

ADDRESSING ORGANISATIONAL CHALLENGES OF CULTURAL TOURISM IN RURAL AREAS THROUGH COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM MODEL

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Abstract

Purpose –The purpose of this paper is to identify the organisational challenges of cultural tourism development in rural areas and to discuss and address those challenges using the principles of a community-based tourism concept.

Methodology – A desk research was conducted to investigate cultural tourism in rural areas and the community-based tourism concept. Then, the case study of Gorski Kotar was introduced as an example of a rural area with potential for further cultural tourism development. Secondary data on Gorski Kotar was gathered from various sources and processed using qualitative approach for the purpose of identifying and analysing the key organisational challenges of cultural tourism in rural areas. Those challenges are discussed in the context of a shift towards community-based tourism and its main principles.

Findings – Key organisational issues in the management of cultural tourism in rural areas have been identified and linked to rural community capacities in terms of insufficient social and human capital. In line with the fact that cultural tourism assets are usually an inseparable part of local identity, community-based tourism as a model of tourism developed, owned and controlled by the local community, can be very useful in overcoming organisational problems involved in creating and sustaining tourism products based on local culture.

Originality of the research – This paper deals with the rather unexplored topic of analysing organisational elements and challenges as potentially the main causes of success/failure of cultural tourism in rural areas.

Keywords community-based tourism, cultural tourism, rural areas, Gorski Kotar

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, community-based tourism, as a model of local tourism development owned and/or managed by communities and aimed at generating benefits for the broader community, has been recognized by practitioners as a viable model for achieving sustainable tourism development and community development. However, there is still an ongoing debate concerning the tools, means and organisational methods which should be used in planning and implementing this type of tourism in order to maximise community benefits and distribute them in a fair manner among community members. Debate is particularly vivid on nature and means of participation of community residents in planning and decision making process (Tosun 2006). Modern trends are also in favour of this type of tourism model because the ongoing search for authenticity and “feeling like a local” by being immersed in a community’s everyday

life, along with growing demand for unique experiences related to tradition and heritage, are in line with the principles and offering of community-based tourism that emphasises local community qualities and relationships with guests-visitors.

Cultural tourism as one of the most propulsive branches of tourism also offers a wide range of culture-related experiences and is constantly innovating in order to meet the interests of a discerning tourism market. Constant increase of interest of visitors for unique and authentic experiences especially contributes to the tourist development of rural areas with specific tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Still, many problems are present in cultural tourism development, from properly interpreting culture and including it in tourism products and services, to the question of the ownership and management of heritage (especially, intangible heritage).

The main purpose of this paper is to analyse potentials of using community-based tourism and its principles based on community participation in decision making, ownership and management of tourism activities in the development of cultural tourism in rural areas. Having in mind that search for authenticity is one of the main motives of culture-oriented tourists and recognising great potentials that rural areas have for providing unique and authentic experiences, community-based tourism principles might help in overcoming problems in management of cultural rural offer such as difficulties with marketing, lack of specialized employees oriented on culture offer presentation, creation of innovative tourist products based on culture etc.

Gorski Kotar, an under-developed rural area in Croatia, has been selected as study area and its existing cultural offer has been analysed from the perspective of potential visitor. The current problems in cultural tourism offer presentation and management were identified based on content analysis of available online information and are discussed from the perspective of community-based tourism particularly supporting idea of more active involvement of existing associations and individuals interested in preserving and presenting local culture to visitors. Even though this “outside” type of analysis is not most appropriate for research on organizational challenges, it represents first step of a wider research oriented only on emphasising most obvious problems of cultural offer in Gorski kotar.

1. COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM – IDEA AND MAIN CHARACTERISTICS

The initial idea of community-based tourism (CBT) is derived from the work of Murphy, who argued that communities should play an integral role in the development of tourism and proposed an approach that emphasized the need for community control and management over local tourism development (Murphy 1985).

