

Is it possible to combine mass tourism with alternative forms of tourism: the case of Spain, Greece, Slovenia and Croatia

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the birth of alternative tourism as a weapon to combat mass tourism negative effects on natural resources. Hence, some countries reassessed their current tourism planning and development to include alternative tourism. This paper explores alternative forms of tourism, discusses the need for defining, developing and for using alternative forms of tourism. Finally this paper explains how and why Spain, Greece, Slovenia and Croatia used alternative forms of tourism. The results showed that Spain, Greece and Slovenia used certain complementary interfering alternative forms of tourism strategies towards tourism development, while, Croatia substituted mass tourism with alternative tourism.

Key words: Mass tourism, alternative tourism, sustainable tourism, diversification, sun-sea-sand.

INTRODUCTION

The birth of alternative tourism was due to high criticism for mass tourism and its negative effects on destination areas. Alternative tourism incorporated soft tourism, small-scale tourism, green tourism, nature tourism and integrated tourism. Alternative tourism was used as a hope for proving consistency with natural, social and community values, as alternative tourism could have less negative effects on destination areas, environment and population without diminishing positive economic effects (Smith and Eadington, 1992).

Alternative tourism grew rapidly and out of the need to remedy mass tourism's negatively impact on the environment and society, which could affect the attractiveness of a given destination from a long term perspective (Moscardo, 2001). Alternative tourism emphasized the idea of preserving social, natural and historical assets of tourist destinations. Hence, it was considered as the main factor in tourism development. As a consequence of alternative tourism, the concept of sustainable tourism was used as the main goal for tourism development (Moscardo, 2001).

Sustainable tourism stresses the need that all tourism development should enhance natural riches and should contribute to the propelling of socio-economic progress of a destination area. Hence, sustainable tourism increased awareness in environmental sensitivity and ecological consciousness within every tourism activity (Dodds and Butler, 2010). On the contrary, mass tourism aims at quick economic revenues; hence, it places little emphasis on environmental, social impacts and sustainable development. Alternative tourism stresses slow sustainable growth, which can allow more sensitivity for local social economic needs, where tourism revenues can be spent in the destination areas for a long-term perspective tourism development (Dodds and Kuehnel, 2009).

Mass tourism activities depend greatly on seasonal and climatic conditions. Hence, mass tourism came to be known as sea-sun-sand tourism. Mass tourism activities are seasonal activities, reaching high peak and high capacities during summer months. Therefore, there is a big inflow of tourists for popular mass tourism destinations during summer months, creating a high population movement and congestion in high peak. Mass tourism is based on large tourist groups, fixed programs (i.e., predetermined packages) directed by tour operators and travel agencies. On the contrary, alternative tourism is based on small groups, families and even singles, and alternative tourism activities could take place all year round to create average capacities (Dodds, 2005). (See table 1, next page, for general features of mass and alternative tourism).

Table 1
Mass Tourism Vs Alternative Tourism

	Mass Tourism	Alternative Tourism
General Features	Rapid development	Slow development
	Maximizes	Optimizes
	Socially, environmentally, inconsiderate, aggressive	Socially, environmentally, considerate, cautions
	Short Term	Long Term
	Short Term	Long Term
	Remote control	Local control
	Unstable	Stable
	Price Consciousness	Value consciousness
	Quantitative	Qualitative
	Growth	Development
Tourist Behaviour	Peak holiday periods, seasonal	Staggered holiday periods, no necessarily seasonal
	Capacity for high seasonal demand	Staggered holiday periods, no necessarily seasonal
	Tourism development everywhere	Development only in suitable places
Tourist Behaviour	Large Groups	Singles, families, small groups
	Fixed program	Tourists directed
	Spontaneous Decisions	Spontaneous Decisions
	Comfortable and Passive	Tourist decide
		Demanding and active

Source: Gartner, 1996, pp 339-340

With reference to the table 1, it can be said that, alternative tourism can produce better general features and tourist behaviours than mass tourism. Alternative tourism incorporates all stake holders' long term interest and quality of tourism and takes into consideration local communities, their natural environment and resources. In comparison, mass tourism has many disadvantages, but can produce high revenues at high seasons and therefore cannot be ignored completely.

Alternative tourism can broadly be divided into certain categories as follows (Spanish Institute For Prospective Technological Studies, 2001; Gartner, 1996; Aslanyürek, 1984; Lier and Taylor 1993; Lawton and Weaver, 2001): i) Cultural and historical tourism, based on the unique identity of visited site; ii) Health Tourism, depending on the resource and type of facility; iii) Conference-Congress Tourism, depending on the type of activity, and the aim of the meeting; iv) Sports Tourism, based on both excitement and the ability to perform the activity; v) Contact With Nature: Eco- Tourism activities, based on preserved environment having natural riches, and vi) Entertainment Tourism, based on the availability of wide range activities depending on amusement.

