

Connecting Social Actors in Developing Integrated Tourism Products

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Abstract:

Research Question: Our base of the research was the social capital and its impact on the recognition of the opportunities to innovate the tourism products by invigorating the innovative culture of tourism structures in Slovenia and stimulating the collective cooperation of the tourism stakeholders on the global market.

Purpose: Our goal is to make clear the role of the civil society, private enterprises, and organizations from public sector and small entrepreneurs in the creating of social capital, which is the base for the innovation of joint tourism products. Our aim was to identify the factors that stimulate the collaborative networking.

Method: We investigated the cooperation networking between the tourism stakeholders with qualitative method of analysis. We conducted eight non structured interviews with tourism stakeholders and thirteen semi-structured interviews with the managers from various tourism organizations.

Results: The results show that the right organization of consortium activities has the real impact on the creating of new tourism products. The results also show that the collaborative networking in the form of consortium supports the innovative processes and enables the marketing of the integral tourism products.

Organization: The successful networking bases on the means of activation of the social capital, which enables the inclusion of the right stakeholders in the process of creation, translation, and implementing of the innovative ideas in the innovation process. Tourism structures in this process create various consortia form of collaboration and support in the process of acquisition of resources in the process of connecting the know-how, and in the process of the implementation of the same know-how to build the innovative tourism products.

Society: Collaborative networking creates innovative culture of the tourism structures and the other structures in the society. The outcomes of the research show that Slovenian tourismscapes need different formal and informal structures of collaboration like various kind of consortia that empower social capital and enable the continuous generating of new innovative products in tourism sector.

Originality: Conditional paths that are in the core of the collaborative networking develop the new gaze on the innovative agency by replacing the rigid and static planning of collaboration in tourism. The model originally develops new ways of the coordination of the interests of tourism stakeholders that cooperate in the process of innovation of integral tourism products.

Limitations/Future Research: The limitation is the timing of the gathering of the data about the collaborative networking. We did not conduct the longitudinal research and the research results and findings cannot reflect the processes of the collaborative networking. Future research should include tourism stakeholders from other tourismscapes, because tourism is distinctly international endeavour. The comparison between different tourismscapes would show the differences and comparative advantages between tourismscapes regarding collaborative networking and its effects.

Keywords: social capital, tourism, integration, tourism actors, integrated tourism products.

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1 Introduction – Cooperation Among Stakeholders in Developing Integrated Tourism Products

Tourism is an important economic activity in most countries of the European Union and a cornerstone of regional development. The rapid development of tourism has spurred competition between tourist destinations at regional and local levels. This in turn has strengthened the realisation that complex approaches for the development of tourism are needed as a means of enabling continuous development of tourism products.

The basis for the successful integration of stakeholders in tourism is social capital, which is created and utilised by the stakeholders when they engage in various forms of cooperation in developing tourism products.

Numerous authors raise the importance of the varied forms of social capital that make the foundation for the development of means of integration, networking and cooperation. Adler and Kwon (2000, pp. 89–115) note in particular the importance of social networks, social norms, trust, sharing of know-how and the formal institutions.

The aim of this study is to determine the nature of the connections among social actors, entities and organisations, and the incentives and barriers influencing stakeholders as they join forces on the market in order to develop integrated tourism products. Another aim is to determine the expectations and interests of the stakeholders related to their willingness to partake in the development of integrated tourism products.

Since all stakeholders have their own expectations about means for cooperation, the qualitative research sought to uncover deeper factors affecting integration of social actors and the development of integrated tourism products.

2 Theoretical underpinnings

Social capital represents a form of social arrangement based on trust, social norms, networking and networks, which by means of promoting coordinated action from social actors and social structures contributes to a better functioning of society (Putnam, 1993, p. 167). This is particularly important in tourism due to the need for close cooperation in various social networks. Granowetter, (1973), Putnam (1993), Uslaner (2000) and Best and Krueger (2006) conclude that social connections on an individual and collective level are the core of social capital. Onyx and Bullen (2000) argue that social capital creates the following dimensions: networks, reciprocity, common norms and activities of a social actor. Woolcock and Narayan (2001) promote a similar definition of social capital, which they link to norms and networks that drive social action. Flora (1998) on the contrary maintains that only certain characteristics promote the development of social capital, namely the properties of diversity and prevalence of social networks.