Definitions of CBT differ a great deal, based on the level of inclusion of community members, idea of community in general, and the type of tourism that is developed within the community. To point out some extremes, Mann (2000) defines community-based tourism so broadly that it appears to include almost all forms of tourism which involve community members and benefits them, while the definition of Asker and

associates in Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) manual on CBT is much more distinct, stating that CBT is a small-scale model of tourism, particularly suited to rural and regional areas, managed and owned by the community and for the community, which involves interactions between visitors and the host community, with emphasis on favoring local service providers and suppliers and equally distributing benefits from tourism through some kind of legal form of the ownership and management in which the community transparently participates (Asker et. al. 2010).

Theoretical and empirical contributions of several authors in defining CBT's main characteristics and dimensions are summarised below. Therefore, CBT should (ASEAN 2000, Hamzah and Khalifah 2009, Rozemeijer 2001):

- be economically viable (especially in terms of generating income and employment for the purpose of contributing to local development),
- be ecologically sustainable (the environment should not decrease in value)
- involve and empower community members to ensure their participation in tourism planning, ongoing decision making and transparent management of local tourism ,
- work on institutional consolidation through transparent organisation recognised by all community stakeholders (ownership over tourism outcomes)
- establish partnerships with relevant stakeholders and gain recognised standing with relevant authorities,
- ensure an equitable, transparent and fair mechanism for distributing costs and benefits among all participants in activities,
- use a portion of the profits/resources directly for community development and/or to maintain and protect a community's cultural or natural heritage assets (e.g. conservation),
- host tourists within the local community and improve the quality of visitor experiences by strengthening meaningful host and guest interaction.

What can be agreed upon when it comes to defining CBT is that it deals with the idea of communities controlling, managing and developing their own tourism industry and that generally CBT projects provide collective benefits, for example, through contributions to community funds for the development of community assets, or through opportunities for paid employment in the CBT enterprises and supporting organisations.

When talking about (fair) distribution of benefits from tourism it is important to take into consideration that not all benefits are economic: a community and its members can derive great benefits from community-based tourism through the planning process itself, in terms of capacity building, increased community cohesion and opportunity for empowerment.

Although all the listed characteristics and objectives of CBT are a very positive and sustainable way of thinking about tourism development, some authors have expressed their concerns on the efficiency of community participation (see more in Blackstock 2005). The main problems identified include the potential lack of education, business inexperience and insufficient financial assistance that have to be overcome (Addison

1996); problems with power imbalances (Jamal and Getz 1995); various interests within the community that are hard to combine and the time-consuming nature of the process (Okazaki 2008).

Still, local-level participation is essential in developing tourism strategies, especially in deciding on displaying destination's culture and finding balance between economic gain and cultural integrity (Reid 2002). Another linkage has been made between cultural tourism and community-based tourism in the work of Salazar oriented on importance of local tour guides (Salazar 2012), but many aspects of relationship between CBT and cultural tourism still remained under-investigated.

2. CULTURAL TOURISM AND SPECIFIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RURAL AREAS

Cultural tourism – especially the segment interested in learning about locals and their way of life through traditions, customs, gastronomy, music, dance or similar is one of a viable tourism development strategies for rural areas and, due to its reliance on mostly immaterial cultural heritage and small, local attractions, its development depends on the level of community involvement. This section will, therefore, be focused on the aspects of cultural tourism relevant for the rural areas, fleshing out main benefits that communities can derive from the community based cultural tourism development in rural areas.

2.1. Overview of the cultural tourism concept

Having in mind that culture is a very comprehensive and abstract concept, it is not surprising that cultural tourism is also a very complex topic to define and analyse. One of the most popular definitions of cultural tourism was created by World Tourism Organisation in 1985 and it states that ‘Cultural tourism includes movements of persons for essentially cultural motivations such as study tours, performing arts and other cultural tours, travel to festivals and other cultural events, visit to sites and monuments, travel to study nature, folklore or art or pilgrimages’ (WTO 1985, 131). Another similar definition describes cultural tourism as ‘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 1997, 24).

