DESTINATION IMAGES FOR MARKETING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DESTINATIONS

Yuan Yuan Liu

Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Vilnius University, Sauletekio al. 9, (II building), Vilnius, LT10-222, Lithuania

School of Management, Guizhou University, Huaxi, Guiyang, Guizhou, 550025, China

Baltic Sea Region Research Center, Guizhou University, Huaxi, Guiyang, Guizhou, 550025, China

Abstract

Sustainable tourism development has been adequately studied by researchers while sustainable tourism destinations are still a blur picture in practice. As destination image is a core element in effective destination marketing, conveying the image of sustainable tourism destinations becomes important for marketing practice. This study aims at exploring the main ideas and concepts for sustainable tourism destinations thus providing a framework to present the dimensions, focus, attributes, and potential images of sustainable tourism destinations. The framework will create a tool to examine well-developed destination images so as to promote effective destination marketing for sustainable tourism destinations.

Key words: *destination marketing, destination image, sustainable tourism destinations, pull factors*

1. INTRODUCTION

Destination and destination marketing have become the central elements of tourism research (Fyall et al., 2012; and Wang & Pizam, 2011). Destination marketing has been viewed as a pillar of the future growth and sustainable development for the globalized and competitive tourism market (UNWTO, 2011). Marketing as a social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need through creating and exchanging products and value with others (Kotler et al., 1999). American Marketing Association defined that marketing is the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational objectives. Destination marketing is to create and promote tourism products to satisfy tourists' need or desire and is available at a desirable price and place.

However, marketing products contains basically four elements of marketing mix: product, price, place and production, simply 4Ps while marketing tourism products contains another three elements: people, physical evidence and process, simply 7Ps for services marketing. Understanding what benefits and satisfaction consumers are seeking from the services are claimed to be the most important issue in the service products. People are both provider and customer of services. Physical evidence is the tangible, controllable aspects of a service organization constituting the physical evidence of the service. Process is a system within a service organization where stakeholders receive services.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Destination, destination marketing and destination images. Leiper (1979) defined that a destination is a place where the consumer travels to temporarily, from the region where they reside in, thus creating a tourism flow in both time and space. Ryan (1991) claimed that a destination can be perceived as a geographic space in which a cluster of tourism resources exist. Pike & Page (2014) stated that a destination represents an amalgam of a diverse and broad range of business and people. Elbe (2003) defined destination as a geographical tourist endpoint, and be it a country, region, city, or village, a geographical room offering tourists the complete tourist products. Wahab et al. (1976) defined destination marketing as a managerial process to identify both actual and potential tourists, to communicate with them, to ascertain and influence their wishes, needs, motivations, likes and dislikes, on local, regional, national and international levels, as well as to formulate and adapt their tourist

products to achieve optimal tourist satisfaction by fulfilling their objectives. Crompton (1979) defined destination image as the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a destination. Zhang et al. (2014) stated that destination image demonstrably affects desirable tourist behavior outcomes, for example, the visit intention. Kaplanidou & Gibson (2010) claimed that destination image influence tourist attitude towards participation while Josiassen et al. (2015) found that destination image influence tourist intention to recommend. The central role of destination image in tourist decision making process and researches had been identified by researchers (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Bastiaansen et al., 2016; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Chon, 1990; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Gallarza et al., 2002; Morgan & Pritchard, 1998; and Royo-Vela, 2009).

Sustainable tourism destinations. The idea of sustainable development has been implemented into tourism sector. Bramwell & Lane (1993) stated that sustainable tourism is a positive approach aiming at reducing the tensions between different elements: tourism industry, the tourists, the environment, and the destination. Sörensson & von Friedrichs (2013) pointed out that sustainable tourism focuses on the triple pillar: economic, social, and environmental impact of tourism. Spindler (2013) modeled cultural conservation and recreation activities together with economic, social, and environmental issues at the sustainable tourism destinations. Thus a sustainable tourism destination can be concluded as a geographical place where tourism products are supplied with the concerns of the triple pillar of sustainable tourism development.

Pull factors. Dann (1977) stated that pull factors in tourism are those which attract tourists to a given destination whose value is seen to reside in the object of travel. Crompton (1979) defined pull factors as motives explaining the choice of destinations, as a specific resort may hold a number of attractions for potential tourists. Pull factors of a resort may be sunshine, relaxed temperature, friendly natives, etc. Philips & House (2009) claimed that pull factors are those that emerge as a result of the attractiveness of the destination, including tangible resources, such as beaches, coral reefs, rivers, sea and landscape, biodiversity, and intangible resources, e.g. the cultural heritage. Beerli & Martin (2004) showed pull factors (attributes) of a destination in the table below.

Table 1. Pull attributes of destinations. Adapted from Beerli & Martin (2004)

Elements	**Attributes**
Natural resources	Weather, beaches, countryside, variety of flora and fauna.
General infrastructure	Roads, airports, ports, private/public transport, health.
Tourist infrastructure	Hotel accommodation, restaurants, bars, nightlife, easy access, excursions, tourist information/services.
Leisure and recreation	Theme parks, sports and entertainment activities, casinos.
Art, history and culture	Museums, festivals, craft, gastronomy, folklore, religion and customs.
Political and economic	Stability, economic development, safety, affordability.
Environment	Scenery, cleanliness, low pollution, low congestion.
Social	Friendliness of locals, visible poverty, quality of life, language barriers.
Atmosphere	Luxurious, fashionable, exclusive, family oriented, exotic, mystic, relaxing, fun and interesting.

