

IMPROVING THE COMPETITIVENESS OF TOURISM OFFER OF VOJVODINA THROUGH FOSTERING COOPERATION IN CROSS-BORDER REGIONS

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Abstract:

Cultural tourism is connected to the change of preferences of modern tourists and their demands for sustainable destination development and helps to affirm the importance of culture along with the improvement of intercultural communication, showing respect for other cultures and deepening of mutual understanding within different social entities. This paper aims to investigate the ways of strengthening and improving of cultural and historical heritage in order to enhance tourism attraction between cross border regions in Serbia (Vojvodina) and Hungary. In the long-run, it can enhance tourism development and generate new job opportunities, contribute to the development of relevant partnerships and networks needed for rural tourism development.

Keywords:

cultural tourism, cultural heritage, sustainable development, cross-border regions.

INTRODUCTION

In the world in which the process of globalization has led to dramatic economic, political and social changes, cultural tourism has significant role in the communication of fundamental values of intercultural dialogue, protection and promotion of cultural diversity and preservation of cultural heritage. Numerous local communities are constantly trying to identify and develop tangible and intangible elements of cultural heritage as the means to achieve a growing competitive advantage in an increasingly competitive tourism market. Traditional tourism forms have negative effects on sustainable development of a destination. In order to neutralize their influence, cultural tourism plays an important role in regeneration and protection of cultural heritage treasures and contribution to employment and sustainable economic growth. The use of cultural heritage, with minimum related investments, attracts a growing number of cultural tourists whose spending isn't influenced by global market fluctuations.

As part of increasing competitiveness of tourism regions and the capacity for sustainable growth, a number of European initiatives is directed towards cross-border cooperation. The FRESCO project of the cross-border Cooperation program Hungary – Serbia serves as an excellent example of tourism-related initiatives. The FRESCO project is in line

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with the communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. This study may serve as an example to other cross-border initiatives, implemented through projects and studies, or as an example of developing a joint tourism projects. One of the objectives is to identify the need and cooperation possibilities in accordance with the development strategies of the municipalities of Bač, Serbia and Bácsborsód, Hungary for creation of joint tourism attraction of Vojvodina region. This is based on the research study of both municipalities' endogenous resources to tourism potential together with the surrounding settlements.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Cultural tourism enhances intercultural communication and promotes equality of different culture traditions between social and ethnic groups. All over the world, local communities are constantly promoting their cultural assets and developing new ways of communication with target segments in order to gain a comparative advantage in the global tourism market.

Tourism is an ideal field for the meeting of cultures. Thus, cultural tourism aims to link the consumer (educated tourists eager to be introduced to another culture) with the intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic-artistic sphere of nation. In this context, cultural tourism factors include: art, colonies, exhibitions, events, festivals, music, dance, drama (theater and film), languages and literature. It needs to be mentioned that the concept of cultural tourism is very complex so there is the debate about how it could be defined (Richards, 2007; Shackleford, 2001). Usually, culture is analyzed through two components. The first involves exploring cultural categories such as: organization of time and space, relationship with nature and social organization. The second component includes the cultural principles (values, beliefs, social norms) that enable things (objects, phenomena) to be grouped into cultural categories, ranked and evaluated (Maričić, 2008). Both components play a very important role in the planning of tourism development of a particular area since they give guidelines on how the local offer of a specific country could be presented to certain types of tourists.

One of possible definitions determines cultural tourism as the visits of persons who are outside the domestic community and are completely or partially motivated by their interest in the historical, artistic, scientific or "lifestyle/heritage" offerings of a local community, a region, a group or an institution (Richards, 2007). The UN World Tourism Organization (1985) defines cultural

tourism as travelling with the aim of learning about foreign cultures, presentation of one's own artistic work, visits to festivals, cultural sightseeing, *etc.* In a certain sense, all tourism travelling can be seen as a form of cultural tourism because they "satisfy tourists' needs to learn about foreign countries and raise the level of their cultural awareness and experiences through meeting with other people.

Therefore, cultural tourism is an interactive, dynamic and advancing process of people's intercultural, maintained by the rich diversity and heritage of different cultures. From that view, culture can also be defined as a "living identity". Culture and cultural heritage, as the expression of identity and history of the people to which they belong, can serve as a tool for forming the identity and differentiation of destinations, which at the same time localize and globalize cultural and tourist experiences that are characterized by the contact and mixing of diverse cultures (Jelinčić, 2009).

From an economic point of view, cultural tourism is out of culture to tourism market with cultural and artistic product that has cultural and economic value. Looking from an organizational point of view, it is the interconnection of culture and tourism - two complementary strands that need to establish partnership and join in the formation of joint products. Thus, we get the cultural economy, which has become one of the four fastest growing sectors in the world economy (Dojčinović, 2005). Cultural tourism is therefore the movement of tourists motivated by cultural reasons, but also the opportunity to promote revived cultural assets of a region, locality, city, which provide tourist experience.

