

Wine and Cultural Tourism as One of Niche Tourism Opportunities in Canada and Slovakia

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The article deals with new development in tourism, especially after the pandemic situation of COVID-19. In the period of economic crises and turmoil tourism places are able to benefit from the positive influence of so called soft and more sustainable values created by the improvement of image, reputation and the quality of destination services, by using of local cultural resources and heritage.

The objective of this study is wine tourism, which has become one of the growing niche attractors in specific regions all over the world. In the combination with culinary tourism and cultural tourism offers a specific tourism product not only to the segment of cultural tourists, but tends to be more attractive to the segments of seniors. The study will be focused on two countries, Canada and the case of Brand Niagara Region and Slovakia. The qualitative research has been prepared, especially focused on product development and the innovative promotion strategies. These two countries were chosen due to a personal experience, former research and interest in this topic.

Keywords: wine tourism, cultural tourism, niche tourism, innovative promotion strategies, competitiveness

INTRODUCTION

Tourism might be described as vulnerable due to the unexpected situations and causes originated by humans or naturally, as for instance crises. Responses of different countries to these events depend on a variety of factors, especially the economic position, the model of governance, preparedness to cope a critical situation, reaction of international community, mass media and business culture. As a consequence of different crises and disasters, tourism activities usually decline, the image and competitiveness are undermined.

New critical situation with COVID-19 totally changed the tourism pattern. Visitors had to stop their visits, countries introduced pandemic plan rules and closed borders, formerly mass tourism destinations have been totally empty and people started to think differently about tourism activities and tourism destinations. Their new expectations could be influenced with more health risk rules, health protection, avoidance of crowding and congestion, desire for privacy, unique experiences provided by service providers in more quiet and protected places. This might be a reason why in this paper has been developed the idea of building the country tourism competitiveness on these expectations of visitors in the future. It means more niche tourism development and sustainability as one of the most important factors of success in tourism development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The competitiveness concept has been adapted from different disciplines, especially the management and marketing; however, competitiveness cannot be viewed only from the business and management perspective because the other global forces create so called “onion” corpus from layers surrounding a destination or a place consisting of geographical, economic, demographic, climatic, technological, environmental, political, and demographic forces. For this reason, not only competitive and comparative advantages, but also other aspects of competitiveness contribute significantly to the destination competitiveness.

Crouch and Ritchie (2003) mentioned human, historical, technical and cultural resources and the size of economy to be decisive sources of competitive advantage. Porter (1990) embraced the factors of competitiveness to be demand and supply, strategy, competitiveness, and rivalry. Competitive advantage stems in the allocation of the resources of comparative advantage. Innovative approach to competitiveness has appeared in different models of competitiveness (for example Poon’s model, Vanhove’s model, Crouch & Ritchie’s model, etc.) and started to raise a question which factors are the most influential on competitiveness. Tourism attractiveness and competitive advantage of a specific places could be enhanced, based on Ritchie and Zins (1978), by the elements as the handicrafts, language, traditions, the gastronomy (food and drinks), art and music, history, work methods typical for that particular place or region, architecture, religion, educational system, style of dress, leisure activities reflecting the lifestyle of a specific place or a region. For this reason place identity, authenticity and history, natural and physical environment, knowledge, culture and religion have the impact on the product offering and a projected place image and influence competitiveness and marketing of a destination.

The authors Dwyer, Forsyth & Rao, 2000; Matias, Nijkamp & Neto (2007) defined “tourism destination competitiveness as a general concept that encompasses price differentials coupled with exchange rate movements, productivity levels of various components of the tourist industry and qualitative factors affecting the attractiveness or otherwise of a destinations”. Anholt (2007, p. 31) mentioned that building competitive identity “isn’t an advertising, design or public relations exercise, although of course these techniques are essential for the promoting the things that the country makes and does: its tourist and heritage attractions, its companies and their products and services, its music and art and other cultural products, its sport, its people, its investment and employment opportunities.” The role of art and cultural products, brands and tourism plays an important role in the competitive advantage forming.

Comparative advantage is a measurement of the endowments, e.g., measurement of the available resources serving as a potential for tourism development. “Comparative advantage would relate to climate, scenery, flora, fauna, etc., while competitive advantage would relate to such items as the tourism infrastructure (hotels, events, attractions, transportation, and networks), the quality management, skills of workers, government policy, etc.” (Kim & Dwyer, p. 58). “

More complex approach to the competitiveness of destinations defined different scholars, as for example, Buhalis (2000, p.106), who included into the definition of competitiveness the concept of sustainability of the local resources. He noted, “a destination competitiveness is a synergy of economic, social, and sustainability concepts”. Crouch and Ritchie (2003) added, “a successful destinations cannot spend their natural capital in order to be economically profitable”. This important turning point in being competitive and do not deplete for short-term success all resources, influences the epistemological base of destination competitiveness that has been established during the last 20 years.

