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# THE POSSIBILITY OF USING ONLINE TOOLS TO INCREASE THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF A NAUTICAL TOURISM PRODUCT

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## **Abstract**

*The article focuses on yacht cruises treated as complex tourist products. For the purposes of the article, it was assumed that the measure of attractiveness of such products is the satisfaction of the tourist after the end of the consumption process. It is influenced by the ability to choose from among a wide range of individual products that are best suited to the needs of a given tourist. The main purpose of the article was to indicate the possibility of using online tools that facilitate the access to information on individual tourist products and support the subsequent stages of consumption of the tourist product. The article presents a typical process of consumption of a nautical tourism product, research on the activity of sailors and their purchase preferences regarding goods and services purchased in the visited ports. It also presents the possibilities of making nautical tourism products more attractive by Internet tools, for example by facilitating the finding of up-to-date information, its consolidation or increasing the safety of navigation. At the end, recommendations regarding the widespread use of online tools by entities offering goods and services purchased by sailors are presented. The article uses such research methods as: critical literature analysis, participant observation and questionnaire surveys.*

**Keywords:** *nautical tourism, tourist product management, attractiveness of a tourist product, IT tools in tourism*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Nautical tourism is a form of active tourism that involves traveling and yachting in water areas [Łapko, 2015, p.14]. According to T. Luković it may be also defined as: *navigation and stay of tourists on sailboats, as well as stay in nautical ports (...)* [Luković, Łapko, Vuković, 2019, p. 41]. Active tourism is a form of tourism in which the main element of the travel - regardless of the duration of the tourist activity - is a particular form of recreational and hobby activity [Merski, 2009, p. 21]. According to K. R. Mazurski, it consists in traveling for recreational purposes with the use of own physical activity in covering a distance [Mazurski, 2006, p.31]. It is created specifically for a given participant and is sometimes co-created by him. Moreover, it requires not only physical activity, but also intellectual and natural one [Mazurski, 2006, p. 21]. This tourism is usually associated with traveling between yacht ports, visiting port towns, meeting new people and making intensive contact with the natural environment. In addition, the nautical tourism entails the need to service the vessel, which requires both physical and intellectual effort. Of course it can be undertaken with differing participants skill levels [Jennings, 2007, p.23]. Cruises are usually organized independently

by tourists, or by specialized travel agencies, but considering the individual needs and desires of the clients.

Recognizing the essence of the trip in this way, it can be regarded as a complex tourist product, which is a composition of ingredients satisfying various complementary needs and desires of tourists. Therefore, these ingredients will be individual tourist products.

According to the definition of the need, it is a state of perceived lack that constitutes an inseparable part of the human condition and structure. Desires, on the other hand, are forms that embrace human needs shaped by culture and individual personality [Armstrong, Kotler, 2016, pp. 37-38].

S. Smith distinguishes five groups of elements included in the tourist product. In his opinion these are: natural values, services, hospitality (understood as the ratio of the population of the reception area to tourists), freedom of choice resulting from the diversity of the offer, and the involvement of tourists due to the nature of travel. The article focuses mainly on issues related to three aspects: services, freedom of choice and involvement of tourists, which can be supported by modern technologies and significantly increase the attractiveness of a nautical tourism product [Smith, 1994, pp. 587-595].

The article uses such research methods as: literature analysis and participant observation. The results of surveys, which were carried out in 2017 in Baltic sea ports located in Germany, Poland, Denmark, Russia and Lithuania, were also used. The research was carried out by the South Coast Baltic project team. The author of this article is a member of that project and took an active part in the process of developing methodology, conducting research and developing results therein.

The main research question was to find how the online tools can facilitate the access to information on individual tourist products and support the subsequent stages of consumption of the tourist product.

The subject related to the product of nautical tourism is very rarely mentioned in the literature, therefore it can be concluded that the article organizes the available knowledge and also fills in the existing theoretical gap. The article presents recommendations regarding the possible applications of modern technologies that may positively affect the attractiveness of the product offered by nautical tourism.

