

THE BALANCE BETWEEN ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN THE DANUBE BEND TOURIST MICRODESTINATION

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Abstract: *Because the Danube bend tourist destination represents and may represent in the future the tourist destination of excellence, comprising more tourist products, we consider imperative the identification and, subsequently, the consolidation of that **tourism form** through which the respective destination stands out from the others, respectively the one that ensures a competitive advantage for the tourist market/s aimed.*

In this context, researches may easily fail in identifying the reasons/advantages of non-visitors/prior tourists and the perceptions of the weak and strong points of each of the competitive destinations because, on the one hand, although the tourists (including the prior tourists) have certain declared reasons to choose a destination, other elements, many times emotional ones, represent the basis of the choice, as well as of the creation of a positive image (perception) of that destination; and, on the other hand, given the fact that the researched persons (including non-visitors) gather different experiences during the period between the moment of purchase and the one of “usage” of the tourist product, the terms of comparison and of reference being different, this making even more difficult the interpretation of the research results.

Key-words: tourism, destination, specialization, traditional, market.

Introduction

This methodological article aims at the analysis of the attractiveness elements of a divine destination with a tourist potential, the facilities and the services from the destination, its image, all these being an ensemble that we would like to be qualitative and to justify the increase of the tourist flow and the reputation earned in time and with effort of all the actors involved in the shaping and the attractive sustainability of the Danube Bend destination.

These are the ones that decisively determine the choice of the respective destination by the tourists and influence the behaviour of the tourists in the destination.

We can include here: **the natural heritage:** natural landscapes, rivers, lakes, sea, beach, natural parks and reservations, climate, generally all the physical and geographical features of the destination and its natural resources; **the architectural heritage,** both historical and modern; **the cultural heritage,** the social attractions: the lifestyle of the local population, the language, the culture, the social contacts opportunities, festivals, etc.

1. Destination attractiveness elements

The heritage elements that the tourist may find in the Danube Bend destination must be presented either in a promotion brochure or on the respective destination site, with the specification that there is no professional promotion site of the bend, only attempts regarding the accommodation infrastructure.

These elements constitute, in fact, the “driving force” of any tourist activity. Together, they form the environment of the respective destination: natural, economic, cultural, social. The number of visitors that the destination can receive during a period of time (a day, a month, a year), without the risk of deteriorating the environment and without reducing its attractiveness, represents the destination capacity.

2. The image of the destination

The attitudes, the perceptions and the images have an important role in the decision to choose a tourist destination. The image is the total of the perceptions and the convictions that people have regarding the respective destination. The image of a destination does not necessarily have as basis a prior experience, meaning a visit to the

respective destination. All the tourist destinations have an own image, and the marketer interest is to delimit it clearly from the other destinations. The capacity to identify and promote the value is the main factor of competitiveness of the society on a long term. This means to correctly and realistically identify the fields in which there are performance premises and to stimulate the development of the quality related to these fields, to identify the valuable individuals and their fields of excellence followed by the direction towards an education and training in consensus with their natural skills so as to harmonise their interests with those of the society.

3. The competitiveness of a destination

The competitiveness of a destination is given by the proportion in which it succeeds to exploit the human value legacy with which is naturally endowed. This has two major components: mass education and training and directing the inclinations, the creation of conditions for the individual to act within the respective field.

Although from an economic point of view, the concept of competitiveness in tourism defined as “*the capacity to deal with competition in an efficient and profitable manner on the tourist market*” is integrated in the one used in the specialty literature, the specific content of tourism makes this complex and multidimensional approach of this concept necessary.

From the tourist point of view, the product covers the complete experience from the home departure to the return, the manifestation of deficiencies at the level of one single component being enough for the global level of competitiveness to be affected. Moreover, we must emphasise the fact that most of the times a tourist destination overlaps or is found close to a local community: city or rural settlement whose economic, social, cultural life influences to a bigger or smaller extent the tourist activity, being at its turn influenced by it (in the case of the Bend, there are Orsova and Dr. Tr. Severin).

The competitiveness of the destination - as a tourist product means the assurance of the competitiveness of the tourist products that *represents the quintessence of the process of achieving the competitiveness in tourism*. This is the result of the competitiveness of the providers directly involved in the production of the tourist products included in the package, as well as of the other determining factors that leave their mark on the tourist destination competitiveness.

Therefore, the marketing specialists have defined the concept of “**product universe**” which synthesises very well these influences. Thus, the tourist product is represented by the *assembly of perceptions which the tourist has in connection with the product: visual images: colours, environment, geographical and physical environment, atmosphere, scents, musical sensations, human relationships* (with the personnel, the other tourists, and the populations), the level of *comfort*, etc.