RESEARCH STUDY

The research issue is presented as the development of cultural tourism in cross-border regions and tendencies of cultural tourism development in a multi-national community, each of which is directed towards preserving and developing its own cultural identity. The overall objective of the paper is to identify the needs and cooperation possibilities according to the development strategies of the municipalities of Bač, Serbia and Bácsborsód, Hungary for creation of joint tourism attraction of Vojvodina region. This must be based on the research study of both municipalities, endogenous resources with a high tourism potential together with the surrounding settlements.

In order to find the answers to the above-given questions, we have conducted a primary inquiry in a form of an interview with direct and indirect focus groups.



Focus group research is based on mutual comparison of the attitudes of individuals in a group of selected leading partially structured discussion (Fern, 2001). The research is carried out with a small group of people relevant to the research problem. A survey was conducted among five focus groups with key stakeholders in tourism development of the cross-border region: Bač and Bácsborsód Tourism Organizations (10 participants), representatives of the city administration (10), participants in culture (10), private entrepreneurs (10) and local people (10). Identification of the focus groups was based on the specific role that they play in tourism development of the region. The main topics included the issue of the achieved level of development of tourism products, development of potential limitations and suggestions for possible improvement of tourism development of the region.

The inquiry was conducted during April and May of 2016 among 50 participants of the focus groups in cross-border regions. Our hypothesis was that the cultural tourism of specific regions is primarily based on multiethnicity that has given its contribution to architectural objects, gastronomy, multilingualism and crafts, in the sense of producing items and souvenirs. This is the sign that the regions of Serbia (Vojvodina) and Hungary already have a certain cultural identity formed on the tourism market.

In order to survey experts, we used a semi-structured questionnaire containing the questions related to their assessment of the current situation in the realm of culture and tourism. Also, we asked them about the current cultural identity and the desired identity and image of the regions, about the contribution of cultural institutions to development of cultural tourism, regional cooperation, manifestations in which the cultural institution took part, number of visitors in the preceding year, and most importantly, virtues and flaws in the cultural offer of the regions compared to other competitive destinations. This interview also included the SWOT analysis of tourism potential of the region and the municipalities of Bač and Bácsborsód.

EMPIRICAL RESULTS

For this research paper, interviews were conducted with 50 representatives of different focus groups. The focus group research was conducted in an unstructured way. The atmosphere during the discussion was relaxed, and participants were encouraged to participate equally in the discussion. The duration of the discussion was 60 minutes and the results obtained enabled performing a qualitative and quantitative analysis.

The questionnaire included 10 questions based on which qualitative content analysis was carried out. The questions were related to the development of cultural tourism and heritage in the surveyed regions and in Vojvodina as a wider area. The respondents were asked to consider how they can take advantage of the development potential of the region for the purpose of tourism development of Vojvodina. In addition, a discussion and development of tourism in the past or whether something has been done regarding the tourism development strategy of Vojvodina and how much of the observed regions involved in this development. The respondents analysed the promotional material, Internet presentation of the region, presentation at fairs *etc.* Based on the study, a qualitative analysis was done as the basis for development of tourism regions and positioning strategy for tourism development.

Vojvodina as a tourism destination is a framework for considering the development of tourism cross-border regions. Vojvodina's future tourism development is conceived as a distinctive tourism destination thanks to its unique position, rich cultural traditions, idyllic rural atmosphere, picturesque landscapes, gastro-oenological offer and the kindness of people. The tourism development in Vojvodina is in line with the global tourism trends, thus indicating shortening of the length of stay at the destination, the search for environmentally preserved areas, programs that are facing the preservation of health and refreshment from the fast pace of life. All focus group participants agreed that the cross-border region can better exploit their development potential better promotion, networking of tourism operators, tourism aid for important projects and projects applying for EU pre-accession funds. According to the respondents, the basic conditions for the development of tourism in the region are: clean environment (22%), cultural and historical heritage (45%), the possibility of active rest (20%), infrastructure and tourism facilities (13%). When asked about the system of values which exists in this area, the respondents believe that its elements are: hospitality of local residents (26%), gastronomy, enology, ethnology (18%), conservation of the natural environment (12%), cultural and historical heritage (36%), environment and anti-stress ambient (8%), *etc.* We also asked them how to exploit tourism potential of the region, and the answers that we have received confirm that it is necessary to invest more in the promotion, gather all tourism stakeholders and support projects for pre-accession funds. As regards the most important tourism products of the region, the respondents highlighted the following: events and ma-



nifestations, ethnic and religious tourism, hunting and fishing, cultural tourism and special interests tourism (biking). Tourism workers considered that it is essential to develop the cultural and historical heritage tours as well as gastronomic tours..