Even though cultural tourism is not a new phenomenon, forms of culture being consumed by cultural (and other) tourists are constantly changing and include elements which previously would not have been considered ‘cultural’. Previous understandings of cultural tourism as visits to historical places, art exhibitions, concerts, etc. is today extended to include less “high culture” activities like ‘soaking up the atmosphere’ of a destination or sampling local food through increasingly popular culinary/gastronomic tourism (Ivanovic 2008). Also, the activity of tourists has significantly shifted away from the passive consumption of cultural elements of a destination towards more active involvement which creates unique and memorable experiences. Active tourists interested in traditions, local food and way of life of particular communities are great

potential market for tourism of rural areas, therefore, the definition given by ICOMOS shall be taken for further discussion. It states that “cultural tourism can be defined as that activity which enables people to experience the different ways of life of other people, thereby gaining at first hand an understanding of their customs, traditions, the physical environment, the intellectual ideas and those places of architectural, historic, archaeological or other cultural significance which remain from earlier times.”(ICOMOS 1997). It is important to note that from the time when this definition was created, even more emphasis has been given to the search for authenticity: in its highlight for 2016, OECD specifically stressed the increased interest of tourists for authentic experiences when travelling and for hands-on experience of the tradition (OECD n.d.). Shift from holidays in all-inclusive resorts with minimal contact with local communities to learning and actively participating in local traditions of rural areas, while staying at family accommodation premises or on farms in rural areas to enhance authenticity and rusticity of experience is a real big change that should be embraced and utilized by rural tourism stakeholder (Smith 2009). This type of deep involvement of tourists in the culturescape of a destination, where they get the chance to be creative through engagement in crafts, arts, culinary and other activities, creates a close link between the tourists, the local population and its cultural heritage (Richards and Wilson, 2007) and opens great opportunities for rural areas to become recognised as interesting authentic destinations for unique experiences.

2.2. Challenges of cultural tourism development in rural areas

Rural area is another term that is hard to precisely define. Rural areas are often defined by what they are not (urban areas) and usually are identified as places of special interest in terms of enhanced developmental efforts. According to Lane (1994), in many national and international (e.g. EU) policies focused on the development of rural areas, rural areas are generally described through dimensions of population density (rather low), accessibility (often suffering from inadequate transport network), settlement patterns and existence of local facilities (usually additional governmental support needed in order to maintain the living standard of local residents and decrease emigration trends towards more developed urban areas). Some other (often stereotypical) general characteristics of rural areas include the abundance of land and its relatively cheap price, extensive natural resources and a specific set of culture patterns linking the residents of certain rural areas (Wiggins and Proctor 2001). Still, in order not to overgeneralise the term *rural areas*, Wiggins and Proctor provided a classification of rural areas which includes three distinctive categories: peri-urban zones, the (middle) countryside, and remote rural areas, where activities of tourism and recreation are specifically significant for the last two mentioned (Wiggins and Proctor 2001).

Rural tourism is most common form of tourism offer un rural areas and has the following characteristics: located in rural areas, built upon the rural world's special features of small-scale enterprise, open space, contact with nature and the natural world, heritage, 'traditional' societies and 'traditional' practices, rural in scale in terms of buildings and settlements, traditional in character, growing slowly and organically, connected with local families and representing the complex pattern of rural environment, economy, history and location (Lane 1994). Deeper insight into those

characteristics reveals that many of the attractions associated with rural tourism can actually be classified as elements of cultural tourism (traditions, specific historical context, unique settlements and societies, etc.). Some authors even address it integrally under the concept of “cultural rural tourism” (MacDonald and Jolliffe 2003).

When talking about cultural rural tourism it is of the utmost importance to recognize, develop and adequately organise existing distinct tangible and intangible heritage of a particular rural area in order to create an authentic experience for visitors, but also to ensure its preservation for future generations. Interpretation of culture in order to make it more attractive but without degrading it, as well as the issues of authenticity, commodification and general ownership of and access to culture, are important research themes in contemporary tourism literature (Smith 2009). On the level of rural communities, previously mentioned issues create an even bigger impact because the local culture in rural areas is often of special importance to local residents and represents their identity. Therefore, preserving local sites, monuments and traditions is not always motivated by tourism, but has much stronger roots in community pride and the importance that culture has for a particular individual, group or community and their social interaction (Cole 2005). Consequently, when developing tourism with rural culture as a core resource, a key factor for success often lies in involving local community members. This is important not just to ensure a more authentic experience for visitors and maintain local control over the interpretation of culture, but also in the light of often insufficient financial resources on the local level. Many interesting sites, monuments, exhibitions and traditions are not properly included in the tourism offering system due to the lack of organisational and financial resources. Often enthusiasts within the community are solely responsible for the successful presentation of particular cultural elements and for creating a favourable environment for further development (MacDonald and Jolliffe, 2003). Having that in mind, voluntary involvement of local residents can be important input in terms of human capital that needs to be invested in cultural tourism development, which links cultural rural tourism development to a community-based tourism model.

