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RE-EVALUATING A STRATEGIC MODEL FOR TOURISM DESTINATIONS: PRACTICAL IMPLEMEN- TATION OF THEORIES AND CONCEPTS USING A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

In this work 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.

The methodology used has been to apply the four case studies in such a way as to build evidence of the existence of critical success factors. In this way we seek to develop a general model for strategic evaluation. The case studies are examples of sustainable, heritage tourism operating outside major tourism destinations. We elaborate the view that top-down models tend to suffer from weakened impact, unfocused resourcing and diffusion of organisational energy at the point of delivery, due to the bureaucratic elements present in such models. Equally, bottom-up models tend to suffer from a lack of professionalism and expertise on the local level, where there is insufficient human capacity to address and resource the critical success factors and resolve them in strategic and sustainable manner.

KEYWORDS

Sustainability; Heritage; Strategy; Localism; Resilience.

ECONLIT KEYS

O180; O21; R110.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1) OBJECTIVE

In this paper we are seeking to identify what we regard as a number of dysfunctional barriers 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, these tend to have a locally oriented concept, as opposed to a national or international concept. The challenge of resourcing and managing such 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 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:

a) 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.

b) Addressing failures, the need to address a lack of:

- professionalism and expertise at local levels;
- understanding of private sector for the need to contribute towards destination management, both in non-financial and financial way;
- 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.

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:

1. Creating economic regeneration.
2. Contributing to regional tourism development.
3. Complementing other tourism products.
4. Transferability of the model to other destinations and tourism sectors.
5. Developing and maintaining sustainable tourism.

Those factors that induce negative results may be seen as:

1. Failure to provide local/regional economic regeneration.
2. Failure to contribute to the local/regional tourism model.
3. Non-complimentarity with other tourism products.
4. Lack of transferability of options, models, techniques and selling points.
5. Failure to provide a sustainable tourism concept and product range.

1.2) METHODOLOGY USED

It is clear to the authors, that inadequately planned tourism development, which fails to engage all stakeholders, may seriously disadvantage the ecological, socio-economic and historical-cultural heritage elements of the overall local environment. The use of cases provides a background in which practice and theory may collide; this collision allows a more secure and sustainable process of managing local sustainable and environmental tourism, which is beneficial to all stakeholders. By analysing cases from the local tourism environment and subjecting them to a level of critical analysis in terms of their success/failure, we are able to reach a closer understanding of how local sustainable tourism may more successfully operate. Yin (Yin, 2003) suggests that "case studies are the preferred strategy when "how" or "why" questions are being posed" and also suggests the value of multiple-case studies, as we have used, in order to provide contrasting results.

In the paper we used a so-called two-level approach. First we used conceptual desk research on local level sustainable & heritage tourism in the context

of the above-mentioned success and failure factors. In addition we also performed a detailed literature search on destination management and developmental issues in the relation to the heritage tourism products and its worldwide trends. Theoretical and operational frameworks gained from literature and practical experience of both authors' work in the last 25 years was then studied and checked with the use of four selected case studies in Slovenia, Ireland and Scotland. Each Case study present its own model and experience on development of heritage tourism and its multi-stakeholder management in the context of particular destination where product was located. Detailed analysis and field research interviews were performed in each of the selected case studies in to collect and elaborate information and data on heritage product and management. This brings us finally to the phase where suggestions of follow-up research models are proposed and discussed in order to promote continuing research and investigation. Final conclusions and the next steps for action are part of this phase.

2. DEVELOPING THE HERITAGE/CULTURAL TOURISM MARKET?

2.1) CONNECTIVITY INTO THE MACRO-ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

We suggest that it is possible 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 a greater capacity for sustainable heritage and cultural tourism. In general this tourism model 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 flexibility to position itself in the most appropriate market segments.

2.2) MULTI-STAKEHOLDER CONCEPTS

In this paper we are advancing the view that one of the beneficial methodologies for growing and developing sustainable 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:

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.

2.3) 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 (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 that extols the free market values of competition.

3. THE CASE STUDIES

3.1) CASE STUDY 1

THE 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 the 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.

2. 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 (Koščak, 2009). The idea was to develop a tourist product which was capable of offering opportunities for stays of up to seven days in the region.

3. 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 (Koščak, 2012). 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.

It is clear that:

1. 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.
2. 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.

3.2) CASE STUDY 2

THE HERITAGE TRAILS OF SLOVENIAN ISTRIA

1. Introduction

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 plateaux offering stunning 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.

2. 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.

2.1 Methodology

First of all, shared opinion among experts, who were responsible for the development of the concept was that the Heritage Trail in Slovenian Istria must take account of the 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 had the potential to build on the existing pattern of tourist enterprises and flows of visitors, namely:

- (a) day visitors, coming from the adjoining coastal resorts and from Trieste and the surrounding areas of Slovenia and Croatia;
- (b) people staying overnight within the area.

Team of experts suggested that there should be particular emphasis upon three issues, namely:

- 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 may take the larger and the smaller scales of activity stated above.
- The existing pattern of tourism activity, with a focus on the types of visitor (see above) and their profile (nationality, point of origin etc.), since this would provide crucial clues to the early stages of developing and marketing the Trail.
- The existing or potential links between different features on the prospective Trail: this would 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

2.2 Stages of commercial product adaptation and implementation

The 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 were 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 (Ritchie & Crouch, 2000).