## **2. THE CONSUMPTION PROCESS OF NAUTICAL TOURISM PRODUCTS**

If a cruise under the nautical tourism is treated as a product, it should be noted that despite being one of many consumer products, it has a special meaning for the buyer. This is due to the fact that it is not a regular product but an eligible one. It is purchased relatively rarely (the time in which you can afford to go for a cruise can be limited by many factors, such as the availability of free time or adequate financial resources), and its purchase is associated with a large commitment from the buyer. This commitment results from the specificity of experiencing a tourist product, which is usually divided into three phases [Kaczmarek, Stasiak, 2010, p. 78]:

1. The preparation phase, covering various activities from the moment of realizing the need of rest to start the journey (searching for an offer, analysis of alternatives, booking, for example, access means of transport, yacht charter or places in the marina, purchase of selected products needed during the voyage, route planning, completing equipment, etc.).
2. The consumption phase, which lasts from the moment the tourist leaves the house to return. This phase is related to the actual consumption of purchased goods and services, as well as any non-commercial events that occur during the trip. In this phase, the quality of the promised and expected quality is also compared.

- The memory phase, which is called the "echo of the product". It begins after the end of consumption, and its duration depends on the personality of the tourist and on the intensity of experience experienced during the consumption phase, in special cases it may last even several dozen years. The stimulus to memories are, for example, souvenirs brought from the trip.

The process of traditional consumption of a nautical tourism product including particular phases is shown in Figure 1.

It presents the individual stages of travel, typical activities performed during a given stage by the tourist and the corresponding phase of experiencing the tourist product.

It should be noted that not all of the mentioned activities must always appear during the trip, because, as it was mentioned above, they depend to a large extent on the needs of tourists, and here there are absolutely no restrictions.

