IS CITTASLOW AN EFFECTIVE MODEL IN DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM? A CASE STUDY IN AUSTRIA

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ABSTRACT

In modern times, the fast-moving nature became rampant and nearly every product or service is aligned to be better, further or bigger. The human kind is evolved into a consumer society who strives after more possessions, while the economy is booming in order to satisfy every upcoming need. In addition to this, the people are confronted with stress, unhealthy nutrition and pollution day by day. The need to escape the fast lifestyle is emerging (Matos, 2004). Therefore the counter reaction to this fast pace is, as an offset to the loss of cultural personality, increasing materialism and urbanization, to give priority to the regional identity and to resurrect national traditions (Knox, 2005).

In order to cope with the deterioration of the wider environmental situation and decline of our natural resources, several tourism destinations aim for providing more sustainable offers. In course of this, the idea of slow cities (Cittaslow) was born which can be targeted as a paragon for vacation spots; hence they have already realized different aspects which are regarded as environmental-friendly.

Sustainability comes along with a health-related quality of life. Therefore the idea of the slow cities can be seen as an interesting concept, which enables the inhabitants as well as visitors to benefit from living permanently or just temporary in these special towns. Through the protection of exploiting their natural resources and interference in the biodiversity, people can enjoy the pristine and pure-minded environment, for example tasting the culinary delicacy (Knox, 2005).

This paper is based on an exploratory research design with the objective to illustrate information about Cittaslow and its implication on the development of tourism in those cities. In Austria there are three cities, Enns in Upper Austria, Horn in Lower Austria and Hartberg in Styria which satisfy the criteria set by the committee of Cittaslow.

Due to the main objective of this paper, to investigate the tourism specific aspect behind the concept of Cittaslow, the answer to the following research question "Can the concept of Cittaslow be an effective model in destination development for sustainable tourism?" was searched. The information provided in this paper is based on a

qualitative research, a secondary data collection through literature and a primary data collection through expert interviews in those three slow cities.

Keywords: Destination Development, Sustainable Tourism, Tourism Paradox, Cittaslow.

1. DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

According to Bieger and Beritelli (2013) the term destination can be defined as a geographical area which is chosen by the guest. It has to include various facilities which are essential for the stay, like accommodation, board, and entertainment. A destination has to be led as a strategic business unit in order to be the competitive unit in the incoming tourism. As stated by Inskeep (1991) a tourism destination is comprised of six major components that are essential in order to create an attractive tourism product. The first component is the tourist attractions and activities with cultural, natural or artificial background. This is followed by the accommodation, including all kinds of facilities which offer a provision of rooms or lodgings where travelers do not only spend the night but make also use of other services offered there. The third component are tourist facilities and services which support the tourism development like tour operators or restaurants, banks who offer money exchange, beauty centers, medical facilities or souvenir shops who top off a tourism destination.

A further important aspect of a destination is the accessibility (transportation), which "...refers to all those elements that effect cost, speed and convenience with which a particular tourist destination can be reached." (Bennett and Strydom, 2001). Additionally to the existing means of transportation like land, water and air transportation new and innovative offers like city busses, e-bikes or bicycle pathways increase the customer satisfaction. In addition to this, the other infrastructure which is the foundation of any infrastructure is of fundamental importance. Visitors highly appreciate destinations where systems of communication, utilities, electric power, access to internet, sufficient clean water supply and waste disposal in order to keep the area clean, are given.

The final input is institutional elements like local tourism organizations whose mission is to promote the destination and provide the guests with sufficient information. In order to develop a successful tourism destination, all the components have to be possessed (Inskeep, 1991).

A destination passes through a development cycle (Althof, 2001) which consists of the following stages: Discovery, Involvement, Development, Consolidation, Stagnation and Decline. In the development process of an attractive tourism product, the consumer plays the most significant role. The demand of a destination affects the products and services provided by a tourism region. Therefore the value of a destination will be measured by the satisfaction of the tourists needs (Bieger and Beritelli, 2013).