After this brief presentation of most important elements of community-based tourism and cultural tourism, some potentially significant overlapping can be identified, especially regarding necessity for active involvement of local community members in creation of tourism offer. Ideas and proposals on how this involvement can be operationalized and used for overcoming obstacles in early stages of rural cultural tourism development require more focus on case studies of rural communities struggling with cultural tourism development and promotion and analysis of their existing situation in order to propose certain changes.

3. CASE STUDY: CULTURAL TOURISM IN GORSKI KOTAR – CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM IMPLEMENTATION

This section focuses on analysing the chosen case study. The first part provides a very short presentation of study area – region of Gorski Kotar as a mountainous rural area in Croatia. The second part of the section briefly describes the research methodology and results of the analysis of the available culture tourism offering, and discusses the identified problems and challenges from the perspective of community-based tourism.

3.1. Short description of Gorski Kotar as a case study area

Gorski Kotar is the rural mountainous area of Primorje-Gorski Kotar County in western Croatia and it is located between two major Croatian tourism markets, Zagreb (the national capital) and Rijeka/Istria (coastal tourist destinations). Regardless of its favorable position and great natural resources it is among the least economically developed regions in Croatia with a very low number of inhabitants (just over 23,000 residing in an area of 1,275.05 km²). Depopulation trends and constant decrease in the number of inhabitants puts great pressure on national and regional governments and creates severe problems to local authorities of the three towns and six municipalities which exist in that area. With an overall standard of living that is lower than the national average, Gorski Kotar is looking towards enhancing existing revenue streams from traditional sectors (forestry and wood processing) with tourism development. To build the destination and promote events, each of the nine local self-administrating units in Gorski Kotar have established local tourism boards, but the development of the tourism (and event) offering and the increase of visitation figures are progressing slowly.

In 2015 around 80,754 overnights were realised in Gorski kotar, accounting for around 0,6% of all overnights in Primorje-Gorski Kotar County (FTHM and Institute for Tourism 2016). Great natural beauties (mountains, lakes, forests, wildlife, one national park) have significant potential for further tourism development, especially for recreation and outdoor activities, which have been emphasised as a potential key segment in the overall strategy of tourism development (Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Croatia 2013). Some research on the organisation of existing small-scale sport events in Gorski Kotar has been conducted and important organisational challenges such as the lack of cooperation among stakeholders, a significant level of distrust, and the need for more-transparent organisation between community representatives have been identified (see more in Peric et. al. 2016).

3.2. Analysis of the cultural tourism resources in Gorski Kotar and recommendations based on community-based tourism principles

For the purpose of analysing the existing cultural tourism offering in Gorski Kotar, the authors decided to apply a qualitative approach and use secondary data. The websites of local tourist boards, as well as the website of the Kvarner Tourist Board as the regional tourist organisation, were used as the principal source of data. This selection was made to enable the authors to gain insight into the available cultural tourism

resources and attractions from the visitor's perspective and to analyse and rate their current accessibility.

All the analysed elements suffer from rather scarce online information, which is more suited to visitors with prior knowledge of the area and those who do not need to plan in advance when it comes to visiting Gorski Kotar. Research analysis revealed that from the perspective of potential visitor interested in cultural offer, there is a significant lack of detailed information on particular facilities/products/events and almost no existence of organised tours and itineraries focused on the cultural attractions that would combine cultural elements with other existing tourism products to create a unique experience for visitors.

