

THE ROLE OF REGIONAL TOURISM ORGANISATION IN CREATING TOURISM PRODUCTS OF A REGION - A CASE STUDY OF THE CARPATHIAN TRAIL OF HISTORICAL HOUSES AND GARDENS

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Keywords:

- tourism product
- region
- tourism organisation

Abstract:

The formation of tourism products of a region is highly supported by tourism organizations and especially regional tourism organizations (ROTs) which act as a platform for cooperation of local authorities, tourism business operators and other undertakings involved in the development of tourism. The integration of activities carried under the ROTs paves the way for the partnership for the implementation of a common vision of development, one of whose goals is to develop a tourism product of the region. This article aims at showing the role of ROT in stimulating the creation of tourism products in the region. It provides the description of a case study of the Carpathian Trail of Historical Houses and Gardens - the latest networking venture of the Podkarpackie Regional Tourism Organisation. The new project involved 35 sites from around the region. This project example clearly shows the methods adopted during the creation of thematic routes and point to the role of the trail leader, which was taken by the Podkarpackie Regional Tourism Organization. The development is based on such methods as enquiry, search query, case studies, literature analysis and analysis of secondary data..

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has become in many areas a major road to economic development, a generator of jobs and source of income, not only for the representatives of direct tourism supply but also for those engaged in para-tourism. Since tourism is seen as one of the key factors in the regional and local development it is local governments that have the key role in shaping it. Whether tourism-related measures are taken and whether they effectively contribute to the development of the region, this depends to a large extent on the decisions taken by the local authorities. When analysing competence acts on commune, district and province government, it can be concluded that most of the activities of local governments are related to tourism (e.g.: matters related to the spatial order, environmental protection, nature and culture conservation, including protection of historical monuments, promotion, cooperation with NGOs, cooperation with local and regional communities of other states and others.)¹. Objectives and directions of tourism development are often included in the development strategies prepared by local government units, with tourism represented as one of the main development priorities.

¹ Based on the Acts: Ustawa z dnia 8 marca 1990 r. o samorządzie gminnym art.7 ust.1, Ustawa z dnia 5 czerwca 1998 r. o samorządzie powiatowym art.4 ust.1, Ustawa z dnia 5 czerwca 1998 r. o samorządzie województwa art.11 ust1.

Following the emergence of numerous non-governmental organizations and the entry into force of the act on public benefit activity and volunteerism, an increasing role in the development of tourism falls on tourist organizations whose purpose is not profit but realization of social tasks. In Poland, an example of the most important tourism organizations are the Regional Tourism Organisations (ROT) and Local Tourism Organisations (LOT), which were selected on the basis of the Act on the Polish Tourism Organisation of 25 June 1999 [Ustawa z 25 czerwca 1999 r. o Polskiej Organizacji Turystycznej]. These organizations, along the lines of Western European Destination Management Organizations (DMOs), are acting as regional tourism leaders, assuming the task of integrating local authorities, tourism business operators and other entities involved in the development of tourism and enabling the creation of partnerships to implement a common vision of development [Zmysłony 2010:117-136].

THE ROLE OF TOURISM ORGANISATIONS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM

According to Art. 4.3 of the Act on the Polish Tourism Organisation (as amended) as well as the requirements of the Polish Tourism Organisation, and in line with the assumptions of creating a three-tier system of tourism promotion in Poland (operating since 2000), the most important tasks of the regional tourism organizations can be read as follows [www.pot.gov.pl, access Dec.2016]:

- coordination of promotional activities in the province,
- creating a regional tourist information system - to provide comprehensive information about the region based on local tourist information offices and incorporating the tourist information system in national solutions.
- promotion of regional tourist attractions at home and abroad,
- stimulating the creation and development of the tourism product in the region (providing a high quality tourism product that is able to meet the international competition),
- initiating, evaluating and supporting plans for the development and modernization of tourism infrastructure,
- inspiring and supporting the launch of Local Tourism Organisations in the region,
- tourism-oriented staff performance improvement programmes,
- carrying out research and marketing analysis in the field of tourism.