First of all, participation of focus groups in cross-border regions is highly positive (83%) about the cultural and heritage tourism offer. The reason lies in the fact that these institutions also recognize the importance of cross-border cooperation with the aim of realizing new programs and emitting those to the wider public. These cross border regions have always been recognizable for their high level of culture, which distinguishes it and gives it a special hallmark. The multi-ethnicity and variety factor, which is present not only in the ethnic composition of the population, but also in the institutions that care about culture, also contributes to that. These institutions look after the tradition and heritage, while opening the door for new and young authors, the future carriers of culture, so they can expose, develop and improve themselves, which will be very important in the future – because the culture of the future hides in the youth of today.

Certain institutions primarily foster artistic programs directed towards the local audience, but these programs are self-organized, without initiative and cooperation with other institutions. The question of tolerance between the different ethnicities in the regions of Serbia (Vojvodina) and Hungary caused divided opinions. Most institutions viewed the question from a personal angle and the angle of contribution to tolerance, and so assessed this phenomenon relatively positively, emphasizing their maximal engagement in working with the public. First and foremost, it's the fact of multiculturalism and diversity that has been nurtured by these regions for centuries. Numerous festivals are held in a peaceful environment and most of them place folk music, folk games, folk motives, traditions and heritage as their central focus. In this way, many citizens can acquaint themselves with their fellow citizens' cultures, while the tourists can do the same with local culture, which strengthens the general level of tolerance.

SWOT analysis is performed on the basis of the analysis (socio-demographic conditions, infrastructure, and level of economic development, tourism demand and supply, attraction base), several site visits, interviews with the key stakeholders of tourism development, and in consultation with the relevant literature. There is no doubt that Bacs and Bácsborsód possess necessary elements for development of tourism potential. Some are of the opinion that Bačka fortress is a

national tourism attraction and the potential space for various cultural manifestations. In this region, there is the Franciscan monastery in Bač, Bođani Monastery, the Castle of Latinovits family in Bácsborsód, and also the chapel of Latinovits family which has been renovated, and boasts quiet and gentle landscape and numerous events *etc.*

The Region of Bač boasts rich cultural and historical heritage, immovable and movable cultural property. It is rich in medieval period with an impressive old fortress Bač with the Barbican and the outskirts, the preserved architectural heritage dating from the 12th to the 19th century period, reflecting the influence of Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, Byzantine and Islamic art, Baroque and unequivocally testifies the cultural diversity of the region, which represents a link between the cultures and traditions of the Balkans. It still preserves rich tangible and intangible heritage of the culture of life and work of the Bačka region - songs, costumes, customs, handicrafts, rural architecture and agriculture. Tourism attractions of Bač contribute to different people whose richness of tradition and customs attract tourists and events - a variety of attractive events, cultural and artistic events, fairs, river Danube canal DTD with walkways and artificial attractions.

Tourism attraction of Bač and the surrounding tourism area is only partially valorized as tourism and it is far from optimal destination tourism product. Potential religious tourism is hardly broached, and the potential for developing a cultural tourism, which, above all, lays in the fortress of Bač, has yet to develop, with help of the investments from the FRESCO project. Due to its favorable location near the Danube (waterway 43 km), the large markets of Belgrade and Novi Sad and proximity to the boarder region, there is a huge potential for developing tourism on the water (Danube region).

CONCLUSION

Culture is a fundamental factor in development of any country. Namely, every society can be distinguished by its specificity, which also marks the potential tourists' train of thought before travelling to a certain destination. But what are the elements of culture, how is culture built and what is the primary motive of a society by which it can most easily be distinguished and differentiated from others? The narrow level of culture presented by a society is built from a large number of motives – tradition, gastronomy and taste, architecture, history (in the views of others – conflicts, previous wars), and also the education level of the population, as well as the mentality itself,



which is partly a result of the above given items, and partly of innate characteristics.

By striving to provide answers to such questions, in an unorganized multicultural destination, non-harmonized interethnic relations would cause an inevitable dispute, from which reservations would be formed and the sides would come into conflict. On the other hand, the region of Vojvodina can be proud of the fact that its multiculturalism has been formed over centuries, and managed to bridge the gap between various ethnicities which found themselves all in one place due to turbulent historical events. Modern society brings new challenges that pose new threats to peaceful ethnic relations, and have an effect on the departure of members of certain minorities, which increases the numbers of the dominant ethnic community, and which wouldn't present a problem were we not aspiring to keep an authentic multiethnic environment. The lack of a strong intellectual caste in the region's government and administration, the vanished civic middle class, the very class that built and nourished the culture, as well as indifference of investors towards supporting new endeavors, all present a serious threat to the tourism foundation, and by that, to cultural tourism in Bač and Bácsborsód.

Therefore, this research paper wants to set up a conceptual framework for the holders of economic, social and tourism policy in the cross-border regions. Thus, it will become a guide for the design of a set of activities that has to be systemic and long-term development of tourism products and infrastructure, and manage the tourism development. It is a document incorporating all elements of tourism development of this area as for making business and development decisions at the level of entrepreneurship, particularly tourism companies and potential investors.

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