EVENTS AS AN ELEMENT OF TOURIST DESTINATION QUALITY – A CASE STUDY OF PRIMORJE-GORSKI KOTAR COUNTY

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Abstract
Integrated Quality Management (IQM) was developed to encourage the development and implementation of approaches focused on quality and sustainable development. It represents an integrated approach to managing the quality of tourist destinations on a continuous basis. IQM emphasizes four key elements in its approach: tourist satisfaction, local tourism industry satisfaction, local people’s quality of life and environmental quality. QUALITEST is a tool designed by the European Commission for measuring the results of implementing quality processes in destinations. It consists of two groups of indicators: quality of the destination and quality of the tourism product. One of the elements that are measured within the second group is related to the quality of the tourism offering, which includes events among other things. Events, an important element in creating a tourism offering, have an effect on the image and promotion of the destination, on the length of tourists’ stay, on occupancy rate and on tourist consumption. Accordingly, the aim of this paper is to analyse tourist events in Primorje-Gorski Kotar County by their type and by region. The results of analysis could provide a basis for improvements related to the development of different types of tourist events in different destinations of Primorje-Gorski Kotar County.

Introduction
In achieving the quality of tourist destinations an approach known as Integrated Quality Management can be used. Its main characteristic is that it is comprehensive, i.e. it includes all stakeholders in the process of assuring quality in tourist destinations. One of the benefits that can be achieved by using this approach is improvement in the quality of the tourism offering, in which events have an important role. The importance of events is highlighted in the
quality measurement system for destinations – QUALITEST. The focus of this research is the analysis of the offering of tourist events in different destinations of Primorje-Gorski Kotar County (Croatia). The analysis also includes the structure of events by type and by region. The results of such analysis could provide a basis for actions that can be taken to develop those types of events that are insufficiently represented. Whether there is a connection between the number of different types of events and the number of tourist overnights will also be analysed. Furthermore, a comparison will be made with other coastal counties regarding the events offering. The paper is based on results presented in the student’s final paper “The Quality of the Tourist Events Offering in Primorje-Gorski Kotar County”.

Integrated Quality Management (IQM)

The quality of any destination, as well as the quality of the tourism offering, is determined by a variety of operators. Therefore, a tourist’s perception of a destination will depend on different factors such as quality of tourist services, safety and security, hospitality, and traffic. Integrated Quality Management (IQM) was developed to manage all these factors. It is “an approach to managing a tourism destination which focuses on an ongoing process of improving visitor satisfaction, while seeking to improve the local economy, the environment and the quality of life of the local community” (European Communities, 2000: 11) IQM integrates four key elements in its approach (European Communities, 2003: 4):

- tourist satisfaction,
- local tourism industry satisfaction,
- local people’s quality of life,
- environmental quality.

Integrated quality management (IQM) should simultaneously take into account, and have a favourable impact on the activities of tourism professionals, tourists, the local population and the environment (European Communities, 2000: 10). Balance should be achieved in all these aspects. Otherwise, imbalance, even in only one of them, could have a negative impact on the overall quality of the destination and the tourism product.

The IQM approach can be implemented through five stages: identify the partners, decide on actions, implement actions, measure effects, evaluate and adjust. In order to be able to monitor the overall levels of tourism quality in the destination the QUALITEST tool was developed as a complement to the IQM concept since it proposes indicators within the four key elements of IQM. Therefore it fits into stage 4 of the IQM approach. (European Communities, 2003: 4–5). Using QUALITEST a destination is provided with a set of core indicators that can be used to measure quality performance in tourist destinations.

It consists of 16 quality themes divided into two groups (European Communities, 2003: 8):

- quality of the destination (viability of local tourism industry, local people satisfaction, support to local tourism industry, marketing and promotion, safety and security, ambient air quality, local environmental quality),

- quality of the tourist product (pre-arrival communication, accessibility, transport, accommodation, information, eating and drinking, activities, bathing water quality, value for money).