This leads to the fact that the offer of tourist attractions, which a destination can possess has a big say in the travel motivation of tourists. Therefore a destination needs to have one major attraction, which encourage tourists to pay a visit. In course of visiting this specific sight, tourist will take the opportunity to enjoy oneself also at other interesting points of the destination (Bieger and Beritelli, 2013). As the landscape and nature often serve as the

major tourist attractions of specific regions, a considerate and sustainable approach to natural resources has to be ensured. In course of a destination development, it has to be paid attention to the local community as well. The inhabitations need to be incorporated in the planning processes to ensure a common consent (Steinecke, 2013). Tourism shall not just enhance the welfare of a destination, a further important objective is to improve the suitability of human living and convey their culture to the tourists. An inter-cultural exchange has to take place that both parties, locals and visitors can benefit from (Sharma, 2004).

In order to successfully develop a competitive tourism destination, the strengths and competences need to be investigated. The following questions need to be answered in the development process:

- What kind of destination is aimed for?
- Which objects shall be reached?
- Which position on the market does the destination want to achieve?
- What is the target group?
- What are the future objectives?

A destination which decides to react against commercialization, has the chance to concentrate on the preservation of customs, traditions and heritage in order to keep their own identity. The tourism development in small towns or cities gives local producers the chance to preserve their business and are not oppressed by big business concerns (Eisenstein, 2010). In order to successfully develop a tourism destination, the economic, the socio-cultural and the ecological effects need to be taken into consideration. The economic impact of tourism of a destination is of great significance to the local government or tourism-specific decisions or further activities. Although the measurement of the economic effect compared to the socio-cultural and ecological impacts is simpler, the capture of the business situation a destination can possess shall not be underestimated (Heath, 1992).

2. TOURISM PARADOX

The growth of tourism cannot be always considered as having a positive impact for destinations. Because of the increase of the tourism industry, many historic destinations started to lose their historical identity and suffer from overcrowding (Diekmann and Gillot, 2010). The tourism paradox begins to appear at this stage since the natural and cultural resources that are worth seeing are consumed by the travelers. Tourism paradox is the name given to this phenomenon where tourism industry destroys natural and cultural environment that is necessary for tourism activities. Tourism paradox is also the name of unsustainable tourism (Arikan and Ünsever, 2014).

As the popularity of diverse tourist destinations is steady increasing, this involves an ascending figure of visitors. Through the stimulation of the economy, also the revenues of local suppliers increase who use the chance to expansion their existing capacity in order to make more profit. As a result of this, the problem concerning diminishing resources affects the vacation resort. Projects that focus on and emphasize the economic and social benefits should be undertaken in order to protect these values in the end. Besides the economic aspect of conserving cultural and natural heritage it is also very important to protect the destination from the negative effects of tourism.

In order to customize tourism for humans, the tourism sector has to undertake diverse activities to improve the accessibility to the destinations, accommodations and points of interest. This involves intruding into the natural resources, like forests, lakes, coasts and mountains which is a contradiction in terms. Although there is a need of developing better infrastructure, interference, in the foundation on which tourism is built up, is self-defeating (Williams and Ponsford, 2008).

Tourism is regarded predominantly as an economic revenue stream for a destination but to stay in effect for a long time, it demands a deliberately approach to our surrounding. The authors stated that although travelling supports the economic system of touristic places it can never be conducted in a sustainable way due to the unavoidable conveyance of people (Wilde and Slob, 2007). In addition to this, enterprises that are active in tourism also have to be aware of the negative consequences which make an impact on the environment. They have to act towards more sustainable products and practices in order to lead by example (Williams and Ponsford, 2008).

3. SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

The term sustainability related to tourism need to be rediscovered in the artless surrounding, the social development and the promoting of the economy in the area concerned. In order to aim at the target of a sustainable tourism product, the ecological balance of an area needs to be in consistent with the economic system (Kuhn, 2007). The primary motivation factors of tourists who pilgrim to sustainable tourism destinations are enjoying the beautiful landscape with its fauna and flora untainted by pollution. The wider the spectrum of natural attractions a place offers, the more a tourist cherishes the experience and it will sink deep into memory. As an important tool to extend the awareness of tourist attractions out of our natural environment educational work needs to be done (Edgell, 2006).

Sustainable tourism development meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future. It is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems (World Tourism Organization, 1995).

