

# EMERGING TRENDS IN TOURISM: NEED FOR ALTERNATIVE FORMS IN MACEDONIAN TOURISM

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## ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this paper is to research the development of tourism, taking into consideration the growing competition and new consumer intentions. The aim of this research is to analyze the alternative forms of tourism as a crucial factor for long term sustainability. As a basic research method used is an interview with tourist providers in Macedonia (travel agencies - DMC companies and tourist guides), regarding their experience for alternative tourism forms. Results are showing growing trend of alternative forms of tourism considering different tourist nationalities. These results are valuable for further scientific research in consumer analyzes, and presents an input for the national tourism in this region.*

**Keywords:**

tourism marketing, customer needs, alternative tourism, sustainable tourism

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The basic definition for tourism is that it incorporates the sun and sea model i.e. its basis lies in the possibility to offer the sun and sea package tour to tourists<sup>1</sup>. Sustainable tourism nowadays lies on the premises that it can only be achievable through development of alternative forms of tourism. This will allow future tourists to meet their purest needs and wants and to manage to meet their preferences. Alternative forms of tourism aim to preserve environmental, economic and socio-cultural impacts that tourists have on a certain destination<sup>2</sup>. By doing this, they allow sustainable growth of the destination in particular, and of the country in general. This will allow more sensitivity for local, social and economic demand and revenues from the tourism can be spent on future development of that particular destination.

The research objective of this paper is to determine which are the most attractive alternative forms of tourism, why do tourists like to be involved in those forms of tourism and which are the benefits of having a tourist offer with incorporated forms of alternative tourism. In the paper an empirical research is done followed by relevant sources (DMC companies and tourist guides) which are involved in this research area. From the research and the literature consulted, the results expected are that incorporating alternative forms of tourism in the tourist offer is more than needed and slowly, but surely becomes a trend in the tourist industry. This fact is based on the changing habits of tourists around the world and it becomes a world trend.

## 2. TOURISM SPECIFICS AND MARKETING TOURISM

Tourism represents a possibility for exploiting the protected areas on a sustainable way. At the same time, that is a way to use, preserve and to develop the living environment which is rich with extraordinary natural and human made elements and contents. The development of the alternative forms of tourism is of special significance in the areas in which there is authentic nature and cultural heritage connected to the possibility for recreation, fun and cultural experience.

### **The characteristics of the tourism market**

In the development of the economic explanation of tourism, there are numerous attempts to give detailed and precise explanation of the service industry and to make clear distinction from other areas and industries. There are a lot of definitions of the term "service", but the most complete is the one that is given by P. Kotler

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1 Naume Marinovski, Turisticka geografija na Republika Makedonija (Fakultet za turizam i ugostitelstvo, Ohrid, 2001: 111-117).

2 Dimitros Buhalis, Marketing the cooperative destination of the future (Tourism Management, 21, 2006: 97-116).

(2008: 71): "The service is each and every activity or usage that one side can offer to the other which in its basics is unacceptable and does not intend to establish ownership of a physical object".

The tourism 'product' is an experience achieved through the combination of a diverse array of products and services (Heath, Wall, 1994; Scott, Parfitt, Laws, 2000). For visitors, the product is the total experience, covering the entire amalgam of all aspects and components of the product, including attitudes and expectations. According to Middleton & Clarke (2001), the overall tourism product is a package, and might be defined in terms of five main components, namely: destination attractions; destination facilities and services; accessibility of the destination (including transport); images, brands and perceptions; price to the visitor. Hence, destination is a provider of experiences.

### **Tourism marketing approach**

One of the biggest challenges faced by tourism marketers is that the product is largely intangible. What we are marketing, of course, are intangibles. The tangibles are essential and necessary but as soon as they reach a certain level of acceptance, they become secondary. Because they are so difficult to differentiate, to be competitive, the intangibles have to be marketed. Even as tangibles, mountains and beaches have a measure of intangibility because they are experienced rather than possessed (Ryan, 2005).

If tourism products are mostly intangible, they have to be marketed with tangible evidence. This is what is referred to as "tangibilizing the intangible." However, this is a complicated process. By emphasizing the concrete elements one may fail to differentiate oneself from the competition, and since the intangible elements are abstract, by emphasizing the abstract one compounds the intangibility.

The season concentration is a very important specification of the tourist market. According to this, involved parties should keep on mind the big costs for building and maintaining the capacities, but also not to forget the participation of human resources in most of the tourist branches.

