

Heritage Tourism, Thematic Routes and Possibilities for Innovation

KATALIN NAGY
ASSISTANT LECTURER

e-mail: marnk@uni-miskolc.hu

SUMMARY

Heritage tourism is a recently “fashionable” phenomenon, also an answer for present-day trends. Views are different concerning what belongs to this concept; some consider only cultural values, some others rank natural values as well, and parts of the World Heritage have unique place among them. Thematic routes are a special opportunity for heritage tourism, targeting new groups by additional programs and attractions, making them more interesting, attractive and diversified. They play an important role in common European programs, too, like the Cultural Routes Program of the European Council. When developing thematic routes, especially those based on heritage elements, there are a number of special aspects which have to be taken into account, like authenticity and local initiation. Experiencing globalisation in tourism as well, we can state that success is based on innovation. Regarding heritage tourism, product, service, organisation and process innovations are equally required as new ways of being competitive.

Keywords: Heritage, thematic routes, heritage development project, tourism innovation

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INTRODUCTION, RESEARCH QUESTION AND CONCEPTS

Tourism is one of the leading economic sectors, and growing very dynamically. According to a recent report of the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), tourism had a 9% share of the global GDP, and a 3% share of employment in 2009. Regarding Europe, the same figures are 5% and 5.2%. In the past decade, international tourism has grown by 4-5% per year. Though global tourism fell by 4% in 2009 due to the crisis, the recovery was strong and rapid, producing a 6.9% increase in international arrivals in 2010, with a record of 935 million. The forecast growth in European tourism for 2011 was 2-4% (UNWTO data).

The importance of cultural tourism is continuously increasing within the total tourism market. According to UNWTO data, the share of cultural tourism in international travel increased from 37% (1995) to 40% (2004). In 2009 there were about 375 million cultural trips. In Europe, tourists make up 71% of all visitors to cultural attractions.

We can also experience a qualitative change in tourism demand, partly due to the development of society as a whole and partly to globalisation (OECD 2010). The main drivers are increasing incomes, new and cheaper means of transport, and intensive use of the info-communication technology. Parallel with this, we can experience the development of a global network society. As is stated in a recent research study of the EC about the impact of cultural routes on SME's innovation and

competitiveness, the traditional vertical value chains are being replaced by a more complex value network, where destinations, for instance, become an integral part of value creation process.

The question arises: what can the key elements be in the successful development of thematic routes? At first glance, the answer seems to be simple: innovation! But which type? Product and process innovations can be placed in the first place. First of all, developments have to be based on local initiation and will; these can be one of the sources of authenticity, too. Regarding processes, quality can be a central element.

As an initial hypothesis, I would state that thematic route development is not really built on professional bases, but rather according to available grant programmes, and by the initiative of (sometimes external) experts and municipalities rather than local people and activists.

In Section 1, I would like to introduce the main concepts in the research area. In Section 2 existing methodologies are summarized. Section 3 presents how thematic routes appear in the European policies, with examples in Section 4. Section 5 summarises the main concepts of tourism innovations. Finally, conclusions are drawn from local and international surveys.

Cultural Tourism

Cultural tourism involves visits to cultural attractions and events. The currently most accepted definition is given by the Association for Tourism and Leisure Education (ATLAS): “Cultural tourism is the movement of persons to cultural attractions away from their normal place of residence, with the

intention to gather new information and experiences to satisfy their cultural needs.” (Richards, 2003) The OECD report on culture and tourism (2009) summarizes the main drivers for developing cultural tourism: valorizing and preserving heritage; economic development and employment; physical and economic regeneration; strengthening and/or diversifying tourism; retaining population; and developing cultural understanding.