Due to the extreme stationary aspect of a destination and the increasing environmentalism of the visitors, a sustainable dealing with the environment and its fauna and flora needs to be ensured. Therefore certain environmental protection measures have to be taken into consideration (Simpson, 2011). Concerning the operational level, companies have to follow a strict waste disposal, water and electricity austerity measures as well as considering environmental protection regulation regarding the construction of new buildings.

As tourism is concomitant with transportation, the focus of offering more sustainable means of transportation need to be laid. In order to reduce noise and pollution produced by the traffic, the individual transportation shall be reduced by offering attractive packages with public transit. A reduction of traffic within a tourism destination can be achieved due to more pedestrian streets, rentals of bicycles, e-bikes or a city bus (Steinecke, 2013).

The focus on sustainability in tourism is very helpful in the development process of a destination as it will result in

obtaining cost leadership, quality leadership as well as a niche-position. An intact landscape and an unspoiled countryside are nowadays taken as evidences for a qualitative and valuable vacation. The achieved quality leadership enables the providers to prevail a higher price level compared to the competitors on the market. In combination with a strong brand name, a justification of the price will be ensured. The creation of a niche-position due to the sustainable aspect of the destination enables the region to elude from the tough competitive pressure in the market and to focus on a selected circle of customers (Kristges, 2003).

4. CITTASLOW

In October 1999 the new concept of a sustainable town was initiated by Paolo Saturnini, previous mayor of Greve in Chianti, located in Tuscany who consolidated with three other Italian mayors, namely Stefano Cimicchi (Orvieto), Francesca Guida (Bra), Domenico Marrone (Postiano) and the Founder of Slow Food, Carlo Petrini. As by the year 2015, 199 member cities present in 30 countries in the world can be possessed by the Cittaslow International Network, this continuing growth acts as an indicator for its success (Cittaslow International, 2015).

The fundamental idea is to counteract the fast city movement in order to provide better living conditions for the inhabitants of the city. The concept of Cittaslow is metonymic with sustainability, history, tradition and hospitality. Moreover the participating cities are advocates of individuality (Knox, 2005). One of the criteria is a population figure below 50.000. Furthermore, they have to promote an ecological policy, an infrastructure policy and have to characterize agricultural quality (Mayer and Knox, 2006).

Regarding to the opinion of the followers, the fast growing cities run the risk of losing their personality by introducing more and more food outlets, hotels and other tourism facilities which are indiscernible from each other. Not only gastronomic outlets have to maintain their uniqueness, also the city itself has to save its exceptionalism and find an appropriate positioning on the market in order to gain more competitive advantage. Therefore slow cities are featured true to the motto, back to basics. Their goal is to inform their visitors of the history and traditions of each sight, place or guest-house (Knox, 2005).

The cities which are certificated as Cittaslow are distinctly marked with a logo that is based on the Slow Food emblem. It illustrates an orange snail which carries a pastel-colored skyline that is composed of numerous houses, roofs and a clock tower on its snail shell. Moreover the writing "Cittaslow" is displayed below the snail and the application of the logo is regimented (Cittaslow International, 2015).

The participating cities put great emphasis on traditional handcraft, organic farmers, family businesses and promotion of regional products for the preservation of their own identity. In order to accomplish the objectives set by the Cittaslow committee a strict pursuit of the following seven categories, which are written down in the Cittaslow manifest, is of fundamental importance (Semmens and Freeman, 2012):

- Environmental issues (recycling program, waste and pollution control);
- Infrastructure policy (control of traffic, pedestrian streets);
- Urban Quality (support local traditions, entrepreneurs, employment);
- Appreciation of autochthonous products (local farmers, suppliers, organic farming);

- Hospitality (tourist information centre);
- Raise Cittaslow awareness. (public relation activity for Cittaslow);
- Scenic Quality (preservation of the scenic richness).

Mayer and Knox (2009) regard the international Charter of the Cittaslow association as a deeper elaboration of the philosophy which also serves as a guideline for destination development in regards to sustainability and improvement of quality of life. Nilsson *et al.* (2011) claims that there is a not a direct objective between the slow city concept and tourism or destination marketing. The impact of the Cittaslow certification on a destination is particularly identifiable concerning local events that combine the eco-gastronomic aspect of the slow food context.

