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**TOURIST BOARD NETWORKING IN THE REGION SLAVONIA AS
THE CONDITION FOR AN EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT OF THE
REGION**

**UMREŽAVANJE TURISTIČKIH ZAJEDNICA REGIJE SLAVONIJE
KAO PREDUVJET EFIKASNOG MARKETINŠKOG UPRAVLJANJA**

ABSTRACT

There are different models of regional networking of tourism organizations. The first regional tourism organization was founded in 1864th in St. Moritz. After that a greater role of regional organizations have not come to the fore until the seventies and eighties of the 20th century. The England Tourist Board (ETB) was established in 1969 by 12 regional tourism organizations, with the support of local authorities and the private sector. In other European countries, regional tourism organizations have been established starting from the eighties of the 20th century. Models of regional networking of tourism organizations may be different. In some countries, the system is dictated by the state, as it is the case in England or in Queensland, in Australia. In Sweden and New Zealand, there is freedom of the regional networking, each establishment of a regional structure is preferred. The Croatian practice at the national level still do not know the formal model of regionalization. Tourist board networking in the tourist undeveloped continental part of Croatia, particularly of those that operate in Slavonia as the most underdeveloped tourist region in Croatia, is a prerequisite for effective marketing and management of tourist destinations in this area. The same is corroborated by the results of primary research that was conducted in September and October 2013 among directors of the Tourist Boards in the region of Slavonia. The primary research objective was to determine if the region of Slavonia may become more recognizable in tourist markets only if its tourism development is managed unified, from the regional level. At this level, there is a need to constitute the Tourist Organization of Slavonia. Main functions

of this organization will be, beside marketing, strategic planning and development; tourism system management, and research and information gathering.

Key words: *tourist networking; regionalization; destination management organizations; tourist region of Slavonia; regional tourism organization*

SAŽETAK

U svijetu postoje različiti modeli regionalnog povezivanja turističkih organizacija. Prva regionalna turistička organizacija osnovana je 1864. u St. Moritzu, nakon čega veća uloga regionalnih turističkih organizacija u promoviranju odredišta dolazi do izražaja tek sedamdesetih i osamdesetih godina 20. stoljeća. Turistička zajednica Engleske (ETB) je 1969. osnovala 12 regionalnih turističkih organizacija, uz potporu lokalnih vlasti i privatnog sektora. U drugim europskim zemljama regionalne turističke organizacije se osnivaju počevši od osamdesetih godina 20. stoljeća. Modeli regionalnog okupljanja turističkih organizacija mogu biti različiti. U nekim zemljama sustav je diktiran s državne ili nacionalne razine, kao što je slučaj u Engleskoj ili u Queenslandu u Australiji. U Švedskoj i Novom Zelandu postoji sloboda regionalnog vezivanja, svaka struktura regionalnog ustrojavanja je poželjna, s tim da je regionalnim turističkim organizacijama na raspolaganju mala ili indirektna financijska pomoć, pa su, vezano za financiranje, prepušteni milosti i nemilosti lokalnih vlasti. Hrvatska turistička praksa još uvijek ne poznaje formalni model regionalizacije. Umrežavanje Turističkih zajednica turistički nerazvijenog kontinentalnog dijela Hrvatske, posebno onih koje djeluju u Slavoniji kao najnerazvijenijoj turističkoj regiji, predstavlja preduvjet za efikasno marketinško upravljanje turističkim odredištima na ovim područjima. Isto je potkrijepljeno rezultatima primarnog istraživanja koje je putem web ankete u rujnu i listopadu 2013. provedeno među direktorima Turističkih zajednica unutar regije Slavonije. Cilj provedenog primarnog istraživanja bio je utvrditi je li Slavonija na turističkim tržištima može postati prepoznatljiva ako se njezinim turističkim razvojem bude upravljalo jedinstveno s regionalne razine. Na ovoj razini treba formirati Turističku organizaciju Slavonije, čije će glavne funkcije, osim marketinga, biti i strateško planiranje i razvoj; upravljanje sustavom turizma te istraživanje i prikupljanje informacija.

Ključne riječi: *turističko umrežavanje; regionalizacija; menadžment organizacija odredišta; turistička regija Slavonija; regionalna turistička organizacija*

1. Introduction

Cluster-based economic development is a model of development of economic operators, particularly the small and medium sized ones, as they initiate growth and innovation and both the local and regional level through networking. (Horvat, 2012:230).

The first regional tourism organization was founded in 1864th in St. Moritz (Lasser, 2000:111-126). In some countries, the system is dictated by the state or national level, as it is the case in England or in Queensland, in Australia. In Sweden and New Zealand (Ateljević, 2009, 296), there is freedom of the regional networking, each establishment of a regional structure is preferred. The small or indirect financial assistance for regional tourism organizations is available, so, related to finance, they are left to the mercy of the local authorities (Pike, 2008, 51,68).