ATLAS has also identified several quantitative and qualitative trends, as shown in Figure 1:

Quantitative trends	Qualitative trends
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Increased number of “cultural holidays” – Rising education, income and status levels in the market – More use of Internet for information gathering and booking – More visits to cultural events and festivals, driven by increased supply and a desire for co-presence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Growing interest in popular culture, or the “everyday culture” of the destination – Growing role for the arts in cultural tourism – Increased linkage between tourism and creativity, and the growth of “creative tourism” – Growing “omnivorous” feature of cultural consumption

Source: Impact of European Cultural Routes on SMEs’ innovation and competitiveness, 2011

Figure 5. Trends in Cultural Tourism

Europe is a key cultural destination, and several significant cultural tourism niches can be identified, replacing mass tourism: creative, educational, gastronomic, religious, spiritual and holistic, wellness and spa, cultural volunteer and roots of migrant tourism types. Authenticity is also an important question, where new trends can be experienced towards context, originality and user-generated content.

As we will see, heritage is an important part of cultural tourism, and its development can evidently fit the identified market niches.

Heritage

The best-known concepts can be summarized as follows (in Puczko-Racz, 2000):

- Nuryanti (1996): part of a society’s cultural traditions and also a community’s identity.
- Hall-McArthur (1998): such a past value which is considered to be worth preserving for the next generations by the previous ones.
- Thurnbridge and Ashworth (1996): in a broader sense, there are five essential aspects: any physical remains from the past, individual and collective memories, intangible elements of the past, results of cultural and artistic works, natural environment, outstanding economical activity, the so-called “heritage industry”

Heritage elements can be divided into two main groups: cultural and natural heritage; and cultural heritage can be divided into two sub-groups of tangible and intangible elements. Natural heritage is mentioned much more rarely, though it appears e.g. as a World Heritage category. We can find cultural heritage with several possible definitions. In general, it involves

the most characteristic dimension of an area and its population (culture). According to Czene (2002), it is a complex heritage kept together by culture, but they are not equivalent with each other; culture becomes heritage by the character of accumulating traditions. Tóth-Trócsányi (1997) says that cultural heritage is a continuously shaping phenomenon. Both are in close relationship with the socio-economic space, which is a result of certain processes and also a starting point for future development.

We can find several more definitions in different legal documents as well. The most important ones are the following: World Heritage Agreement (1972), which Hungary joined in 1985; 21st Statute of 1985 (Hungary); LXIV law of 2001 about the protection of cultural heritage (Hungary); UNESCO Agreement about the Protection of Intellectual Cultural Heritage (2003).

Heritage-based Tourism

There are several different opinions and views, the most important are as follows:

- Swarbrooke (1994, in Puczko-Racz 2000): „based on heritage, where heritage is the central element of tourism product on the one hand, and it is the main motivation for tourists on the other”.
- National Trust for Historic Preservation (USA): „travelling to experience the places, artefacts and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present. It includes historic, cultural and natural attractions.” Furthermore: „heritage tourism is a critical piece of the historic preservation puzzle. It helps protect our nation’s natural and cultural treasures by building awareness, creating new jobs, providing new business opportunities, and strengthening local economies. Every time you enjoy a historic place, you are not only helping to preserve it — you are helping to improve the quality of life for residents and visitors alike”.
- Nurick (2000): Heritage is anything transmitted from the past, especially: original cultural and natural material; the built environment; the archaeological resource; the intangible heritage; the natural heritage, that ‘heritage’ is perceived by our multicultural society as having a quality or significance that makes it worth preserving for its own sake and for the appreciation of current and future generations.
- Silberberg (1995): Cultural and Heritage Tourism is a tool of economic development that achieves economic growth through attracting visitors from outside a host community, who are motivated wholly or in part by interest in the historical, artistic, scientific or lifestyle/heritage offerings of a community, region, group or institution. Such travel is focused upon experiencing cultural environments, including landscapes, the visual and performing arts and special lifestyles, values, traditions, and events.

- Fladmark (1994): cultural heritage tourism is not only identification, management and protection; it helps in understanding tourism’s effects on local communities and regions, increases economical and social benefits, helps finding the necessary financial resources for protection, marketing and promotion.