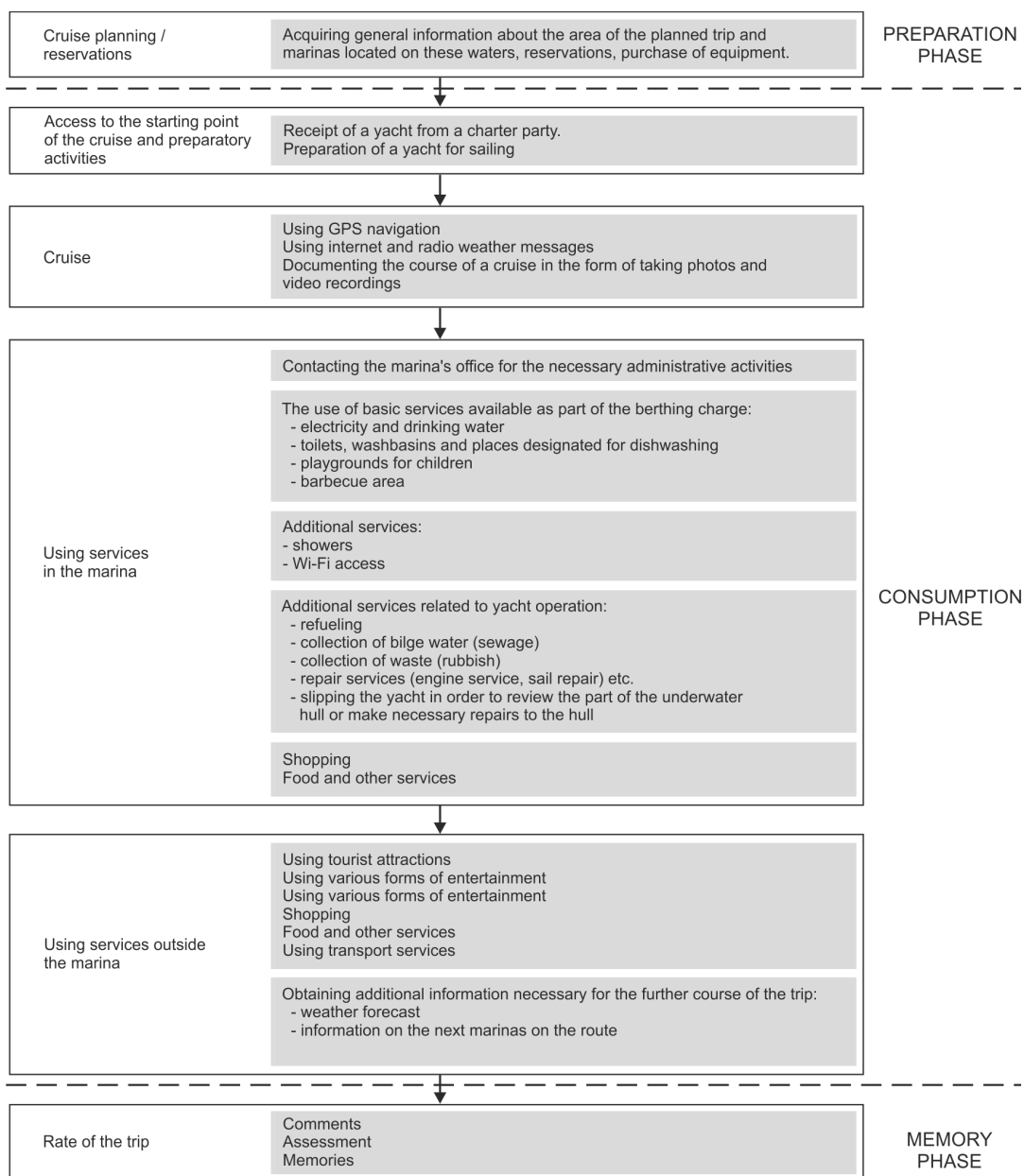


Figure 1 Process of traditional consumption of a nautical tourism product

The research carried out in July 2017 in 70 yacht ports located in Germany, Poland, Denmark, Russia and Lithuania (with 1188 sailors participating in the research) was very diverse in this respect. The research was a part of the *South Coast Baltic* project (Establishing durable cross-border boating destination management on the basis of the MARRIAGE cooperation network) which is financed under Interreg South Baltic Programme 2014-2020.

The questionnaire method and standardized interview technique were used, using random selection of the sample (persons on board of their vessels were asked to take part in the survey while research was conducted at the port). Tourists were asked to answer the question of what they were doing or going to do in a given port, and they could give any number of answers. Obviously, the activities mentioned included those that did not involve the consumption of services or the purchase of material products. They resulted from the desire to satisfy the needs of these tourists and motivated them to visit a given port. These are: the desire to rest, swim in the sea and the desire to visit friends. The services mentioned, or products the willingness to buy / consume was declared by tourists, included those that could be bought / consumed in the port area, outside it (in the port town), or anywhere (Table 1).

Table 1 Answers to the question: What have you done/intend to do during the stay in the current harbour/marina?

Activity/service	Percentage of answers (%)	Place of purchase of a service or other product	
		Port	Town
Use the available facilities	75,48	X	X
Buy foods and other things that are needed	66,67	X	X
Going to restaurants & / or cafés	65,24	X	X
Go swimming in the sea	53,81		X
Take a rest before continuing the voyage	50,95	X	X
Go shopping / visiting the town	41,19		X
Visit cultural attractions (museum, exhibitions)	40,95		X
Visit nature attractions	40,00		X
Make a bike trip in the surrounding	33,81		X
Spend time in the company of other sailors	30,00	X	X
Make barbecue	21,19	X	
Participate in an event taking place nearby	19,52	X	X
Make required repairs of the yacht / equipment	16,67	X	
Practice sailing skills	14,76	X	
Go for sports - hiking	10,48		X
Visit friends living nearby	9,76		X
Go for sports - diving	1,90		X
Go for sports - surfing / kiting	1,19		X
Go for spa, wellness or beauty offers	0,95	X	X
Go for sports - golfing	0,71		X

Source: Own study based on research carried out as part of the South Coast Baltic project. Survey results worked out by M. Forkiewicz from Gdańsk University of Technology (Poland)

As can be seen from the data presented in Table 1, sailors purchase different products and use various services during their cruise. Only some of them are available in the port area. The products and services available in the port town and its immediate vicinity are also very important. They are all individual tourist products included in the final product. Its final attractiveness is measured by the satisfaction of a given cruise. It is the greater, the more it coincides with consumer expectations, and this convergence is conditioned by its complexity, which results from a wide

range of individual tourist products. The wide offer allows the sailors to compose the final product - a cruise / travel according to individual needs and preferences [Panasiuk, 2010, p. 65].