DEVELOPING ALTERNATIVE TOURISM IN RELATION TO SPAIN, GREECE, SLOVENIA AND CROATIA

Spain as one of the leading countries in beach tourism made lot of progress in developing alternative forms of tourism in relation to changing global tourism trends. Greece was facing similar phases of tourism development as Spain, but at a much later date. Slovenia was trying to promote itself both as sea-sun-sand type of tourism, and used alternative tourism activities with newly determined tourism policies, while Croatia had used alternative activities (i.e., cultural tourism) to replace mass tourism activities.

SPAIN

Spain was the leading country for beach holidays (Spanks, 2003), and the second largest destination after France for international tourism (World Tourism Organization's Overview 2002). Hence, Spain could demonstrate the great experience it had acquired in the tourism sector (Spanish Institute For Prospective Technological Studies, 2001). However, Spain could not develop alternative tourism, because its tourism markets were out of date. Its deficient public system infrastructure could not cope with high volume tourists' needs. It had large urbanized landscape, noise and water pollution which were projecting a negative tourism image (Porrás, 2000). Arguably, Spain could not compete with new tourist destinations, and hence, to be able offer more modern tourist products, which could be also more suitable for the new tendencies of demand (Porrás, 2000).

Spanish demand for sun-sea-sand product has been consolidated, and a policy of diversification in the tourist sector has been carried out, by including new tendencies for more frequent shorter holidays and different modes of transport, in an effort to ease seasonal effects of the tourist industry (Spanks, 2003). The Spanish tourism sector was considered as an experienced sector which knew how to grow, develop by making large investments to improve quality to meet global demands, and to perform better in difficult situations, demonstrating its capacity in terms of quality and competitiveness (Ministry of Economy, General Directorate of Commerce and Investments, 2004).

In the light of these, the initial stage in the development of the alternative source of tourism, Spain had to diagnose and analyze its current tourism situation. Hence, The Spanish Tourism's White Paper was prepared in 1990 to set the problems of tourism sector in Spain. This effort was done in the following stages:

1) The declaration of The Competition Framework (i.e., Plan of 1992) with eight action areas of improvement, which were: i) Co-ordination; ii) Quality; iii) Technical Development; iv) Destinations; v) International Cooperation; vi) Training, vii) New Products, viii) Statistical and Economical Analysis of Tourism.

2) Restrictions on urban and tourist development; planning control in popular tourist areas, the investment efforts in public infrastructure (i.e. transportation network: air, roads, railways), treatment of supply and waste water, and recovery of coastline (Porrás, 2000).

3) The Comprehensive Plan for Quality in Spanish Tourism. The plan was prepared with the efforts of both private and public sectors, and was intended to give response to the challenges that Spain Tourism could face in the coming years. This plan was consisted with the creation of demand for new products, ranging from complementary activities to complete holidays, as well as renovating existing offer and generating public investment in infrastructure (Ministry of Economy, General Directorate of Commerce and Investments, 2004). In other words, the aim of the plan was to keep Spain as a leading tourist destination with alternative tourist activities shaped by global tourism trends, and complementary activities in the coastal region serving for sustainability, even-out seasonality, products and markets diversification and profitability.

As a result of the above changes developments, the quality factor has been handled in certain programs (Porrás, 2000) in the following ways: i) Quality in tourist destinations, ii) Quality in tourist products; iii) Quality in tourist services; iv) Quality training; v) Technological innovation and development; vi) Globalization of Spanish tourist industry; vii) International co-operation; viii) Statistical information and economic analysis, viii) Promotion, and, x) Support in marketing.

The main objective of such aims was for Spain to ensure that the concept of quality holiday could be the factor that could differentiate Spain from other destinations on the international markets. Therefore, a special attention had been given on the program for quality in tourist products, by promoting activities that could contribute to the diversification and could be reducing seasonality in Spanish tourism. For the diversification of tourism activities and prolongation of the tourist season, the focus was on developing sports holidays. Especially, nautical and adventure sports, cultural tourism, business tourism, health tourism, rural tourism and holiday homes (Ministry of Economy, General Directorate of Commerce and Investments, 2004). But mostly, Spain focused on golf and skiing despite that Spain did not have the technical quality and the suitable infrastructure available to contribute to the quality program of Spanish tourism (Spanks, 2003).