Thematic Routes

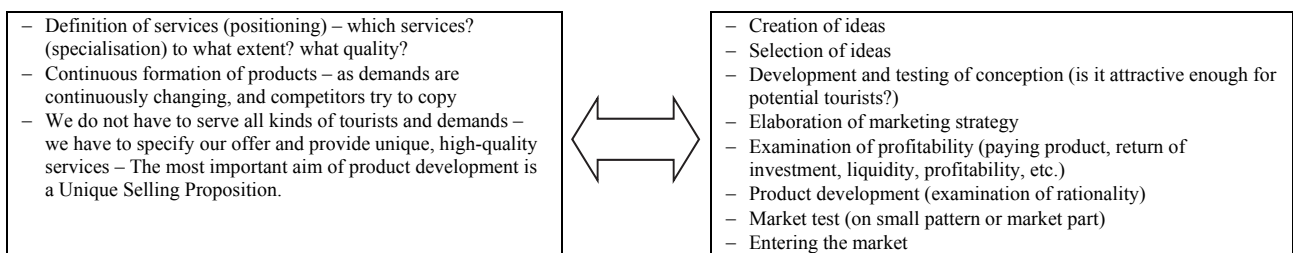
Finally, the concept of “thematic route” means a route that connects natural or artificial attractions, on the basis of a certain theme, and that are accessible by a form of transport. Considering sustainability, thematic routes provide education and leisure at the same time. The main aims of such routes are: raising interest, education, development of cooperation, new

markets, protection, packaging, decrease expenditures, development, fitting the trends, etc.

The Cultural Routes of the European Council program – as we will see later – testifies to the special role of thematic routes and trips in global tourism today.

METHODOLOGY OF HERITAGE DEVELOPMENT

Though heritage tourism has several special characteristics, we have to take classical product development processes into consideration as well. These can be found on the right side of Figure 2, while the tourism product development priorities are on the left side:



Source: own edition

Figure 6. Classical Process of Product Development

Heritage planning means the proper utilisation of past remains. This became general only in the 20th century in Western Europe, where heritage values of an area are in focus; their utilisation by such methods which results in concrete benefits (e.g. increasing number of visitors). Heritage values are used for economical functions. The development of a heritage product is the result of activity over several periods.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation (USA) worked out the following methodology for the development of cultural heritage tourism:

- Step 1: Access to potential
- Step 2: Plan and organise
- Step 3: Prepare for visitors, protect and manage
- Step 4: Market for success

With the help of the following five basic principles we can avoid all the difficulties arising from the meeting of culture, heritage and tourism:

- Collaborate: Building partnerships is essential, as they help develop local support. Tourists’ demands can be satisfied only by several, cooperating institutions and stakeholders.
- Find the Fit: Balancing the needs of residents and visitors, defining the amount of tourists that can be handled. Local circumstances determine what an area needs to do and can do.
- Make sites and programs come alive: Creative and exciting interpretation is important! Engage all senses of visitors!
- Focus on quality and authenticity: Authenticity of previous generations, local culture and traditions –

these will interest visitors and make the area unique. Only these can add real value.

- Preserve and protect: Heritage elements are irreplaceable! Only long-term preservation and protection is acceptable. This is true for traditions, handicrafts, feasts and gastronomy as well.