However, the condition of consumption of these products is to provide tourists with information about their availability. Appropriate availability of up-to-date information facilitates selection of a place, time, date and, possibly, tourist events, that sailors want to participate in during the cruise, as well as getting interesting information about tourist reception areas. The information should be easily accessible and, like the offer itself, should be comprehensive. This requires cooperation between various entities offering individual tourist products (located in and outside the port) and IT tools that ensure efficient information flow and their consolidation.

### **3. USE OF INTERNET TOOLS AS FULFILLMENT OF TRADITIONAL TOURISM PRODUCTS IN NAUTICAL TOURISM**

Demographic factors are crucial for planning marketing activities [Weaver, Lawton 2010, p. 63]. As a result of the natural succession of generations among sailors, the number of people born in the late 1980s and in the 1990s is growing. In the scientific literature this generation is sometimes called: Generation Y, Millennials or Generation Tech [Kolnhofer-Derecskei, Reicher, 2017, p. 107]. The character of this generation shows that they are, among others, ambitious, curious, innovative, and impatient. They want to be motivated and get pleasure out of life. They prefer to communicate more quickly and effectively via email, social networks or text messaging as opposed to traditional means of communication. The Internet appeared when they were small, so it is a natural tool for them [Gures, Inan, Arslan, 2017, p. 2015]. There are also more and more representatives of the Z generation, i.e. people born in the first decade of the 21st century, which is also called the Nation of Facebook and its members are defined as digital natives [Akçayır, Dündar, & Akçayır, 2016, p. 435, Benenett, Maton, & Kervin, 2008, p. 775]. This generation does not know the world without the Internet. The Internet means their friends, all the information they get and sharing their knowledge and opinions about various products (including tourist ones) on social networks [Csobanka, 2016, p. 66]. This trend cannot be ignored. For young sailors digital technologies and instant access to information is something natural, which is why they show great openness to the possibility of using new applications dedicated to sailors [Raport 2016, p. 79]. In the ranking of portals and websites most visited by sailors, Facebook is ranked first. [Raport 2016, p. 111]. This is due to the fact that, when planning a trip and charter, the surveyed sailors most often look for recommendations of friends [Raport 2016, p. 64]. Entities responsible for the creation of nautical tourism products (both yacht ports and other entities located outside them) must use modern technologies to communicate with these tourists. Traditional, printed travel guides, press advertisements, and even radio and television broadcasts will not go to representatives of the Y and Z generations. People are looking for information on the Internet and there they should find it. In addition, the internationalization of the nautical tourism market should be taken into account, which requires the preparation of messages in many languages.

As research conducted among Polish marinas located on the Baltic Sea Coast has shown, most of the ports do not even have their own website (only 3 ports out of 18), and for those existing independent or shared with other facilities there is a lack of basic information such as services available in the port, prices, tourist attractions in the area, etc., that is, information that people planning their trips are looking for. The vast majority of websites are available only in Polish, which excludes their use by foreigners [Hącia, Łapko, 2018, p. 78]. The situation of marinas located in the Mediterranean region is slightly better. Out of the 234 ports (belonging to 10 different countries), only 20 do not have their own websites, but only on 129 websites there is information in English (out of a total of 160 ports). The quality and availability of information contained there, however, is not always sufficient [Benevolo, Spinelli, 2019, p.].