A **product/service is competitive** when it has the capacity to impose on a certain market, to be sold in large quantities, potentially comparable with those of the similar products and services made and sold by competitors. Therefore, the concept of tourist product does not represent only the combination of multiple variants of those two categories of elements: tourist resources and services, but it also means **a certain concept about the product**.

The higher and higher exigencies that tourists have related to the tourist products have imposed a series of attributes, which a tourist product must fulfil in order to be competitive:

- ❖ **satisfaction,**
- ❖ **accessibility,**
- ❖ **legitimacy,**
- ❖ **security and safety,**
- ❖ **authenticity,**
- ❖ **transparency,**

❖ **harmony with nature,** to their achievement contributing, to the same extent, the competitiveness achieved at the level of each provider of tourist services of the tourist destination, as well as the other determining factors of tourist destination competitiveness.

The differentiation results, mainly, from the **value chain of the destination as a tourist company** (fig. 1). Like any product, regarding the Danube Bend tourist product (a special product, unique at a national level), the value chain must also be analysed from two perspectives, as follows: the value chain of the company and the value chain of the buyer.

From the tourist company perspective, the chain comprises the value margin and the value activities, each of these being a potential uniqueness source. In their turn, the value activities (classified as primary and support activities) are divided in direct, indirect and quality assurance activities.

The evolution of the quality concept, from the quality assurance to the total quality management, has imposed the use of the working methods and procedures in all the compartments and all the levels of the tourist product, with the setting of indicators for all the “satisfaction creating” factors (from the quality ingredients for the product preparation, respectively from the quality of the linen to the “destination quality”, these including the quality of the service providing personnel).

In other words, the quality concept, approached from the perspective of the provider/supplier, found in all the value creating elements, are found under the form of the satisfaction element for the buyer (for example, the degree of

comfort - for accommodation, the nutritious value/the taste - for food, the degree of fitting with equipment, the competence, etc. - for the entire destination).

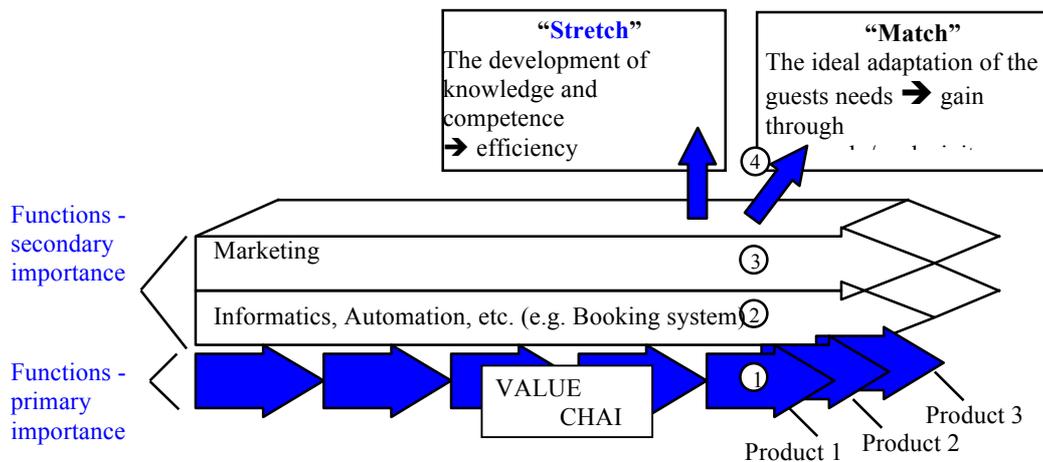


Fig. 1 - The value chain of the destination as a tourist company

The value is creating elements – from the perspective of the supplier/provider, transformed, during the consumption of the tourist product; seen from the perspective of the buyer, in satisfaction determining elements; comprise, among others, *the image of a destination*.

3.1. The image of a destination, represents all the information and the real impressions sent to the potential consumers about the local population, the infrastructure, the climate, the hydrology, the attractions, the history, the personal safety, etc. and is formed through perceptions and experiences.

Intangible elements such as the local culture, the diversity of the sport activities, the restaurants, the cafes, etc., which can increase the value of a destination, transformed in tangible elements, respectively the historical sites, the events, (cultural manifestations, festivals, etc.) form an environment where “there are many things to do”, being able to create a psychological image favourable for the return of the tourist to the destination.

The transformation of these attributes in advantages for the tourist, through which a destination can differentiate, takes place within a strategy to position itself. Together with the differentiation variables of “product” and “image”, other variables (such as the hired personnel, variable which can increase or decrease the value of the offered tourist product) are used also for a tourist destination.