Moreover in the philosophy of Cittaslow it is anchored that the local inhabitants are the primary target group for all the performed activities, not the tourists. In order to avoid mass tourism, the local council and the tourism respondents of the destination attach less importance to destination marketing. According to Heitmann *et al.* (2011) the concept of Cittaslow allows an indirect influence on customer segmentation as this kind of tourism primarily attracts quality tourists and leads to a tourism development on high-value.

The concept of Cittaslow can be expanded in a broader sense to the tourism development with a special focus on gastronomy within a rural context by Nilsson *et al.* (2011). As rural areas often face the problem of migration into cities which entails a decline in workforce and detriments for the economy, a counteraction has been developed. In order to make agrarian destinations more interesting for visitors is the consideration of the culinary richness and the application as a tourist attraction. This aspect extracts several advantages, namely an increase in travelers' expenditures, a source of income in the off-season and the promotion of local products which can be included in the restaurants.

The interviewees of Enns are of the mind that it is definitely a model which can be implemented in order to create a vacation spot if certain conditions are given. As the human kind is striving for having more quality time and slow movement due to the fast moving world, the trend is definitely towards a more sustainable way of traveling. It has to be taken into account that the philosophy of Cittaslow is not intended to promote the tourism on site. The main objective is to increase the quality of life for the people resident in the destination which can be constructed as an indirect repercussion as well on tourism, considering the benefit of tourists from the unimpaired environment.

In comparison with the opinion of the experts of Hartberg, Cittaslow is not a tourism concept. It needs to be seen from the perspective that Cittaslow cannot be perceived as a tourism model as the development of a city towards a feel-good city, especially for the inhabitants, has highest priority. Due to the fact that the principles of Cittaslow include the terms, hospitality, culture, authenticity and regionality, words that are also strongly connected with tourism, the development towards a tourism destination is not excluded.

Experts stated more precisely, it is the decision of slow cities if they are aiming towards becoming a tourism destination as this involves a considerable amount of investment regarding tourism facilities as well as advertising in addition to the indispensable efforts regarding modifications and investments a Cittaslow involves. If a touristic infrastructure and unique attractions are not given by a destination the tourist have no endeavor to travel to a

region even.

5. CONCLUSION

The main objective of this paper was to investigate the concept of Cittaslow with regard to several different aspects that are incorporated. The research question was aimed to approach the measures which need to be undertaken after the certification in order to become a competitive and sustainable destination. In order to become a competitive destination, it has been identified that the right positioning on the market which involves analyzing the unique selling proposition of each city is of utmost importance. This entails in a certain extent the promotion of the city in order to gain competitive advantage.

Moreover the research results in an insufficient awareness of the local residents towards the term Cittaslow. Therefore the consciousness-raising and involvement of the population in the development process through work groups is regarded as a fundamental activity on the part of the local council in order to gain commitment as well as support. The findings support the assumption that tourism destinations are as well living areas for the native population, therefore the task of the destination management team is to raise the tourism awareness and create a hospitable atmosphere by convincing locals of the general benefit from tourism and factoring them into the planning process.

In order to raise the awareness of the Cittaslow in Austria and attract more tourists, these cities are present at tourism fairs where they also promote regional producers and their products. Several articles have been published in local newspapers or on TV in order to inform other people of the existence of Cittaslow in Austria. In addition to the requirements set by the Cittaslow association, several measures regarding a guarantee of an advanced sustainable development need to be undertaken by the communities. According to the findings, funding programs have been implemented by the local council in order to make the renovation of buildings, in a more sustainable way, more attractive.

In order to fulfill the requirements regarding the infrastructure policy set by the Cittaslow association, all the slow cities implemented a reduced-traffic area and a shared space concept. Therefore the Austrian slow cities established several counter measures like a free city bus, e-Bikes and cycle paths which support a more sustainable conveyance. The introduction of eco-friendly means of transportation, giving the example of e-bikes or a complimentary city bus is regarded as an important activity which leads to a reduction of traffic within the city centre. Moreover this measure is perceived as an important tourism product as visitors highly benefit from the provisions of these forms of conveyance due to the possibility of individual usage.

