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Vrednotenje strateškega modela turistične destinacije – tranzicija v smeri novih podjetniških aktivnosti

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Izveček

V članku želimo identificirati to, kar lahko poimenujemo “disfunkcionalne ovire” za razvoj okolju prijaznega in ekonomsko upravičenega trajnostnega in odgovornega turizma na lokalni ravni. Ekonomske, socialne in okoljske spremembe, ki smo jim priča tudi na turističnem tržišču, so vodile k naraščajočemu pomenu in vlogi iniciativ, ki postavljajo v ospredje lokalno vodene razvojne procese pri razvoju turističnih produktov in destinacij, namesto tistih, ki so jih v preteklosti usmerjali nacionalni in mednarodni koncepti.

Naša raziskava je potekala na treh primerljivih destinacijah. Posledično v članku predstavljamo tri primere dobre prakse, v katerih izpostavljam njihove izkušnje in potencialne prednosti/slabosti. Izpostavljam jih kot primer lokalno vodenih razvojnih modelov, z upoštevanjem načel participativnega načrtovanja, kakor tudi kot nasprotje “od zgoraj navzdol” vodenih modelov, ki temeljijo na nacionalnih in mednarodnih iniciativah oziroma strukturah.

Ključne besede: Trajnost – dediščinski turizem – strateški model – lokalne turistične koalicije & partnerstva – prožen management resursov – nove podjetniške aktivnosti

Re-evaluating a strategic model for tourism destinations - part of the transition to new entrepreneurial activities

Abstract

In this paper we seek to identify what we see as a dysfunctional barrier in the development of environmentally and economically sustainable tourism at a local level. Changing shifts in tourism markets have led to the greater importance of sustainable tourism initiatives, which by their very nature will tend to have a locally oriented concept, as opposed to a national or international concept.

Our research used three comparative case-studies to consider the potential advantage of locally focused bottom-up tourism models based on coalitions of key local actors over top-down models based on national or international structures.

Keywords: Sustainability – heritage tourism – strategic modelling – local tourism coalitions – resilient resource management - new entrepreneurial activities

1 Introductory comments

In this paper we are seeking to identify what we see as a number of dysfunctional barriers in the development of environmentally and economically sustainable tourism at a local level and how this may affect the transition to new entrepreneurial activities. Changing shifts in tourism markets have led to the greater importance of sustainable tourism initiatives, which tend to have a locally oriented concept, as opposed to a national or international concept. The challenge of resourcing and managing these destinations has been intensified by a contemporary economic climate with both capital shortages as well as greater demands for value from tourism clients. This may therefore be an opportune moment in time to seek to re-evaluate the strategic model for those tourism destinations that are based on the development of locally-focused and environmentally sustainable cultural and heritage tourism.

In re-evaluating that model, we have identified two important features:

Finding focus - the need to focus on the necessity for tourism destinations to operate on the basis of the bottom-up model, where the target concept is related to:

- growing tourism actions and activity from a local level
- thereafter engaging upwards into regional/national/international levels

Addressing failures - the need to address as part of the entrepreneurial process:

- a lack of professionalism and expertise at local levels
- a lack of understanding of private sector for the need to contribute towards destination management, both in non-financial and financial way
- a lack of satisfactory human capacity to address the issues and resolve them in a strategic and sustainable manner on the local and even regional level sometimes

We are suggesting that the building of strong coalitions of local actors as well as dynamic connectivity with key individuals/institutions on a regional/national level will not only meet the focus on the bottom-up methodology but will satisfactorily address the problematic failures. We suggest that many of the problematic failures are due to the fact that, in general, top-down models tend to suffer from weakened impact, unfocused resourcing and a diffusion of structural energy at the point of local delivery due to the bureaucratic elements present in such models. Small scale entrepreneurship can only flourish and grow organically if the human resources are made available and focused at a local level, thereby improving the environment in which local entrepreneurship can be grown, can be developed and can flourish.