According to Johannesson (2005), the Actor-Network Theory (ANT) is a suitable tool for interpreting the patterns of cooperation among stakeholders in tourism. ANT is a concept that helps us to transform and explain networking practices of various actors. ANT also incorporates various mutually connected classifications and enables us to bring different forms of tourism into a spatial analysis. The Actor-Network Theory presents a new, radical view of tourism and especially of tourist travel. Tourism is described critically by investigating the ontological conditions for cooperation in the sector (Duim et al., 2013). Literature dealing with networking in the tourism industry contains a large number of studies that highlight the importance of networking in the integration of tourism networks (d'Angello & Go, 2009). The research by Dimanche and others (2010) identifies how existing resources in tourism should be restructured and arranged in order to develop original and innovative tourism products.

Defining an integrated tourism product precisely is extremely difficult. Koutoulas (2004) defines it as a product that combines all tourism products to form a distinctive group, including tangible and intangible products. Koutoulas (2004, p. 4) believes that tourism products can be divided into complete and special tourism products. Güler and Crowther (2012) argue that overall satisfaction of tourists is based on the sum of all the attained standards of a tourism product in a single tourist destination. The role of social actors responsible for meeting the needs and desires of consumers is to understand the motivating forces and expectations of their target groups (Williams & Uysal, 2004). The conclusion is that stakeholders in tourism are continually trying to combine area, people and things in order to create and maintain networks and maintain their stability (Van der Duim 2008, p. 15). This integration is reflected in customer satisfaction, which holds a central role in tourism products.

We set out the following research questions:

- What is the nature of the mission and the inclusion of social actors in the development of integrated tourism products?
- Does social capital created by social actors and tourism entities strengthen the exchange of know-how and spur the development of new know-how for the creation of integrated tourism products?
- What are the means of cooperation between tourism entities and in what fields and tasks is the cooperation strongest?

3 Methodology

We carried out the qualitative data analysis with unstructured and semi-structured interviews. Unstructured interviews with tourism entities in Slovenia were carried out in the period from 1 December 2014 to 5 January 2015. The unstructured interviews included 8 stakeholders from small businesses, tourism entities and organisations. Semi-structured interviews with managerial staff at a number of tourism entities in Slovenia were conducted in the period from 7 January 2015 to 23 January 2015. The semi-structured interview included 13 stakeholders from the following tourism entities: large tourism company – a spa operator, the regional development agency, an institution for transfer of know-how in tourism, the local community,

the institute for culture, sport, tourism and youth, a small tourism company, a travel agency, the centre for entrepreneurship and tourism, an association promoting tourism and sustainable development, a medium-sized tourism company – a hotel, the tourist information centre, and the public cultural heritage institute.

The responses from the semi-structured interviews were transcribed into a word editor, edited and encoded. We used the open coding method. The coding was tied to our observations from the unstructured interviews (Charmaz, 1983, p. 112; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 89).

The qualitative analysis was implemented in three stages:

- Cyclically with a method of repetition and progression of thinking about the processes of developing integrated tourism products.
- By introducing new data to promote understanding of organisational innovation in the field of tourism.
- By using a comprehensive approach enabling each sub-step in the process to be separated as a whole and analysed independently (Seidel, 1992, p. 2).

For the data analysis we used a process developed by Creswell (2009, p. 175):

- collect data in a specific environment;
- collect data in a structured or non-structured way;
- collect data from different sources, organise it and sort it systematically;
- create and develop patterns, categories and themes bottom up – the inductive analysis;
- create a theoretical concept;
- interpret the observations – the researcher and the participants in the interviews; and
- develop an overall picture of the research problem.

4 Results of the Qualitative Analysis

4.1 The inclusion of social actors in the development of integrated tourism products

Tourism entities have a vision for creating and developing integrated tourism products and a shared vision for the overall development of tourism through the creation and development of integrated tourism products. Tourism entities also have a clearly defined vision for future creation and development of integrated tourism products. The links between tourism entities contribute to the development of the innovative potential. Tourism entities identify a connection between their objectives and common goals.