An Australian research program has found the following key success factors regarding heritage tourism (Carlsen et al. 2008):

Success factors in heritage tourism operation	Critical success factors in heritage tourism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agreed objectives and clear concepts - Financial planning for budgeting, capital raising and price setting - Effective marketing strategies based on sound market research - Destination and proximity to major markets and visitor flows - Human resource management, including paid staff and volunteers - Planning for product differentiation, life cycles and value adding - Quality and authenticity of products and experiences - Engage cultural heritage and tourism expertise in conservation and promotion - Design interpretation as an integral part of the heritage tourism experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Issues influencing visitor flows and market access included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - accessibility convenience - high fuel costs discouraging self drive visitors - group tour access - destination image - attraction clustering - proximity to major markets - location in growing tourism regions - use of night tours to keep visitors in the region - proximity to other facilities such as accommodation and entertainment in nearby towns and cities

Source: Carlsen et al. 2008

Figure 7. Key Success Factors in Heritage Tourism

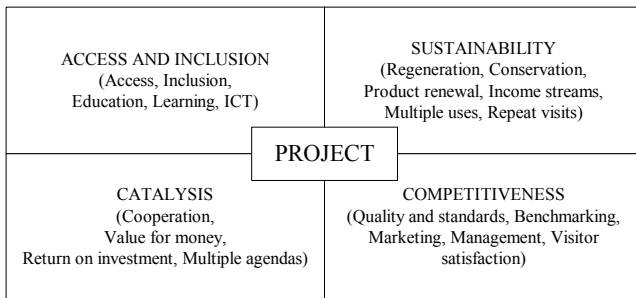
Nurick (2000) has examined *British heritage tourism*. He used the best-known definitions (see earlier). Heritage plays an outstanding role in Great Britain's tourism, one of the leading motivation elements, and he found that it is almost impossible to draw a boundary between heritage and non-heritage tourism:

Main motivations of leisure travel to Great Britain, activities determining decisions	
Visiting 'heritage' sites (castles, monuments, churches, etc.)	37 %
Exploring historic / interesting towns / cities	29 %
Visiting artistic/heritage exhibits (museums/art galleries/heritage centres/etc.)	29 %
Attending performing arts, etc. (theatre/cinema/opera/ballet)	18 %
Visiting gardens, parks	16 %
Hiking / walking / rambling / orienteering	8 %
Pleasure motoring	4 %

Source: Nurick, 2000

Figure 8. Motivations of Leisure Travel in Great Britain

Based on his findings, he identified the following success factors related to heritage-based tourism projects:



Source: Nurick, 2000

Figure 9. Success Factors in Heritage-Based Tourism Development Projects

Finally, there are certain community aspects as well, regarding cultural heritage tourism. There are three essential components which have to be integrated:

- The desire of a community to share its cultural legacy with tourists,
- An intact cultural resource base that can provide the foundation for a community cultural heritage product,
- An accessible travel market that is interested in visiting the certain heritage.

HERITAGE AND CULTURAL ROUTES IN EUROPEAN POLICY

Parallel to economic and political construction, which is one of the means of integration, travel also plays an important role in raising the awareness of a continent that sometimes gives the impression of both seeking unity and of splitting up. Travel within Europe allows the practice of a multicultural European identity and a concrete sharing of its values by the citizens. The idea of enabling Europeans to rediscover, in their spare time, a tourist cultural practice has led to a turn towards great trans-border, even continental, routes. These routes influenced the

history of cultural relations, and for centuries supported exchanges and blending; imposes itself upon our contemporaries as one of the instruments of cultural action and free movement of ideas and people.

The Cultural Routes programme was launched by the Council of Europe in 1987. Its objective was to demonstrate, by means of a journey through space and time, how the heritage of the different countries and cultures of Europe contributes to a shared cultural heritage. The Cultural Routes put into practice the fundamental principles of the Council of Europe: human rights, cultural democracy, cultural diversity and identity, dialogue, mutual exchange and enrichment across boundaries and centuries.