This has led us towards the ideal of both Critical Success Factors and Critical Failure Factors in the development of an appropriate model. The factors for success in the model may be seen as:

- (i) Creating economic regeneration
- (ii) Contributing to regional tourism development
- (iii) Complementing other tourism products
- (iv) Transferability of the model to other destinations and tourism sectors
- (v) Developing and maintaining sustainable tourism

Those factors, which induce negative results, may be seen as:

- (i) Failure to provide local/regional economic regeneration
- (ii) Failure to contribute to the local/regional tourism model

- (iii) Non-complementarity with other tourism products
- (iv) Lack of transferability of options, models, techniques and selling points
- (v) Failure to provide a sustainable tourism concept and product range

2 An overview of trends?

We can make the assumption that tourism suffered from the international financial crisis of 2008-2010 and the ensuing economic depression. We may speculate that tourists have either:

- *deferred foreign vacation activities*
- *sought cheaper but same price/value locations*
- *traded down from hotels to self-catering*
- *switched to a series of mini-breaks*

This paper is focused on the cultural/heritage tourism concept, linked to small-scale tourism activity with a strong proportion of self-generated funding and varying levels of infrastructure support at regional and national level. But primarily, we are investigating the local level - for example the level at which eco-tourism and environmentally sustainable tourism is able to develop and grow. At the same time, the concept of cultural/heritage vacation activity may not have been so badly dented by the macro-economic environment. Despite the altered economic realities, the cultural/heritage vacation may be conceived of as having two poles of engagement:

1. ***The “grey” vacation market*** - those above 55 years of age who are retired, remain physically active and have sufficient financial assets to indulge in independently organised/semi-independently organised vacations. This will cover those driving their own cars or taking low-cost flights and hiring cars or booking on small niche group activities. Such a market is attractive for cultural/heritage vacations, which may include culinary aspects (including vineyard tours), historical and cultural aspects and also elements of health/wellness tourism. Indeed, it is difficult to draw over-strict boundaries between cultural-heritage-culinary-wellness
2. ***The “back-packer” market*** - an Australian study (<http://www.crctourism.com.au/wms/upload/resources/110017%20evolbackpackermarket%20web.pdf>) indicated that “back-packers” are those travelers who will to use budget accommodation; take longer rather than briefer vacations; be 30-40 years of age ; demonstrate flexibility in their travel itineraries and demonstrate a strong involvement in social activity

Both groups share an acute interest in the cultural/heritage vacation experience, but tend to vary on the level of comfort they expect in accommodation. The “greys” will look for what we can describe as boutique accommodation - i.e. rooms with self-contained facilities, whilst the “back-packers” are happy with hostel type shared facilities. The “greys” may be interested in unique culinary experiences, trying local foods, experiencing local drinks and are willing to pay for that experience. The “back-packers” are interested in inter-action with others in their age-group and less interested in culinary and viticultural experiences. These are possibly sweeping generalisations, but in the absence of distinctive empirical data it is difficult to do other than to speculate.

Nonetheless, what is powerfully important about both these markets is their ability to deliver economic inputs directly into local economies, a factor which does not appear in the so-called “cruise tourism” market, where participants take all meals on the cruise ships and as a result spend minimal amounts in the locations they visit. Indeed, it would appear to be the situation in such tourism centres as Dubrovnik and Venice that the environmental footprint of cruise tourism may create higher impact costs on the local environment, the local economy and the local socio-economic structure than may be recovered from the direct economic inputs.

3 Where does this take the heritage/cultural tourism market?

3.1 Connectivity to the macro-economic and financial environment

We may be able to predict that as a result of the dynamic yet highly negative changes brought about by the international financial crisis from 2008-2010 there may be greater capacity for sustainable heritage and cultural tourism which general operates in the micro and small scale tourism business sector. On one side, the massive credit restrictions of lending institutions have created a highly negative environment for micro/small businesses as a whole. But at the same time, micro/small businesses have a high degree of flexibility and adaptational skills - if they are properly managed and strategically directed. Sustainable heritage and cultural tourism therefore has the ability to position itself in the most appropriate market segments as a new entrepreneurial activity.