The analysis of the ROT's specific tasks indicates that they relate, among others, to the creation and development of a regional tourism product. Similarly with LOTs which operate at the lowest governmental level (district, commune, village); their primary task is to create, develop and promote tourism product around local assets and tourist attractions. The remaining LOTs' tasks include [www.pot.gov.pl, access Dec. 2016]:

- integration of the local community, mainly the units of local government and the tourism industry,
- collecting and updating information on attractions and tourism products,
- maintenance and running local tourist information offices.

ROT's and LOT's usually act as associations and create an area of cooperation between various actors and institutions that seek, among others, to develop new tourism products. A comprehensive nature of tourism product requires a multi-level cooperation for its creation.

Due to this complex structure of tourism product it is sometimes difficult to point to one producer because it is created by a lot of independent entities with different business profiles. The tourism product is also shaped by internal determinants which arise directly from the tourism potential of the region and give final shape to the regional tourism product [Nawrocka 2004:364].

A tourism product of the region² can be defined as the resultant of the products of companies located on its territory, tourist attractions, the accessibility of the village and the image of the region [Rapacz (red.) 1997:97]. It is a spatial product, occurring only in a particular region and based on local attractions (natural, cultural, historical heritage), which determines its authenticity, originality and uniqueness. Therefore a regional tourism product is composed of such elements as tourist attractions (natural assets, historic buildings, interesting buildings, etc.), infrastructure, tourism services, transport accessibility, image and economic attractiveness. It is a comprehensive offer for tourists generated by the region and not only by an individual site [Gołembski (red.)2002:129].

CARPATHIAN TRAIL OF HISTORICAL HOUSES AND GARDENS AS THE LATEST TOURISM PRODUCT OF THE REGION

Examples of joint actions of local governments, tourism organizations and private operators to create a tourism product of the region are, for instance, thematic routes. Within the Podkarpackie Province many such products were established in recent years: Wooden Architecture Route, the Trail of Icons, "On the footpath of the the Good Soldier Svejk" Trail, Pottery Trail, the Oil Trail or the Podkarpackie Fare and Wine Trail [www.podkarpackie.travel.pl, access Dec 2016].

The most recent project of the Podkarpackie Regional Tourism Organisation in the category of thematic trails is the Carpathian Trail of Historical Houses and Gardens, co-financed by the Ministry of Sport and Tourism. As part of this project there was created at the end of 2015 another networking product of cultural tourism in Podkarpackie Province. What is more, the Carpathian Trail of Historical Houses and Gardens, in line with definition by Łukasz Gaweł, meets all the criteria of the cultural route. It is „ (...) a well-mapped and marked material route, linking the landmarks and places which have been chosen according to a set thematic criterion and form a unique and representative example that depicts a broad-based cultural heritage of a given region, society, ethnic group, national minority or nation.”[Gaweł 2011:76].

As many as 34 sites located in different parts of the region declared their willingness to participate in the Trail, these being the most beautiful palaces, castles and manor houses. All sites on the Trail have been grouped into four routes:

1. The Northern Route (Baranów Sandomierski, Korzeniów, Tarnobrzeg, Stalowa Wola, Przecław, Straszęcin i Werynia)
2. The Central Route (Boguchwała, Jasionka, Julin, Lipnik, Łańcut, Przeworsk, Rzeszów –Zamek, Rzeszów – Pałac Letni Lubomirskich)
3. The Southern Route (Dukla, Iwonicz, Iwonicz-Zdrój, Kopytowa, Kombornia, Lesko, Olszanica, Żarnowiec)
4. The Eastern Route (Bolestraszyce, Boratyn, Dubiecko, Krasieczyn, Horyniec-Zdrój, Narol, Sieniawa, Stubno)

One of the main goals of the project was to support the development and operation of the Trail through deeper strengthening business ties and greater integration of sites included in the Trail, promotion of networking product amidst potential tourists and tour operators.