Tourist demand, across tourist offer is very much elastic, determined with many factors, most of which are irrational (Ritchie, 2002). As a result of the different individual needs on the side of the demand and the different possibilities in their satisfaction, diversity floats on the surface, but also difference in behavior from the participants on the side of the demand.

Before the tourist product is created, there is a need to make a market research regarding which is the targeted segment, where that product will be offered and who will be the competition. Also, several products need to be combined and offered together. This is because tourism is complex and there is a need of enriching the existing products and a very creative policy has to be implemented. By combining the partial products, one complex product is being produced which can be offered to the market.

### 3. ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF TOURISM - THEORETICAL ASPECTS

Corporate travel, conventions and incentive tourism, are becoming increasingly significant. This segment is exceptionally lucrative, and primarily takes place out of the summer peak season, which is enough reason to intensively promote its development. This would attract an increasing number of foreign experts, scientists, professors and researchers. The necessary prerequisite for developing convention tourism is the construction of quality convention centres.

The tourist offer of one receptive country should be concentrated on all factors, especially the cultural, natural and historical ones. This is because tourists from abroad will not travel thousands of kilometers only for one partial tourist product, i.e. the well-known cuisine of the country. But, this also means that this factor has to be the carrier of the tourist offer, and the other factors have to be present as well. The table below explains the differences between mass tourism and alternative tourism.

**Table 1.:** Mass Tourism Vs Alternative Tourism

|                         | <b>Tourism Mass Tourism</b>  | <b>Alternative Tourism</b>   |
|-------------------------|--|--|
| <b>General Features</b> | Rapid development<br>Maximizes<br>Socially, environmentally, inconsiderate, aggressive<br>Short Term<br>Short Term<br>Remote control<br>Unstable<br>Price Consciousness<br>Quantitative<br>Growth<br>Peak holiday periods, seasonal<br>Capacity for high seasonal demand<br>Tourism development everywhere | Slow development<br>Optimizes<br>Socially, environmentally, considerate, cautions<br>Long Term<br>Long Term<br>Local control<br>Stable<br>Value consciousness<br>Qualitative<br>Development<br>Staggered holiday periods, no necessarily seasonal<br>Staggered holiday periods, no necessarily seasonal<br>Development only in suitable places |
| <b>Tourist Behavior</b> | Large Groups<br>Fixed program<br>Spontaneous Decisions<br>Comfortable and Passive<br>Demanding and active  | Singles, families, small groups<br>Tourists directed<br>Spontaneous Decisions<br>Tourist decide<br>Tourist decide  |

Source: Gartner, (1996: 339-340).

As presented above, the table shows the most important specifics of the alternative forms of tourism. The table also gives hints for possibilities for future development of sustainable forms of tourism. For example, mass tourism is all about maximizing profit on the short term, it is unstable, quantitative, and seasonal. Also, it characterizes with large groups with fixed program with spontaneous decisions. Au contraire, the alternative forms of tourism are into slow development, optimizing profit on the long term basis, it is stable, qualitative and not necessarily seasonal. These forms characterize with small groups, tourist directed with spontaneous decisions. It is clear that the alternative forms of tourism are more for sustainable tourism on the long run.

The alternative forms of tourism are the factor which allows incorporating different segments on the side of the tourist demand. In this way, different needs and wants on the side of the demand can or might find attractive contents. In that manner, they will be able to satisfy their needs. Throughout these alternative forms of tourism, an outstanding support is being given in the efforts to protect the exotic environment, the rare sceneries, untouched nature, tradition and culture and a possibility for their activation can be achieved (Marinoski, 2001).

In recent analysis of market demand preferences, a few types of tourism are mentioned as being present on the market: ecotourism, cultural tourism, adventure tourism, cruises and nautical tourism (Marinoski, 2001). The alternative forms of tourism are a crucial factor which helps towards incorporation of different segments of the tourist demand. In this way, different types of needs and wants on the side of the demand shall be satisfied. And, eventually, that will help in the preservation of the exotic areas, untouched nature, culture and tradition.

Since its base start as the "ecologically and socially responsible way of traveling", ecotourism has developed into an economically important product, "traveling with a natural element" (Bernadini, 1992). Thus far, ecotourism has created possibilities for development in inadequately developed tourism regions, as well as for the maintenance and funding of protected areas. In ecotourism we differentiate tourists according to two important segments: small groups with special interests in ecotourism who spend their whole vacation this way; and the large number of tourists who spend their vacation, for example, on the beach, but also take part in "short nature excursions" (Bernadini, 1992).