But as we suggested in the introduction, and in a sense this is the real conundrum, it needs overlaying support from local and regional economic agencies as well as the development of multi-stakeholder coalitions of public, private and mutually owned partnerships to underpin the ability to be flexible, to grasp new market opportunities and to retain and develop those opportunities.

3.2 Multi-stakeholder

In this paper we are advancing the view that one of the beneficial methodologies for growing and developing sustainable entrepreneurial tourism (e.g. heritage and cultural tourism at a local level in rural locations) is by adopting a multi-stakeholder approach. This involves a structured sustainable and integrated approach by a core of multiple stakeholders in terms of start-up, implementation and development. The crucial pointers about the multi-stakeholder approach are:

- (a) Entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial skills, harnessed in a bottom-up model of development, have the potential to make a huge impact on rural and agri-tourist micro-economies at a local community level. The effect in driving wealth creation and expanding employment is measurable in a very tangible and transparent way.
- (b) Furthermore, multi-stakeholder tourism projects benefit the ownership transformation process by forcing public, private, co-operative and social ownership agents and enterprises to work together for common benefit. Because of the bottom up approach, the measurable value at an enterprise or agency level is also more tangible and obvious.
- (c) We can also see that by engaging local public agencies, the dimension of environmental planning and protection can be assured. In this way the sustainable nature of tourism and its impact on the local environment can be assessed and given due priority.

3.3 The failed potential of mutual co-operation in local tourism

One of the major failures of the economic transition process, which assaulted Central and Eastern European economies through 1990-2000, was the continuation of the destruction of co-operative and mutually-owned institutions at a local level in rural environments. Slovenia, renowned as the “land of the co-operators” during the 19th century is a prime example of the collapse of that vision of agrarian self-reliance, which agricultural credit and production co-operatives espoused. To a degree, this was “*due to the fact that in many parts of the private sector, co-operatives are seen as inherently socialist. Yet this is a serious misapprehension given that the origins of Slovenian co-operative and mutual institutions derives from the nineteenth century nationalist-Catholic-agrarian consensus which then could find no distinctive place either in the highly centralist first Yugoslav state nor indeed in the second decentralised Yugoslav state*” (O’Rourke, 2012).

For locally-focused tourism activity, mutually-owned or co-operatively owned organisations of entrepreneurs provide a significant methodology for not only mobilising credit inflows, but also providing seriously constructive marketing and promotional power. Unfortunately, it is often difficult to encourage individual entrepreneurs to comprehend and understand the value of co-operation within a culture, which extols the free market values of competition.

A prime example is the need for small-scale tourism entrepreneurs to develop a promotional mechanism to market their product or service at a national and international level. Individually the costs of such an activity are frequently far too great for micro-enterprises, but they are possible for groups of enterprises. This evidences how an integrated model enables participants to benefit from the totality and complexity of resources and skills held by all stakeholders. Obviously, mutuals or co-operatives are not the only structural form of organisation, equally valid are not-for-profit agencies which combine a variety of stakeholders or associations. Mutuals have tended to be a prevalent form (e.g. the Italian confidi model), in part due to the fact that they operate on a one member-one vote principal.

However, we would suggest that mutual-ownership/co-operative models are very appropriate for locally-based tourism operating in the area of cultural heritage. Given that the players are generally micro/small enterprises, collaboration in a tourism co-operative may be meaningful in terms not only of marketing and promotion but also in regard to access to credit facilities. Access to credit and access to low-cost credit, is a major challenge for the new entrepreneurs - especially those who are seeking to develop ecologically and environmentally sustainable products, which may not always be seen by mainline financial institutions as worthy of financial commitment. Positioning as mutual loan guarantee societies (or similar entities) could create institutions which on behalf of their small tourism enterprise members, are able to access and articulate bank credit, venture capital and other forms of financial accessibility which small enterprises on their own are not able to reach.

