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INNOVATION THROUGH NICHE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE POST-INDUSTRIAL ECONOMY

Tamara Rátz

PhD, Professor of Tourism, Head of Tourism Department
Director of Centre for Business Studies
Kodolányi János University of Applied Sciences, Hungary

Introduction

The current paper is based on a 3-year research project that aims to analyse the actual and the potential added value of niche tourism products in the successful development and the international competitiveness of Hungarian tourism. Tourism development is often a highly pursued economic alternative to traditional industries in post-industrial economies. At many currently popular tourist destinations, deindustrialisation and the development of the service sector, including tourism, only followed various unsuccessful attempts at sustaining industrial activities, especially in the 1970s and 1980s [1]. However, at this stage it was already becoming clear that mass tourism development may bring about serious negative social, economic and environmental consequences; moreover, industrial communities often lacked the traditional geographical and heritage resources of conventional tourism development. Therefore, post-industrial tourism development is often based on creativity and innovation in identifying potential niche products and catering for niche visitor segments.

The concept of niche tourism and its role in the global economy

Niche tourism (also known as special interest tourism) is a relatively new phenomenon in the history of tourism [2], which has emerged as a counter-point to mass tourism development. Following World War 2, the globalisation of tourism, mass travel and the associated extensive suprastructural development led to large-scale agglomerations of hotels and resorts, growth in the number of visitor attractions designed to accommodate large numbers of people, an increase in air traffic and a general expansion in freight capacity and transport infrastructure. Within the framework of the resulting mass tourism, 980 million international tourist arrivals were registered in 2011 [3]. Services provided for mass tourists are also large-scale and relatively standardised, offering fairly similar experiences [4]. In mass tourism, competition between major producers and destinations is mainly based on price, which also plays a key role in the tourists' decision-making process [5]. The democratisation of tourist consumption, the emergence of large numbers of internationally inexperienced travellers in the 1960-70's has led to the application of Fordist principles in the field of tourism, resulting in the growing success of travel companies seeking economies of scale, and offering standardised packages and services [6].

However, during the last two decades, in parallel with the globalisation of mass tourism, a new, opposite trend has also appeared in the international tourist market: specialisation as opposed to homogenisation [7]. The increasing ratio of experienced travellers has brought about new demand patterns, and has significantly influenced the services offered by many destinations and companies. The importance of alternative tourism products such as festival tourism or ecotourism has been increasing, and the gradual fragmentation of the supply led to the creation of highly specialised niche products, such as birding within ecotourism, or movie-induced visits within cultural tourism [8]. The role of imagination, creativity and innovation has become central, leading to the creation of financially

profitable products based on site-specific features that are also more compliant with the criteria of economic, cultural and ecological sustainability [9].

Although niche tourism products are highly diverse, they all satisfy the unique needs of very narrow segments, particularly in comparison with the mass demand and relatively standardised supply of traditional tourist products (such as waterside holidays, winter holidays/winter sports, general interest urban tourism). Consequently, in niche tourism, the basis of product development is uniqueness and a personal, tailor-made approach, with the tourist's active involvement in the product design and the service delivery process [10]. Thus, the phenomenon of co-creation is gaining significance also in the field of tourism, meaning the co-operation of guests and producers in the personalisation of services, and the opportunity of individual mixing and matching of service components by the customers [11].

On a global level, niche tourism research has a tradition of approximately two decades. On the one hand, niche tourism has become a subject of research as a consequence of increasingly sophisticated consumer behaviour analysis in the field of tourism. As tourism marketing studies started to focus more on the individual experience as well as the expected and perceived consumer value [12], these approaches also highlighted the importance of individual tourist activities, of product development strategies aiming to satisfy personal needs, and of the added value of the overall service procedure. On the other hand, increasing competition in the international tourism market also encouraged the assessment of factors of competitiveness, particularly the analysis of service and destination USPs and ESPs [13]; such studies emphasised the role of niche products as potential unique competitive advantages for a company or a destination. At the beginning, most studies on niche tourism aimed to clarify the notion and to explore the characteristics of various niche tourism products, however, the growth of knowledge in this area has increasingly led to a deeper, more complex assessment of the supply and demand features of unique products.