The vision for creating and developing integrated tourism products: Eight of the thirteen social actors have clear and definitive vision for the future development of integrated tourism products, which they share with potential stakeholders in tourism. Their visions for creating and developing integrated tourism products emphasise the principles of sustainable development. The implementation of an individual vision is directly connected with the determined long-term and short-term objectives of tourism entities and conditioned with the implementation of the primary activities of the social actor. Social actors believe that the

mission related to developing competitive advantages of tourism by identifying and developing appealing offerings and satisfying the needs of the target groups. Social actors recognise that innovative tourism products fail to reach the potential target groups and do not bring higher revenue for them when insufficient attention is paid to raising awareness, promoting and marketing these products. They make a point of concluding that all stakeholders involved in delivering integrated tourism products need to be included in efforts to raise awareness, promotion and marketing.

The social actors conclude that the implementation of a vision depends on meaningful and close cooperation between the entities in tourism. The medium-sized tourism company, travel agency, the entrepreneur in the tourism sector, the local community and the institution dealing with the transfer of know-how all recognise the importance of their own vision for successful future operations. The said entities are therefore in the stage of either drafting their own vision or have already included the importance of integrated tourism products in strategic documents that are in the process of being put into practice.

While the majority of the social actors have their own vision of developing integrated tourism products and share it with potential partners from the field, it is surprising that 10 respondents raised the lack of a common development vision. Among the factors obstructing the development of a *common* vision of developing integrated tourism products, the social actors raised the pursuit of partial short-term interests. As a result difficulties arise in reconciling the interests of the different stakeholders. The representative of the small tourism company cites an example of the diverging interests in that some stakeholders want to “...*offer a vineyard and wine, other galleries and art, so it is difficult to create integrated tourism products due to conflicts in supply which are difficult to reconcile*”. A desire to pursue their own interests is the second limiting factor, which the respondents identified as a factor of weakened cooperation among stakeholders in their locality. The representative from the institute of culture, sports, tourism and youth notes that “*presently everyone is looking for their own slice of the pie, without real integration*”. According to the travel agent, an organisation promoting cooperation would be needed (e.g. a regional destination organisation) as a centralising power that would be responsible for promoting integration among tourism entities in the local environment. In addition to diverse interests and lack of integration and cooperation among stakeholders, the third and fourth limiting factors in developing a common vision are funding and bureaucracy. Social actors note that public funding has been significantly reduced in recent years, leaving the majority of stakeholders to focus primarily on measures to stay afloat and activities set down in their mission or vision. They raise the importance of networking with stakeholders and providing assistance to the smaller entities. A declining financial situation has been coupled with extensive bureaucracy, whose complexity prevents tourism entities from carrying out their mission. In addition to the above causes for a lack of a common vision of developing integrated tourism products, the travel agent raises poor information literacy of stakeholders and underutilisation of IT technologies, given that many stakeholders in the industry do not have their own websites and are not present on social networks.

The tendencies of social actors to devise a common vision of development are similar to the tendencies in designing their own visions for developing integrated tourism products. These stem from the desire for general development in tourism and the development of integrated tourism products as well as the desire to enhance the competitive advantage and recognition of the local area and of its integrated tourism products. The motives for establishing a common vision of developing integrated tourism products depend also on the marketability of integrated tourism products and on the impact on revenues for the stakeholders, as well as on the promotion of integrated tourism products in cooperation with the media. Stakeholders indicated that a common vision of creating integrated tourism products was based on the desire to protect the local tourism potential, create jobs at local stakeholders and strengthen cooperation and integration.

The expectations of the stakeholders regarding a common vision of developing integrated tourism products are often unrealistic or too high. According to the entrepreneur in the tourism industry who was surveyed, the high expectations stem from these expectations being *"based on their professional thinking and understanding of the entities that significantly impact innovation developments. These are sometimes realistic, but often they expect too much or overestimate the impact of innovation on the market value of integrated tourism products which can be achieved"*. The representative of the tourist information centre said that expectations were *"high mostly when dealing with the anticipated impacts and benefits but less so when it comes to the input into integrated tourism products"*. The social actors conclude that a frequent misconception in the development of a common vision is that the connecting and creative role will be assumed by local, regional or national communities and political institutions. In their opinion, initiatives for crafting a common visions and integrated tourism products should come from the tourism entities, since they have an interest in promoting and marketing integrated tourism products. The role of local, regional or national communities is limited to establishing a suitable infrastructure framework for the development of tourism. Forming a common vision must be carried out in a "bottom up" approach rather than relying on methods of days gone by when local, regional or national communities defined models which stakeholders had to apply "top down".

