme as drivers of development are to continuously improve all elements of the well-being offering and additional offerings (introducing new services/facilities) in innovating an integrated destination product and to be positioned as a leader of the well-being and wellness offering in Croatia in creating unique experiences and emotional value for tourists.

The overall development concept of well-being tourism of the destination and stakeholders should evolve through the innovation of operational strategies:

- Research and development strategy – actively studying the development of trends in wellness and well-being tourism. Implementing business intelligence and CRM in gathering key information and knowledge on competitor activities and tourist preferences in the present and in the future. It is essential to actively create the future based on proactive and predictive action in generating responses to possible opportunities and future scenarios.

- Marketing strategy – continuous innovation of three marketing strategies based on marketing research of the market. The starting point is the definition of a target segment: families with children, recreationists, active middle-aged or elderly tourists, health-aware tourists, higher purchasing power, geographically focused on expanding countries. Must be repositioned as a unique and qualitatively distinctive well-being destination (an oasis of peace, tranquillity and enjoyment, geared to all the senses). Innovations to the marketing mix should be based on developing the offering and promotion and on defining price policies and new distribution channels. The promotional mix should focus on the target segment to generate greater revenue relative to costs. Promotion in specialised journals, at well-being tourism trade shows, on banners, etc. is a priority. Use should be made of bloggers, visits by journalists, travel agencies. The key to modern promotion is to actively manage social networks and platforms, and actively connect online and offline channels to differentiate the destination from competitors (Kolb 2006, 78). The best promoters are satisfied tourists.
- Offering strategy – developing the well-being offering by improving supplementary elements of the offering. The starting point is the construction of well-designed accommodation facilities (luxury household accommodations, glamping in pristine nature) and catering facilities based on domestic cuisine (promoting healthy eating habits, cooperation with family farms) and indigenous décor, highlighting the food and wine offering. The LifeClass Terme offering should be based on an innovative well-being offering and novel treatments, and should include audio and olfactory offerings, as well as various forms of animation, entertainment and theme evenings. LifeClass Terme needs to develop medical wellness through destination well-being projects; by introducing the concepts of biodynamic food in nutrition, holism in health, medical treatments; and by appointing health managers. At the destination level, the offering should be enriched with trails for hiking, running and biking and with cultural and creative services/facilities aimed at presenting the local culture and tradition and actively involving tourists in various cultural and sports events to create an integrated product.
- Personnel strategy – the continuous education and improvement of employees across all levels. Residents should be encouraged to engage in tourism and top managers should be brought into achieve knowledge-based leadership. The key is creating a culture that promotes learning and knowledge, and motivating employees to achieve self-actualisation through the success of LifeClass Terme and the destination.
- Financial strategy – based on new sources of funding, attracting investors (*fDi Magazine*, the specialised edition of *Financial Times*, has listed Međimurje among the top ten regions with less than a million and a half inhabitants, in the category of quality of strategy for attracting foreign investors), establishing public-private partnerships, and financial management aimed at generating profit and then reinvesting it to achieve excellence for tourists.

All operational strategies must be coordinated and brought together for the purpose of accomplishing the visions and objectives of tourism development of the destination and LifeClass Terme. The strategic management of destination development is essential in gaining competitive advantages.

5. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT OF THE SVETI MARTIN DESTINATION

Tourism needs to grow into an engine of economic development in the Sveti Martin destination, with a multiplier effect on tourist satisfaction and residents' quality of life, to ensure sustainable development. The key to development is collaboration, together with the functional, horizontal integration of stakeholders in fostering tourism development. Stakeholders should be involved in creating a vision and setting strategic objectives and innovative operational strategies in determining which alternative has the greatest possibility of success (Hardy and Pearson 2017, 12). Residents have an especially important role to play as generators of entrepreneurship, through which local culture, traditions and customs are presented to differentiate the destination from competitors (Rangus et al. 2017, 170). Tourists also need to play an active role as co-creators of the new tourism offering.

Integration can be reinforced by establishing a tourism product club of Sveti Martin well-being tourism as a novel model of collaboration grounded on community-based tourism planning (Mc Comb et al. 2016, 7). The key to the success of a tourism product club lies in identifying potential stakeholders and facilitating their greater cooperation, through leadership and management. The concept it operates on is that by generating common benefits the club guarantees that individual benefits will also be generated for stakeholders. Activities should be carried out based on the Actors-Resources-Activities (A-R-A) model that underlines a networking approach and includes the effects of individual business relations among stakeholders in the club (Håkansson et al. 2009, 75). It must create positive effects for stakeholders (exchange of knowledge and information, greater bargaining power, new markets, competing together on the market, product innovation, competitiveness), for the destination (product development, branding, rejuvenation, repositioning), and for tourists (new value, new product, innovation). LifeClass Terme should be the driver of integration, encouraging other stakeholders to become involved (by formulating cooperation, joint creation of the future, division of roles, leadership, monitoring). Specialised well-being tourism agencies could become involved as consultants. The precondition to success is an efficient Tourist Board at the municipality and county levels, capable of generating promotional activities, as well as a local administration that is effective in breaking down administrative barriers. A culture of trust and community should be developed to disperse fear that the major stakeholder (LifeClass Terme) might take advantage of other stakeholders.

While LifeClass Terme is interested in creating an integrated destination product and expanding its offering, smaller stakeholders are interested in increasing the sales of their products through internal marketing and gaining distinctiveness through a unique product and brand. The well-being tourism offering can be enriched by bringing together small entrepreneurs, family farms and other supply providers, including competitors. Continuous monitoring and feedback are essential in driving the cycle and model of offering innovation and in outgrowing the competition. The well-being offering must evolve into the identity, synonym and brand of Sveti Martin na Muri, as a distinctive and highly competitive well-being destination geared to the tourists of the present and the future.

CONCLUSION

Well-being tourism is growing into one of the most attractive forms of tourism in response to the challenges and stresses of modern living and the need for mental and physical relaxation and rest. The dynamic of the environment, tourist preferences and growing competition are setting a new paradigm of well-being development in creating a highly competitive product to ensure excellence.

Situation analysis confirms the high competitive ability of the well-being offering of LifeClass Terme within the poorly developed – in terms of tourism – destination Sveti Martin na Muri and Međimurje County (inadequate involvement of other stakeholders, in particular residents). (Future research could focus on dynamic benchmarking with the closest competitors in Croatia and Slovenia). Natural preconditions and the innovative potential of LifeClass Terme are resulting in positive development trends that will ultimately make it a market leader. In development, it is imperative to introduce innovative operational strategies to ensure the continuous improvement of the offering (innovative well-being offering and supplementary offerings, creating an integrated destination product) and promotion by overcoming financial and human resource limitations (a two-way process between LifeClass Terme and the destination). The well-being offering needs to evolve into the destination's brand and identity. Sustainable development has to be based on the systematic and active creation of the future based on collaboration and networking (well-being tourism product club), with the active participation of all stakeholders, residents in particular (community-based tourism), as the drivers of family entrepreneurship in creating new value for tourists.

The results of research can be implemented at the well-being destination level and at the level of well-being tourism supply providers in designing the present and the future (continuous research is essential). The limitations of the research are the small sample of respondents and the fact that it was not possible to include tourists in the research process.

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