Croatian National Tourist Board practice for now does not know the model of regionalization. In the formation of tourist communities, it has been started from administrative organization, without being mindful of whether a particular administrative unit in which a certain tourist board operates really presents a tourist destination which has to be managed in as efficient a way as possible, and in which integrated tourism products have been created (Wang, 2008,139).

2. Tourist communities organization in Croatia

The establishment of the regional tourist boards has not been anticipated by The Law on Tourist Boards and the promotion of Croatian tourism (2008, Article 3) nor the mandatory or in optional shape. Therefore, we can say that the current legal framework does not provide the ability to manage Slavonia as a tourist destination and its tourism products as a whole (Šalamon Vrdoljak, 2013).

The principal activities of the tourist boards of the region Slavonia can be seen through the analysis of data from reports on the work and on the financial performance of the tourist boards of counties and cities which are county seats in the region. Thus, analyzing the financial indicators for the 2012th, the following has been found:

- in total income at all observed tourist boards the biggest one is the income from membership fees and residence taxes,
- cofinancing of own projects through funds transferred from The Croatian National Tourist Board and the Ministry of Tourism in the largest amount among county tourist boards has been provided by the Tourist Board of Virovitica-Podravina County (283,222.45 million kunas), and among city tourist boards by the Tourist Board of Slavonski Brod (155,710.00 kunas),
- in total expenditures of functional marketing at all observed tourist boards, largest participation (over 50.0 %) have projects in the area of policy " improving products " such as decorating the place, tourist signs, new tourism products, information points and welcome services, and special projects providing support for events (at the level of the national tourist board, according to data from the Report on the work and on the financial operations of the Croatian Tourist Board in the period from January, 1 to December, 31 2012th, projects in the field of policy "improving products" in the structure of expenditures accounted for only 8, 9%,
- the most funds for promotional activities spent in the 2012th among county tourist boards the Tourist Board of the Virovitica - Podravina County (1.110.452.20 kunas), and among city tourist boards, the Tourist Board of the city of Osijek (785.606.05 kunas),
- when it comes to funds intended for advertising (these funds in the expense structure of functional marketing of the Croatian National Tourist Board, according to data from the above mentioned reports, account for the largest share, even with 62.6 %) most of them, although in a relatively small percentage, allocated the Tourist Board of the Osijek - Baranja County (270,106.14 kunas,or 14.5 %),
- the possibility of fair appearances and a special presentation abroad, with co-financing by the Croatian National Tourist Board, took advantage of, in the 2012th, all county Tourist Boards in the region, with the exception of the Tourist Board of the Požega-Slavonia County .

In other words, the present analysis shows that, in opposite to the Croatian coastal tourist communities in which the majority of revenue and income come from the residence taxes, the

main source of financing continental tourist boards, including the region of Slavonia, makes membership fees, as well as the budgetary grants or, in some communities, transferred funds from the Croatian National Tourist Board and the Ministry of Tourism, for co-financing projects.

From the analysis of the data is also evident that in contrast to the Croatian National Tourist Board with the largest expenditure of functional marketing for advertising, the Tourist Boards in the region of Slavonia, as a tourist underdeveloped region, most funds spend on activities related to the creation and improvement of tourism products that are in this area still fragmented, underdeveloped, and poorly interpreted and promoted.

3. Primary research results

In order to determine the attitude of the representatives of some tourist boards in the region with regard to a possible unified management of the region as a whole tourist destination, and promoting and selling the region as a tourist unit, during September and October 2013 it has been conducted independent survey among the directors of the Tourist Boards within the region.

Questionnaires were completed by four representatives of the county Tourist Boards, a representative of the Tourist Board of Baranja as an area, nine representatives of the city Tourist Boards, and 11 representatives of the municipality Tourist Boards, therefore, the representatives of the 68.6 % of the total number of tourist communities that operate in the region.

The research results are presented in tables.

Table 1 The existence of tourism master plans in the region of Slavonia, questions and answers of the respondents

Has the area of your county (city, municipality) adopted a strategic plan for tourism development?		
	Replies, in %	Replies, in absolute terms
It has not.	46,0	11
It has been working on it.	33,0	8
It has.	21,0	5
Total.	100,0	24

Source: Independently conducted research, Slavonski Brod, September and October 2013

Table 2 Compliance of tourism master plans of lower levels with the tourism master plans of higher levels in the region of Slavonia, questions and answers of the respondents

Is a strategic plan for tourism development in your area aligned with the strategic plan for tourism development in the area of higher level?		
	Replies, in %	Replies, in absolute terms
Yes, totally.	30,0	3
Yes, in part.	40,0	4
Not at all.	20,0	2
I have no knowledge.	10,0	1
Total.	100,0	10

