



T.E.I. Thessaloniki
Greece



Department of Tourism
Management

UDC 338.486(497.5-3Kvarner)
Preliminary communication
Received: 06.10.2006

THE "UMBRELLA" BRAND AND BRANDING PROCESS IN THE KVARNER DESTINATION

Vinka Cetinski
Jože Perić
Dora Smolčić Jurdana
University of Rijeka, Croatia

Abstract: Fierce competition on the world tourism market is making it necessary for tourist destinations to position themselves appropriately and to differentiate themselves from the competition. This paper looks at the importance of space as a key marker of a tourist destination, and focuses on the meaning of a brand in enhancing attractiveness on the tourism market and strengthening competitive ability. The paper is based on the example of the Kvarner destination, that is, the Primorsko-Goranska County.

Key words: umbrella brand, tourist destination

Sažetak: KONCEPT «UMBRELLA BRAND» I UPRAVLJANJE PROCESOM BRANDING NA PRIMJERU KVARNERA. Snažna konkurencija na svjetskom turističkom tržištu postavlja pred turističke destinacije potrebu da se adekvatno pozicioniraju i diferenciraju od konkurencije. U radu se obrazlaže značaj prostora kao važnog markera turističke destinacije, te posebno značaj branda za postizanje atraktivnosti na turističkom tržištu i jačanje konkurentost. Rad se bazira na primjeru Kvarnera, odnosno Primorsko-goranske županije.

Ključne riječi: umbrella brand, turistička destinacija, Kvarner

¹ Vinka Cetinski, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Jože Perić, Ph.D., Full Professor, Dora Smolčić Jurdana, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, University of Rijeka, Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management in Opatija, Croatia.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is comprised of an introduction, two themed sections, and a conclusion. It highlights the importance of space in differentiating a destination on the tourism market and, using the Kvarner region as an example, it seeks to explain the significance of the "umbrella" brand in making a tourist destination successful.

2. FEATURES OF SPACE AS A KEY MARKER OF TOURISTS DESTINATIONS

Unless supported by an appropriate development concept and defined strategic orientations (objectives – methodology – means/ways) in its continuous race against unrelenting competitors on the tourism market, a tourist destination is likely to lose its authentic and distinctive attributes, the very features that should evolve into the most appealing of its pull factors. The conservation of a destination's cultural identity and its spatial features represents a key element of its distinction and a starting point in gaining competitive ability in the irrepressible process of globalisation.

Recently (2005), the term "geotourism" has emerged in texts appearing in the widely read and influential publications of National Geographic and TIA, On-line Tourism and Marketing. It is defined as "tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a visited destination – its environment, culture, heritage and the well-being of its residents". (www. online, 2005)

Geotourism underlines the need to conserve a destination's geographical and spatial attributes, and it takes into account the combined characteristics of natural resources and the local population that, together, set a destination apart from the rest and make it special and unique. Authentic settings, traditions, customs, local cuisine, and cultural and historical heritage – these are the elements of a destination's tourism offering that are of the utmost importance for tourism demand markets. At its core, geotourism represents a means for strengthening and creating added value based on the natural and cultural elements that make a destination special and different.

3. SOME ELEMENTS OF DESTINATION BRANDING IN THE KVARNER REGION

Brands are omnipresent in open market systems. In a marketplace of fierce marketing and a plethora of information, brands appear as a kind of "salvation", helping to distinguish products and services, as well as make individual countries and regions distinctive.

Branding is a marketing and managerial process that gives a certain product or service a unique identity and image, making it distinctive and differentiating it from the competition.