Case study 1: DOLENJSKA & BELA KRAJINA HERITAGE TRAIL EXPERIENCE

The rural case-study presented is one of a region in Slovenia along the border with Croatia, where a twelve year process can be tracked, from preliminary idea to the operational reality of sustainable international tourism in a strategically-located destination-region.

1 Integrated rural community development project – CRPOV and International Heritage Trail Consultancy

The community development role of CRPOV involved many local village meetings, linked to the economic need for diversification of the rural economy. This background of the CRPOV programme as well as the parallel development in terms of Wine Trails, prompted the Regional Chamber of Commerce of Dolenjska & Bela krajina to accept an invitation by a consortium (which had in 1996 secured European Union funding to launch two pilot projects in Slovenia and Bulgaria) to create Heritage Trails. The consortium included Ecotourism Ltd. (a British consultancy firm), PRISMA (a Greek consultancy firm) and ECOVAST (The European Council for the Village and Small Town). All of these were supported by regional and national institutions in the field of natural and cultural heritage.

2a Material & Methods

The UK/Slovene Heritage Trail team conducted a ‘Tourist Resource Inventorisation & selection’, based upon natural, built and living cultural heritage resources in the selected region. Some 150 sites were identified and proposed by the different partners involved in the participation process for the Heritage Trail. From this large number, 28 sites were selected, to be networked in a trail system for the area. The idea was to develop a tourist product, which was capable of offering opportunities for stays of up to seven days in the region.

2b Results

A major result of this work was the creation of a Regional Partnership of 32 organisations, from the public, private and NGO sectors, which signed an agreement to co-operate in the Heritage Trail’s implementation phases of marketing and product development. This partnership - working under the umbrella of the Regional Chamber of Commerce – was in operation for 12 years until December 2008, then “transferred”

into LAG LEADER partnership, which remains a vibrant and robust operating entity. The partnership supports, co-ordinates and brings together the provider-partners. Work in general consists of marketing activities, product development, and training activities, where different combinations of partners, institutions, and individuals are involved.

For marketing purposes, a local commercial partner - Kompas Novo mesto - was invited into the partnership in 2002, in order to articulate a stronger and more effective assault on foreign markets. Kompas was engaged to act as the marketing agency, on behalf of the Heritage Trail partnership. Although the official launch of the product was in 1997, at the World Travel Market in London, followed in 1998 by a presentation at ITB/Tourist Fair in Berlin, there was no significant response. Foreign markets at that time had limited awareness about any Slovene tourist products, other than what can be described as the constantly featured traditional Slovene Tourist icons such as Lake Bled, Kranjska Gora ski resort, Postojna Cave, and Portoroz seaside resort.

The effective commercial launch of the Heritage Trail at an international level, with a foreign tourist industry adviser and a much greater professionally co-ordinated national approach, was delayed until 2002, in London. There, at the World Travel Market, the launch had the active support of the Slovene Tourism Board, together with other relevant institutions.

3 Thematic routes – next stage development...

From these well accepted initial considerations we sought for further development of the product. Our thinking was led by the facts that:

- More than 75% of tourists from foreign markets are seeking active holidays,
- More than 50% of the reservations are made by internet,
- More tourists want to change the destinations every couple of days, etc.

So, it was found necessary to create a product which:

- Can be used by the individual traveler in the same manner as by a tour operator
- Will connect actual tourist offer components in the region
- Will be supported by all new commonly used technologies
- Will support active holidays
- Should be different to other products in the field of active holidays.