The main objectives in developing integrated tourism products: In developing integrated tourism products, social actors in the tourism sector are guided by established and development-minded long-term objectives. The only exception in this was the medium-sized tourism company, the hotel, which assessed that its objectives regarding integration were of a short-term nature resulting from a lack of a clear vision for the development of cooperation between key stakeholders in its locality. The most common long-term objective raised by as many as nine respondents was the commitment to establishing connections between stakeholders and networking. The stakeholders respect the principles of participatory planning involving local entities in integrated tourism products and the principles of partnership. With their network connections, the partners in the development of integrated tourism products are also planning

joint marketing and innovative promotion activities through various channels and established networks.

The second most frequently raised objective in developing integrated tourism products raised by social actors is the branding of the tourist destination and its natural and cultural assets and unique tourism offerings. Branding is strengthened with the development of high-quality products that appeal to the potential visitors and customers, covering a wide range of regional goods and services and which are marketable. The development of high-quality integrated tourism products thereby helps increase the number of guests and the tourism revenues for the stakeholders.

Another long-term objective of developing integrated tourism products in the view of the respondents is concern for socially-responsible sustainable development of the local environment, and the broader region and the nation. The aim is to provide a quality tourist destination in concert with conditions for sustainable development of the stakeholders. The emphasis in this respect is on the development of local communities with a view to being more resistant to external impacts, such as those related economic crises, climate change, environmental factors, social ethics and ethical economics. The stakeholders strive to bolster sustainable development and pursue long-term goals designed to provide for local self-reliance based on building an effective system of self-sufficiency in food, energy, know-how and self-employment in tourism. According to the respondents, enabling self-employment and creating the means for independent business survival is possible by strengthening the opportunities afforded by networking with stakeholders.

Only four respondents noted a link between the objectives of integrated tourism products and the common objectives of tourism entities. The respondents believe that the creation of integrated tourism products should be organised in a way that allows tourism entities to recognise a link between the objectives of creating integrated tourism products and common goals. However, the tourism industry entrepreneur highlighted that "*the managers at the destination level have, save for a few products, not created the opportunities and possibilities in this respect due to a lack of formal and lasting connections that stem from subjective factors*". The lack of a clear connection between the objectives is made worse by unreliable and opaque planning and development of integrated tourism products. The respondent from the tourist information centre believes this stems from a lack of trust. Another consequence in destinations where there is a lack of clarity among objectives is that stakeholders act at their own initiative in connecting with potential partners and developing integrated tourism products. The respondent from the small tourism company noted that often the objectives are not immediately apparent, but become so gradually based on the response obtained to a product, to which the stakeholders then adjust their cooperation. In cases where the connection between the objectives of creating integrated tourism products and the common goals are immediately apparent, the connections are formed at a multitude of levels in all entities seeking cooperation and integration. A clear link between the objectives of the various tourism entities was presented by the representative from the Centre for Entrepreneurship and Tourism: "*The purpose of*

developing integrated tourism products is to preserve the authenticity, the welcoming nature and appeal of local tourism through packages containing a selected offering focused on healthy living, active outdoor leisure activities and events, culinary delights and Posavje wines. The common objective is for the destination to find its identity and build its image as a place of natural, cultural and culinary specialities and to promote itself under a single brand. The aim of the tourism entities is to provide the best quality service or product and to be included in the joint promotion activities under the single brand."

4.2 The exchange of know-how among social actors

Social actors conclude that the development of new know-how in developing integrated tourism products is a foundation for all cooperation.

Know-how for integrated tourism products: Social actors from various tourism entities assessed that they have the required know-how for developing integrated tourism products. Some of them assessed that they have certain skills required for developing integrated tourism products. Moreover, some of the social actors viewed themselves as having practical experience in developing integrated tourism products. They are of the opinion that this know-how applies mostly to a specific range of tourism products such as those related to natural heritage, cultural heritage and supplementary tourism activities. They are also seeking to combine their know-how with products in the area of sports and recreation, health tourism and farm tourism. They also concluded that they have the know-how for developing integrated tourism products in gastronomy, wine and alternative tourism. Some of the social actors use systematic approaches to building know-how needed for developing a product, evolving an idea through debate and subsequent refinement. In this way the products are also prepared for coordination with other actors. They see it as essential that the potential for developing products is connected with other ideas and innovations in the local environment.