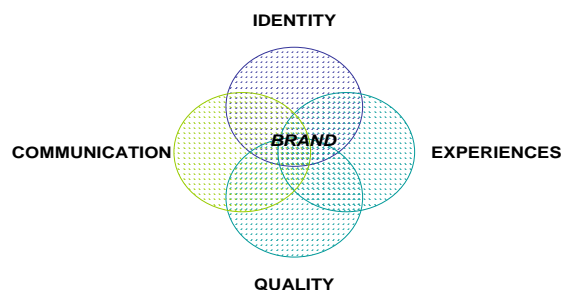
"Branding is one of the decisions involved in developing a tourism marketing strategy. It is an important part of a product planning. The branding process in tourism

involves researching, developing and implementing an organization's brand decisions as well as maintaining brand equity." (Witt, S.F., Moutinho, L, 1994)

Tourist destination branding is a process through which a destination actively seeks to create a unique and competitive identity to position itself, as best as possible on the home and foreign market, as a desirable tourist destination and an area of promising economic development. Creating a brand is a complex and time-consuming process requiring considerable capital and innovativeness and bringing together the many factors that impact on developing and enhancing the distinctive image of a destination.

"A destination brand is a name, symbol, logo, word, mark or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates the destination; furthermore, it conveys the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; it also serves to consolidate and reinforce the recollection of pleasurable memories of the destination experience. The first part of the foregoing definition addresses the traditional identification and differentiation functions of a brand. The second part, in contrast to traditional product branding, emphasizes that it is especially important that a destination brand conveys, either explicitly or implicitly, the promise of the essence of leisure travel – a memorable experience – and one that, if at all possible, is uniquely available at the destination in question." (Goeldner, C.R., Ritchie, J.R.B., McIntosh, R.W., 2000)

Figure 1: Factors impacting on the power of a destination brand



Source: Mc Ericson, 2006.

The above factors can be identified as being: (Mc Ericson, 2006)

Identity:

- Strong and visible
- Distinctive
- Triggers clear, positive associations
- Easy to remember

Experience:

- Powerful
- Exceptional
- Emotional
- Motivating
- Fulfilling
- Different

Quality:

- Commensurate with the characteristics of target groups across all levels

Communication:

- PR and advertising strategy
- Well-designed promotional materials
- Strong on-line promotion
- Sponsored articles, news reports, constant media coverage
- Other verbal and visual ways of communicating with target groups.

The above clearly illustrates what is required in developing a strong destination brand.

With regard to the complexity of the branding process, as well as the complexity of measuring brand performance, Ritchie points out the key items for analysis.

Figure 2: Measures of Destination Brand Performance

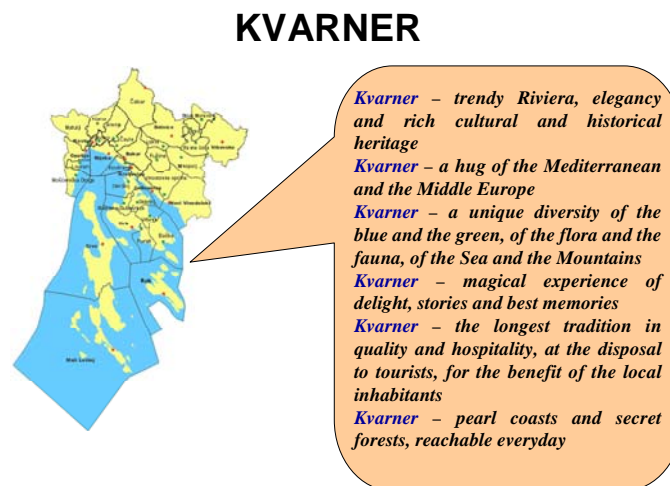
Roles	Measure
<p>Selection <i>Sub-Components</i> Identification Differentiation Anticipation Expectation Reassurance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The extent to which the destination is chosen over others • Degree of recognition/association • Lack of confusion with other destinations • Lack of confusion with other products/services • The extent to which brand generates a desire to visit a destination • The intensity of the desire to visit that the brand generates • The nature and importance of the specific benefits the visitor expects to realize for the destination experience • The extent to which the brand provides a "cloud of comfort" for the visitor – a feeling that all is, or will go well during the destination visit
<p>Recollection <i>Sub-Components</i> Consolidation Reinforcement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ease, frequency, and strength of recall of the destination experience • The extent to which the brand helps create memories of the destination and the visitor's experiences • The intensity of warmth of memories elicited • The degree of comfort provided that the future/current choice was/is a sound one • The ability of the brand to serve as a catalyst to tie together the many "bits" of memory of the destination experience • The ability of the brand to "cement" the consolidated memory of the destination experience

Source: Goeldner, C.R., Ritchie, J.R.B., McIntosh, R.W., 2000, p. 655.