In 2009 and with financial support of the European Regional fund we successfully finished the project, which fulfil all that conditions. With the project, we built “back-bone” for four main activities hiking, biking, horse riding and rowing in the whole region. The routes are connecting natural and cultural heritage of the region with other tourist offer, such as accommodation, activities, information, services etc. Wholly digitalised and located by GPS, routes are now presented in the renewed portal <http://www.slovenia-heritage.net/> and the new built mobile portal <http://activeslovenia.mobi>. The product also is presented in the Facebook and YouTube. Biking and horse riding routes are also visualised. The potential tourist can take a detailed look and then plan their holidays from home (internet). Once on the terrain, they can use Mobile, PDA, GPS devices (and printouts) to navigate themselves in the region. For those who have insufficient time to create the holidays by themselves, the active tourist packages are (pre)-prepared and shown on the web as well.

It is clear that:

- Entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial skills, harnessed in a bottom-up model of development, will have a huge impact on rural and agri-tourist micro-economies at a local community level. The effect in driving wealth creation and expanding employment is measurable in a very tangible and transparent way.
- Furthermore, multi-stakeholder tourism projects benefit the ownership transformation process by forcing public, private and social ownership agents and enterprises to work together for common benefit. Because of the bottom up approach, the measurable value of an enterprise or agency level is also more tangible and obvious. It can also be seen that by engaging local public agencies, the dimension of environmental planning and protection can be assured. In this way the sustainable nature of tourism and its impact on the local environment can be assessed and given due priority.
- At the same time, in such integrated projects, individual entrepreneurs begin to comprehend and understand the value of co-operation as well as of competition. A key feature is often the need for small-scale tourism entrepreneurs to develop a promotional mechanism to market their product or service at a wider national and international level. Individually the costs of such an activity are too great for micro-enterprises, but they are possible for groups of enterprises. This shows how an integrated model enables participants to benefit from the totality and complexity of resources and skills held by all stakeholders.

Case study 2: THE HERITAGE TRAILS OF SLOVENIAN ISTRIA

In 2001 the municipalities of Piran, Izola and Koper, and many public and private organisations in Slovenian Istria, have expressed enthusiasm for the concept of a Heritage Trail. They were fortunate in being able to observe what has been achieved in the pioneer Heritage Trail in Dolenjska & Bela krajina (presented in the Case Study No. 1). It should be recognised, however, that there is no standard model of Heritage Trail. The initiative in each area should be suited to the character of that area. Seen from a European perspective, Slovenian Istria is a compact rural area of very distinctive character. It is green and fertile, with Mediterranean climate and vegetation. It has a remarkable structure of deep valleys and flat-topped hills, with plateau, which offer very fine views west to the sea, north into mountainous Slovenia, and south into Croatian Istria. The overall effect is of a fine and distinctive landscape. The area is rich in wildlife, and in features of cultural heritage, including fine churches (some with remarkable frescoes and other features), vernacular buildings, water-powered mills and other monuments. It has traditional local products of high quality, notable a variety of good wines; a distinctive regional cuisine; and a local dialect and tradition of customs, dress, music and decorative arts, which are remembered and valued by the older local people.

1 Heritage Trails Consultancy

The main implementation institution for the project beside three already mentioned municipalities of Koper, Izola and Piran was Regional Development Centre of Koper, which was supported by regional institutions on the field of natural and cultural heritage. Partners & stakeholders in the project were institutions from public, private and NGO sector in this part of Slovenia.

2 Methods

First of all, shared opinion among experts, which were responsible for the development of the concept was, that the Heritage Trail in Slovenian Istria must take account of this distinctive character of the territory. It must take account also of the area's location, immediately behind and above the zone of coastal tourism, and adjoining the Croatian part of Istria, to which it is linked by history, character and a pattern of inland roads and tracks. It can build on the existing pattern of tourist enterprises and of flows of visitors.