Research methods

Within the framework of the 3-year long research project, both secondary and primary methods are used. Secondary research includes the analysis of available domestic and international literature sources in the following subject areas:

- The development, history, types and characteristics of niche (special interest) tourism
- The theory of motivation in tourism, the travel decision process, and the external, internal, objective and subjective factors influencing travel behaviour

Primary research methods include the following techniques:

- Data collection and analysis using internet databases to explore the availability of resources to be used in niche tourism development, as well as the range of existing niche tourism products, investigation of the geographical dimensions of supply, identification of potential development opportunities
- Delphi survey in order to define the destination-specific concept of niche tourism
- Assessment of niche tourism supply
 - Exploration of success factors among successful and unsuccessful niche tourism companies (PEST and SWOT analyses) – structured interviews with managers and/or owners of 25 successful and 25 struggling businesses
 - Exploration and assessment of products currently under development (PEST and SWOT analyses) – structured interviews with initiators, managers and/or owners of 20 projects
 - Investigation of the media coverage of niche tourism – content analysis based on broadcasted and printed mediums
- Assessment of niche tourism demand
 - Focus group research with frequent, experienced travellers (interest in niche products, familiarity, perceptions, actual demand)
 - Structured interviews with customers who have a unique hobby (interest in hobby-related tourist products, familiarity, perceptions, actual demand)
 - Questionnaire surveys among frequent, experienced and typical, average travellers (interest in niche products, familiarity, perceptions, actual demand, information sources)

Innovation in niche tourism development in post-industrial Székesfehérvár

The city of Székesfehérvár is located in central Hungary, app. 65 km from the capital city, Budapest. It is the seat of Fejér county and the regional centre of Central Transdanubia, with a population of app. 102,000 persons. The city's tourism development potential is closely connected to its historic heritage: established in the 10th century, it is one of the most ancient Hungarian settlements, and in the Middle Ages, Székesfehérvár was a royal residence and the most important town of the Hungarian state. For centuries, the Hungarian kings and queens were crowned and buried in its basilica, where the symbols of the royal power were kept, together with the state archives and the treasury. Due to its religious and commercial significance and its central location within the country, Székesfehérvár became the meeting point of pilgrimage routes to the Holy Land as well as important trading routes leading to all directions. The royal markets held weekly also contributed to the economic and social development of the town.

Throughout its turbulent history in Central Hungary, the city has been destroyed and rebuilt several times. After World War II, similarly to many other cities in the socialist era, Székesfehérvár was subject to rapid industrialization that led to the opening of such important factories – soon becoming popular consumer brands – as the Ikarus bus factory, the Videoton Radio and Television factory (Figure 1) and the Könnyűfémű aluminium processing plant.

Figure 1

Nostalgic logos of the Ikarus¹ and the Videoton² brands



At the end of the socialist regime, all important factories were on the verge of collapsing and thousands of people lost their jobs. However, in terms of modern economic development, the city actually profited from losing the old and inefficient companies as the abundance of skilled labour together with excellent traffic connections and high-quality infrastructure attracted numerous foreign firms seeking to invest in Hungary, and Székesfehérvár became one of the prime destinations for multinational companies in Hungary (e.g. Ford, IBM, followed later by Philips, Alcoa or Denso), turning the city into a success story of Hungary's transition into a market economy.

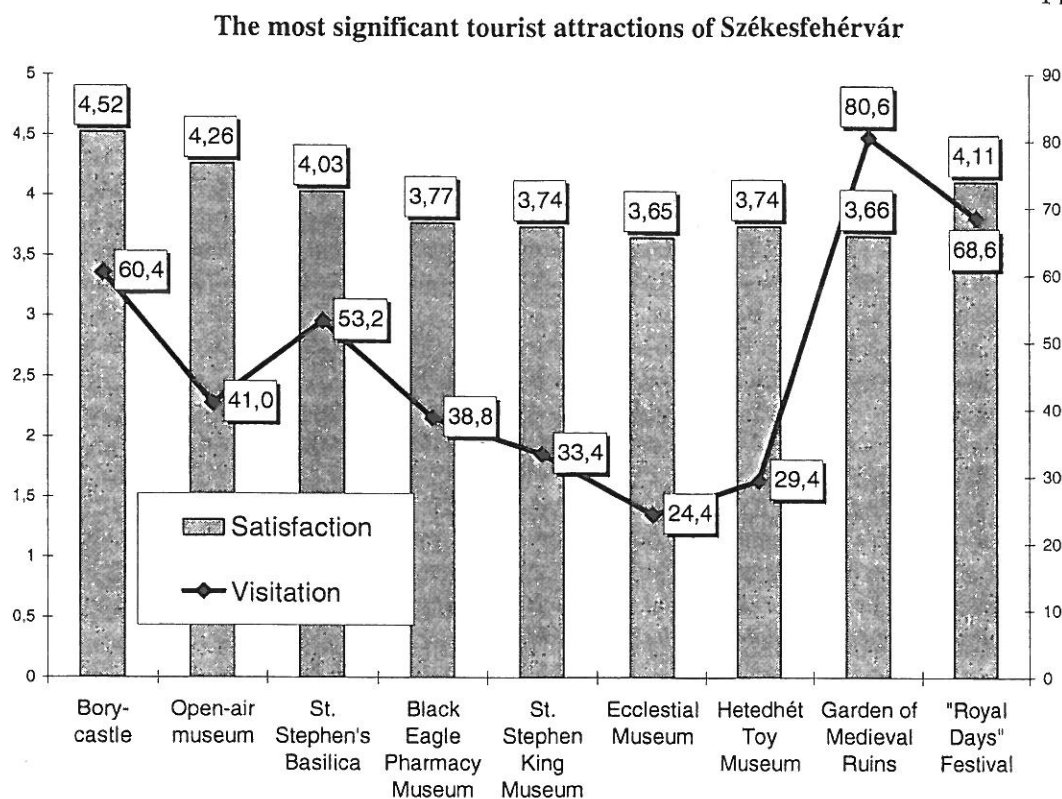
Despite the existence of a rich industrial heritage that is becoming increasingly popular, due to the fashionable trends of retro and nostalgia products and services [14], the growing symbiosis of technology and service development [15], and the rising interest in industrial tourism throughout the world [16], at the moment most visitors perceive Székesfehérvár as a predominantly historic and cultural destination. Figure 2 shows the most popular attractions of the city based on a survey carried out in summer 2012 ('satisfaction' with the attraction was measured on a 1-5 scale with 5 being the highest satisfaction level, while 'visitation' values indicate the percentage of respondents who actually visited the given attraction). According to the findings, while the most highly evaluated attraction of Székesfehérvár is a fairytale building (the extraordinary Bory-castle was built by sculptor and architect Jenő Bory in the 20th century), the most visited and most emblematic site is the Garden of Medieval Ruins, followed by the "Royal Days" historic festival and the St. Stephen's Basilica, all three evoking the medieval heritage of the city.