The following section deals with the principal elements of the identity of the Kvarner destination, and describes the "umbrella" brand concept on the Kvarner example.

In accordance with the Master Plan of Tourism Development of the Primorsko-Goranska County, the Kvarner region seeks to build its identity on the tourist market as a fashionable, elegant Riviera, rich in cultural and historical heritage. The Kvarner region represents a unique diversity of blue and green, flora and fauna, sea and mountains. It offers the charms of new experiences, romantic tales and fondest memories. Accounting for about 22 per cent of Croatia's tourist traffic, this destination has a long tradition in quality and hospitality.

Figure 3: Vision of the Kvarner destination



Source: Master Plan of Tourism Development in the Primorsko-Goranska County, University of Rijeka, 2006

Based on the above, a list can be made of the elements of Kvarner's identity that form the precondition for building a brand recognised by the market (umbrella brand).

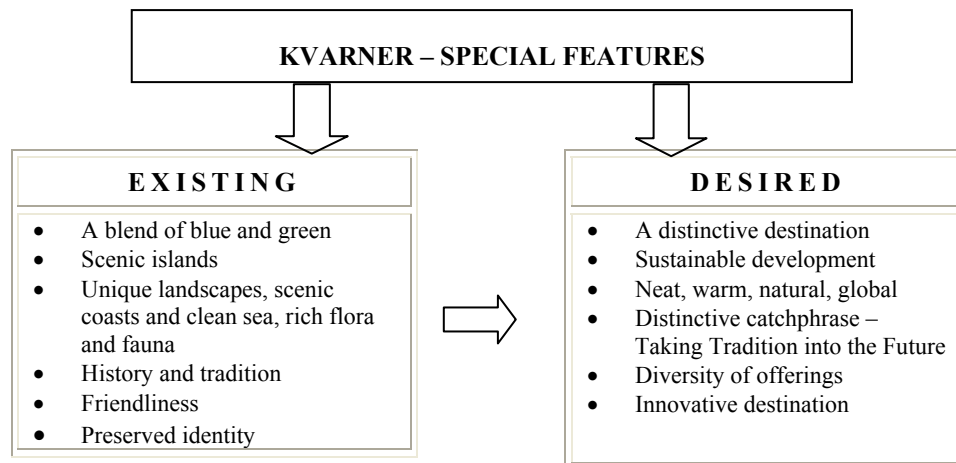
The Kvarner destination is marked by a singular blend of blue and green, forests and islands, unique landscapes, and a wealth of flora and fauna. Tourism demand surveys confirm that tourists foremost identify the Kvarner destination through its unique and bountiful natural resources and landscapes. Viewed globally, it has managed to preserve its local identity throughout its long history and tradition. The destination's longstanding tourism tradition, together with its openness, is what makes it appealing to tourists who experience it as friendly and intimate.

In positioning the Kvarner destination in the future, advantage should be taken of the fact that its has been building its distinctive image on both domestic and foreign

tourist markets for years. Despite many efforts, the destination's position today is still largely characterised by the offering of its traditional product – leisure, sun and sea. This is also the cause of the destination's highly seasonal character, which in economic terms (business operations, municipal infrastructure, etc.) gives rise to substantial problems. The destination's rich cultural and historical heritage and its unique natural resources drive the need of introducing new facilities and services to the tourism offering and valorising this legacy in market terms (while providing it with adequate protection from devastation and pollution).

It follows from the above that the Kvarner destination does not have a sufficiently distinctive image and identity (although this is improving), nor is it sufficiently differentiated from competing destinations; in terms of development and competition, its market position is indeterminate and poorly defined.