These factors imply that a Heritage Trail in this area will be different from that in Dolenjska-Bela krajina in two crucial ways:

- a. It must be aimed at two distinct types of visitor, namely :
 - i. day visitors, coming from the adjoining coastal resorts and from Trieste and the surrounding areas of Slovenia and Croatia
 - ii. people staying overnight within the area.
- b. It must relate to two different scales of activity, namely :
 - i. larger groups of visitors, for example parties of 20 - 30 or 50 people arriving in a coach (although this are fewer than some years ago): such groups need to be focused only on those roads, and those facilities, which have the capacity to take them
 - ii. smaller groups, such as families or parties arriving by car or minibus, who can use the narrower roads and the smaller facilities.

These points were taken into account in the design phase of the Heritage Trail. This phase included the elements of analysis, which were pioneered in the Dolenjska & Bela krajina Heritage Trail. In this analysis, team of experts suggested that there should be particular emphasis upon three issues, namely:

- c. The character and physical capacity of the focal points (villages, churches, restaurants, monuments etc) and of the roads and tracks through the area, with a clear distinction between those, which can take the larger, and the smaller scales of activity stated above.
- d. The present pattern of tourism activity, with a focus on the types of visitor (see above) and their profile (nationality, point of origin etc), since this will provide crucial clues to the early stages of developing and marketing the Trail.
- e. The existing or potential links between different features on the prospective Trail: this will provide the starting-point for creating and marketing distinctive 'products' within the total concept of the Trail. For example, the establishments connected with horse riding may be linked to a network of horse-riding routes within and beyond the area.

Finally, a model was drawn in order to illustrate all these elements and justify why the concept of the Trail was structured in the method proposed. This model presents historical movements from inland rural parts of the territory, which supplied main towns on the coast. In the context of sustainable tourism development product, as Heritage trails should be structured, the model anticipated a range of integrated tourism products. This included an interaction in terms of the tourism offer comprised as an ideal product mix between the coastal elements and the rural elements, which may be seen as sustainable in the longer-term perspective. Furthermore, such a plan will have the intrinsic capacity in helping to revitalise the rural part of Slovene Istria, which to a degree has suffered from a level of peripherality from the more intensive touristic development of the coastal region. The main aim of the project was therefore to stimulate tourism development in the hinterland of the Slovene coast. This aim should be pursued by offering support to rural business initiatives, by improving the infrastructure and by intensive marketing activity with focus on rural hinterland of Slovene Istria.

3 Stages of commercial product adaptation and implementation

For a change from Heritage Trails in Dolenjska and Bela krajina, Heritage Trails in Slovenia Istria was sadly never officially launched, neither on the domestic nor on the international market. The reason for this failure lay in the fact that tourist stakeholders in this coastal region, which was traditionally and remains now the most visited tourism region in Slovenia, were fixated in the past achievements of tourism activity. As a result, in the current contemporary environment, which holds greater challenges and demands, they have been unable and to a degree unwilling to make that critical step forward to co-operate, to engage and to agree an efficient and long-term public-private partnership & co-operation, which will perform as Destination Management Organisation (DMO). Such a DMO would act on behalf of all tourist stakeholders in the region and by the synergies thus created dynamise the entire tourism offer for this region. Regrettably, such an organisation does not exist in this region of Slovenia and unfortunately, it is the only Slovenian tourism region, which is without such an important capacity. This is kind of paradox, but on the other side a painful reality which already reflects in some tourism figures and statistics. This figure shows, and we can interpret it as such, that the traditional sun, sea and sand product (3S), is not in trend anymore and that its life cycle is declining. Unfortunately, it was a lost opportunity to launch a Heritage Trail and to focus on the rural offer

some years ago when the opportunity was ripe for such actions. It is not our intention to speculate and insist that this will change the figures presented above, but we believe that a Heritage Trail type structure would open immense opportunities for rural entrepreneurs and offer them new challenges for new jobs in their home-yards in rural Istria. Certainly the evidence presented in Case Study 1, shows how such a potential can reach a realistic and achievable end.