Source: Independently conducted research, Slavonski Brod, September and October 2013

Table 3 Sufficiency of funds to perform promotional activities, questions and answers of the respondents

Are you of the opinion that assets coming from different sources of financing are sufficient to carry out your own promotional activities?		
	Replies, in %	Replies, in absolute terms
Yes, they are.	0,0	0
No, they are not.	54,0	13
We adopt ourselves to the situation.	38,0	9
It depends from case to case.	8,0	2
Total.	100,0	24

Source: Independently conducted research, Slavonski Brod, September and October, 2013

Table 4 Presentation of the tourist region Slavonia abroad, questions and answers of the respondents

Are you of the opinion that it would be more efficient when it comes to the region of Slavonia, that the Croatian National Tourist Board co-finances the costs of special presentations and performances on the international tourist markets of the Slavonian region as a whole, or do you prefer the current model of providing support for presentations abroad done by county Tourism Boards ?		
	Replies, in %	Replies, in absolute terms
I prefer the model of co-financing presentation of the tourist region of Slavonia as a whole.	61,0	14
I prefer the current model of co-financing tourist presentations of individual counties.	35,0	8
I have no particular opinion.	4,0	1
Total.	100,00	23

Source: Independently conducted research, Slavonski Brod, September and October, 2013

Table 5 Support to the concept of creating unique tourist products at the level of the region Slavonia, questions and answers of the respondents

Do you support the concept of creating a unique tourism products at the region level in function of its better positioning on tourist markets at home and abroad ?		
	Replies, in %	Replies, in absolute terms
Yes, completely.	42,0	10
Yes, in part.	50,0	12
Not at all.	8,0	2
Total.	100,00	24

Source: Independently conducted research, Slavonski Brod, September and October, 2013

Table 6 Support to the concept of creating the tourist board at the regional level, questions and answers of the respondents

Do you support the idea of creating the Tourist Board at the regional level to manage the unique tourism development in the region?		
	Replies, in %	Replies, in absolute terms
Yes, completely.	14,0	3
Yes, in part.	59,0	13
Not at all.	27,0	6
Total.	100,00	24

Source: Independently conducted research, Slavonski Brod, September and October, 2013

Table 7 Co-financing of the project of creating a unique tourist board and making a single marketing plan at the regional level, questions and answers of the respondents

Are you of the opinion that the bodies of your tourist community would be ready to support the co-financing of the project of creating a unique Tourist Board and creating a unified marketing plan at the regional level?		
	Replies, in %	Replies, in absolute terms
Yes, completely.	14,0	3
Yes, in part.	59,0	13
Not at all.	27,0	6
Total.	100,00	24

Source: Independently conducted research, Slavonski Brod, September and October, 2013

Relevant research results, which are presented in the above tables, are as follows:

- by 46.0 % of respondents tourism development has been carried out without the tourist development plan, while in 33.0 % cases working on tourism master plan is in progress,
- only 30.0 % of respondents have tourism plans aligned with development plans for lower or higher levels; partial compliance is expressed in 40% of the respondents, while one-fifth of representatives of tourist boards are talking about non-compliance,
- when it comes to the sufficiency of funds for carrying out promotional activities, more than half of the respondents is of the opinion that the funds are insufficient for this purpose, while 38.0 % of them say that they are adapting to the situation,
- the majority of respondents, 61.0 %, is committed to presenting and co- presenting tourist region of Slavonia abroad as a whole, while 35.0 % of respondents prefer the current model of providing support for the representation abroad to county tourist boards,
- the concept of creating a unique tourism products at the regional level has full support of 42.0 % of respondents, while 50 % of respondents support this concept partially,
- with the idea of creating a unique tourist destination management organizations at the regional level of Slavonia in principle agree 73.0 % of respondents, although it unreservedly support only 14.0 % of respondents,
- however, only 14.0 % of respondents believe that their tourist boards are willing to support the project of financing the Tourist Board at the regional level, as well as the creation of a single regional marketing programs, while even 27.0 % of respondents believe that it is not realistic to expect.

In any case, the conclusion that by the present investigation and the results that were obtained, can be drawn is that most tourist boards in the region basically support unique management of the region as a tourist destination, as well as the creation of a unique marketing programs at the regional level, to make it more recognizable the tourist market.

However, the results also suggest that a significant number of respondents talk about their own limited sources of funding, in addition to partial and political interests, which could become a major threat to the realization of the project of tourist board networking in the region of Slavonia.

As tourism development plan is the first step in destination management and mechanism for the establishment of cooperation and partnership among all stakeholders involved in tourism development (Pender, Sharpley, 2005,51), while most tourist destinations in Slavonia in which tourist boards operate has no tourist development plans, in the area of region is almost impossible to single out a tourist board which fully performs the role of the destination management organization (Pike, 2008, 31), although in modern conditions is increasingly

seen that destination management is a prerequisite for achieve significant results in tourist markets.