Themes must satisfy all of the following criteria (CM/Res (2010)52):

1. the theme must be representative of European values and common to several countries of Europe;
2. the theme must be researched and developed by groups of multidisciplinary experts from different regions of Europe so as to ensure that the activities and projects which illustrate it are based on consensus;
3. the theme must be illustrative of European memory, history and heritage and contribute to an interpretation of the diversity of present-day Europe;
4. the theme must lend itself to cultural and educational exchanges for young people and hence be in line with the Council of Europe's ideas and concerns in these fields;
5. the theme must permit the development of initiatives and exemplary and innovative projects in the field of cultural tourism and sustainable cultural development;
6. the theme must lend itself to the development of tourist products in partnership with tourist agencies and operators aimed at different publics, including school groups.

The list of priority fields of action includes:

- cooperation in research and development,
- enhancement of memory, history and European heritage,
- cultural and educational exchanges for younger Europeans,
- contemporary cultural and artistic practice,
- cultural tourism and sustainable cultural development.

A technical body, the European Institute of Cultural Routes, was set up in 1998 for operational purposes. Its role is to examine applications for new projects, to monitor activities in the field and co-ordinate the work of partner organisations and to disseminate and archive information documents.

In 2005, the European Institute of Cultural Routes created the European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG) "Culture Routes Europe", giving life to a common organization which aims to gather all the networks responsible for the cultural routes of the Council of Europe and to work together, in a coherent way, for tourist visibility and realisation of the cultural routes program.

The European Heritage Label is designed to promote the transnational European dimension of cultural property, monuments, natural or urban sites, tangible and intangible,

contemporary and traditional heritage and sites that have played a key role in building and uniting Europe. It aims to strengthen the support of European citizens for a shared European identity and to foster a sense of belonging to a common cultural space.

The European Heritage Label is designed to encourage people's understanding of, and respect and support for, their heritage. It represents a means of protecting and promoting our cultural heritage, with the aim of identifying and passing on that heritage to future generations, while strengthening cooperation between European states.

REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL EXAMPLES

Concerning the Northern Hungarian tourism region, there are significant examples for the importance of heritage-based tourism, with special regard to thematic routes:

- During the elaboration of the tourism development strategy of the Northern Hungarian tourism region in 2007 a deep attraction audit was carried out. From the 4,670 elements identified, 2,688 could be classified as cultural and heritage attractions.
- The Hungary – Slovakia Cross-border Cooperation Programme 2007-2013 provided a very good opportunity for tourism development projects, too. The “Tours without Borders” project was carried out in 2009-2010, and its main aim was to elaborate joint tourism packages along three thematic routes: the Gothic Route, the Iron Route, and the Forts and Castles Route. The project partners were Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County and the Town Municipality of Spišská Nová Ves. These heritage elements play a very important role in the tourism offer of the region, and represent great historical and cultural value. Just think about the common parts of our history, or the industrial significance, as this area was referred to as the “iron heart of Europe” in the 18th-19th centuries. Under the name “MEDI AVEL” another project is being carried out in 2011-2012 as a continuation, with the aim of elaboration of new joint programmes along thematic routes: the Gothic Route, Industrial Heritage Trails and Wine Routes. Eight museums are also involved with new exhibitions, and the partners are Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County and the Košice Region.

Within the above mentioned “Tours without Borders” project, a survey was carried out among the participating entrepreneurs and tourism organisations (both Slovak and Hungarian) (Nagy 2010). The results seem to support the initial hypothesis. The project was initiated by the two municipalities, and potential stakeholders were addressed only later. The rate of participating stakeholders was the first “shock” – only around 15% from all of those approached. Regarding existing partnerships, 65% of Hungarian and 40% of Slovak entrepreneurs have certain co-operations. Only 60% had heard about thematic routes before, though the guests of 81% of the respondents would have been interested in them. Of the

respondents, 78% had considered participating in such programs, but they were not proactive, rather waiting for an invitation to join. Finally, 90% of the entrepreneurs wanted to be involved. Regarding the rate of participation, this is only 13-14% of the number of the original sample. This supports the hypothesis that well-established project developments should be based on local initiation, especially in special programs like heritage-based thematic routes.