Lack of know-how required for integrated tourism products: On the other hand, some of the social actors identified a lack of adequate know-how required for developing tourism products. They said that their know-how in this area lacks the required depth to be applied successfully. They assessed that there was a general shortage of know-how in the sector. Even the know-how that entities possess becomes obsolete quickly. Some social actors at the local level went as far as to assess that they completely lack the required know-how. However, the travel agency noted that it had extensive experience with developing integrated tourism products.

Transfer of know-how for integrated tourism products: Social actors identified a limited transfer of know-how at some of the tourism entities involved. One of the tourism entities identified its expertise as an opportunity for integration with other entities. Social actors in some entities are strictly focused on transferring knowledge at entity level. However, this transfer of know-how is overly narrow and as such not particularly useful because it does not transcend to other tourism entities and other areas of local life. For the most part internal exchange of know-

how at the entities is based on dialogue, discussions, brainstorming and on proposals for developing new integrated tourism products.

Aside from geographical expanse, the diversity among the stakeholders in the transfer of know-how is even more evident in the forms of transfer. Considering time limitations, the respondents listed thematic workshops, thematic training events, advisory sessions, consultative meetings, fairs and joint presentations, seminars, fieldwork, specialised courses (for foreign languages and guides), forums and human resources mobility activities such as organised visits to organisations or youth and other exchanges as the most common forms of short-term transfer of know-how. The long-term forms of transfer included national and international projects and research work. Only one of the respondents recognised the internet as a useful instrument for learning and transferring know-how, while the other respondents raised the importance of direct interaction through communication, conversation and dialogue.

The respondents indicated that the flow of information and transfer of know-how varied within individual organisations, which points to an internal transfer of know-how where the key actors are staff within the organisation. The answers from the respondents also indicated that know-how was shared between partner organisations, suggesting that external transfer is present. The key players in this are external professionals and the local population. The respondents also identified staff at public institutions and private institutions as well as companies as carriers of external transfer.

Most of the respondents believe that they have sufficient know-how for developing integrated tourism products. The positive self-assessment stems from extensive experience in tourism and the development of integrated tourism products and the presence of a highly-qualified workforce. Social players assume the role of providers of know-how to interested stakeholders in tourism. Considering themselves as providers of know-how were stakeholders from the local community, the institute for culture, sports, tourism and youth and the small tourism business. The stakeholder from the institute of culture, sports, tourism and youth explained the perceived lack of know-how by stating that *"knowledge is in short supply. We are constantly learning and seeking out new information. We believe that our know-how lacks sufficient insight into what integrated tourism products must contain, what is truly important and what are its essentials elements. It is also possible that we may possess the required knowledge, but simply do not know how to approach the development of integrated tourism product."* The stakeholder representing the small tourism business raised the modern-day problem of short lifespan of information, concluding that organisations need to self-evaluate their skills and compare them to best practices at other stakeholders.

The value of the know-how which a stakeholder can transfer internally and externally is related to the nature of its core business. Consequently, the most widely transferred know-how is related to sustainable development in local communities, preservation and development of natural and cultural heritage, and the development and promotion of integrated tourism products. The respondents also listed know-how related to human resource management and

project management. Key areas of know-how also relate to specific forms of tourism, namely sports, recreation and spa tourism, rural tourism, and culinary, wine and alternative tourism. The basic purpose of transferable know-how is the ability to deal with the intersection of the various fields that are present in new, innovative and high-quality integrated tourism products running all the way to practical implementation in the local environment. This also relates to the development of an innovative marketing approach for integrated tourism products and to the ability to identify modern guests.

The respondents also stated that the extent of involvement of stakeholders in the transfer of know-how is dependent on the needs stemming from the surrounding environment and the market for which the integrated tourism product is developed. Additionally, there is the role of the governing act which sets down the mission and strategic development plans for the stakeholders and their rationale for integration. Among the key factors for the transfer of know-how the respondents identified their own initiative and their individual benefits stemming from the development of integrated tourism products. Important initiatives for the transfer of know-how also arise from the potential for joint marketing of integrated tourism products and responding to the current needs of the environment with integrated tourism products.

Importance and advantages of information systems: The social actors stated that a modern information system is essential for exchange and transfer of know-how and that strong information technology support is required to develop integrated tourism products. Most of the respondents use an information system in performing their activities, although a greater issue is the level of satisfaction with the system itself. They noted that a constantly updated information system providing seamless access to key information is crucial. Its value lies mostly in the free and simple means for promoting and marketing integrated tourism products, but also in the support it allows for developing and refining products. In one of the regions the respondents highlighted that a common information system already exists at regional level. Here the tourism entities have access to the updated databases and the internet is used an important tool.