Figure 4: Special features of the Kvarner – existing and desired



Source: Master Plan of Tourism Development in the Primorsko-Goranska County, University of Rijeka, 2006

The existing features of the Kvarner destination should be built upon in a manner that will allow future tourist development to be forged within the concept of sustainable development and continuously provide the destination will an innovative and diverse tourism offering. The destination should continue building its image of a warm and natural destination, well kept and intimate, but also global and open to the world. This makes the catchphrase "Taking Tradition into the Future" all the more appropriate as a basis on which the destination can differentiate itself and build its image.

The Kvarner's primary elements of differentiation and the conditions on which it can build an umbrella brand are:

- Its fashionable setting and its tradition
- Its preserved and genuine identity
- Its natural diversity (sea, mountains, islands)
- Its rich cultural and historical heritage

- Its people and customs
- Adventure, passion, tranquillity, pleasant life, sport
- Events
- Gastronomy and enology.

Managing the branding process in the Kvarner destination

According to the approach taken by Mc Ericsson in Zagreb in 2006, the destination branding process needs to be managed at two levels: (Mc Ericson, 2006)

A) At a global level through a BRAND COUNCIL.

A Brand Council represents a coordinating body consisting of representatives of the County, the project team and the DBMC.

It sets out the strategic guidelines and decisions regarding the major lines along which the project will develop and the sources of funding.

B) At an operative or tactical level through a Destination Brand Management Company (DBMC).

On the one hand, a DBMC represents an effective communication centre, and on the other, a proactive, receptive company specialised in structuring, managing and seeking a profiled portfolio of selective local products.

This project positioning makes it necessary to introduce a new form and structure of company initial capital in the form of a Public Private Initiative (PPI), that is, a model of PPI with a majority participation of private relative to public initiative.

Namely, public capital guarantees continuous and systematic monitoring and the appropriate participation of the County in all projects, while controlling private interests provide the required dose of operationality, elasticity in implementation and, business and market efficiency.

In reality, this translates into the ability of a system structured on joint capital to adjust with greater ease to market trends, react with greater speed to change, position itself with greater transparency relative to the competition, and finally, to continuously and systematically increase the overall satisfaction of both its founders and its end users.

From the Master Plan of Tourism Development of the Primorsko-Goranska County, the Brand Council selects a module of sales proposals with driver projects.

The driver projects chosen represent perception change masters, the task of which it is to bring about a chained and effective change to the way the destination is perceived at the county, national and international level.

In reality, this means making a careful selection, in the initial stage, of four to five pilot entrepreneurial projects assessed as being capable of profoundly changing how the destination is perceived, and which will:

- ⇒ Generate and encompass, that is, evolve within, select spatial areas of the County.
For example, one project in Gorski Kotar, one in the islands, one in Rijeka, Opatija, etc.
This is important in order to demonstrate how an entrepreneurial project can bring appropriate and concrete communication and market benefits to a destination.
- ⇒ Use their successful outcomes as concrete and demonstrated proof in making all other economic entities sensitive to the need of joining the DBMC as a kind of propulsive market and communication pool of the County.

Ideally, to efficiently launch the activation mechanism, the following activities would be required:

- In the first phase, secure initial earmarked funds at the county level for realising the pilot projects.
- In the second phase, make the individual entities (public and private sector) of the tourist destination a part of the DBMC pool, and include select, interested sponsors for each project.
- In the third phase, the DBMC's operative market approach will enable it to cover about 50 per cent of funding needed.

4. CONCLUSION

Today, we are witnesses to the growing number of emerging tourist destinations with diverse offerings, striving to carve out a share of the tourism market. To improve the market position of a tourist destination, efforts must be made to develop the destination's brand. The Kvarner destination, accounting for about 22 per cent of Croatia's tourist traffic, is in the process of developing a brand to provide the strong support it needs in competing on the discerning tourism market.

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