Events have an important role among those activities that are vital elements in achieving and improving the quality of a tourism product. This was also confirmed by the QUALITEST study conducted in ten test destinations (Cork – Republic of Ireland, El Vendrell – Spain, Helsinki – Finland, Isle of Man – UK, Lech – Austria, Lesvos – Greece, Lillehammer – Norway, Odsherred – Denmark, Söderslätt – Sweden, Touluse – France) that were asked to
rank the sectors in their local tourism industry that are the most important for the quality of tourism in the destination. The results showed that the most important sectors were the hotel sector and transport, followed by commercial tourist attractions, and sporting and recreational activities (European Communities, 2003: 7).

QUALITEST can help in creating and improving the quality of the tourism offering in all types of tourist destinations (urban, rural and coastal) because it provides them with (European Communities, 2003: 5):

– an integrated tool for measuring and monitoring the internal quality performance of the destination over time, and
– a vehicle for benchmarking their quality performance externally with that of similar destinations.

Also QUALITEST can be used to communicate quality performance to relevant stakeholders. Furthermore, using QUALITEST, a destination can benchmark itself with other destinations with a similar location and level of tourism. (European Communities, 2003: 6).

Definition and types of events

Events represent an important factor in promoting the tradition, customs and lifestyle of local people. By enriching the tourism offering, events have a significant influence on the tourists’ perception of the quality of tourism products and services and of the whole destination. Getz (2008: 406) argues that “from the tourism industry’s perspective, typically through the eyes of a DMO or event development agency, events are highly valued as attractions, catalysts, animators, place marketers and image-makers.” In defining events Getz (2008: 404) states that “planned events are a spatial-temporal phenomenon, and each is unique because of interactions among the setting, people and management systems, including design elements and the program.” Shone and Parry (2004: 3) state that “special events are: that phenomenon arising from those non-routine occasions which have leisure, cultural, personal or organizational objectives set apart from the normal activity of daily life, whose purpose is to enlighten, celebrate, entertain or challenge the experience of a group of people.

They are characterized by the following (Van der Wagen, 2001: 2–3):

– they are often “once in a lifetime” experiences for the participants,
– they are generally expensive to stage,
– they usually take place over a short time span,
– they require long and careful planning,
– they generally take place once only (however, many are held annually, usually at the same time every year),
– they carry a high level of risk, including financial risk and safety risk,
– there is often a lot at stake for those involved, including the event management team.

People who are involved in the organization of an event have to ensure smooth event performance and try to reduce possible risks in order to achieve a high level of visitors’ satisfaction. In designing an event, the following aspects should be taken into consideration: venue for the event, transport opportunities, traffic infrastructure, available human and financial resources, audience, timing, interested parties such as contactors, sponsors, local community.

Events can be classified by using the criteria of size and type. By their size events can be classified as (Van der Wagen, 2001: 4):

– mega-events (generally targeted at international markets),
– hallmark events (designed to increase the appeal of a specific tourism destination or region),
– major events (attract significant local interest and a large number of participants),
– minor events (annual events, one-off events).

Regarding type, events can be classified as Sporting, Entertainment, Arts and culture, Commercial marketing and promotional, Meetings and exhibitions, Festivals, Family, Fundraising and Miscellaneous events (Van der Wagen, 2001: 7–11).

Therefore, there are a lot of possibilities for the development of different types of events with focus on the different experiences they can provide to their visitors. Considering the importance of events as a motivator of tourist arrivals, a research was conducted in Croatian coastal destinations. Results have shown that entertainment is a motivation for 44.1% of tourists, and new experiences and adventures for 25.3% of them (TOMAS, 2010: 40). Research has also shown that during their stay 69.7% of tourists attended local events; 39.4%, concerts; and 38.5%, museums and exhibitions (TOMAS, 2010: 60). The research has also shown that the advantages of the tourism offering in Croatian coastal destinations relative to the competition (Spain, Italy, Greece, and Turkey) are the beauty of the landscape, environmental preservation, cleanliness of places, as well as safety and hospitality. However, results have also shown that the main disadvantages in comparison with our competitors pertain to entertainment, sport and shopping. Therefore, action should be taken to improve these aspects of the tourism offering, and organizing events is an important part of such activities.

