
DEVELOPMENT OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PRODUCTS BY THE DMO

Karmen Mentil

LABELSCAPE
Integration of sustainability labels into Mediterranean tourism policies

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Content:

1. Definition of an integral tourism product versus a simple individual offer	2
2. Reasons for developing complex tourism products in destinations	2
3. Characteristics of sustainable tourism products	2
4. Sustainable certification as a tool to support development of sustainable tourism products	3
5. Skills and trainings for SMEs for the development and marketing of sustainable tourism products ..	3
6. Awards for sustainable tourism products and certification schemes	4
7. Steps of Tourism Product Development: the bottom-up approach	4
8. Modelling the customer journey as a tool to get to know the touchpoints of potential tourist	6
9. Best practice in an Alpine destination	6
References	7



1. Definition of an integral tourism product versus a simple individual offer

The integral tourism product is characterised by its complex nature. It consists of the various individual offers consumed by a tourist during the trip. Each tourism business or sub-sector has its individual offers for the guest (e.g., hotels provide the accommodation service, gastronomy the meals and catering, the outdoor or cultural activities, museums, etc.). These single services and goods are interdependent and complement each other. The tourist perceives this bundle of offers as the integral tourism product.

This implies that only if each service and offer function in their sequence and are coordinated with each other, the overall product - "the holiday experience" - gains in value and is perceived as attractive by the guest.

It is one of the most important tasks of any DMO to develop the integral and sustainable tourism product. An instrument to plan, to analyse and optimise the tourism product of your destination is the so-called customer journey – that is all touchpoints of your guest before, during and after vacationing in your destination.

2. Reasons for developing complex tourism products in destinations

It is the consumption of the integral tourism product – the optimised and emotionalised bundle of offers - that allows engaging in attractive activities specific for the destination. And only that creates the actual travel experience of the traveller. Presumably, the higher the satisfaction of the tourist is, the more budget is spent. Thus, the integral tourism product can be equated with the total travel experience - adding substantial value to the destination. And only that will be remembered by the guest and by the host as well. The DMO have the important role to organize, monitor and improve constantly the encompassing travel experience.

3. Characteristics of sustainable tourism products

When it comes to sustainable or the so-called responsible tourism products, 3 levels need to be taken into consideration: the social, the economical and the ecological factors of tourism development. And those three are intertwined and inter-dependent!

In practice, the ecological factors are put at the first place of consideration. And here, most importantly, we need to focus on sustainable transportation, because of its highest relevance in respect of carbon emission in tourism - it accounts for around 75 %. The buzzwords are "sustainable mobility vacation", or to put it simple: "car-free holidays". Examples to establish that new offer integrate the arrival and departure to and from the destination via rail or bus. Travelling by train in comparison to the car has various positives impacts, it is just not so stressful!

Next step would mean to provide for the last mile from the station to the hotel by public transportation; and once the guest has arrived safely at the destination: environmentally friendly transportation should be catered for. Sustainable transport offers focus on public and private shared transportation. Additionally, the concept of sustainable mobility at the destination including its touristic offer favours non-pollution modes of travel and enhance the experience of the surroundings with the bike or by hiking.



The following other individual parts of the tourism product have to be integrated well by the DMO: environmentally friendly hotels, the offer for green activities in outdoor sports, cultural highlights, and very importantly the meals integrating regional products and dishes.

Promoting local cuisine is generally an indicator of sustainable practices as it avoids long haul transportation. Additionally, it must further combine the dimension of social responsibility and economical fairness. Most importantly, local cuisine has gained importance over the last years due to the increasing demand for an authentic culinary experience. For most tourists it is one of the most important parts of their trip: to taste and enjoy the regional food and beverages. This increasing demand favours the local economy and reduces the negative environmental impact of this sector.

And - also not to forget – it so very important to provide encompassing information about this integral responsible product - through suitable communication channels. The DMO can play a vital role here in feeding these channels and also supporting SMEs in the professional handling of media channels.

One factor of success cannot be mentioned enough: The local stakeholders need to be activated by the DMO and be part of the overall tourism experience for the guest – only that makes it a real authentic and responsible holiday stay in the destination!

