

How to **improve the synergy** among **stakeholders** in the **tourism industry** of Serbia

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Objectives | Serbia passed through very complicated periods over the past two decades. Being part of Yugoslavia it had a positive image, but since 1990 until the present day, the most common identification of Serbia is with the image of war. This fact also had a great influence on the tourism industry. In the time of Yugoslavia, the current Serbia was pretty much excluded from the tourism map. This gives a clue why the positioning on the international tourism market is not an easy issue nowadays and why it causes many problems. Beside that, one of the major issues is that stakeholders involved in the tourism industry in Serbia do not cooperate enough.

With the new Tourism Strategy of Serbia, adopted in 2006, the country has been divided in four clusters; Vojvodina, Belgrade, South-East Serbia and South-West Serbia. Under this strategy, synergy is the basis for each of the clusters. To work together in collaboration and to have a common goal is important to be able to position Serbia as a destination on the international tourism market.

However, there is not enough cooperation among the stakeholders in the tourism industry in Serbia. Therefore, the necessary Synergy for tourism development is not formed. This research was conducted in order to understand the reasons for this issue.

Methodology | The goal of the research is to provide an answer to the question on how to improve the synergy among stakeholders in the Serbian tourism sector in relation to the success of future development of Serbia as a tourism destination.

To reach this goal, the use of the retrospective-prospective study design is made. This method is used to find out what is the past and the current position of Serbia and to gather the relevant data about the key players in the Serbian tourism industry.

This type of research can be used to answer questions on how to improve a current problematic situation. It is therefore applied to reach the goal of this research.

This research is an explanatory one. An explanatory research explains the "how" and "why" of an issue or problem which is already known as a fact. Explanatory researches look for causes and reasons behind an issue and explains why it is as it is (Jennings, 2001). In this case this research method is applicable since the issue of slow development of Serbia as a tourism destination is known and is a fact.

To avoid too much self-reflexivity in the research, questions are formed as if the interviewer is not familiar with the topic and doesn't know much about it. On this way the opinion and beliefs of the researcher are not influencing the design and application of the research.

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Main results and contributions | From this research the main obstacles identified are the lack of synergy among the stakeholders is the missing cooperation.

The main reason for the low level of cooperation is lack of trust. Consequence is that the private sector is not enough involved in the tourism planning. In Serbian tourism industry there is no strong leadership, most of the leaders rather have a political background. There are a lot of managers who are not flexible enough and are not ready for a change, which is marked as highly needed in Serbia. Beside many other issues, there is the very important fact that there is no human resources to implement the strategy. This leads to the situation that tourism happens spontaneously in Serbia.

Limitations | One of the main limitations is the availability of reliable data. Reliable data is difficult to get from the past two decades, both because of the war period and the subsequent problematic gathering of data, as well as the changes in the geopolitical situation. Statistical data might be misleading, because for political reasons the official information can be coloured or biased.

Conclusions | The Republic of Serbia is a country in transition with a high tourism potential. The country is going through serious reforms in the tourism sector. Besides these reforms there are many other problems, which the tourism sector of Serbia is facing. The sector is trying to reposition itself on the international market but is having a hard task in creating a positive image for Serbia. The picture of war is still in the eyes of many tourists.

The present tourism strategy in Serbia has a high attention for the idea of an integrated tourism destination. However, the problem is that the implementation of the strategy can not be done well because the stakeholders are not working together and do not cooperate.

To describe this issue in more detail, the situation on the local level is presented in the case of the specific destination of Palic in northern Serbia. The main outcome is that there is a lack of trust and uninvolvement of the private sector in forming the development strategy. These issues have a major influence on the existing non-cooperation among the stakeholders. Beside that insufficient education, lack of strategical thinking and not being ready for changes seems to add a lot to the toughness of the task that is waiting for Serbia. The main problem is that there is no knowledge and experience in how to implement the strategy. There are not enough experts who can tell, and show how to implement the strategy. Also it is not known which steps have to be taken at all to implement the strategy and who and what is necessary for that.

The form of how the tourism body in a country is organised is marked as an old fashioned one.

Ministry has a mission as a coordinator of the development initiatives and funding to the support of the developments. But what came out of this research is that stakeholders in tourism say that ministry should provide a clear hierarchy structure and marketing plan, and that does not exist.

Because of the transition private sector is not yet weak and have no power on decision making and influencing the cooperation on a global level.

This leads to the answer on the main question on how the synergy between the stakeholders can be improved. It is obvious that to reach a situation of synergy among stakeholders, a strong management is needed.

Some of the stakeholders know that the cooperation is the key to success and that their success is more depending on the success of the whole 'orchestra', rather than acting as a 'soloist'. However, the tourism sector of Serbia needs a dirigent to guide the orchestra.

Bibliography |

Jennings, G., 2001, *Tourism Research*, 1st edition, John Wiley & Sons Australia Ltd, Milton, Qld