4. The identity

The identity of the destination is the “main means of identification, but also the source of associations made by the consumer, representing the connections between the values and the brand”. In the case of the tourist destination, the identity elements are those that become most of the times attractiveness elements (giving value and/or uniqueness to the destination) and, at the same time, main reasons in choosing it. The choice criteria of a destination depend on the manner in which it is perceived, respectively the image that the consumer has formed about it; at the same time, considering evaluation criteria of the destination quality.

Seen from the perspective of the buyer (from the target market to the destination), *the value chain* is formed from the actual values or from the values perceived by it, through which the destination may be differentiated/selected.

The difference, in its most sustainable form, derives from the creation, in a unique manner, of the value for the buyer, respectively of the purchase criteria. They are classified, in their turn, in usage criteria and signalling criteria.

The usage criteria measure/evaluate the factors/the elements that create value for the buyer, while the signalling criteria reflect the manner in which the buyers perceive the existence of the value, being able to state that they follow a natural way, while applying an efficient marketing, the usage criteria.

The usage criteria include: the product quality, the product features (physical and geographical), but also the duration of the stay, the means of transport, etc.

The important signalling criteria are: the image/the identity/the reputation of the destination, the market quota, the tradition/the seniority in the field, the price as an indicator of quality, the external appearance of the product,

etc.). A signalling criterion is important only to the extent to which it contributes to the actual perception of the value, the purchase done through the fulfilment of the usage criteria.

The important sustainable competition advantage sources, specified in the majority of the specialty studies, are the differentiation, the quality (the chain and the value system), the cost reduction, the niche marketing, the advance performance or technology, the management manner, the organisation culture and style.

Table 1. Destination Value Chain (I/II)

Product development	Destination and compacted product	Promotion	Distribution and sale	In and out logistics	Operations and services at the destination	Aftercare
Aerial alliances and new destinations Environment and cultural resources Development of services and facilities Increase and development for the visitor Exploitation of new markets and market segments New ways, themes, hub/spokes and itineraries Quality management (standards) and insurance systems Improved service offer management	Marketing materials Production of collective compaction of attractions, from cities and regions Commissions and supply agreement Prices negotiation Full packages sale	Marketing, PR and customer promotion Fairs, exhibitions, seminars, visits Market presentation Familiarisation trips Press/Educational liaisons	E-mail requests and information services Distribution of destination information Brochures Operator alliances Sales through agencies (retail) E-business Reservations Payments and ticketing Insurance On the spot prices and booking	Visa and passport Airport facilities and services VAT recovery Immigration services Check in and boarding operations Luggage On-board services	Airport transfers Taxi services Public transport Visitor centres Accommodation Catering Trips Attractions Car rentals Entertainment Health and beauty Sport and recreation	Management of databases Consumer and customer feedback Industry and continuous feedback

Participating with the Danube Bend destination in the EDEN European Project (“European Destinations of Excellence”) has been selected to appoint the European Destinations of Excellence because it promotes sustainable tourism development models in the European Union.

This project benefitted from the support of the European Commission, which launched it in 2006 and which is still playing a fundamental role in coordination, occupying, following the international selection, the fourth place, with the same score (94) as the one ranking the third from 32 competitors, our biggest gain being the overcoming of famous tourist destinations for Romanian tourism as well as for others, such as: the Seaside, Brasov area, Bucovina monasteries area, etc. A direct benefit of this success is the free of charge promotion at a European level of the European tourist destination: Drobeta-Ponore-Danube Bend, at the European tourism fairs, but also with other events, receiving, thus, the visit of foreign journalists who contributed with the promotion of the above-mentioned destination to the revival of the tourism in the area.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the multitude of elements that contribute to the assurance of the competitiveness of a tourist product needs the use of a complex toolkit that ensures, on the hand, the largest knowledge of the needs, the exigencies of the tourists' expectations, and, on the other hand, to allow an anticipation of the future evolutions, based on which to

draw “the shape of the most efficient products”. At the same time, the large number of actors that take part in the creation of the tourist product means a permanent collaboration, the creation of a common action frame into sustainability development.

The objectives to follow for tourism sustainability, the existing EU framework for the development of economic, social and environmental policies based on the Partnership for Growth and Jobs and the Sustainable Development Strategy provides an adequate background for achieving Objectives on the sustainability of the European tourism and challenges to be addressed to objectives of this “agenda”: economic prosperity, social equity and cohesion, protection of the natural environment and culture.

These objectives should also guide European tourism stakeholders in their policies and actions affecting the impact of outbound tourism from Europe and in supporting tourism as a tool for sustainable development in host countries.

To achieve these objectives, a number of tourism specific challenges need to be addressed.

They mainly include the preservation and sustainable management of natural and cultural resources, minimizing resource use of resources and pollution in tourism destinations including the production of waste, managing change in the interests of community welfare, reducing the seasonality of demand, studying environmental impact of local transport involved in tourism, making tourism accessible to all without discrimination and improving the quality of jobs in the sector, also addressing in the Commission migration policy the issue of employing third-country nationals whose stay is illegal.