For the purpose of analysis and clear presentation, all identified cultural resources and attractions of Gorski Kotar are classified in higher level-item categories based on the type and prevailing characteristic of a particular resource. Resources listed by categories and geographical position (town or municipality) are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: **Cultural resources and attractions of Gorski Kotar**

	Museums, ethnographic collections, ethno houses & other exhibitions	Cultural trails & outdoor monuments	Religious buildings/ monuments	Culture-related events
Fužine	Ethnographic collection Lic	-	3 churches The Shrine of our Lady of the Snows	<i>Days of Mushrooms,</i> <i>Days of Strawberries,</i> <i>Days of Lavender,</i> Poetry & art events, Concerts
Lokve	Exhibition dedicated to frogs, Ethnographic collection, Lujzijana Gallery	Sculptures by the lake, The Way of the Cross Path Bunker on Bukovac		Local carnival traditions, Frog catchers' night, Sculpture workshop
Delnice	Permanent exhibition on hunting, forestry and fishing in Zrinski Castle, Racki House Popovic's mill		3 churches	Kotar Fest Oldtimer rally Apple Days
Mrkopalj		WW2 Memorial Area "Fajeri"	6 churches	Local fair Peace Memorial Pilgrimage Holiday Art Fest

	Museums, ethnographic collections, ethno houses & other exhibitions	Cultural trails & outdoor monuments	Religious buildings/ monuments	Culture-related events
Čabar	Ethnographic collection Castle Zrinski, Prezid regional collection, “Palčava šiša”, House of Gorski Kotar	Trsce Miners Trail (with mining sites) , Energy Trail Trbuhovica Tombs, Old mills, Roman Limes Wall		Harvest Festival Pear Days Dormice Days
Vrbovsko	I.G.Kovacic Memorial Museum Plemenitaš Sculpture Art Workshop/exhibition	Zrinski-Frankopan Castle, Protected rural areas	Orthodox monastery in Gomirje, 3 churches	Goran's Spring, Pumpkin Fest, Mushrooms Days, Evening in Severin na Kupi, Winter Evening in Vrbovsko
Ravna Gora	Ethno estate Juretic	Military history monuments	3 churches	Blueberry Day Elder Day Mushroom Days Pan Festival Festival of old times "From Grandma's Chest", Cultural Autumn, Wool Festival
Brod Moravice		Protected rural ethno zones		Days of Plums, Pentecost Religious Gathering
Skrad	Loncaric House	Munjara Hydropower plant	3 churches	Raspberry Days, Spring at Zeleni Vir, Woodrock

Source: Authors research based on data available on websites of all nine tourist boards of Gorski Kotar and sub-website of the Kvarner Tourist Board dedicated to Gorski Kotar

Analysis revealed that there is no shortage in existing and potential cultural attractions, especially in terms of local gastronomy. The specific gastronomy of certain areas and the local fairs of indigenous products are being organised throughout the year and their existence contributes to the overall tourism offering. In addition to the very much present ethnographic and sacral heritage, a rather large number of various events dedicated to gastronomy, art and old traditions give the impression of a culturally abundant area with great appeal for visitors throughout the year. Most of the gastronomic events focus on a specific local plant that is an ingredient of interesting dishes. These events are part of a larger project called “Fruits of the Mountains“ which is developed as a series of events designed to bring together local producers, and manufacturers of local souvenirs, handiwork and other handcraft items typical of

Gorski Kotar (Plodovi Gorja n.d.) Apart from this unique project, no other visible proof has been found of cooperation among municipality tourist boards in creating new, and connecting existing, elements of the cultural offering.

Other issues that have been identified during the research include:

- Museums, collections and exhibitions: Apart from a few exceptions, most of the facilities are open only on request, and sometimes are available only with prior notice.
- Cultural trails & outdoor monuments: Rarely are there any clear instructions on how to reach a certain monument or any maps of a trail(s).
- Religious buildings/monuments: Similar to cultural trails & outdoor monuments, clear directions are hard to find and visiting hours are also not available online.
- Culture-related events: Not all dates are available for the current year, so visitors cannot plan their attendance in advance. Sometimes the place where an event is to be held is not clearly described, nor is any event logistics information available (where to park, whether there is public transportation to/from the event site, etc.)
- Intangible heritage: Despite the fact that interesting elements of intangible heritage exists in a certain area (like legend of Petar Klepac in Cabar of Alraune phenomena), very little effort has been made to present it in detail or to include it as part of some other tourist offering.