GREECE

Tourism industry contributed to Greek economy a lot in terms of GDP growth (i.e., 16.3% in 2002) and employment (14.4 % of total employment, directly related jobs) (Dessylla, 2004). Greece based its tourism

development on mainly on mass-market models and included the popular sun-sea-sand destinations. However, this model was needed changes. Hence, Greece started to evaluate its current tourism model, tourist activities and the need of alternative form of tourism. Out of this evaluation, the following several weaknesses emerged (ELKE: The Hellenic Center for Investment): i) High seasonality and high density in peak seasons, ii) Dominance of mass tourism, iii) Lack of thematic and alternative forms of tourism, iv) Unhealthy public infrastructure. On the contrary, the following strengths existed within the Greek tourism (ELKE: The Hellenic Center for Investment): i) The increase in the number of tourist arrivals; ii) Diverse natural beauty; iii) Cultural and historical heritage; and, iv) Vibrant folklore and Greek way of life.

Therefore, Greece went about to formulate new tourism strategies to help it shift from low budget mass tourism to high quality and alternative forms of tourism (ELKE: 6), due to radical changes in the leisure industry linked to increasing demand for alternative and integrated forms of quality tourism. It was believed that the success of Greek tourism as an international tourist destination, could be maintained by upgrading and modernizing its tourist industry, by developing alternative tourism activities, and by prolonging its tourist season with the prospect year-round tourism (Pangalos, 2003).

Under the light of global trends in the tourism industry, Hellenic Tourism Organization, an institution of Greek National Tourism Organization became responsible for carrying out the market researches and studies, stating tourist opportunities for investors, making research on the thematic and alternative forms of tourism, had determined a strategic plan for tourism development called “National Plan for Regional Development 2000-2006”, in order to progress high quality tourist activities (Greek National Tourism Organization). This plan supported the view of alternative tourism as a tool for sustainable development and contributed to the protection and enhancement of the environment. National Plan for Regional Development focused on the development of golf tourism, marine tourism, conference tourism, and thermal tourism (i.e., spas and thermal springs), winter tourism and eco-tourism (Dessylla, 2004; ELKE).

SLOVENIA

Tourism sector in Slovenia was contributing to Slovene economy (i.e., 9.1% in GDP, 52.500 directly jobs) and it was becoming the leading sector of the Slovenian economy (Ministry of Economy, Government of Republic of Slovenia, 2001). Slovenia's first tourism development strategy (i.e., “Strategy of Slovenian Tourism in the 2000-2006 Period”), was to determine basic orientations in order to deal with the international tourist market and its changing trends. Like Greece, Slovenia assessed its tourism advantages and weaknesses. According to Ministry of Economy, Government of Republic of Slovenia (2001), its main advantages were: i) Variety and attractiveness of natural environment; ii) Undamaged nature; iii) Remarkableness; and iv) Disperse and relative smallness of tourist centers instead of mass tourism, but tourism development according to tourist trends. According to Ministry of Economy, Government of Republic of Slovenia (2001), the weaknesses were: i) Little attractiveness of products and services; ii) Few tourist attractions; iii) Low quality of services; iv) Weak development in infrastructure; and, v) Unsuitable offer in winter tourism.

After the above evaluation, Slovenia defined its basic strategy, in term of offering attractiveness and variety in destinations, remarkableness and uniqueness of tourist product, and decided on the other identities, in order to formulate the Slovenian identity in tourism. While Slovenia was trying to promote its tourist opportunities, despite the fact that, it was surrounded with huge competitors (i.e., Austria, Italy, Hungary and Croatia), Slovenia came to the realization that it did not have enough competitive advantages. However, Slovenia thought to come around this problem by using its tourist destinations, offering better organizations, quick access to original and qualified tourist products within environmentally sound policies referring to global tourism markets. Therefore, the basic strategic tourism themes of Slovenian tourism focused on three basic regions namely: i) Productive region, including health resorts; ii) Business tourism, geographical region with, natural and cultural facilities, and thematic parks; iii) Program region consisted of 3-E (ecological, ethnological-ethnological) country tourism, 3-A (active- action adrenaline) recreation tourism and 3-D experience and imaginary tourism. Complementary activities were being served as the combination of winter and health tourism, such as business and natural activities, health tourism, 3-tourism and coastal activities (Ministry of Economy, Government of Republic of Slovenia, 2001). The objective of all those combinations was to extend the tourist season and target groups for all year-round, as the common idea was that massive tourism covers individualistic tourism needs. Hence, the reason behind the need for a huge differentiation program for Slovenia (Ministry of Economy, Government of Republic of Slovenia, 2001). Sports, cultural activities and business tourism were the tourist activities that developed quickly and travel tourism on coasts, lakes and rivers had important role to play in the tourist movements. Therefore, the Slovenian tourist industry determined its tourist activities in order to develop and put them together at the same time.