4. Sustainable tourism certification as a tool to support development of sustainable tourism products

Labels are awarded to different tourism enterprises, services, products and destinations. They are proof of the fact that providers voluntarily opt for measures in support of sustainability principles that go beyond legislation.

Those certificates witness, that there is a high level of awareness for the topic of responsible travel. Labels are an objective instrument for the guest to compare the various offers on the travel market. Therefore, investing resources into acquiring a label will pay on two levels.

First of all, the enterprise optimizes its processes, its energy use, its waste management, its human resources, its products in use, etc. – and hereby effectively saves money - and of course carbon emissions.

Secondly, it is a clear advantage on the travel market: with an accredited label you as the entrepreneur prove that you take care of the environment and of our climate. And that provides you with a clear marketing advantage.

Nowadays, a new range of sustainable tourism certificates are developed at the level of destinations, calling the DMOs into action. They play a very important role in administering and fostering this process to acquire a valuable destination label.

5. Skills and trainings for SMEs for the development and marketing of sustainable tourism products

In many cases, not enough time and resources are invested in analysing thoroughly the stakeholders on the different levels - and planning the relevant measures to integrate and activate those continuously. Activities to communicate and motivate for the process of co-create in the destination with relevant stakeholders, including inhabitants, is often a big challenge for small tourism businesses.



Another point to start with is the target group analyses. Even managers of smaller businesses can profit substantially by the creation of their „ personas “. With that technique you can easier understand your potential customer and develop suitable offers. The following questions arise:

- What target groups would we like to attract?
- Would we win more guests of these target groups if we develop sustainable mobility products?
- How could we reach our target groups, do we know their media channels and communications habits?
- Which offers are interesting and innovative for our target groups? Do we already provide these offers? If not – can we develop those anew / and do they fit well into our destination philosophy and structure?

Interesting would also be to invest time and resources in the co-creation process with the guest in small enterprises. Letting them interact and consult on the tourism product can bring very valuable insights and new ideas for all kinds of businesses.

When it comes to marketing, many new tools and media channels spring up daily! To successfully handle these novelties needs constant training of management and staff.

Innovation management is another point, where especially smaller tourism entities are sometimes strained. That needs thorough planning and wise investment! But without innovation activities you cannot position your business successfully on the market in the long run.

DMOs can substantially support their local SMEs in these phases of developing and marketing of tourism products.

6. Awards for sustainable tourism products and certification schemes

The aims of most awards are to promote the relevant topic - in our case sustainability - and the sharing of best practices.

An award's objectives can be threefold, namely to:

- a) reward destinations that have a well-established record of achieving high sustainability objectives,
- b) encourage destinations to commit to ambitious goals for future environmental improvement and sustainable development, and
- c) provide a role model and benchmark to inspire other destinations and promote best practices and experiences.

An interesting example amongst others it the label „ Green Destination “: it boasts two types of recognition: The full certification programme and the pre-certification awards. The numbers of destinations taking part in one or both programmes are increasing strongly.

7. Steps of Tourism Product Development: the bottom-up approach

Research the Market



At this step, the DMO conducts research on the present market to recognize the open doors. This research incorporates economy, investigation of different market portions and their fluctuated necessities, past and current market information, and tourism trends.

Match the Product with Market

By assessing the market segments and conditions for tourism, distinctive packages are made for different market segments with the end goal that they can fulfil the necessity of the consumer.

Assess the Destination

Since destination shapes the premise of product advancement, the goal is here to evaluate its tourism potential and its capacity to oblige and serve the tourists. Highlights and possible deficiencies are analysed. It is evaluated if the destination is satisfying the necessities of accommodation, attractions, activities, and amenities. It is additionally checked for its accessibility.

Understand the Stakeholder Role

Tourism product advancement is the result of shared endeavours of different partners – the vast range of local and regional stakeholders. It includes recognizing every one of the partners in private and open segments, DMOs, tourism and other organizations, and their individual role in building up their piece of the tourism product. The partner gatherings should be organised by the DMO and are directed to designing the process. The stakeholders are invited to develop a long-haul vision, medium-term activities, and plan the process of continuous evaluation and improvement.