Events can have positive benefits, in terms of economy and tourism. “Consequently events have become an integral component of the tourism industry in many regions as they can serve as an additional competitive advantage to attract visitors to a destination. Events can help raise money, foster community development or the arts, provides leisure opportunities and make excellent communications tools” (Soteriades and Dimou, 2011: 330)

Results from a study of guest satisfaction with events offered in a tourist destinations (Municipality of Neum in Bosnia and Herzegovina) showed that an association exists between the level of guest satisfaction with events and the level of guest satisfaction with the destination’s overall tourism offering, Pearson’s R = 0.389, p < 0.05. (Milohnić et al., 2012).

Bowdin et al. (2011: 94) argues that “events are also seen as image-makers, creating profile for destinations, positioning them in the market and providing competitive marketing advantage.” Destination promoters increasingly use them to raise the awareness and the image of destination (Jurinčić and Brezovec, 1998: 176).

The results from the primary research in Cyprus confirmed the positive attitude of governmental and non-governmental tourism organizations as well as private companies towards the importance of events. Results have confirmed the positive impacts of events through favourable publicity and media. Events have also been perceived as the drivers of infrastructure development. One of the benefits of events that has been emphasized is that they can help to resolve the seasonality problem (Avgousti, 2012; Getz, 2008: 419) argues that event tourism is primarily driven by the goal of economic benefits, but the outcomes and impacts at the personal and societal levels, and also in terms of cultural and environmental change should be examined.

**Tourist events offering in Primorje-Gorski Kotar County**

In analysing the tourism offering, i.e. the events offering, in Primorje-Gorski Kotar County, research was focused on the Kvarner destination which is divided into five regions: Rijeka and its area, the Opatija Riviera, the
Crikvenica-Vinodol Riviera, Gorski Kotar and the islands of Rab, Cres, Krk and Lošinj. This region is traditionally engaged in maritime activities, fishing and tourism.

As part of the Master Plan for the development of tourism in Primorje-Gorski Kotar County (University of Rijeka, 2005), the current state, together with opportunities for development of different tourism resources, was analysed. Research has shown that natural resources represent a vital part of the tourism offering. This statement was also confirmed by the high level of tourists’ satisfaction with this aspect. Climate conditions were also highly rated by tourists. One aspect that should be improved is the offering based on cultural and historical heritage. In addition, the tourism offering should be enriched with additional tourism services and facilities (activities) such as sports and entertainment. One of the problems that were indicated by this research is the unequally developed infrastructure in different regions.

Events provide a variety of possibilities for the enrichment of the tourism offering and the diversification of the destination on the tourist market. They can also extend the season and improve the quality of life of local people. Analysis of the events offering in the Kvarner destination was done by using available data from the Calendar of Events (Kvarner County Tourist Board, 2013). The analysis included all the events that were announced in the Calendar up to the end of March 2013. Despite this limitation, analysis based on available data can represent a good basis for the evaluation of the events offering.

Analysis of events and the events offering in the Kvarner destination by type has demonstrated their diversity (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event type</th>
<th>Number of events</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sporting</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment, Arts and Culture</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>34.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial, Marketing and Promotional</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Festivals</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>23.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings and Exhibitions</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous events</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>209</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Kvarner County Tourist Board (2013).

Most of the events are focused on entertainment, art and culture (34.9%). Festivals (23.0%) also account for a significant share, as do sport events (20.6%). The number of events that focus on business activities, such as Commercial, marketing and promotional events and Meetings and exhibitions, is considerably smaller.

How these types of events are distributed in different regions is shown in Table 2.