Within the Cultural Routes of the European Council, by this time, there are 25 routes under the “brand” European Cultural Routes. To mention just a few examples: the first route was the Santiago de Compostela Pilgrim Routes in 1987, running through eight countries. The European Mozart Routes were established in 2002, with the cooperation of 10 countries. The Phoenicians Route (18 countries in three continents), established in 2003, represents an ancient, Mediterranean community, and developed into an intercultural model of the European Union. Hungary has been an important partner in the Central European Iron Trail from its “birth” in 2007, with Miskolc and its surroundings in the focus.

There are many of other, sometimes even surprising or extreme examples, when heritage elements have become the main tourism attractions of an area. Just as a “foretaste”, some of them are:

- Military heritage as tourism attraction – Military heritage tourism is a further sub-set within heritage tourism, in which “the veneration of military death is linked to modern nationalistic impulses”. (Gatewood and Cameron 2004). There are outstanding museums, like the National Military Museum of New Zealand; previous “top secret” objects which became visitor centres, like the former submarine base in Balaklava (Ukraine); or the Maginot line thematic route in Lorraine, France.
- Active tourism and nature protection along the former “iron curtain” – “Borders separate – nature unites”: this is the slogan of a great nature protection program, also known as the Green Belt of Europe. The zone has a really untouched natural habitat, the best sample of Europe's biodiversity. Today it is 6,800 km long, in 22 countries. The aim of the Iron Curtain Trail, which is still in development, is to also transfer the idea of experiencing history to a European level as well. This 6,800 km trail guides cyclists with an interest in history from the Barents Sea on the Norwegian-Russian border to the Black Sea along what used to be the Iron Curtain, which is now no longer a dividing line but a symbol of a shared, pan-European experience in a reunified Europe.

TOURISM INNOVATIONS

As we could see, cultural and heritage tourism are a very complex system and play an outstanding and significant role in world tourism, especially in Europe. European Cultural Routes also face a challenge. The European Institute of Cultural Routes prepared a report for the Congress of Local and Regional

Authorities of the Council of Europe, identifying the following trends and their rising importance in cultural tourism (in: EC CIP project study 2011):

- showcase exhibitions and of European capitals for culture,
- for visitors of museums of territories and scientific museums, based on living presentations, i.e. with people working (interactivity!),
- industrial heritage sites,
- military architecture sites,
- memorial sites,
- natural and historic parks,
- celebrations, especially those of prominent local, national and European figures,
- annual themes coordinating a common policy for territories.

The recommendations for existing Cultural Routes have been organised in five main groups of capacity-building, network governance, performance evaluation, brand image and marketing, and cooperation with the main stakeholders.

These five areas, at the same time, are the main areas of tourism innovations, too. Innovation in tourism is difficult and not frequent (yet), because of some special features of tourism: structure (mainly SMEs) and characteristics (services, not products; intangibility).

First of all, we have to know clearly the actual trends in tourism to be able to provide offers according to demands. These trends represent the great market pull force, which can motivate tourism providers and entrepreneurs to conscious innovation. Besides strong price competition, we can experience liberal conditions which can increase the number of competitors; global providers put high pressure on local SMEs; basic synergies have to be taken into consideration; and, finally, the development of information technology plays a determining role in tourism. These tendencies have to result in new services and structures, and in radical changes in selling channels, and have to open new marketing ways, like solutions based on databases or network organisations.