Crouch and Ritchie (2003), emphasized this concept, by stating that “what makes a tourism destination truly competitive is its ability to increase tourism expenditure, to increasingly attract visitors while providing them with satisfying, memorable experiences, and to do so in a profitable way, while enhancing the well-being of destination residents and preserving the natural capital of the destination for future generations.” This definition contains all aspects of a competitive destinations expressed in the effectiveness and efficiency (economics), satisfaction of consumers – tourists (marketing approach), involvement of community (community building approach), and sustainability concept (protection of

natural resources approach). Application of this definition in the competitiveness concept answers clearly the question why the mass tourism (old tourism) streams had to be replaced by new tourism developments.

One of the possible directions is to build cultural tourism and develop a tourism product obtaining more niche tourism components as a part of cultural tourism, for instance wine tourism. Hall (1996) stated that “wine tourism can be defined as visitation to vineyards, wineries, wine festivals and wine shows for which grape wine tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of a grape-wine region are the prime motivating factors for visitors.”

Porter claims that the success of a firm does not only depend on its strategy and positioning, but also on its being embedded in the environment” (Vanhove, 2005, p. 114). This might be also the environment for wine production and grape-wine region with its specific terroir.

In niche tourism are wine and food main attractions for tourists; for this reason, if a destination tends to attract more visitors and create more loyal consumers, history and art might be excellent supplements to this product offer. “Terroir” of destination (place) determines main attractions of the core products defining in the destination main cultural product. Terroir of Experience means linking of typical local products as for instance food and wine to the experiences of the visitors. “These tourism experiences play an important role in enhancing food and rural identity, because – besides legislative and policy actions - this also depends on the knowledge and attitudes developed by customers for typical agricultural products.” (Corrigliano, Mottironi, 2013). Important to discuss is the expression of “terroir” from the point of view of wine production, where this expression means a typical place for a specific type of wine sort, for instance Bordeaux in France. The existing agricultural conditions (soil consistence) and sunshine abundance might be a reason of gaining a competitive advantage in producing a specific wine with the world-known reputation and brand identity. Wine tourism has become one of the growing niche attractors in specific regions all over the world. In the combination with culinary tourism and cultural tourism (for instance theatre, visiting of historical places, concerts, music festivals) offers a specific tourism product not only to the segment of cultural tourists generally, but tends to be more attractive to the segments of seniors, which is a growing group of tourists in the world.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Several examples and case studies from Canada (Niagara Region) and Slovakia (wine regions in southern part of Slovakia) have been thoroughly studied during several research periods in the past during personal research (post-graduate research at the Waterloo University in Canada during the years 2006-2010), which was based on personal visits, interviews, visits to wineries and structured and unstructured interviews with managers of wineries, representatives of tourism sector in Niagara Region as well as by collecting of secondary data sources in order to obtain rich data for cases and their interpretation.

In Slovakia, the data have been collected similarly during several visits to wineries, discussion with the entrepreneurs in wine production sector (during the event Vinspacirka for instance organized in Slovak town in Banska Bystrica in central Slovakia).

The qualitative research method is based on the specific structure of multi-case studies advised by Yin (2003). Multicase studies and the combination from several points of view has been supported by Vissak (2010), Cresswell (2002), Patton (2002), Xiao and Smith (2006).

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Brand Niagara - Wine Tourism and Cultural Tourism in Niagara Region

Niagara Region is situated at the Niagara Peninsula consists of 12 municipalities: Niagara Falls, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Fort Erie, St. Catharines, Port Colborne, Thorold, Weinfleet, Welland, West Lincoln, Pelham, Lincoln. In tourism product portfolio of this region are offered such products as wine tourism products (Niagara Winery Route), culinary tourism, cultural tourism (Shaw Festival), but this region is also familiar for such attractions as Casino Niagara, Welland Canal (technical attraction serving as the transportation facility as well as tourism attraction), wedding tourism product (Honey Moon Capital of the

World). The region offers also historical sites (battleground between the United States and Great Britain in 1812, etc.). The competitive advantage is based on the proximity to the U.S.A. The icon of region is Niagara Falls; and in the concept of branding it means the place or characteristics, which is the most authentic and typical for the brand identity identification. The identity of this region has been described as “abundant, authentic, beginnings, history, and inventive, one-of-a kind, rare, surprising, unexpected, unique, vivid, and accessible.”