Middleton (2001) states that ecologically produced food is yet another component of tourism and ecology which has become an important factor in defining the tourism product and its differentiation in the market. Opportunities for the production of ecologically-grown food and its sale in catering facilities which offer their services to tourists must be further developed and used in light of the fact that the importance of this segment of the tourist supply is increasing.

When it comes to the social component of this way of travel, it should be noted that companies who offer these products take more care about the well-being of the

consumers. This is because of the combination of ecology and social way of doing business. The social side of these types is also seen by the investments that these companies do for the regions in which alternative forms of tourism are offered.

**Cultural tourism** is becoming more and more a significant part of the supply. In the area of cultural tourism, it is necessary to identify market niches with special cultural interests. It is very often the case that during vacation the guests will visit an event or cultural monument (Bernadini, 1992).

**Adventure tourism** is a small market niche with the potential to grow. Given that today's tourist has access to virtually every corner of the planet, this segment - as stated by the World Tourism Organization (2001) - would now like to explore the altitudes of mountains, the cosmos, the Antarctic, and depths of the seas.

Package tours expressly offer what no other way of travelling can offer and that is the possibility of seeing a great deal in a short period of time. This would explain the large growth rate related to package tours and the prospect of expansion in this segment (Buhalis, 2000).

Owing to the length of the coast and the richness of flora and fauna in the lake, the shore of different lakes and sea sides are the perfect setting for the intensive development of **nautical tourism**, as well as package tours. Fulfilling the needs of this demanding segment has the potential to become an important contribution to the whole of tourist traffic. (Marinoski, 2001).

#### 4. COMPARATIVE STUDY WITH STAKEHOLDERS IN THE EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

Recent studies in Macedonia refer to the ongoing need of establishing mutual cooperation between several municipalities, serving as one of the crucial stakeholders in the development of these forms of tourism. This should be stated in order to start developing different alternative forms of tourism. This will be a great advantage for the economic development of the municipalities, which will bring further development in the field of tourism as well. Experts say that the tourism potentials that Macedonia possess are tremendous and that the alternative forms of tourism need to be in the focus of the policymakers in the field of tourism.

Several other studies show that even the most developed countries in terms of tourism have included the alternative forms of tourism in their offer. That is the case with Spain, Greece, Slovenia and others (Christou, 2012). Spain has developed certain programs in order to ensure the development of these forms of tourism. Some of the programs include: i) Quality in tourist destinations, ii) Quality in tourist products; iii) Quality in tourist services; iv) Quality training; v) Technological innovation and development; vi) Globalization of Spanish tourist industry; vii) International cooperation; viii) Statistical information and economic analysis, viii) Promotion, and, x) Support in marketing (Porras, 2000).

In the case with Greece, the Hellenic Tourism Organization, an institution of Greek National Tourism Organization is responsible in creating and implementing research and providing information to potential investors regarding possibilities for investments in alternative forms of tourism in the country. All this was supported by a national strategic plan, the “National Plan for Regional Development 2000-2006” (Greek National Tourism Organization).

As for the situation in Slovenia, the authorities have developed a strategy to identify and to create directions for further development of these forms of tourism. According to Ministry of Economy, Government of Republic of Slovenia (2001), its main advantages were: i) Variety and attractiveness of natural environment; ii) Undamaged nature; iii) Remarkableness; and iv) Disperse and relative smallness of tourist centers instead of mass tourism, but tourism development according to tourist trends. According to Ministry of Economy, Government of Republic of Slovenia (2001), the weaknesses were: i) Little attractiveness of products and services; ii) Few tourist attractions; iii) Low quality of services; iv) Weak development in infrastructure; and, v) Unsuitable offer in winter tourism.

These studies show that the importance of the alternative forms of tourism is increasing and the predictions are that they will be the foundations of the future tourism development. That means that most of the European countries have identified the main stakeholders for development and also the benefits of the alternative forms of tourism and they are putting great effort in their establishment and development.

This can be of great importance for the case with Macedonia. All stakeholders (i.e. the Agency for promotion and support of the tourism, the Ministry of Economy, DMC companies etc.) which are included in the establishment and development of the alternative forms of tourism should work together and learn from the experience of the more developed countries (in tourism sense) and by that to establish the foundations of a sustainable development of the alternative forms of tourism.