These offers are very well received by both tourists and local residents. According to Steinecke (2010), tourism and transportation is inextricably linked with each other. Due to the motors individual transportation, a high traffic density arouses which leads to a high environmental pollution as well as a noise annoyance that decreases the quality of life of a city. The primary goal, to reduce the motorized individual traffic can be achieved by granting allowances for public transport, offering city busses, the implementation of pedestrian streets, the rental of bicycles or e-bikes and combi-package offers which include public transportation arrival and a reduced entrance fee for an attraction. These strategies have already been introduced by the slow cities in Austria.

The expert interviews result in the importance of hosting cultural events as they serve as an additional attraction for tourists that lead to an increase in visitors and strengthen the commitment of the local community. After adoption of the Cittaslow concept to the communities, a direct link between the usage of regional products at cultural events as well as other occasions for the catering of guests has to be established in order to accomplish a persistent presence and promotion of local products. By hosting events at a certain region, the community as well the destination will derive benefits in the form of creating identity, attracting outside investors, fostering economic development and to accomplish workplaces.

Regarding the Cittaslow evaluation criterion, a valorization of autochthonous products is of fundamental importance. Therefore all of the slow cities in Austria implemented platforms where local food producers have the possibility to sell their goods in the form of weekly markets respectively farmers markets. The slow movement, especially the slow food movement raised the importance of the introduction of local food in restaurants and hotels. In line with literature, it has been identified, the "transformation of local farmers' markets and direct food purchase from growers into a leisure commodity" (Cohen, 2006; Hall, 2010a; Parkins and Craig, 2006; as sited in Fullagar S., 2012).

The research showed that the tourism aspect of destination is strongly related to the attractiveness of the location of the city, its surrounding area and the touristic infrastructure within a destination. In case of the non-existence of these facts, tourists might decide against traveling to one of these cities. In this regard, the experts stated that they made use of the disadvantages of the central markets and created advantages out of them for their slow cities. The historic city centers are the flagships of the cities. In order to defend their position as sustainable cities, the focus has to be laid on specialized shops who offer customer oriented-service and regional products. Quality instead of quantity and slow movement instead of hectic life is the delivered message.

The experts commented the urgent need of the preservation of the urban quality as a major task of a Cittaslow. The evaluation criteria of the association included the historic city centers respectively the historical sites of a city and its preservation. Therefore a concept for the protection of the overall appearance of the townscape has been established which involves incentives for local residents to maintain a suitable semblance of their houses in line with green technology.

According to the experts' knowledge, it is of fundamental importance to elaborate an effective strategy which includes an analysis of the main features and the creation of an image. An effective position implicates the unique selling proposition of the destination with is conducive to gain competitive advantage. In the course of the expert interviews it has been figured out, that slow cities in Austria cannot be collated with each other. Every city has developed its own profile.

The three slow cities in Austria, which have been adduced for the research, are not considered as major travel destinations by the experts. As the development towards a sustainable tourism destination requires an enormous effort due to the need of constructing tourism facilities and establishing further tourism attractions that occasions expenditures, the local councils do not directly intend to focus on the boost of tourism. According to results found in the literature review, the Cittaslow association does not explicitly state an objective towards the promotion of the local tourism of the member cities as it can be perceived as contradictory to their philosophy regarding slow

movement.

Although an increase in tourist arrivals can be possessed in the slow cities in Austria after the certification, it is appeared that these results are partly related to the membership of the Cittaslow association. In the light of the expert's statements, an increase in tourist arrivals due to the Cittaslow certification is more regarded as a very positive ancillary effect as several concerned parties benefit from the generated revenue or employment creation. All the experts agreed on the following characteristics which can be attributed to a typical Cittaslow tourist: higher educational level, quality-oriented, not price sensitive, interested in culture and history.

As the fundamental idea behind the Cittaslow concept is the improvement of the quality of life of the local population which additionally involves the conscious dealing with natural resources and sustainable adjustments, the majority of the experts agreed on the fact that the concept of Cittaslow is not a model for the developing of a sustainable tourism destination.

In summary it can be stated, that the concept of Cittaslow provides various indications for a destination and it depends on the community to make the best out of it. Nonetheless, a destination needs to have basic requisites which serve as the foundation for a sustainable destination. As slow cities are not directly aimed towards becoming a sustainable tourism destination the decision resides to the community.

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