Deficiencies of information systems and its use: In certain tourism entities, the actors who participated in the qualitative study noted that the information system is not systematically managed and that it is inadequate for their work. Some of the stakeholders noted that they had no access to an information system, while others are not familiar with information systems that would help develop integrated tourism products. In cases where such a system exists, the question arises whether it is being properly utilised by the social actors. The actors are also faced with a range of problems that affect the effective use of the opportunities presented by information systems.

The social actors conclude that, on one hand, problems are related to the characteristics of the information system and are exhibited in the absence of systematic and transparent data which would be available to the users. Another problem is that data can be outdated given the short

lifespan of data and a lack of regular updates. However, another aspect is the lack of understanding of the possibilities offered by information systems to social actors.

4.3 Collaborative networking

The majority of the respondents assessed that collaborative networking was weak and predominantly dependent on geographic proximity and on similarities in operations among the stakeholders. Involvement in collaborative networking is based foremost on individual expectations and the diverse interests of stakeholders.

From the participants in the qualitative study, the travel agency, tourist association, tourist information centre and medium-sized tourism company were involved in collaborative networking. These entities are the most suited to coordination of various stakeholders due to the nature of their activities. What is more, these entities work with various tourism stakeholders and tourists in performing their activities. As a result they are inclined to various forms of collaborative networking and in this way contribute to the development of integrated tourism products.

A lack of interest in collaborative networking is expressed by the local community, the cultural heritage institute, the entrepreneur and the hotel business. Their preferences are related to the way they conduct their business and their status in the collaborative network. These entities are not at the core of the network since they do not play a connecting role but are instead foremost concerned with providing tourism products and do not participate in collaboration as a means of developing integrated tourism products. From the responses we can conclude that collaborative networking is not adequately developed, since some entities are not actively involved in connecting the relevant tourism stakeholders.

Needs of tourism entities in networking flows: Most respondents highlighted a need for building consensus and the resolution of disputes among social actors. They noted that the process of developing suitable interaction is often a consequence of numerous unsuccessful and incomplete interactions. As a result, there is room for learning in this area. Collaborative networking in their eyes stems from a need to build ethical relationship among stakeholders and meaningful relationships with other players in tourism. The respondents believe that they are connecting with other social actors and developing common innovative tourism products in the Slovenian tourism industry. They highlighted as one of the keys elements of collaborative networking the need for all stakeholders in development of integrated tourism products to understand the needs and wishes of customers. Satisfying the needs of customers should involve the application of know-how and the involvement of customers in the development of tourism products. The opinions of customers of integrated tourism products directly influences the improvement of these products. Moreover, tourism entities understand that the know-how and skills of individuals, companies, organisations and entities in the tourism sector represent the underlying potential for the development integrated tourism products.

The stakeholders said they pay cooperation in joint tourism projects and expect that this will promote development of integrated tourism products. In the process of collaborative networking they noted as important the ability of all social actors to contribute their unique expertise to the development of integrated tourism products. Also of importance is that work and tasks are clearly distributed and that a project approach is applied as part of collaborative networking. They raised the importance of rewarding innovative actions as a means of motivating social actors and promoting the completion of individual projects leading to the development of tourism products. In doing so, the stakeholders highlighted a commitment to ethical and sustainable-minded activities in developing integrated tourism products. They also expressed a belief that failures present good basis for learning and crafting better ways of developing integrated tourism products.

Causes for cooperation and integration: Social actors mostly cooperate in the fields of education and transfer of know-how as well as in the development of integrated tourism products, their promotion and marketing. They are also involved in activities aimed at jointly penetrating domestic and foreign markets with integrated products and working on projects as developers or partners. As many as nine respondents stated that they are involved in individual projects led by other tourism entities aimed at developing integrated tourism products and in carrying out innovation processes. Their involvement extends to projects implemented at regional, national or international level and their assessment is that the cooperation between stakeholders is fair and beneficial. In the opinion of the representatives from the Association of Tourism and Sustainable Development, the organisation's work on projects involving other tourism entities is beneficial given that the experience obtained "*is by all means useful, and we are quick to apply it once the project is over both in terms of the know-how obtained and the social networks which we established*". The respondent from the large tourism company pointed out that cooperation on projects must be based on trust, accountability and, at the end of the day, on the actual results. Participation in joint projects with other tourist structures is related to diverse interests. The representative from the regional development agency listed among common interests the desire to provide high quality products, the possibility of joint ventures and the establishment of an effective marketing system in all tourist entities. Cooperation on projects is also frequent because the stakeholders share a common interest in developing new integrated tourism products. The respondent from the local community highlighted that problems arise when the project is completed and the time comes for the product to be rolled out in the tourism sector. Collaboration often ends at this point. The respondent from the public cultural heritage institute meanwhile highlighted that the institution is guided in participating in joint projects due to the availability of project financing.