3.3) CASE STUDY 3

ARGYLL & THE ISLANDS TOURISM CO-OPERATIVE

1. Background & development of AITC.

This case study is a live example – AITC (Argyle & the Isle Tourism Cooperative, 2015) 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) (Scottish Tourism Statistics 2015). 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 that 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.

2. What makes it different?

There are interesting issues of differentiation in the AITC model

- 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

- The region is geographically peripheral with a distinctive language (Gaelic), strong historical traditions of music and folklore and collective socio-economic structures
- 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 travellers, 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). 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 wildlife and adventure tourism in somewhat harsh climatic conditions as a means of using available capacity during the "low" season.

3. 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.

3.4) CASE STUDY 4

BUILDING SUCCESS ON THE EDGE OF EUROPE

1. Background

This case study is based on a small Irish island one of 28 inhabited offshore islands, which have total estimated population of 3,000. The economic development of these islands is under the responsibility of *Comhar na nOileán Teo* (Federation of Irish islands), the LEADER/ EU partnership company which operates under the Irish government's Department of Arts, Heritage & The Gaeltacht. The company is also the Irish representative on the European Association of Small Islands (ESIN).

2. The island of Inishbofin (*Inis Bó Finne*)

Inishbofin is located 10km from the west coast of Galway, with an area of 23km². The main activities are tourism, farming and some fishing. The island having been inhabited from around 8000 BC. Inishbofin has EU Blue Flag status, with sandy beaches which due to the clear nature of the sea water are good for swimming, snorkeling and diving. Two of the beaches on Inishbofin have been awarded a 'Green Coast Award' to denote their exceptional water quality and natural, un-spoilt environment. Inishbofin is also special area of conservation as it is a breeding area for many species of birds. The population has fallen from 1404 in 1841 to the current level of permanent residents estimated at 212. There is a passenger ferry connection (35 minutes) from the mainland port of Cleggan operating two return sailings daily with an additional sailing in the summer. In addition there is a cargo ferry service twice a week. There is no passenger car ferry access, which limits the capacity of traffic to the island.

3. Tourism background

Structured tourism began on the island in 1969, with 2 hotels; in 2016, there are 3 hotels, 5 Bed & Breakfasts, a hostel, a campsite and 60 holiday homes. The holiday season on Inishbofin operates from Easter-October.

Tourism is focused on a high level of repeat business, predominantly from the domestic market. For the hotel market, although the domestic market is the largest at around 80% (and again highly dependent on repeat visitors) the next largest market is from the UK, followed by France. For day visitors, the Irish domestic market is predominant, followed by France, Germany, Italy, Spain and USA.

4. Organisational structure

After a working through two voluntary associations, in 1993, a legally constituted company limited by guarantee was established - the Inishbofin Development Company (IDC). This has the mission to improve:

1. the quality of life through the establishment, development and provision of support and services;
2. the socio-economic, eco-infrastructure, , cultural, heritage and administrative requirements of the island.

It is clear that on Inishbofin, the community seek to take a different approach to tourism, aiming to achieve sustainable tourism that does not negatively impact upon the island's natural environment, whilst at the same time benefitting and supporting the local community.

The island has, in the words of Simon Murray, Chairman of the IDC, been driven by its peripherality to maintain its existence. The abandonment of a nearby island (Inishark) in 1960's was a great shock for the inhabitants of Inishbofin, and created an urgent need to ensure that the island remained populated and viable. Importantly, the island did not await the provision of government or EU grants before seeking to improve and structure its tourism and related offers. Rather it relied on a process of self-resourcing, and then when it had achieved viable products, then began to seek grants and financial support. This is an interesting learning point, as it indicates that tourism-driven communities can be self-sufficient, independent of grant/loan support and only applying for such support once they have developed a tangible project.

5. Eco-tourism developments

As part of EcoTourism development, the island achieved Gold Certification from EcoTourism Ireland for its *Cultúr na nOileáin* (Culture of the island) tours. These tours offer ecotourism experiences in the most the most

environmentally friendly way (i.e. walking). Importantly both the tour company and the Inishbofin Community Centre are members of the Leave No Trace (LNT) network, with the guided walks keeping to the LNT code of conduct and adhering to the minimal impact hillwalking, birdwatching and marine megafauna viewing codes where relevant. The tour maximum group size is fixed at 25 people per guide. Particular care is taken to highlight features of the Special Areas of Conservation, and how to avoid negatively impacting upon these. Currently there are two EcoTourism experiences - an exploration of Inishbofin and a guided tour to the unpopulated island of Inishark.

Despite the issues of location (e.g. peripherality, lack of developed infrastructure, dependence on a single transport link), this appears to be a community that has built cohesion in its efforts to attract sustainable and environmentally friendly tourism activity. This task has been carried out through self-reliance and self-support, using the cohesion of the island community and the skills of the islanders themselves.

4. CONCLUSIONS

To date we have identified four specific case studies, which have a significant 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 are worthy of continuing research and investigation:

1. Destination Management Organisations should 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/or co-operative organisations which bring together all 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; Case 4 indicates how a small tourism community can be self-reliant as a first stage, and then dynamically driving success to attract support from external agencies

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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