Nilnoppakun & Ampavat (2016) proposed a framework to evaluate the sustainable tourism destination Pai in Thailand. The framework was composed of dimensions and focus (aspects). The framework was created to evaluate the implementation of sustainable tourism practice at the destination and to test if tourists could feel those dimensions with implemented focus. The framework could provide the

research with insights on sustainable tourism destination indicators. Table 2 shows the framework to evaluate the indicators of the sustainable tourism destination. And the framework could provide with a general picture of dimensions for sustainable tourism destinations.

Table 2. Dimensions and focus of sustainable tourism destinations.
Adapted from Nilnoppakun & Ampavat (2016)

Dimensions	**Focus**
Economy	Economic structure
	Public budget
	Regional aspects
	Consumption
	Labor
	Pricing
Environment	Environmental protection
	Biodiversity
	Resources
	Energy
	Air
	Waste
Social/Social equity	Settlement structure
	Income and assets
	Security
	Public health
	Mobility
Culture	Local culture
	National culture
Recreational	Recreational areas
	Recreational activities

Table 2 shows the criteria to evaluate sustainable tourism destinations. There are five dimensions and twenty one aspects of focus in the table. Thus a sustainable tourism destination should be evaluated around those five dimensions, specifically around those twenty one aspects. Thus a sustainable tourism destination should possess features in those five dimensions and twenty one aspects. Moreover, a sustainable tourism destination should show its image based on those dimensions and aspects.

3. MAIN THEORETICAL FINDINGS

The criteria and standard of sustainable tourism destinations will result in their images. A sustainable tourism destination should be developed and evaluated based on the five dimensions and the twenty one aspects of focus. Thus the attributes of a sustainable tourism destination will be influenced by

these dimensions and focus. Accordingly, attributes of a sustainable tourism destination will shape its images. Table 3 shows the framework of impact from dimensions and focus on attributes and images of sustainable tourism destinations.

Table 3. Images for sustainable tourism destinations

Dimensions	**Focus**	**Attributes**	**Images**
Economy	Economic structure	Stability, economic development, safety, affordability, roads, airports, ports, private/public transport, health, hotel accommodation, restaurants, bars, nightlife, easy access, excursions, tourist information/services.	1, strengthening the regional economy; 2, fostering sustainable development of local tourism authorities; 3, local capacity ability; and 4, tourism infrastructure and maximizing benefits of tourism investments.
	Public budget		
	Regional aspects		
	Consumption		
	Labor		
	Pricing		
Environment	Environmental protection	Weather, beaches, countryside, variety of flora and fauna.	1, reducing emission, noise and waste; 2, maximizing use of renewable energies and minimizing negative impacts on soil and water; 3, Biodiversity protection; and 4, minimizing touristic footprint.
	Biodiversity		
	Resources		
	Energy		
	Air		
	Waste		
Social/Social equity	Settlement structure	Friendliness of locals, visible poverty, quality of life, language barriers	1, caring local well-being; 2, improving local education; 3, increasing quality of working conditions; 4, and balancing social equity.
	Income and assets		
	Security		
	Public health		
	Mobility		
Culture	Local culture	Museums, festivals, craft, gastronomy, folklore, religion and customs.	1, sustaining local heritage; 2, promoting regional culture; and 3, maintaining the local architecture.
	National culture		
Recreational	Recreational areas	Luxurious or fashionable exclusive, family oriented, exotic, mystic, relaxing, fun and interesting.	1, improving tourist satisfactions.
	Recreational activities		

Although the dimensions and focus aim at evaluating if a sustainable tourism destination meet the criteria or standard, these dimensions and focus will directly decide features of a sustainable tourism destination. These features will decide and cause features of the destination. These features are both tangible and intangible, and become attributes of a sustainable tourism destination. Images will be shaped by these attributes. Items in the column of attributes should become specified features of sustainable tourism destinations while items from the column of images should convey the sentiments of sustainable tourism destinations.

4. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Destination image is crucial in the tourist decision-making process and it plays a central role in destination marketing. As destination image is the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a destination, an adequate and full-fledged image will convey the ideas, concepts, tasks and missions of sustainable tourism destinations to the public. Only with full considerations of dimension and focus of the sustainable tourism destinations may the images of sustainable tourism destinations be correctly and thoroughly understood and conveyed. For many tourists, sustainable tourism destinations are still a blur picture with comprehensive notion. And it is difficult for many destination marketing practitioners to describe what kind of destinations can be described as sustainable tourism destinations, and what images and sentiments should be conveyed to the public in order to attract tourists to choose sustainable tourism destinations.

This study aims at identifying features and images of sustainable tourism destinations for destination marketing. A framework was identified based on criteria and standard to develop and evaluate sustainable tourism destinations. Attributes of sustainable tourism destinations were specified and thus the images of sustainable tourism destinations were drawn.

The contribution of this study lies in two aspects. On the one hand, the framework provides a clear picture of sustainable tourism destinations. Features and attributes of sustainable tourism destinations have been clearly sketched by the framework. The framework can be used as criteria and standard to develop and evaluate sustainable tourism destinations, but also can be used as outlines for branding and marketing of sustainable tourism destinations. On the other hand, the framework identified and specified future research trends of sustainable tourism destinations marketing.

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