4. Conclusion

It is increasingly clear that in the modern tourist area, the needs of tourists are becoming more complex, and a growing number of tourists pursues a unique and memorable travel experiences. Therefore, tourism products are becoming more complex and the number of individual services forming part of them is getting bigger and bigger.

The overall tourism product might be defined in terms of five main components: destination attractions; destination facilities and services; accessibility of the destination (including transport); images, brands and perceptions; price to the visitors. Hence, destination is a provider of experiences. Destinations can increasingly be seen as “clusters” or aggregations of businesses, consisting of mainly small and medium- sized Tourism Enterprises (SMTEs) (Middleton and Clarke, 2001).

This complex tourism products should be managed by destination management organizations that should also, within the scope of their work, deal with marketing activities, but also encourage cooperation between the public and private sectors; concern for the environment and the protection of the interests of local communities; create and develop of new tourism products etc.

Destination system complexity derives from the multitude of elements that participate to make it work. Destination system requires integrated management to achieve the synergistic effect of coordinated horizontal management (territorial management) and vertical management (branch or sector management) (Bošković, Saftić, Trošt, 2010, 24). The success of a destination depends on the overall level of services quality, which represents the function of a whole series of variables which are united under the same denominator - the destination management (DMO – Destination Management Organization) (Saftić, Trošt, Rafajac, 2010,117).

Domestic practice shows that in most cases, tourist boards operating in less developed tourist areas have a negligible impact on the development process and are often without political support. The activities of tourist boards are often unrecognized and unacknowledged in the local environment, and due to financial constraints, sometimes have been reduced to giving tourist information and collecting data on realized tourist traffic. In a word said, except for the tourist boards of major cities (Osijek, Slavonski Brod, Vinkovci, Vukovar) that have significant revenue from the membership fees and residence taxes, it can be said that the performance of the basic tasks of tourist communities in tourism most underdeveloped region of Slavonia depends on the local government and the means by which it encourages their work.

The problem is in the organization of tourist communities in Croatia which follows the administrative structure. The promotion of tourism products is done at the county level, what, when talking about the Croatian inland, due to lack of financial resources, but also not sufficient recognition of certain counties of the continental Croatia on the tourist markets, proved insufficiently effective.

Slavonia could achieve much better tourist results, if it would be moved away from the concept of the development of its tourism products by individual counties. Efforts should primarily be focused on creating a recognizable tourist regions within which specific tourism subclusters would be formed, and where the role of the regional tourism organization (RTO) would take over management of the destination organization (DMO), which would represent the tourism product in the region of Slavonia in general (Bartoluci, Hendija, Budimski, 2013, 198).

Thus, the Strategic Marketing Plan for Croatian tourism for the period 2010th to 2014th p. 648, recommends networking of the county tourist boards in the cluster of Slavonia in the DMO, as well as extract resources for its activities. Support to the project of development DMO has been also envisaged by The Operational Marketing Plan of Croatian Tourism (p. 26) (Scott, Baggio, Cooper, 2008, 44).

The management of tourist destinations should be seen as the tourist activities that engage local interests within a meaningful business relationship with tourist suppliers, in order to create products in a tourist destination as well as manage development within tourist destination. The management of the tourist destinations in the executing of its public functions of coordination, and using the functions of planning, organizing and control, creates prerequisites for systematic attribution of all those that are essential for the development of the product destination (Magaš, 2008, 2,3,19).

In Slavonia, which on the tourist markets can be positioned only as a whole, the role of management of tourist destinations is becoming an indispensable element of tourism development. A tourist organization formed at the regional level should be responsible for the management of Slavonia as a complete and recognizable tourist destination.

Within the project "Training of tourist communities to act according to the model of destination marketing/management organizations (DMO)" conducted by the Croatian National Tourist Board in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism, which has a stronghold in the Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia tourism by 2020. (N.N., 2013), on the workshops held for the representatives of the tourism sector, including the directors of the Tourist Boards, throughout the Croatia, a new model for structuring regional organizations as a starting point for a transformation of the existing county Tourism Boards in the management organizations of the regional character was presented.

In doing so, it remains unclear whether as such regional tourism organizations, which in this model of development become decision makers, for the region of Slavonia, have been provided county Tourist Boards operating in the region, or one single tourism organization that would manage the regional level of tourism development in the region as a whole.

The model for which we stand when it comes to the specific region of Slavonia is the model of constituting a regional management organization (RMO). In this model, the rights and responsibilities of managing all aspects of tourism in the region of Slavonia should be conveyed to this organization, while its role would primarily stem from the need to perform marketing activities related to the particular selective forms of tourism whose development is possible in the region, but also from the strategic planning and development; tourism system management system, and research and information gathering.

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