Defining the possible areas of tourism innovations, we need the following key elements:

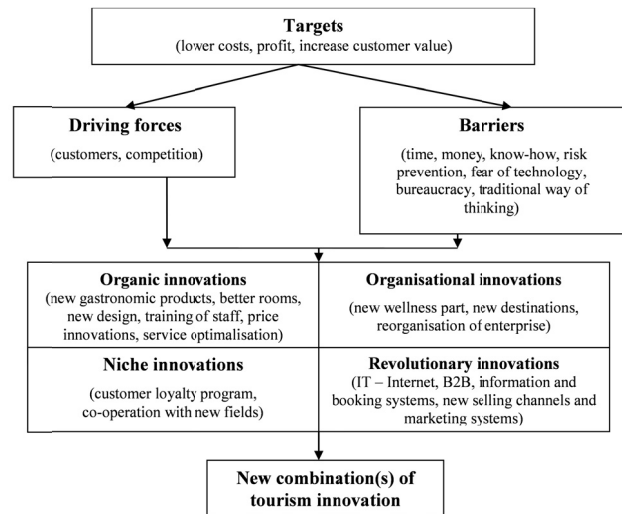
- individualisation of mass tourism, according to the double expectation of effectiveness and uniqueness,
- wide use of ICT systems,
- formation of special value elements (like design, colours, emotions) increasing the experience,
- strengthening the core competencies of destinations and enterprises, and
- serving new markets, target groups – i.e. marketing innovations.

The main points of tourism innovations are to give new target-tool combinations, new problem solutions – the possible forms, according to Weiermair (2004) are:

- organic innovations (based on existing competences, relations and networks),
- niche innovations (new, concentrated forms of existing competences),
- organisational innovations (new co-operations without existing competences), and

- revolutionary innovations (new competences on existing relations).

Figure 6 provides examples of these forms.



Source: on the basis of Weiermair, 2004

Figure 10. Tourism Innovations

Due to globalisation, the competition between destinations is increasing. Product innovations themselves are not enough for maintaining competitiveness. As was stated before, process and organisational innovations are what is most lacking. As tourism products are combinations of several services, we have to deal with networks and co-operation regarding organisation patterns.

Innovation has become one of the main economic viewpoints both in the European Union (e.g. the Lisbon and EU 2020 strategies) and on the regional level; just think of the significant investments in research and education (mainly from community sources) or subsidies in the most innovative sectors (like transportation and energy). This is true in the case of services, too, especially in those requiring a certain level of know-how and qualifications, which is typical in certain tourism activities (e.g. accommodation, catering, real estate). Information and communication technologies (ICT) are the fields where we can experience the most changes and innovations in tourism as well. The wide use of ICT and the Internet has allowed tourists to directly keep in touch with service providers, thus decreasing the transaction costs and eliminating intermediaries.

Today, changing demand directs the market, which is ruled by the customers. Service providers suffer the consequences of this. This means a new kind of problem, which requires an innovative and creative way of thinking for the formation of wide range of niche tourism forms. Moreover, lifestyles have been changed over the past decades – a healthier population with higher disposable incomes travels more often, but for less time. Focus is put on “best quality for best price”, instead of the lowest price. Customer loyalty is decreasing; tourists are searching for sustainable and authentic forms of holidays instead of mass tourism.

Tourism innovations cannot be limited to individual innovation performances; rather, they are the results of some cooperation, where entrepreneurial (stakeholders, companies, etc.) and community (tourism offices, marketing agencies, local and regional municipalities, etc.) levels both take part. The community level determines the economical, social, ecological, regulative, organisational and other environmental factors which are interconnected with tourism, and their management has the largest impact on innovation processes.

Experience can also be considered as one of the most important and determining factors of service innovations, regarding the experience-focused principle of tourism. They see innovations as the results of a process rather than results of individuals' creativity. Thus, "open innovations" can play a very important role in tourism; for example, the "best practices" method is widely used in tourism development projects.

"A product is what you buy – an experience is what you remember" (Michelle Sears, 2011) – this should be the main driving force in tourism innovations.

Innovation is part of the decision-making daily routine of big companies – but for small tourism enterprises, focusing mainly on certain destinations, innovation possibilities are limited. The primary obstacle is the lack of human and financial resources. Small enterprises concentrate on average demands of average customers – new products and services mean a real challenge. Tourism based on experience, sustainable tourism, nature-based, cultural or heritage-based tourism can be a strategic way for elaborating innovative new tourism products.

