

# Planning the revitalisation of Franciscan Monastery on the island of Badija, Croatia

## Introduction

The small island of Badija (0,97 km<sup>2</sup>) is situated in the close proximity to the island of Korčula, a popular tourism destination in South Dalmatia. The first and only inhabitants on the island were Franciscan monks who have settled there at the end of 14th century and built an impressive monastery. The entire island is now protected as the national cultural heritage.

The Franciscans were living on Badija till 1960s, when the island was nationalized and turned into the sport center for the youth. At that time, numerous sports and recreation grounds (tennis, basketball, handball, volleyball, etc.) and recreational trails around the island were built. The business model of the island changed again in 1986, when the monastery was turned in a hotel. As a result of using the island for various non-religious purposes, substantial deterioration of the monastery buildings took place. The church and chapel were used as storage, while the cloister, altars, statues and other valuable sacral heritage suffered serious damage or physical destruction. Additionally, during the whole non-Franciscan ownership, residents and visitors of Korčula were using the Badija beaches in the summer season. Hence, transport of daily visitors to the island has become an important source of income for local population. As a result of such practice, vital facilities for the daily visitors (dock, beach, restaurant) are nowadays in the close proximity to the monastery.

In 2003, Badija was returned to the Franciscans. Since Franciscans decided to use the island in order to promote spirituality and Christian beliefs, as well as for charity and humanitarian purposes, they have handed over the management rights to one of the Franciscans' charity organisation - "International Godparenthood to

Herceg Bosnian Children". This organization undertook the obligation to restore the original atmosphere of the island. In order to facilitate longer stays of devoted Christian followers who would, surrounded by preserved natural environment, spend their time in meditation and/or spiritual enlightenment, the monastery required thorough renovation. However, the funds needed for the renovation exceeded financial capabilities of the Franciscans. The question was, therefore, how to program the future use of the monastery, and the island as a whole, in a manner that will enable generation of continuous and relatively plentiful sources of autonomous revenues that would provide necessary financial means for the renovation process as well as for the day to day operational costs of the monastery.

In order to fulfill the expectations of the Franciscans, experts from the Institute of Tourism have proposed the best use concept for the island with special attention paid to the most appropriate use of the monastery and the entire island area. Also, the assessment of market and financial potential of the proposed concept was carried out.

The whole project has been approached in several stages. Upon the initial appraisal of all relevant geomorphologic, landscape, climate and/or infrastructural determinants of the island, as well as the analysis of market trends in religious tourism, it was possible to point out the opportunities and identify possible development bottlenecks that should be taken into account when designing the best use concept for the island. In the second stage, several functional zones were identified. For each of these, the structure, size and interrelationship between all proposed facilities and services were specified. Finally, the appropriate business model was defined.

## Market and competition

Generally speaking, the market analysis has indicated several key success factors relevant to the revitalization of spiritual life on Badija. In terms of the demand, a fast growing special interests market is of particular interest, especially its increasingly important sub segment - religious tourism. Namely, different forms of religion-related trips are globally considered an extremely dynamic industry whose market potential is estimated at about U.S. \$ 18 billion or about 300 million tourists annually. According to the research conducted in the U.S. by the Travel Industry Association of America, one in four tourists is interested in various forms of "spiritual" vacations, and this type of holiday attracts all age groups.

In terms of the potential demand for Badija, under a provision of well designed and targeted promotional activities focused on a smaller number of geographic markets, very conservative initial estimates suggested that the island could attract annually around 100 thousand tourists motivated by religious reasons.

Potential competition for Badija project should be sought primarily among the localities that meet the following criteria: a) the possibility for spiritual growth and development in the broadest context, b) the atmosphere of peace, serenity and contemplation in a natural, well-preserved, relatively isolated environment, c) accommodation in (centennial) monastic-type establishments and / or similar facilities, or d) programs and activities targeting the needs of different, mostly religion motivated, visitors.

The benchmark analysis indicated that, in Croatia, the current range of facilities dedicated to the mental and physical recovery and spiritual growth is in the early stage of development and offers relatively modest scope of services. In this context, the development concept of Badija as a place of spiritual renewal, peace and contemplation, represents a major break through and has no real competition in Croatia.