The project provides for the following actions:

- development and issuing a discount card,
- 4-day study tours for the hosts of the sites on the Trail,

² In the literature are used interchangeably: regional tourist product, the product of tourist reception, tourist product of the region, area among others, E. Dziedzic, *Obszar recepcji turystycznej jako przedmiot zarządzania strategicznego*, SGH, Warszawa 1999; J. Kaczmarek, A. Stasiak, B. Włodarczyk, *Produkt turystyczny. Pomysł-Organizacja-Zarządzania*, PWE, Warszawa 2010; M. Zdon-Korzeniowska, *Jak kształtować regionalne produkty turystyczne? Teoria i praktyka*, Wydawnictwo UJ, Kraków 2009.

- 3 four-day tours for Polish journalists from Mazovia, Lower Silesia and Lesser Poland Provinces,
- 1 four-day study tour for British journalists and tour operators,
- participation in the SUMMER Fair of Tourism and Recreation in Warsaw,
- the launch of photography contest [<http://ogrody.podkarpackie.travel>, access Dec. 2016].

In order to enliven the trail, there are plans to organize a festival of cultural events on the Trail, including theatre performances, concerts of court music, culinary presentation and outdoor photography workshops. There were also created promotional materials, including a guidebook, a map and brochures, the trail-dedicated website and an audio guide. Moreover, the trail was equipped with a logo and tablets enhancing its visual identity.

Most of the set objectives have already been reached, and furthermore, the project partners were given a training in which the participants had the opportunity to learn about the cooperation within the tourist trail and what are the advantages and challenges of the project. It was also an opportunity for the representatives of individual sites to establish closer contact.

At present, the trail offer is still missing in direct sales by travel agents. The plan is to launch the product on the market through promotional activities and drawing travel agencies' attention to special packages. Measures are necessary to integrate the administrators of the various attractions and sites on the trail and prepare joint service proposals.

The product has a great potential in terms of the sales opportunities, especially for those interested in cultural tourism, and particularly in history and architecture, as well as for organised groups such as school groups. The product may be a component of other tourism products (e.g., addressed to visitors of spas located in the Podkarpackie region, or business tourists). It is therefore necessary to cooperate with tour operators (primarily from the Podkarpackie region), specializing in city and cultural tourism.

The trail, as a niche-oriented product, may also be an offer to individual tourists vacationing in the Podkarpackie region and in this context it should be a complementary offer to products with a stronger image. It is desirable to combine the offer of the Carpathian Trail of Historical Houses and Gardens with other trail offers in the region, such as: Wooden Architecture Route, the Lubomirski Family Nests Trail, the Podkarpackie Fare and Wine Trail or the "Błękitny San" Trail.

It is worth noting that for the target routes of the Trail there were developed several package proposals which include individual sites from the structure of the Carpathian Trail of Historical Houses and Gardens and the services they provide, additionally extended by the optional proposals. In addition, for information purposes, each package description includes the details on the operating hours of particular sites and facilities as well as their current price lists.

A tourism package is a combination of two or more components sold as one product at a flat rate price in which the costs of individual items are not extracted. In tourism, the term is synonymous with a flat-rate travel which is characterized by [Kaczmarek, Stasiak, Włodarczyk 2010:122]:

- complexity,
- coherent thematic and organizational conception,
- a flat-rate price,
- repeatability, standardization.

Table 1. Tourism packages under the Carpathian Trail of Historical Houses and Gardens