Bearing in mind that all listed sites are located within 80 km of each other and can be easily reached by car (a 1.5 hour drive, at the most), the latter problem is even more serious. Tours aimed at linking some important cultural sites could be specialised, based on particular interests (gastronomy, religious sites, ethnography, etc.) or created for visitors with general interests. Itineraries targeting visitors who like to independently visit different sites should also be available online, or through mobile applications. For the purpose of encouraging groups to visit Gorski Kotar, day tours and excursions should be specially designed to cover interesting cultural (and other) elements of the offering and link them to events, while accommodation and/or food arrangements should be also available as a part of the tour, or on demand (in order to cover different financial means and preferences). Some very interesting traditions and phenomena are common for the entire area of Gorski Kotar (e.g. the Lujzijana Road) and might be used for creating a unique narrative and developing adequate tourism products. As there was no tourist agency registered in Gorski kotar (nor any outside agency focused on that area) at the moment of writing this paper, the principles of community-based tourism might be very suitable for dealing with the identified organisational issues.

Having in mind local ownership and the involvement of community members, an important idea for increasing the quality of cultural tourism in Gorski Kotar would be to involve local culture-related associations and create a network of volunteers who would be in charge of the existing collections and exhibitions. Since, all municipalities and towns of Gorski Kotar have at least one association dealing with culture, in that way, a greater accessibility of available offer could be achieved. Also, creating a network of different events would definitely contribute to the overall increased visibility of cultural events and would prevent their overlapping. Perhaps the first step

in promotion could be targeting visitors from big towns nearby (Rijeka, Zagreb), which is possible only through significantly bigger engagement in media and social networks. Young people from local communities of Gorski Kotar should also join the cultural tourism development process through providing new ideas as well as through stronger promotional activities on social networks. Development of creative tourism based on combining elements of cultural heritage, traditions, legends and using existing sites to create exciting story should be the task of various community stakeholders. Good example of such approach (although it was initiated on regional level) is “Istra Inspirit” as network of events and unique set of experiences organised on various historical locations where visitors are actively involved in the “play” which brings to life certain local legend/myth or interesting event from history (Istra Inspirit n.d.).

At this moment it is hard to expect that cultural tourism will bring fast and significant economic contribution to community, but cooperation on achieving increased visibility and accessibility of existing offer and creation of new tourist packages would significantly empower local stakeholders (residents, associations, tourist boards, etc.) for future community-based initiatives in the field of tourism. Finally, a presumably good way to increase trust and guarantee transparency in cooperation and distribution of (future) benefits would be to establish a new community-based organisation for the whole of Gorski Kotar which would bring together culture enthusiasts and tourism providers, and network their efforts in creating unique tourist experiences.

CONCLUSION

Community-based tourism is a very significant form of responsible tourism that supports local communities by allowing the local community members to manage the tourist destination offering themselves. It is especially suitable for cultural tourism development where community members are additionally motivated to become involved in preserving their culture and presenting it to visitors.

The case study of Gorski Kotar has revealed many organisational issues that exist in the cultural tourism offering and could be improved by community-based planning and by using the existing social and human capital in a different manner. This paper has merely “scratched the surface” in terms of research on potential organisational recommendations for a community approach in the cultural tourism development of rural communities. Nevertheless, its findings may be a useful base for academics in terms of further empirical research and/or research on good practice examples suitable for community-based rural cultural tourism development. Also local tourist boards, tourism businesses and local culture-oriented associations in rural areas should be aware of the significant potential that community-based tourism models offer for cooperation in cultural tourism development. Main limitation of the study is the lack of more detailed information on cultural offer from local authorities /service providers, as well as their perspective of organisational challenges in a form of qualitative data. However, this initial analysis will serve as a basis for future research within scientific project on community-based tourism implementation within selective forms of tourism in rural areas.

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