In Slovenia, tourism was accepted as the most important economic activity. Therefore, tourism was arguably considered to be based on the quality service and sustainable development principles. Every tourism objective strategy stressed and tried to improve the quality of each tourist product and activity of diversification which could contribute to environmental protection.

CROATIA

In Croatia, the tourism sector had been considered among the major employer, the mainstay of the nation's economy, and the largest source of foreign exchange. For instance, in 2003 the inflow of tourism revenue in US\$ during the tourist season was \$ 7.9, which was 7% higher compared to previous year (Bulic, 2002).

Croatia had been among European destinations, with natural attractions of 1104-mile Mediterranean coastline, dotted with 1185 islands, and rich cultural and historical heritage. Croatia possessed ecologically preserved environment and unspoiled attractions (i.e., Adriatic Sea, natural parks, and thermal springs). Based on the importance of tourism for the Croatian economy, and on the desire to utilize available resources and potentials for the future in the best possible way, the Croatian Government adopted the Development Strategy of Croatian Tourism in 1993 (Bulic, 2002).

This Development Strategy dealt with the following points: i) Main starting points and guidelines compatible with Croatian interests in tourism; ii) Basic aims of development of the Croatian tourist sector; iii) List of priority activities and the policy for steering the development of Croatian tourism parallel to development strategy of Croatia; and, iv) Croatia's Tourism Cluster began considering new ways of developing the Croatian Tourism industry and providing guidance to tourism enterprises and policymakers in 2002. The overall aim of the development strategy was to enhance the competitiveness of Croatia in the global tourism marketplace, and to increase the country's economic benefits from tourism, depending on conservation and sustainable development (Jelincic, 2000).

Croatia in an effort to take advantage of developments taking place in the international market, had placed and improved its profitably in a sustainable manner, and its competitiveness. With the concept of improving competitiveness, the Croatian tourism sector tried to upgrade its tourism industry and to have diversified offering, highly valued products and qualified services. In other words, within the short-term, Croatia aimed to distribute visits of foreign tourists throughout the year, and to increase the amount of money that they would spend (The Croatian Tourism Cluster, 2003).

Croatia's tourism sector had been so far using mass tourism strategy, even though it had been recognized such strategy was not at Croatia's best interest. Hence, Croatia considered that the mass tourism, which positioned Croatia in a low-cost destination attracting low spending tourist, had been inappropriate for Croatia. However, the major target of Croatia remained that it should be developing a high-value added, high quality product, which was fundamentally based on sustainability that could replace mass tourism, which was blamed for depleting natural resources. With sustainable tourism development, living standards were expected to rise without destroying the natural assets, riches of cultural heritage and distinctive lifestyle. Tourism revenues could stay in local community, which in turn could increase the profitability of such local community.

Croatian's tourism begun to progress through the fostering of cultural tourism. With this progress, Croatian tourism development strategy had turned into the usage and promotion of Croatian cultural resources. Although many tourist programs included culture as part of the tourist package, this was not enough, as most of these cultural programs had been imported from international markets, and Croatia was not using Croatian cultural distinctiveness and local assets as tourist resources. Cultural distinctiveness was a comprehensive feature, beyond merely visiting heritage sites, churches and museums. It was the utilization of every aspect of Croatian culture, like food, wine, the landscape, activities and even the language. It was also the inclusion and the involvement of the visitors with locals and to make every tourist a cultural explorer and discoverer.

The objectives of the development of Cultural Tourism Strategy had included apart from increasing visitors, the prolonging of the tourism season, extending the geographical base beyond the beach and into the hinterlands, guaranteeing sustainability; encouraging micro-business development and economic prosperity (Jelincic, 2000). Prolonging the tourism season and extending the geographical base, so far, Croatia had been selling only sea, sand and sun, basic tourism activities. On the other hand, cultural tourism development could properly stimulate progress of tourism in other seasons than just summer.

Cities located along the coast had normally focused on using their coastal position as the primary benefit in tourism, and had only been using culture and other facilities as a secondary tourist resource. In such a case, cultural tourism would be the means of extending the season, but, Croatian tourism industry had desired that inland cities should also develop their own cultural tourism programs, and accordingly to double the number of tourists who could visit locations away from coasts and stay there more than one night (Croatian Tourism Industry).