Number and name of the package	Area of validity / routing
Package no 1 - "Journey into the times of noblemen"	Rzeszów- Łańcut-Przeworsk-Zarzecze-Jasionka-Rzeszów
Package no 2 - Photography workshops entitled: "Palace and park landscapes"	(Option I): Rzeszów - Wiśniowa - Boguchwała – Rzeszów (Option II) Rzeszów – Wiśniowa - Boguchwała – Łańcut - Julin – Rzeszów
Package no 3 - Tour combined with culinary workshops entitled: "On the Trail of court delicacies"	(Option I): Rzeszów-Sieniawa-Boratyn-Bolestraszyce-Krasiczyn-Dubiecko-Rzeszów (Option II) Rzeszów-Bolestraszyce-Krasiczyn-Dubiecko-Sieniawa-Rzeszów (Option III): Rzeszów-Bolestraszyce- Dubiecko- Krasiczyn-Sieniawa-Rzeszów (Option IV with canoeing down the river San): Rzeszów-Bolestraszyce-Krasiczyn-Dubiecko-Sieniawa-Rzeszów
Pakiet nr 4 - "In the footsteps of architectural styles"	(Option I): Rzeszów - Stalowa Wola - Tarnobrzeg Zamek Tarnowskich w Dzikowie -Baranów Sandomierski -Przeclaw-Rzeszów (Option II) Rzeszów – Korzeniów – Przeclaw - Baranów Sandomierski - Stalowa Wola – Tarnobrzeg
Package no 5 - "For the body and spirit in the court atmosphere"	Rzeszów - Iwonicz Zdrój - Żarnowiec - Kopytowa - Kombornia – Rzeszów
Package no 6 - "Actively and convivially at the foot of the Bieszczady Mountains"	Rzeszów – Lesko - Uherce Mineralne – Olszanica – Rzeszów
Package no 7 - "Adventures with ghosts"	Rzeszów – Lesko - Olszanica – Rzeszów
Package no 8 - "Hiking and feasting at the foot of the Bieszczady Mountains" – 3-day package	Rzeszów – Lesko - Uherce Mineralne – Olszanica - Rzeszów

source: report for Podkarpackie Regional Tourism Organization [Nizioł 2015]

A basic package includes the goods and services necessary for the tour implementation, i.e. accommodation, food, transportation. An extended package, in addition to the basic package offer, includes further services and goods which increase the attractiveness of the offer and the choice of which the client usually has no influence on. An optional package includes all the complementary elements to the basic (or extended) package which the tourist can order for a fixed surcharge.

A tourism package can be "produced" not only by the tour operators but also by other tourism-related undertakings such as hotels, agrarian holiday farms or tourism organizations or else by entities non related to tourism such as schools, parishes, youth organizations. Whatever the nature of the producer of a tourism package, in each case it is a form of a sale of goods and services of interest.

The suggested package offers may serve as proposals for tour operators and/or travel agencies expanding their sales offer. Such cooperation may contribute in the future to an enhanced commercialization of historic buildings included in the concept of the Carpathian Trail of Historical Houses and Gardens.

SALES AND DISTRIBUTION OF THE TRAIL OFFER

The procedure of commercialization of the tourism product i.e. creating its market offer significantly influences the product market success and thus stimulates the demand for its components. From a marketing point of view, an important issue is therefore the sales or distribution of the product. This process should be arranged so that the customer could purchase a particular offer easily and as comfortable as possible, in the right place at the right

time and at the lowest possible cost. It is important to bear in mind that the primary goal of the customer - the tourist is to have benefits. Convenience, ease and comfort of purchase is also an advantage, and the desire to achieve it may induce the tourist to select the very product.

Distribution is a system whose origin is the producer and the end - the customer. Whereas the distribution channels is an organized system created or used to provide convenient points of sale to customers, away from the place of production and consumption of the tourism product.

Market activities are dominated by two types of distribution channels:

- direct channels, where the producer has a direct contact with the customer during the sales process (e.g. a hotel sells its products directly to the customer),
- indirect channels, essentially based on the existence of an intermediate link between the producer and the customer; in tourism indirect distribution is also called agency sales, where the tour operator in order to sell its portfolio uses a network of agents.

Package offers of the Carpathian Trail of Historical Houses and Gardens should be distributed by both direct and indirect channels.

In line with the project assumptions, the model sales of the tourism offer of the Carpathian Trail of Historical Houses and Gardens should involve the transfer of the products to the distribution by specialized tour operators and tourism agencies, acting in the Podkarpackie region and/or national market in the field of domestic and inbound tourism. This solution is recommended provided that the Podkarpackie Regional Tourism Organization (PROT) as the creator and manager of the Carpathian Trail of Historical Houses and Gardens does not look for profit from the sales of the product and other tourism offers but seeks rather a distribution channel to sell them. A free transfer of the products, packages and ready-for-sale offers to a tour operator makes it possible for individual partners of the Carpathian Trail of Historical Houses and Gardens, accommodation and tourist attractions administrators to increase the sales. It also ensures professionalism and consistency of marketing actions as well as concentration of sales by one specialized tour operator.