CONCLUSIONS

The OECD held its conference "Innovation and Growth in Tourism" in 2003 in Lugano, Switzerland. In its final paper, Prof. Peter Keller, Chairman of OECD Tourism Committee, summarized the conclusions as follows (excerpts):

"Innovation in tourism is no longer a question of a giant leap forward – it is a series of small steps that lead to incremental growth. Innovation is a feedback process. One innovation inevitably leads to another one. Innovations improve products and reduce the cost of processes. The innovation process has thus become an investment process. Large companies set aside a significant part of their total budget for research and development. In this regard, investments in innovation are not that different from investments in installations or equipment." (Keller 2004, p.4)

There is a need for innovation-oriented tourism policy. The future of traditional destinations will depend on a more innovation-oriented tourism policy, which has the main tasks of:

- extending the life-cycles of tourism products and services,
- achieving a steady rate of growth – depending on inputs of capital and labour, more effective structures, reaching new markets, investment on training and know-how, as well as research and development.

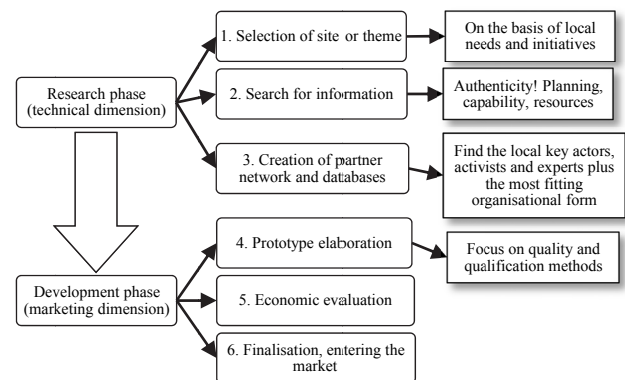
These factors can be considered as the main driving forces of innovation. They can generate further development, and act as a base for the required product, process and marketing

innovations. This is true on the destination level, too, which should become more competitive on both national and international markets. Destinations should utilize endogenous factors, like agglomeration in the case of traditional tourism centres. Similarly, traditional destinations focus on the best and biggest places, thus shadowing the agglomeration; the latter then can focus on niche markets.

Regarding innovation mechanism, there are certain tools in innovation-oriented tourism policy, like training (providing long-term human resources, stating that destination is the best level of learning; production and diffusion of know-how (reaching sector-specific and macroeconomic, mainly external values); innovation promotion (supporting competition and cooperation, creating innovative atmosphere). We can state that competition between destinations depends on innovation abilities.

Networking is one of the key elements in the case of cultural routes, too. This naturally leads to a series of further questions, like forms of cooperation, management, leadership and governance, financial backgrounds, etc. SMEs – being the basis of tourism – are participants of networks along cultural route; that is why it is so exciting to wait for the final results of recent research projects on the routes' impact on their innovation ability.

So, how to go on with the innovative development of heritage-based thematic routes? Using the traditional models of community and company research and innovation processes, my first model is:



Source: own edition

Figure 11. Initial Hypothetical Model for Thematic Route Developments

The blocks on the right side of Figure 7 contain my hypothetical conclusions, which, at the same time, point out the directions for my further research questions. As product development itself is not enough for success and competitiveness, the priorities should be:

- elaborating the most suitable organisational form(s) for such heritage-based thematic routes, which are initiated by local people (whether or not it is necessary to have an external expert, initiator, advisor or moderator) – that is, creation of a co-operational model;

- elaboration of a thematic route qualification system or method, which is suitable for establishing a commonly used methodology for all kind of thematic routes (such a system does not yet exist; whether it is possible at all to form such a system, as routes may include many different types of services and stakeholders) – that is, creation of a complex qualification model.
- The construction and testing of such a qualification model could be a great step forward for not only product, but also process innovation, too.

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