Additionally, in order to extend the tourist season, Croatian tourism industry had been developing other tourist activities such as sports, mountaineering and hiking, excursion to religious places, activities related to flora-fauna and natural beauty, gastronomy, nautical tourism and health tourism. Also, construction of golf courses was considered among the most necessary and indispensable elements of the development of a quality tourist offer, and as a chance of changing of traditional prevailing market image as a country of seasonal and mass tourism.

With the Guarantee of Sustainability and the Encouraging of Micro-Business Development strategy, Croatia was aiming to manage to integrate local community to tourism activities. This intention was based on the consideration that, if a local community was able to integrate its everyday businesses and professions into the tourist activity, hence, to accordingly present its local lifestyle; it could raise the quality of tourist visit, as well as the quality of local population life. Additionally, the development of traditional crafts, art galleries, restaurants offering local food and beverages had to be stimulated. The important point of such a strategy was that the owners of such businesses should come from the local population.

Meanwhile, the components of Croatian tourism industry had defined themselves certain roles in promoting cultural tourism. While accommodation units could meet the standards of international markets, and offer standards of service that reflected Croatian cultural standards, restaurants could offer innovative cuisine based on Croatian customs and local ingredients, building on the Croatian tradition of gastronomy and exposing historic influences of other cuisines. Tour operators could highlight cultural, historical, and natural wonders unique to Croatia (The Croatian Tourism Cluster, 2003).

As tourist's products were diversified and tourist's destinations had positioned themselves in new markets segments, quality had become a paramount concern. Therefore, the Croatian Ministry of Tourism aimed to promote quality tourism by encouraging local families to develop small, boutique-type hotels that would be environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable. There had been a movement in the direction of higher-value added tourism, as accommodation facilities themselves were engaged in organic farming to promote high quality gastronomy and other forms of sustainable tourism development.

Croatian cultural tourism had a vision of exposing Croatia's nature, culture, and society to the world. These elements were thought to contribute to the wealth of the Croatian people, business and communities, but they should not be overused for short-term gain, and they should be preserved for the future generations. The guiding principles of this vision were the followings (The Croatian Tourism Cluster, 2003): i) The diversity of regions, historic and cultural ties would be utilized and the identity of tourism industry would be constituted accordingly. ii) Tourism in Croatia should ensure sustainability of nature, culture, cultural heritage, and should retain socioeconomic balance and living communities. iii) The business environment for tourism services should be open, and transparent to provide society's control over the preservation of natural, cultural, and community resources. iv) Tourism should be treated as an aspect of the economy and a way of life rather than an industry sector. All matters helping to develop sustainable tourism, such as transportation, infrastructure services and privatization should be equally facilitated and promoted by the public authorities. v) Services for tourism should be integrated into the life and economy of the country, and especially within the local communities of the tourism destinations. Tourism services could offer rich, authentic, unique experiences with a standardized price system, and should seek to enhance quality of destination, product and service standards.

With the realization of the above listed targets and the implementation of the stated policy, Croatia could reach a level of total number of foreign visitors amounting to 10-11 million, and approximately 6-7 billion Euro in revenue from over-all tourist consumption by the end of the decade (Bulic, 2002).

To sum up, Croatia has been a Mediterranean tourist destination serving for mass tourism. Croatian tourism industry had also been aware of the changing consumer preferences and global tourism tendencies. In the light of this, cultural tourism was considered an alternative activity to replace mass tourism, as mass tourism had been blamed for depleting its natural resources. Instead, with a sustainable manner, developing small-scale activities respectful to local communities and life styles were chosen. Croatia had seen cultural tourism as a rival to mass

tourism and in the long run its tourism industry was expected to gain more revenues than mass tourism had been generating up to now by utilization and promotion of the country's cultural identity, historical and natural assets.

CONCLUSION

The four selected countries which were presented had as common feature their mass tourism potential. Except Slovenia, the other three countries had a remarkable position in international mass tourism market. In each country, the attempt of the relevant authorities to determine certain strategies to interfere with the progress of tourism development was observed. That is to say, these countries were in a position to shift the emphasis on promoting alternative modes of tourism rather than insisting merely on mass tourism destinations. Except Croatia, the rest of the selected countries had recognized alternative modes of tourism as complementary activities to current beach potential. However, Croatia had opted to use alternative tourism, because it blamed mass tourism for depleting natural resources, damaging environment and bringing low spending tourist. Thus, Croatia rejected any further development of mass tourism.

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