Whereas in the case of indirect channels the role of PROT will be limited to mainly finding the right tour operators and agents, in the case of direct distribution the key factor is the right instruments that can help to attract the customer and sell the offer of the Carpathian Trail of Historical Houses and Gardens.

The recommended instruments include:

- direct sales in the points of customer service or distance selling (the problem may be the lack of databases of potential customers),
- the sale as a response to various promotional actions, such as participation in quizzes, winning lottery tickets or customer inquiries - be them personal, via mail or by telephone, resulting from previously carried out promotional procedures;
- sales at fairs, exhibitions and tourist commodities exchanges,
- Internet sales which nowadays play an increasingly important role in the sale process, due to an increasing autonomy of tourists in the area of planning their leisure time additionally, also increase the activity of retailers in the target markets, the information accessibility, direct sales to customers, automation of the booking process, and a virtually non-stop functioning - 24 hours a day, 7 days a week,
- other forms of sales or sales support in connection with direct promotion - this group includes loyalty cards, creating clubs and other forms of associations collaborating with tour operators or the sale in schools, tourist and hobby clubs and different associations, etc.[Mikos von Rohrscheidt 2010].

Increasingly popular forms of distribution are those adopted from other sectors of the economy. Loyalty cards allow for matching the customer with a particular tourism product,

that is a place. The obvious basic condition that must be met is satisfaction of the very customer. For example, a repeated use of the product provides tourists with special discounts.

An interesting solution is the establishment of a "club of friends". It is also the way to bind people who have already been once in a given place. The underlying condition is continued and constant staying in contact. It is worthwhile to issue a document that clearly states that a person is a member of such a club. There should be made a list of privileges that the members can enjoy. These may be discounts on stays, small gadgets, invitations to special events: concerts, meetings with interesting people, meetings to celebrate the days of the place etc. It is also important to invest in regular sending of a full set of offers (e.g. twice a year). It can be combined with sending Christmas and Easter wishes.

In addition, noteworthy is the use of the so-called "special channels" which are very effective especially in dealing with such segments as school youth. This segment is very promising when considering the sales of the Carpathian Trail of Historical Houses and Gardens offer, with two considerations in mind however. Firstly, there are limitations of a formal nature, connected with the possibilities of contacting the students in the school premises, and secondly it must be remembered that the children's tour itinerary is also decided on by parents and teachers.

Sales in the tourism business is also closely associated with the issue of booking. Therefore it is recommended to include the Carpathian Trail of Historical Houses and Gardens offers into one of the existing reservation systems.

CONCLUSION

The concept of the Carpathian Trail of Historical Houses and Gardens assumes a joint action in the implementation of a specific business venture, which for various reasons exceeds the capabilities of a single operator. Individual undertakings and tour service providers operating on the Trail have a great chance to benefit from the promotional opportunities offered by combining their own offers with the Trail offer (in terms of marketing activities, especially those promotion-related, the leadership in the project was taken by the Podkarpackie Regional Tourism Organisation). Joint effort greatly helps to overcome market and information barriers and economies of scale achieved through mutual commitment reduce unit costs incurred by each of the participants in the network.

It must be remembered that networking products are created not only by market operators but also by public and non-profit organizations. This may in turn give rise to conflicts and difficulties in the division of tasks, responsibilities and expected benefits (understood more broadly than profits). Nonetheless, the incorporation of local administrations, social economy organizations, cultural institutions or the potential of local residents provides the basis for an unusual tourist attractiveness, which the market players could never achieve on their own, even those best organized.

This diversified operational structure of networking products decides about their uniqueness and competitive strength and demonstrates good chance of success in the market and therefore raises hopes that the venture of the Carpathian Trail of Historical Houses and Gardens will ultimately gain market autonomy.

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