The Gorski Kotar region has the highest number of sports events. This is to be expected since this region is focused on developing sports and recreational tourism by exploiting its natural resources. Rijeka and its area have the highest number of entertainment, arts and cultural events. This can be connected to the fact that Rijeka plans to apply for the title of European Capital of Culture 2020. Festivals are mostly held on the islands and the Opatija Riviera. These festivals are mainly based on local gastronomy which represents an important element of the tourism offering in these regions.
Table 2. Event by region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Rijeka and its area</th>
<th>Gorski Kotar</th>
<th>Crikvenica-Vinodol Riviera</th>
<th>Islands of Rab, Krk, Cres, Lošinj</th>
<th>Opatija Riviera</th>
<th>Total by type of event (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sporting</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>43 (20.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment, Arts and Culture</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>73 (34.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial, Marketing and Promotional</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8 (3.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Festivals</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>48 (23.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meetings and Exhibitions</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18 (8.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous events</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19 (9.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total by region</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>209 (100.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Kvarner County Tourist Board (2013).

To find out if there is a correlation between the number of tourist overnights and the number of different types of events, the nonparametric test Kendall Tau was carried out using the statistical package Statistica 8.0 (N = 5). The analysis has shown that a statistically significant correlation exists between Festivals and the number of tourist overnights (Table 3). The reason for that could stem from the contents of such types of events, mostly oriented on local and traditional products that attract tourists who are willing to stay longer in regions with such a tourism offering.

Table 3. Kendall Tau Correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Kendall Tau Correlations (EVENTS PGZ)</th>
<th>MD pairwise deleted</th>
<th>Marked correlations are significant at p &lt; 0.05</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fest.</td>
<td>1.000000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of overnights</td>
<td>0.948683</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Kvarner County Tourist Board (2013).

In comparison with other Croatian coastal counties, Primorje-Gorski Kotar County develops and organizes more events. For example, according to the Calendar of Events for 2013, Dubrovnik-Neretva County has 103 events; Istria County, 142; and Split-Dalmatia County, 96 events (Dubrovnik and Neretva..., 2013; Istria Tourist Board, 2013; Split-Dalmatia County..., 2013).

It can be concluded from the above analysis that the events offering in Primorje-Gorski Kotar county is designed for different types of tourists and their preferences, but there are some areas that can be improved, such as commercial events and conferences. Also additional efforts need to be made to enrich the existing offering of tourist events in regions such as Gorski Kotar (the highlands) and the Crikvenica-Vinodol Riviera (the coast).
Conclusions

Primorje-Gorski Kotar County has good prerequisites for the development and diversification of a well-designed tourism offering. Its favourable geographical position makes it an easily accessible destination. Its climate conditions represent one of the competitive advantages creating conditions for year-round operations on the coast as well as in the highlands (Gorski Kotar).

The events offering in Primorje-Gorski Kotar County is characterized by different types of events designed for different target groups. Mostly they are oriented on entertainment, arts and culture, festivals and sports. Some aspects of the events offering are not yet well developed, such as commercial events. Therefore additional improvements to this element of the tourism offering need to be made. The analysis has shown that two regions (the Opatija Riviera, and Rijeka and its area) are leaders in event organization. Namely, more than 50% of the total number of events is held in these regions. Other regions could also achieve this positive trend by combining their own ideas and knowledge with the experience of these advanced regions.

Results have also shown that a significant correlation exists between Festivals and the number of tourist overnights (Kendall Tau Correlations = 0.948683, p < 0.05). Therefore this type of event should be further promoted and efforts focused on activities that will keep tourists in the destination. This concept should also be applied in developing and organizing other types of events. Regarding the results obtained it should be pointed out that this research is subject to some limitations. One of them is related to the analysed period which should be extended in the future.

References


Dubrovnik and Neretva County Tourist Board (2013). Calendar of Events. Available at: http://visitdubrovnik.hr/hrHR/Dogadanja?ZWR0XDMxLJeyLjwMTMgMDA6MDA6MDA6MDAsc2R0XDAxLjAxLjwMTMgMDA6MDA6MDA6MDA%3d (accessed on 1.12.2013).


Kvarner County Tourist Board (2013). Calendar of Events. Available at: www.kvarner.hr/turizam/dogadanja (accessed on 31.03.2013).