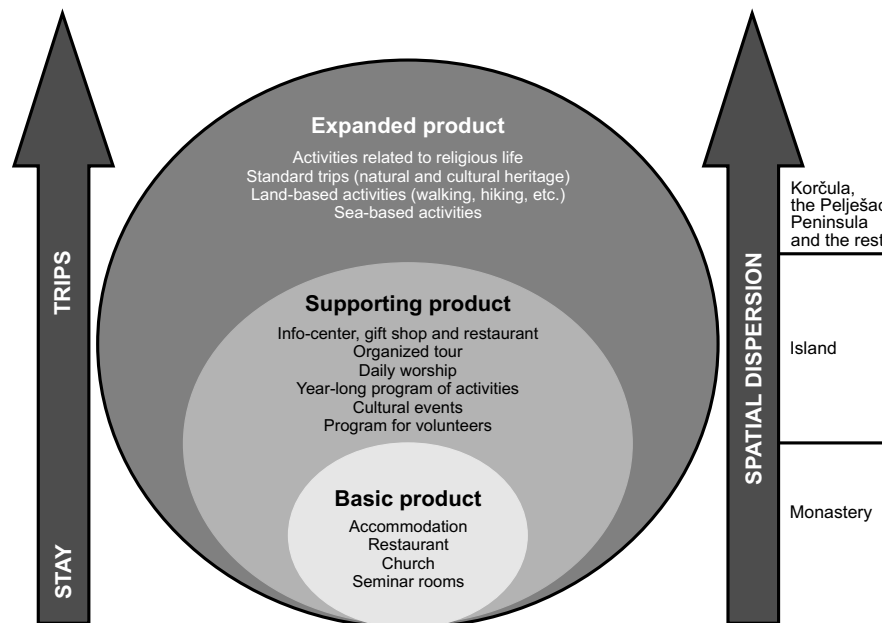
## Experience, products and target groups

The new experience system of Badija should be mostly based on:

- Accommodation in the monumental monastery where visitors will receive (enjoy) traditional Franciscan hospitality and the atmosphere filled with peace, tranquility and spirituality;
- Atmosphere of (voluntary) isolation during visitors' stay on the island, meditation in pristine and preserved environment, accompanied with soothing contemplative walks, isolated from the hustle and bustle of everyday life;
- Cultural, historical and artistic features of the monastery, especially for those who are more motivated by culture, rather than by faith;
- An exceptional natural setting (coast and inland), with numerous possibilities for various recreational activities on land (walking in nature, hiking, biking) and the sea;
- Vicinity of the town of Korčula as a very popular tourist destination with a good system of tourism attractions and supporting services; the rich sacral heritage of the entire island of Korčula and the nearby Pelješac peninsula, other monasteries, as well as a numerous religious events;
- Various cultural events that enrich the visitor experience, especially during the summer months, and
- Opportunities for (organized) trips to very attractive and popular regional destinations - Ston, Neretva river valley, Dubrovnik, Mljet and Lastovo as well as Medjugorje, Mostar and Hutovo Blato in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Therefore, starting from the existing attractions and resource base, and taking into account the potential tourist experiences of the entire catchment area, it was proposed that Badija should offer a fully integrated visitor experience that would consist of: a) basic product, b) supporting product, and c) enhanced products (Figure 1)

**Figure 1 Integrated Product of Badija**



Based on the segmentation of demand according to the motivation and needs of potential visitors, several market segments were identified: a) deeply religious people who, staying at the monastery, want to deepen their faith and experience monastic life, b) (religious) people retreating to peace and seclusion seeking spiritual healing and physical recovery, c) persons who, by staying in a monastery environment that soothes and relaxes them, look to improve their social skills, through various pastoral programs with the like-minded, d) people looking for spiritual renewal through a combination of prayer and physical activity e) persons who want to feel socially useful and are willing to help with the maintenance of the monastery and its surroundings, f) persons who, by residing at the monastery, want to acquire authentic and unknown experiences, and g) persons who are more secular-minded but with greater interest for learning about religion, sacral art and architecture than for deeper religious experience.