Product Building

At this step, the product is assembled by strong support of the DMO, utilizing the assets available in the destination. Focus is on the target groups and their needs. It includes improvement of existing offers and services as well as developing innovative and extraordinary activities and experiences for the guest.

Marketing and Promotion

The functional and emotional advantages of the tourism at the tourist destination are imparted to the market. The DMO as well as the showcasing individual SME produce and optimise website(s), landing pages for online campaigns, brochures, place advertisements on the business portals, and contact media (journalists and bloggers), maybe even advertise on TV and radio. They likewise utilize different other promoting strategies to build the product visibility. Today, the focus is to a growing extent put on social media, with their influencers and platforms of various kinds (Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.).

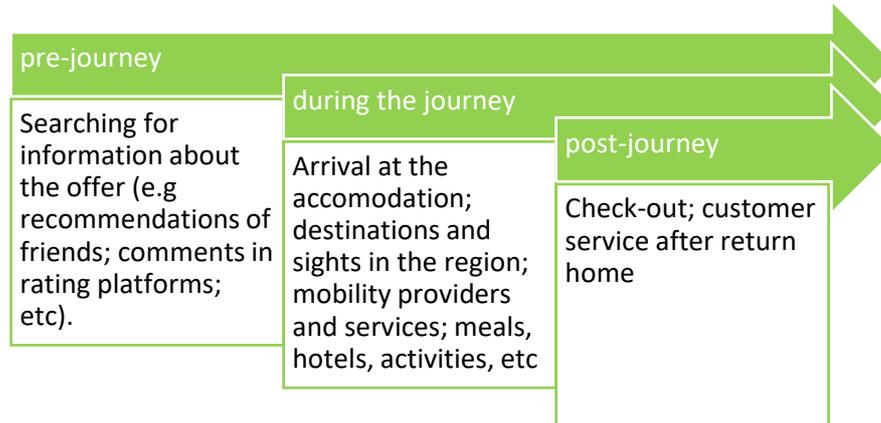
Providing Human and Technical Resource

It is one of the roles of the DMO to provide talented staff and contemporary innovation in order to meet the requirements of tourists proficiently. DMO deal with all tourism related operations, marketing and direct contact and information for and with the guests.



8. Modelling the customer journey as a tool to get to know the touchpoints of potential tourist

During the customer journey all interaction with host and customer can be defined, his needs analysed, and the offers improved with the strong support and coordination of the DMO. The touchpoints across the customer journey can be divided into the three phases “pre-journey”, “during the journey” and “post-journey”.



Sustainable products multiplied over the last years. The demand is increasing due to a more sensitive society. The target group which is interested in sustainable products usually have their specific online and offline media where they go and get information about a product. According to the marketing strategy information about a product should be placed correspondingly before, during and after the journey.

Additionally, environment labels are another indicator and of sustainability and a way of promoting its product. Since the market is overloaded with offers, customer often turn to something they can rely on sharing the same values. Customers usually know what to expect when they engage with environment labels.

9. Best practice in an Alpine destination

Highly recognized and having won many awards in Europe is the destination Werfenweng in Austria. Werfenweng focuses on sustainable tourism development since the mid-1990. A very specific „ green holiday product “has been created and marketed successfully: the „Soft mobility holidays“, incorporated into a marketable bonus card, the so-called SAMO-Card. All offers included in this bonus card are completely free of charge. Guests are invited to arrive without a car, encompassing transportation by public and individual transport is provided. Specially trained hosts invite the guest to dive into sustainability during their holidays: with offers like guided hiking tours, special bus sightseeing trips, outdoor-sports equipment provided for free, electric bikes and mountain bikes provided, even a fleet of e-cars is waiting for the guests. A shop with local specialities has been established. All the energy needed for the vehicles and services is produced by the sun. The inhabitants are integrated into this green product and can enjoy the specific transportation services as well. A strong cooperation with the regional transportation providers has been built up. Werfenweng is for sure one of the outstanding examples of sustainable and successful sustainable tourism development.

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