4 Tourism destination

It would be a task of DMO to provide opportunities to all tourism stakeholders in the Slovenian Istria to collaborate in a range of areas that can boost business performance and productivity. By coming together local businesses can create something that is greater than the sum of parts, collaborating to strengthen external promotion, but also internal improvements.

DMO can and should therefore provide packages of shared products, be it coastal, be it rural and above all shared services to tourism businesses operation in well-defined geographic area such as Slovene Istria is. For example, a DMO acting as a shared service co-operative could provide such facilities as marketing, bookings, travel services, web presence etc. to a group of local hotels, restaurants, tour operators and guides. These have particular value in connecting up tourism opportunities in both rural and urban areas of Slovene Istria.

Case study 3: ARGYLL & THE ISLANDS TOURISM CO-OPERATIVE

This case study is a live example - AITC was only created in 2012 and remains in the process of establishing and developing its strategic vision. It is an example of a regional tourism destination management organisation (DMO) collectivising state agencies, semi-state bodies, local government, private tourism operators and local DMOs. It is structured as a co-operative in which all members have a single vote irrespective of size, assets or influence.

Whilst Scotland as a whole benefits from one third of all tourists (based on per night spend and thus contributions to Scottish GDP) coming from outside the UK, in the case of Argyll & Bute (the AITC operating region) it is only one-fifth of all tourists. The region has 9% of Scottish land area but only 2% of the national population. At the same time tourism employs around 15% of the regional workforce (10% across Scotland as a whole). Importantly the AITC region has a rich cultural heritage. There are 60 medieval castles, 1256 neolithic monuments, the cradle of Scottish Christianity at Iona and the seat of the ancient Scottish kings at Dunadd. The initial step in creating a distinctive local agency for Argyll and the Islands began in 2009 following the closing of the former state tourist boards; a summit event was held in 2011, which devised a plan with 3 key action points:

1. To develop an umbrella brand identity for the region
2. To have a strategic presence at the tourism exhibitions and events
3. To better communicate within the industry

It was apparent that a delivery vehicle was needed, and that this should be wholly industry based and engage the 150 tourism enterprises in the region. The result was the creation in 2012 of a tourism co-operative for public, private, voluntary and not-for-profit tourism activities in the region - the Argyll & Isles Tourism Co-operative. A key decision was that the new body would focus on destination strategies and thus add value to the existing local DMOs. It was therefore envisioned as an umbrella cooperative, whose members would be the local DMOs as well as sectoral groups. The co-operative, AITC, was established in 2012 with 15 members. The areas covered are Mull, Iona, Tiree and Coll; Islay, Jura and Colonsay; Oban and Lorn; Kintyre and Gigha; Inveraray, Kilmartin and Knapdale; Bute; Cowal/Loch Lomond and the Clyde Sea Lochs. Industry sectors include museums, gardens and food production. Funding was secured from local and central government for the period from 2014 to 2017.

1 What makes it different?

There are interesting issues of differentiation in the AITC model:

1. Formation as a co-operative membership model is based on the “one member one vote” principle. Members work together with a common aim and despite differences in size and resources, all members are equal
2. The region is geographically peripheral with a distinctive language (Gaelic), strong historical traditions of music and folklore and collective socio-economic structures
3. A strong engagement of local communities - often on a volunteer basis

Thus, tourism has to respond to local communities, whilst at the same time recognising that many projects need European level intervention in the provision of resources.

As with many cultural-heritage focused tourism projects in peripheral regions, AITC has a particular attraction for those from small groups (individual travelers, groups of 6-10, the "grey/retired" market) rather than from mass tourism. Transport capacity is limited by aircraft size (under 30 seats), the lack of rail routes or the size of car ferries (which will frequently give priority to commercial traffic).