In the post-industrial economy of Székesfehérvár, the development of industrial heritage tourism would create a site-specific niche product that is based on modern technology, innovation and creativity, and caters for the needs of growing subcultures, both in Hungary and abroad. The nostalgia induced by the popular socialist brands, together with the state-of-the-art technology of the currently successful industrial companies, would serve as the core of product development that memorialise the beauty of industrial plants and the grandeur of technological processes, in addition to celebrating the social heritage of people whose lives have been connected with the city's industrial past and present.

¹ Source: <http://iki266.blog.hu> (downloaded 10.10.2012)

² Source: <http://www.radiohistoria.hu/Oldradio/mainhu.nsf/wmanuid/0000037> (downloaded 10.10.2012)

Figure 2



Source: own survey (2012)

Conclusions

Currently, post-industrial tourism development in Székesfehérvár seems to have two potential pillars to be built on: the traditional "Royal City" image that is embodied by such attractions as St. Stephen's Basilica or the Garden of Medieval Ruins, or the modern and unconventional "Industrial City of the Future" image that is able to present the city's economic transition from classic manufacturing to knowledge- and innovation-based industries, using the latest available technologies in interpretation and attraction development. Although the second approach is less in line with the city's traditional tourism development direction, it requires extensive co-operation with active industrial factories, and would probably reach more narrowly defined customer segments, its parallel development with the city's heritage attractions would provide a connecting path, also in the field of tourism development, from Székesfehérvár's past into its future.

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ПЛЮРАЛИЗАЦИЯ ЦЕННОСТЕЙ И СТИЛЕЙ ЖИЗНИ

Н. А. Головин

д. с. н., профессор кафедры теории и истории социологии факультета социологии
Санкт-Петербургского государственного университета

Поколенческая структура общества формируется, в основном, его историей. Например, в странах, участвовавших и затронутых мировой войной есть военное поколение. Однако бывает так, что модернизация стирает различия поколений, заменяет его различием возрастных групп: молодежь, люди среднего возраста, старшее поколение. Пример тому: восточная и западная части Германии. В первом случае политические поколения есть и похожи на российские, во втором случае в результате давно сложившегося общества потребления новых поколений не возникает. Последнее политическое поколение там – поколение 1968 года – участников движения молодежного протеста против системы. Как же обстоит дело в наших обществах в начале очередного этапа модернизации?

В казахстанском и в российском обществах много общего, основанного на общей истории. Так, у нас есть два крупных советских поколения. Первое сформировалось еще до построения основ социализма (1938 г.), второе – в сложившемся советском обществе вплоть до его кризиса, начавшегося в 1985 году. Нашими общими политическими поколениями являются: 1) Военное и послевоенное поколение; 2) Поколение «оттепели» (1960-х гг.); 3) Поколение «застоя» и 2) Поколение перестройки. Для России это примерно 70 млн. чел, то есть половина населения. Вторая половина – это новые российские поколения, те, кто вырос в России без СССР. Соответственно, половина населения Казахстана – около 7 млн. человек также вырастет в суверенном Казахстане.

Среди них можно различить поколение кризиса и поколение стабилизации. У этих одинаковы названия, но по содержанию социализации они разные за счет политической составляющей социализации. Так, в Казахстане значительно большее влияние имеет этническая и языковая социализация, чем в России. Эти различия нарастали бы, но в начале XXI в России и в Казахстане, в других странах региона произошла относительная стабилизация. Более того, в России громко заявило о себе общество потребления с его иными ценностями. Правда, в нем полноценно участвует лишь 1/3 населения.