The presented results reflect, that we live in a time when it is difficult to consider the website as a modern communication tool, for many it is rather a basic and obvious tool. People using the Internet to

plan their trips (including cruises) want to get the information they need as quickly as possible. That is why they often look for places where information is consolidated, so not so much as standalone websites but platforms. Online platforms are complex IT systems that enable the sale of goods or services, as well as the exchange of knowledge and information between different types of users (enterprises, private individuals) [Martens, 2016, p.3]. Transaction and booking platforms such as Trivago and Booking.com are best known in tourism. They allow tourists to find and book accommodation, read the opinions of other users and give their own one, get acquainted with the tourist offer of the place, order transfer from the airport, etc. However, if it concerns multifunctional platforms dedicated to nautical tourism, unfortunately there are very few of them. Those available have a very limited offer, e.g. they focus only on the charter possibilities, or only on the possibility of booking parking spaces in yacht ports. Therefore, it forces the tourist planning a cruise to make further searches, and thus may negatively affect the experience of the preparation phase.

The availability of solutions based on modern technologies used in the consumption phase is much better. There is a wide range of solutions to facilitate navigation - from smartphone applications with constantly updated weather information, interactive maps, to advanced systems of automatic transmission of weather information and warnings requiring the assembly of appropriate receiving devices on the unit. The choice of a given solution depends only properly on the needs, preferences and financial resources of a given tourist. These solutions certainly contribute to the safety of people sailing. With positive impact on the safety and comfort of tourists, they contribute to a better consumption phase of the tourist product.

The memory phase is also supported by modern technologies, which is largely due to the widespread use of smartphones. The devices used for digital image and sound recording, such as cameras and cameras, enable easy documentation of experiences. Videos and photos are souvenirs that help refresh the memories many years after the cruise.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analyzes carried out in the article, the following conclusions can be made:

1. The needs and desires are very diverse, and in order to satisfy them, tourists take advantage of the goods and services available both within the marina itself and in the port town and its surroundings
2. Sailing cruises are specific, complex tourist products that are a composition of various goods and services (individual tourist products). Due to the fact that nautical tourism is a form of active tourism, the sailors / tourists play a major role in creating these products.
3. All single tourist products included in the final product, which is a sailing cruise, serve to satisfy the needs and desires of tourists.
4. The needs and desires are very diverse, and in order to satisfy them, tourists benefit from the goods and services available both within the yacht port itself and in the port town and its surroundings.
5. The condition to use the goods and services available is to have up-to-date and comprehensive information about them. Consolidation of information in one place, e.g. on a website or platform requires cooperation of various entities/offer providers and appropriate IT tools.
6. Modern technologies support each of the three phases of experiencing a tourist product and thus increase its attractiveness. They provide information necessary for planning a cruise route, allow to make the necessary reservations and provide knowledge about the reception areas. In the consumption phase, they increase the safety of cruise participants, e.g. through access to up-to-date weather and nautical information. They enrich the phase of memories by providing the possibility of documenting individual stages of the voyage.

7. Although modern technologies play an important role as a support for tourist products, this role will grow. This is the result of the growing share of consumers belonging to Y and Z generation on the tourist market. These technologies are natural tools for acquiring and collecting information for them.

Following the above conclusions, it should be stated that if the entities involved in nautical tourism are interested in directing their offer to younger people, they must intensify the use of IT tools for marketing communication. As research carried out in Poland and the Mediterranean basin has shown, many ports do not even have their own website, or there is incomplete information on this page. A major negligence is the lack of access to the English language version, which practically excludes reaching foreign tourists. Of course, such research should be deepened, but it can certainly be said that the tool which is a website should be considered as the absolute minimum. A good solution would be the presence on online platforms devoted to sailing tourism. The platforms should contain not only an exhaustive description of the ports themselves, but also provide access to information about the port town, the offer of goods and services, the possibility of booking some services (e.g. yacht charter, reservation of a parking space, purchase of transfer, accommodation booking, etc.), tourist information, nautical, meteorological, etc. Consolidation of all information in one place allows to simplify the search process and significantly accelerates it.

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