Creation of brand image and brand identity requires a consistent and systematic approach and may “take many years to establish and brand image, establish name recognition and develop strong awareness of a destination or product (Morgan, Pritchard, Piggot, 2003). Success could be not only trend and novelty; it could be a loyalty to the traditional values and attributes implied in new marketing strategies and branding. Niagara Region in Canada, similarly as other regions or countries with tourism traditions, has focused the attention at preparation of a competitive marketing strategy, product innovation and Brand Niagara Original is the result.

Concerning the innovation of tourism products in the existing marketing strategies and based on the above mentioned surveys – Travel Activity and Motivation Survey (TAMS) from 2006 and a “return-to-sample” survey from 2007, we obtained the following secondary research outcome. A priori and posteriori segmentation of the marketing products, offered in marketing strategy of this region, confirmed a necessity of innovation of some tourism products, which have been later also included into the Brand Niagara Original.

The results of survey pointed at the fact that dining, visiting local culinary attractions, organizing events with culinary content are very perspective and popular among visitors. Similarly, as the countries with wine industry, orchards, natural beauties, food and wine festivals (France, Spain, Portugal, Austria, Australia) also Niagara region has a potential for development of such a product strategy. This region is familiar for plentiful wineries (34 in Niagara Escarpment and 30 in Niagara-on-the-Lake), specialized themed international dining facilities, golfing facilities, etc. The result of research highlighted that the most popular activity is experiencing of local food (55,7%). The reasons for tracing the patterns and characteristics of visitors’ motivation and appeal were to explore the most perspective products and find out if the branding strategy outlined in Niagara Region corresponds to research results. One interesting fact, which may lead to the explanation why culinary tourism might be a possible innovative approach in future marketing, is the existence of one important target group, seniors. 56,4% of respondents agreed that Niagara Region is a suitable destination for seniors. To support the idea of importance of culinary tourism as a product suitable to put into the innovative marketing and branding strategy, over 58 million people of North American continent are 55 and older and in 2025 there will be 85 million seniors at the North American continent.

Wine Tourism in Canada

Despite of harsh weather conditions in Canada, some parts of Canada are quite popular for wine production and wine tourism. Wine is popular in Canada for over 150 years, but mostly in the 20th century became more recognized and popular among citizens and visitors. Two provinces are familiar for wine production, e.g., Ontario and British Columbia. New technologies, advanced wine production and a selection of proper wine sorts (mostly from Germany) enabled Canadian vineyards to grow specific grapes and produce wine. Wine has become not only a product available to the local people, but started to be popular for export and tasting during wine touring. Wine tours started to be more popular for the domestic and international visitors.

The places as for instance Niagara Region introduced in their marketing strategies package tours consisting of the visiting of wineries and participating in the cultural programs, or sightseeing of local historical places and natural wonders. Wine touring allows visitors to obtain not only the authentic and in many cases also storytelling experience, but also the active participation in the event by experiencing the technique of wine production and personal commitment in these activities. Package tours are popular among the German and American tourists, but also the other visitors, for instance corporate groups, food clubs, and hospitality associations. The most popular wine brand in this region is ice wine, which is produced

In Slovakia exist six wine growing regions divided into forty subregions, where exist approximately 603 municipalities with their specific natural milieu and historical potential as well as a potential to produce wine and organize wine tours.

Niche tourism as a combination of wine tours and cultural visits with historical content became a popular tourism product also in Slovakia. Familiar wine regions in Slovakia are Malokarpatska (Small Carpathian) wine region, South Slovak wine region, Tokaj wine region, Central Slovak wine region, and East Slovak wine region. One of the most familiar and the oldest is Malokarpatska (Small Carpathian wine region) located in southwestern part of Slovakia, especially around the towns of Modra and Pezinok.

Very popular is in the Small Carpathian region a tradition of organizing of festivals with tasting of young wine called “burciak”, which is a healthy drink full of vitamins and contains only 6 percent of alcohol. The combination of wine routes and cultural tourism could be achieved for instance in a visit of Chateau Béla in southern Slovakia and Elesko winery, where exists a possibility to visit Zoya Museum with Andy Warhol pictures. Slovakian wine routes are well prepared, well marketed and authentic. For the authenticity purpose, in many places with wine and cultural product offer, are people dressed in typical Slovak costumes and present local folklore in their songs and traditions.