Regarding the organization of travel and the length of stay, the market segments to attract are organized and or individual visitors who stay 7 or more days, visitors who come over the (extended) weekend, as well as day-visitors who either participate in a

wide-scale religious gatherings, or take a standard tour around the monastery. Apart from the day visitors on a standard tour of the monastery, all other visitors should, in a variety of ways, be involved in the daily monastic life and programs of spiritual renewal.

### The best use concept

In order to cater to the needs of religious tourists as the main market niche for Badija, and to create conditions for their satisfactory cohabitation with the daily "sun-and-sea" visitors from Korčula, the entire available space of the island should be divided into three separate and substantially different functional zones: a) zone of "spiritual renewal", b) green zone of peace and contemplation, and c) secluded public swimming area for daily visitors.

The spiritual renewal zone includes the monastery and the area in its immediate surroundings, where all the existing buildings, including the facilities initially designed for sport and recreation, are located. This zone represents the core of the future market positioning of Badija, and is intended only for spiritual programs and activities offered by the Franciscans.

The green zone of peace and contemplation covers almost all the remaining area of the island. Given the fact cultivated landscape and vegetation are a very important factor in religious and/or holistic spiritual renewals, this zone should be dedicated for the exclusive use of the monastery's guests participating in various programs of spiritual renewal. This area must remain ecologically clean and undeveloped in terms of new construction. In this regard, trails and walking paths, together with viewing points, resting areas and places of solitude, should be designed in order for the zone to be used for relaxation, meditation and discovering spirituality. Revitalization of olive/fruit groves, vegetables and herb gardens is also highly recommendable.

Finally, a relatively small and secluded, fully equipped public swimming area is proposed for daily visitors from Korčula. The microlocation of this zone should provide the least possible disturbance of monastery guests. In this zone one should build a dock intended for daily transfers of "sun and sea" visitors from Korčula, as well as a small catering facility (F&B outlet serving simple meals, drinks and beverages).

### **Business model**

Since the overall use of Badija is governed by the needs and preferences of the Franciscans, the future development of the island is somewhat constrained. Firstly, new tourism related facilities, especially those intended for accommodation purposes would not be allowed. Secondly, the accommodation capacity of the (restored) monastery would be relatively small (about 42 units). Further, a part of that capacity is to be used by the resident friars. Thirdly, the price per room at the monastery must be relatively modest (i.e. in order to be able to attract lower income groups, following the practice of other similar facilities world-wide). Finally, regarding the specific land-use regime on the island, with the exception of the public swimming zone, there will be no further need for additional food and beverage facilities.

As a result of the above constraints, the expected business operation of Badija,

especially in comparison with typical resort tourism destinations, will be characterized by the relatively modest financial revenues. However, since the goal of the Franciscans is to make Badija financially self-sufficient, expected financial revenues from the ordinary business (spiritual programs for monastery guests) should be complemented by creating various additional sources of revenue. Therefore, it was suggested that the Franciscans should: a) establish a travel agency specializing in programs and activities associated with religious tourism, b) organize large scale religious programs and activities, c) act as intermediaries in renting accommodation in Korčula and Orebić for participants in large-scale religious programs, d) provide catering and rental of beach equipment in the public swimming zone, e) organize sale of souvenirs and local food products in the souvenir shop and stands in the public swimming zone.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the exceptional attractiveness of the renovated monastery, pristine nature and high demand for top quality religious/spiritual programs, all enhanced by the island's relative isolation, Badija offers excellent conditions for developing into a top class destination for religious tourism, targeting especially the ever increasing number of more specialized market niches of Catholics around the world.

Notwithstanding the very favorable long-term trends on the demand side, there will be two factors limiting the long term financial self-sufficiency of Badija. These are: a) a relatively small accommodation capacity of the monastery and b) the expected price range appropriate for the targeted market segments. In order to create the favorable conditions for the generation of additional financial revenues, Franciscans will have to deal seriously with the commercial side of the business. Apart from religious programs and activities, they will have to take advantage of numerous opportunities to provide additional commercial services to the staying guests, daily visitors and groups on organized tours of the monastery complex.

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