Ensuring safety and security of tourists and local communities, keeping current economic productivity, creating economic opportunities for future generations, maintaining essential ecological processes, biodiversity protection and environmental quality in tourist areas (Fig. 2) is another challenge and also a prerequisite for the successful development of tourism.

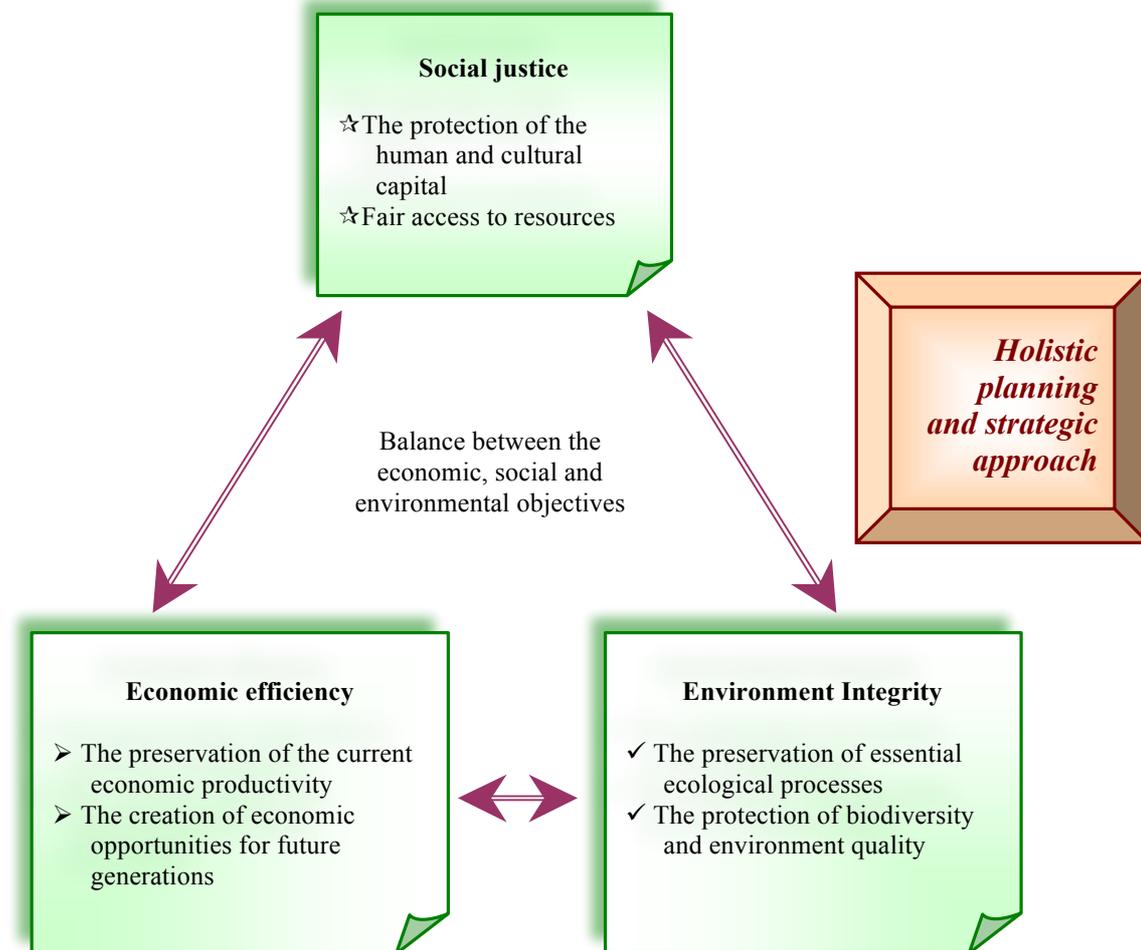


Fig. 2. The balance between economic, social and environmental development of tourism

These priorities may vary in space or time. Priority given to them, how they will be addressed and opportunities they can offer vary from case to case.

Stakeholders should continue to anticipate and monitor changes. Policies and actions must take into account how demand and offer will be affected by environmental challenges – such as climate change and water scarcity –, technology developments or other current political, economic and social issues.

Therefore, all challenges will be regularly updated in conjunction with all stakeholders.

Achieving the objectives of this agenda and addressing the above challenges will require consistent action that can be supported by appropriate public policies: sustainable management of destinations, the integration of sustainability in the business environment and tourists' awareness on sustainability.

Tourism and its direct beneficiary: the tourist destination must join efforts towards sustainable and competitive, to get that attribute of Excellence.

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