The causes of cooperation and integration in the development of integrated tourism products stems from the diverse interests and needs of stakeholders. They can be related to the desire for financial advancement, identification of opportunities for the development of appealing and diverse integrated tourism products or the upgrading of existing products. The respondents highlighted the link between the level of integration and the motive for integration that acts as

an incentive for cooperation. At the majority of respondents the level of integration with other stakeholders is weak, given that it is usually related to their immediate needs.

Formal and informal forms of integration: The findings of the qualitative research indicates that the inclination of tourism entities to collaborative networking depends on the possibilities for establishing formal connections, i.e. the forming of consortia. Consortia are a new form of integrated tourism product and foundation for bringing together various stakeholders in a given tourism destination. The stakeholders see their role in meeting the wishes and expectations of customers. This relies on utilising resources which must be developed with financial investments that individual tourism entities cannot secure due to financial constraints. The respondents believe that a strong and formal form of cooperation, such as a consortium, enables the tourism entities involved to be present in offering the integrated tourism product in the entire locality. They also highlight that it allows them to promote tourism products within an integrated product in the locale and broader, including internationally. This is seen as crucial for the success of a tourist destination.

The respondent from the local community concluded that at regional level there are at least two formal structures of integration in the form of consortia. He noted the consortium "Cviček PTP", which brings together producers of Cviček wine, and the consortium "Tourism v zidanicah" bringing together more than a hundred providers vineyard cottages.

From the viewpoint of the respondents a major advantage of informal structures of integration is a lower degree of commitment. This means that interactions between the stakeholders are less structured and predominantly ad hoc. The representative from the tourism and sustainable development association explained: "*We prefer to form working groups based on the content rather than holding boring meetings as part of some formal structure.*" The respondent from the Centre for Entrepreneurship and Tourism explained that "*the joint working meetings are intended to reach agreement on which local organisation will take the charge. Each of the local partners implements forms integration with tourist entities at the local level*". The tourism industry entrepreneur highlighted that informal connections are formed on the basis of interests and the existing trust between tourist entities. The representative from the medium-sized tourism company moreover added that informal structures of cooperation can be very effective due to a more lively exchange of know-how and information, which form the basis for innovative ideas.

The key characteristic of informal structures of integration, according to the entrepreneur, is that their longevity varies: "*Some last longer, but some fall apart quickly.*"

5 Conclusions

The qualitative analysis has shown that social capital is a precondition for unleashing collaborative networking, which exhibits the local characteristics of the social and material environment. Without the prerequisite trust that is a basic component of social capital there can be no trust. The transfer of know-how which forms the basis for developing new integrated

tourism products sets off the processes of the transition of ideas and concepts into a varied range of integrated tourism products. These are continually morphing to meet the wishes, expectations and needs of customers in tourism. Consequently, the means of collaborative networking are also changing and with it the accumulation of social capital in the tourism industry. The theory of networking is a very relevant concept in our study, which helps to explain the way that players in a given tourism area activate themselves and arrange themselves in a way that enables the development of integrated tourism products.

The goal of integrating social actors in collaborative networking is to enhance the likelihood of satisfying the needs, wishes and expectations of tourists. It is also a means of influencing the interaction with tourists in the process of offering integrated tourism products. The study has highlighted the importance of a suitable organisation in the form of a consortium aimed at developing integrated tourism products. Without a firm structure, the pools of ideas, know-how and resources can be difficult and may not produce the desired results. We therefore conclude that the development of integration in the form of consortia is the right means of meeting the needs, wishes and expectations of customers in tourism by providing integrated tourism products.

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Povezovanje socialnih akterjev pri razvoju integralnih turističnih proizvodov

Povzetek:

Raziskovalno vprašanje: Raziskali smo, ali inovacijska kultura turističnih struktur na področju Slovenije spodbuja zaznavo priložnosti za inoviranje integralnih turističnih proizvodov, ki omogočajo skupen nastop turističnih struktur na turističnem območju.