## 5. METHODOLOGY

The research methodology for this paper was based on a developed questionnaire, which was distributed to parties involved in tourism (i.e. tourist agencies, tourist guides). The questions involved simple answers, meaning that several key factors in the field of tourism were researched. Part of the questions was analyzing the tourist operators' specifics, their customers' demographics, profile and behavior regarding tourism and special set of questions were asked regarding the customers' preferences and attitudes towards alternative forms of tourism. The research was conducted during a period of one month, before the main tourist season in Macedonia in 2014. The field research included several cities in Macedonia: Ohrid, Skopje and Bitola. Around 20% of the questionnaires were distributed in Bitola, and 80% were delivered in Ohrid and Skopje successively, getting answer from total 83 agencies from which 54% national/local and 46% foreign tourist operators.

**Table 2.:** The descriptive statistics of the sample

|                    | Bitola         | Ohrid    | Skopje   | Total     |
|--------------------|----------------|----------|----------|-----------|
| (% of total)       |                |          |          |           |
| National           | 9              | 18       | 18       | 45 (54%)  |
| International      | 3              | 15       | 20       | 38 (46%)  |
| Total (% of total) | 12 (14%)       | 33 (40%) | 38 (46%) | 83 (100%) |
| Chi-square test    | p = 0.00166156 |          |          |           |

Source: Research results.

## 6. RESULTS

All DMC companies, travel agencies and tourist guides which have offered alternative forms of tourism have better results than those which don't offer alternative forms of tourism. It is also obvious that the target group for these forms of tourism is between the ages of 35-65. Those are the people who want to experience the destination from a different point of view. Almost all of the interviewed answered that tourists are into experiencing eco-tourism, rural tourism and adventure form of tourism. And, last but not least, the average percentage of profit growth is 25%, which in today's turbulent business environment is an excellent result. Unfortunately, the scientific data regarding this issue is limited in Macedonia and there are no other similar research projects done whatsoever. But, what is more important is that further research in this area will show other benefits for all parties included in the alternative forms of tourism. The most obvious is the economic growth and development, as well as the benefits for development for the local community and its population. Lastly, this will improve the educational situation in the areas which offer these forms of tourism, which eventually will improve the situation in the country in general. It should be also noted that the role of the DMC companies, travel agencies, tourist guides and all other involved on the side of the tourist offer have tremendous role in further development of these types of tourism, by the fact that they promote this types of tourism and that are directly involved into the creation of the final tourist product on a national or a regional level. Also, their role can be seen by the contribution that they have both in the local and the national economy.

## 7. CONCLUSION

In recent years, on the demand side of the market, there has been a growing trend of tourists seeking specific types of tourism. Historical heritage, natural beauty and pleasant climate make up the framework which, together with the development of high quality accommodation, the rich supply of activities and entertainment, and particularly good service, shall enable the destination i.e. Macedonia to

attract the modern-day tourist. The tourism development needs to be based on the preservation of exceptionally diverse natural and cultural wealth; on principles of sustainable development in the planning of a quality tourism offering; on adequate market positioning and promotion, as well as the cooperation of all individuals and professional institutions that directly and indirectly participate in tourism.

There are several important benefits to undertaking a strategic approach to marketing. These advantages include: establishing the overall objectives and strategies, providing a rational basis for decision-making on marketing and laying the foundation for effective implementation of the marketing plan. However managers must be aware of the planning model's pitfalls and limitations. The marketing strategy for both international and domestic tourism must be derived directly from the development strategy and the need to project a focused and positive image. A key principle applied in formulating the marketing strategy is the maintenance of a close relationship to the development strategy, which emphasizes product improvements and diversification

As seen by this initial research, the need and demand of alternative forms of tourism is growing and becoming more and more an important factor in the future development of tourism in overall. Because tourists are more informed than ever before, they want to have the experience of their lifetime by consuming a complex tourist product in which one or several forms of alternative tourism are incorporated. The research also shows that profits grow more if the tourist agencies offer alternative forms of tourism. By this initial research we have shown that alternative forms of tourism must be taken into serious consideration not just by the direct parties involved in tourism, but by the government as well. National strategy for development of these forms of tourism has to be implemented so that these forms of tourism will be sustainable in the future.

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