The Small Carpathian wine route leads through the former royal towns Bratislava, Svätý Jur, Pezinok, Modra, Trnava and the neighboring Carpathian villages of regions. In these towns are preserved wonderful churches mostly from the 13th–14th century, chapels, cloisters, and other historical buildings.

High quality wine is also produced in Nitra region, especially wines as Veltlinske Zelene (Veltlin Green), Risling Vlasky, Muller-Thurgau. One of the most famous vineyards in Central Europe stellar Chateau Topolcianky is situated in this region. The brand Chateau Topolcianky wine was created in 1933 and is famous not only in Europe, but also overseas. In Nitra region is popular so called “Nitra Wine Festival”, which usually takes place in the fall and welcomes the best Slovak and Moravian wine producers. Visitors can enjoy a tour in the historical wine cellars under Nitra Castle and enjoy rich cultural and musical programs. Nitra wine route is the longest Slovak wine route because it passes through 4 regions. Recently became popular also Zahorie Wine Route, Hontianska Wine Route close to the village Hokoce (near Hungarian boundary) and a novelty is Pozitavska Wine Route.

Several cities started to organize wine festivals and wine tasting, for instance in Banska Bystrica in Central Slovakia became a tradition to organize annually in spring time a wine festival called “Vinspacirka” (Wine Walking) offered for all wine producers and wine lovers from Slovakia and from abroad.

Tokaj wine region belongs to the one of the smallest, but interesting is the quality and popularity of this wine. It requires a unique subsoil (originated by igneous rocks) and microclimate. The wine routes became extremely popular among the visitors and for instance in Tokaj region is popular a combination of gourmet tourism, cultural tourism, and wine tourism. Visitors are interested to visit a Tokaj Viticulture exposition in the South Zemplin Museum in Trebisov in Eastern Slovakia and follow the Tokaj Wine Road, which is famous for its combination of history, traditions of the region, wine touring and discussion with wine makers, wine tasting, shopping, and local food tasting.

FIGURE 2
WINERIES IN SLOVAKIA



Source: https://winesurveyor.weebly.com/tour_slovakia.html

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

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Ontario province recognized the importance of culinary tourism products as the innovative approach to tourism marketing strategy and developed Wine and Culinary Tourism Action Plan, which was designed to support a new potential product and support this project also financially. One of the most important goals was to recognize Ontario internationally as a marketing brand destination in wine and culinary tourism. On base of this development, a very competitive branding process and brand of the region has to be established, which evoked the start of the process of Brand Niagara Original. Brand Niagara Original is used in branding strategies of Niagara Region and could be found also in wine tourism product portfolio and in destination branding strategies focused on wine tourism in the region.

Slovakian case was a different story despite the existing wine routes and popularity of wine tasting and wine touring among visitors from Slovakia and the other countries. Branding strategy in Slovakia is just in the starting position despite of several good regional strategies focused on agritourism and country branding. The country did not fully recognize the importance of culinary tourism and wine owners have to use in some cases own branding strategies and financial resources for promotion. Despite of this situation, Slovakia has a potential to become popular wine tourism destination and uses several good examples and benchmark practices from the European countries as Austria, France, Hungary, Czech Republic, but is influenced also by good practices from Canada.

CONCLUSIONS

In the period of economic crises and turmoil regions or places are able to benefit from the positive influence of so called soft and more sustainable values created by the improvement of image, reputation and the quality of destination services, using of local cultural resources and heritage. The multifunctionality and interdisciplinarity of tourism, based on gourmet and wine attractions, culture and heritage, requires the environment and landscape protection. Protection, preservation, control and sustainable development will be more used methods, especially in this period of time.

The existence of niche tourism opportunities, which can enhance tourism development and improve total performance and competitiveness, can be presented in the form of wine tourism and cultural tourism. Mass tourism and a pressure on the environment in megacities as well as a number of popular tourism destinations visited by an enormous amount of global tourists will due to new development and crisis situation decrease or the destination will have to approach to tourism differently. For this reason, this topic of using niche tourism presented by wine tourism and cultural tourism is important to discuss about; moreover, researchers, practitioners and government representatives can learn from these sustainable approaches and see tourism as a form of symbiosis of nature and tourism development.

We compared two different countries, which are both involved in wine tourism and cultural tourism activities. Canada and Slovakia are different countries when we compare the size and the economy power; however, both countries despite a geographical and political characteristics, belong to the democratic countries with the interest to succeed in tourism competitiveness. They both try to achieve a positive image, reputation and offer an interesting tourism product as wine routes and culture, history, and heritage.

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