Namen: Naš namen je bil opredeliti vlogo civilne družbe, zasebnih organizacij, javnih organizacij v turizmu in malih podjetnikov pri ustvarjanju socialnega kapitala, ki je podlaga za razvoj skupnih inovacij na turističnem prostoru. Naš namen je bil tudi identificirati faktorje, ki spodbujajo sodelovalno mreženje.

Metoda: Kvalitativno analizo smo izvedli s pomočjo nestrukturiranih in pol-strukturiranih intervjujev. V nestrukturirani intervju smo vključili osem intervjuvancev, ki smo jih izbrali iz malih podjetnikov, turističnih struktur in organizacij. Pol-strukturirane intervjuje s trinajstimi vodstvenimi ljudmi v različnih turističnih strukturah smo izvedli na območju Slovenije.

Rezultati: Rezultati raziskave poudarjajo pomen prave organiziranosti v obliki konzorcija za nastanek integralnih turističnih proizvodov. Brez trdne strukture je povezovanje idej, znanja in virov težavno in običajno ne daje spodbudnih rezultatov. Iz rezultatov sklepamo, da je razvoj

povezovanja v obliki konzorcija pravi način za uresničevanje potreb, želja in pričakovanj turističnih odjemalcev v obliki integralnega turističnega proizvoda.

Organizacija: Uspešno povezovanje turističnih struktur temelji na načinu aktiviranja socialnega kapitala, ki omogoča vključevanje pravih turističnih deležnikov v proces ustvarjanja, prevajanja in udejanja idej o novih turističnih proizvodov v proces inoviranja. Turistične strukture v tem procesu ustvarjajo različne konzorcijske oblike povezovanja, ki jim dajejo podporo pri pridobivanju virov, pri povezovanju znanja in pri implementaciji tega znanja v proces inoviranja integralnih turističnih proizvodov in so učinkovita struktura za prevajanje inovativnih idej v proizvode.

Družba: Sodelovalno mreženje ustvarja inovacijsko kulturo, ki spodbuja potrebo po sodelovanju socialnih akterjev in družbenih struktur na vseh ravneh družbenega delovanja. Izidi kažejo, da Slovenija potrebuje različne formalne in manj formalne oblike združevanja, ki krepijo razvoj in uporabo inovacijskih potencialov na vseh področjih družbenega delovanja.

Originalnost: Pogojne poti, ki so bistvo sodelovalnega mreženja, so nov pristop k inovacijskemu delovanju na področju turizma, saj nadomeščajo togo in statično načrtovanje načina povezovanja v turizmu. Model izvirno predstavlja načine interesnega povezovanja, ker omogoča verodostojno in enakovredno sodelovanje vseh deležnikov v procesu inoviranja.

Omejitve/nadaljnje raziskovanje: Omejitev raziskave je čas raziskovanja delovanja socialnega kapitala, ker smo podatke zbrali v določenem kratkem časovnem obdobju in zajeli trenutno stanje sodelovalnega mreženja. V raziskavo smo vključili samo turistične strukture iz slovenskega turističnega prostora. Ker je turizem izrazito mednarodna dejavnost in ker kot proces zajema različne turistične prostore, je smiselno v raziskavo vključiti sosednje turistične prostore in destinacije.

Ključne besede: socialni kapital, turizem, povezovanje, turistične strukture, integralni turistični proizvodi.

Lea-Marija Colarič-Jakše je diplomirala in magistrirala na Fakulteti za turistične študije Univerze na Primorskem. Delovala je kot novinarka in več kot deset let kot svetovalka za podjetništvo in turizem. Njena področja dela se nanašajo na organiziranje, vodenje in implementiranje projektov v podjetniška in turistična okolja, vodenje Turistično informacijskega centra, torej ima bogate teoretične in praktične izkušnje. Je doktorandka Fakultete za organizacijske študije Novo mesto in pripravlja doktorsko disertacijo z naslovom Vpliv dejavnikov socialnega kapitala na inovacije v turistični dejavnosti. Zaposlena je na Fakulteti za turizem Univerze v Mariboru kot prodekanka za sodelovanje z okoljem in je habilitirana predavateljica za predmetno področje turizem. Objavlja strokovne in znanstvene prispevke v različnih publikacijah.