In addition, with a large percentage of the market Scotland/UK-based AITC is seeking to grow the overseas visitor market (which demonstrates higher earning capacity) through focused campaigns. These are now being targeted on the Nordic/Scandinavian markets. An important element is on boosting the offering in relation to wildlife, the open heritage culture, various out-door activities as well as the quality of environmentally sustainable and organically-produced food and drink.

Essentially the AITC tourism offer is mainly channelled through micro & small enterprises, located in remote rural locations with seasonal tourism flows (April to October). As a result, much time has been devoted to community-focused training and brand development during the November-March period. In addition resources are also being focused on developing winter specific programmes focusing on wild-life and adventure tourism in somewhat harsh climatic conditions as a means of using available capacity during the “low” season.

2 The future

The cultural heritage is the most important motivator for tourism growth in this region; a heritage, which is many ways, is protected and developed by the very peripherality and remoteness of the region. This then requires a careful balance between economic development from exploiting the heritage and protecting the viability of the heritage from usage in excess of carrying capacity.

At the same time, this also reflects the equally delicate balance between top-down management - from whence much of the financial funding flows - and the bottom-up developments much of which is driven and inspired by micro enterprises and unpaid volunteers. The top-down has the necessary human resources and connectivity into global tourism markets; the bottom-up has commitment, local knowledge and a desire to share a rich and vibrant heritage. Undoubtedly economic growth will bring significant benefits, but must be handled in such a way as to protect a fragile cultural heritage which has endured for almost 3,000 years on the North-Western edge of Europe. Ethnic-cleansing in the 18th and 19th centuries had a destructive impact on both the landscape and the socio-economic system; it is therefore important to ensure that tourism capacity is managed in such a way as to protect the cultural heritage that remains.

We see this case study as work in progress, a case study that provides useful comparisons with the other case studies and which also may provide some useful lessons for other regions facing similar challenges to their cultural heritage.

4 Concluding views

As has already been intimated, this paper is very much “work-in-progress”. To date we have identified three specific case studies, which have an input into our view of how locally driven destination management organisations engaged in cultural and heritage tourism may operate, develop and flourish. Based on these cases we would suggest the following issues as being worthy of continuing research and investigation:

1. Destination Management Organisations be viewed as critical success factors in promoting, developing and sustaining locally based cultural & heritage tourism. This is due to the fact that a significant level of cultural & heritage tourism derives from peripheral regions which have poor transport and infrastructure facilities
2. Connected to this is the fact that rural tourism by its very nature has significant difficulties in achieving a visible profile without offering a well-defined and potentially unique product.
3. This leads to linking locally focused destination management with city gateway locations
4. We suggest that local cultural & heritage tourism requires a very specific methodology in terms of marketing and promotion. Due to the relatively small scale of the tourism operator base (micro and small-scale enterprises), it is undeniable that the only method of promotion and attainment of a visible profile is through multi-agency and co-operative organisations, which bring together all the players - whether private, public or not-for-profit. Cases 1 and 3 show how such a methodology can successfully operate; Case 2 shows how the failure to co-operate can create an inability to be visible

In general, academic papers are not always regarded as a method for promoting changes in practice and the achievement of practical implementation. Such papers may suggest concepts and ideas that may be converted into real practical applications. Tourism is an academic discipline, which has a very real potential to integrate theory and practice, to provide a situation where theories can be applied and tested in a real world dimension. From our initial work to date, and from this group of case studies, we suggest that there is a significant scope for connecting academic research and practical implementation in the following areas:

- Assessing the potential for model Destination Management Organisations which combine multi-agency organisations from public, private and not-for-profit sector
- Creating capability models which will assist local cultural and heritage organisations to not only assess carrying capacity, but also to identify gateway opportunities
- Understanding more effective relationships between trans-national agencies (e.g. EU), national government agencies, regional and local authorities in order to mitigate the loss of resources which frequently occur as project funds pass through the top-down system
- Creating strong, identifiable and recognisable local brands through local marketing coalitions
- Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of geographic peripherality

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