

SPECIALISED TOURISM PRODUCTS

Development, Management and Practice



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Specialised Tourism Products

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Specialised Tourism Products: Development, Management and Practice

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Neven: *To dear God who guides me and my children – Mia, Ela, Anea and Antoni.*

Ivana: *To my husband, Marko, who was and is my lighthouse.*

Ivan: *To my God and my family.*

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Chapter 1

Introductory Notes

The trigger for this challenge was the first author's experience in developing and managing a new specialised tourism product – *lighthouse tourism*. That project [*Stone Lights – a stay at Adriatic lighthouses*] was developed during 1999–2001 and finally was introduced to the global tourism market (Šerić, 2004). Through experiences of creating and managing this project, the authors have acknowledged the specifics and legalities of implementing marketing for specialised tourism products. A few years after the commercialisation of the project and the positioning of the brand, *Stone Lights* conducted various scientific research related to practical experiences (Jakšić Stojanović et al., 2019a, 2019b; Jakšić Stojanović, Janković, Šerić, & Vukilić, 2019; Jakšić Stojanović, Šerić, et al., 2019; Šerić, 2014; Šerić & Luković, 2013; Šerić, Mihanović, et al., 2020). Presented reflections of the importance of specialised tourism products can also be found in the works of Butler (2020), Coasta (2020), Meler and Magaš (2014), and Angelevska Najdeska and Rakicevik (2012). All these findings are today linked to the pursuit of sustainable tourism development in the design of new specialised tourism products (Meler & Ham, 2012; Meler & Horvat, 2018; Nunkoo et al., 2019; Ruhanen et al., 2019).

The contribution of specialised tourism content to the attractiveness and competitiveness of the destination offer is growing following the negative implications of climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic on the global tourism economy (Gossling et al., 2020; Hall et al., 2020; Morrison, 2013; Prideaux et al., 2020; UNWTO, 2020; Wen et al., 2021; WTTC, 2020; Zhang et al., 2021). Scholars (e.g. Jafari & Xiao, 2021; Jenkins, 2020; Pineda et al., 2004; Šimundić et al., 2016; Waeaver, 2006) point to the need for a systematic approach to tourism development and the development of specialised tourism content.

After developing several specialised tourism products and testing them in practice, the author with selected colleagues consolidated the final knowledge into a concrete model presented in this book. The purpose of the book is to show it to a broader scientific and professional public.

1.1. Specialised Tourism Product

A specialised tourism product as a formal and scientific construct implies atypical and unusual tourist content and offers adapted to tourist segments that express interest in them (Jafari & Xiao, 2021; Kotler et al., 2009; Meler & Ham, 2012; Meler & Horvat, 2018; Šerić, Jakšić Stojanović, et al., 2023; Šerić & Perišić, 2012). Specialised tourism products are often based on complex content and need a complex marketing scenario and specific destination resources (Botti et al., 2009; Buhalis, 2000; Buhalis & Foerste, 2015; Doyle, 2002; Jakšić Stojanović et al., 2020). Creativity in defining the promotional features of a specialised tourism product contributes to its transformation into a tourist attraction (Jafari & Xiao, 2021; Jakšić Stojanović & Šerić, 2018). Such an offer should combine the totality of the tourist experience with the satisfaction of specific needs – adventure, health, gastronomic, culture and others (Richards, 2019). Depending on the resources on which each specialised tourism product is based, its content is specific. A more complex specialised tourism product enables more apparent differentiation and indirectly greater attractiveness (Jakšić Stojanović et al., 2019a). More significant differentiation and originality of a specialised tourism product is a prerequisite for a higher price (Botti et al., 2009; Buhalis, 2000; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003; Šerić, 2014; Šerić, Kalinić, et al., 2011).

A specialised tourism product consists of the following components (Šerić, 2018):

- Core content is the idea and context on which the marketing story is developed. The basic content ensures recognition and attracts tourists (in *lighthouse tourism* it is the experience of the life of lighthouse keepers in past – in isolation – Šerić, 2004).
- Expected content includes the features of the offer based on the perception of the promotion of a specialised tourism product to the target tourist clientele (in the *lighthouse tourism* it is accommodation in an object of cultural heritage located on the protruding capes of the island or cliffs in a preserved landscape).
- Additional content contributes to the continuous maintenance of the attractiveness of a specialised tourism product and enables modifications during its life cycle to maintain demand (in *lighthouse tourism* it includes all potential additional services/activities that could be offered to tourists during their stay – a joint fishing trip with the lighthouse keepers; education in preparing fish meals; kayaking, etc.).
- Expanded content contributes to the attractiveness of the specialised tourism product to the broader tourist population. If sales are unsatisfactory, this content is emphasised via promotion activities (in *lighthouse tourism* it could be guided diving courses, free climbing courses, fishing equipment and boat rental, organised gastronomic events and more). The expanded content of the specialised tourism product is developed by adapting it to tourism segments that do not show interest in the basic content of the offer.

Specialised tourism products have their life cycle (Jobber, 2001). To prolong the maturity phase, additional and expanded content is important. When refining the basic offer with additional and expanded content, one should take into account the profitability and preservation of the recognition of the basic content, primarily if the brand of a specialised tourism product is based on it (Barros & Alves, 2004; Kotler & Armstrong, 2001; Kušen, 2002). Regardless of the originality of the idea of a future specialised tourism product, the possibilities of developing additional and expanded content should also be considered. In the phase of introducing it to the market, the expected content of the specialised tourism product is critical. The perception of the expected content of potentially interested tourists indirectly contributes to matching the offer with their expectations (Buhalis & Foerste, 2015). The authors' and other practices have proven that with the growth of satisfied and loyal tourists, the influence of expected content on new client decreases (Kosmaczewska, 2014; Šerić, Jakšić Stojanović, et al., 2023; Šerić & Talijančić, 2011). The authors got the impression that tourists' perceptions of a specialised tourism product can be changed by changing the relationship between basic, additional and extended content (Jakšić Stojanović et al., 2020; Jakšić Stojanović & Šerić, 2018; Šerić, 2017, 2019b; Šerić, Jerković, et al., 2017; Šerić & Luković, 2013).

A specialised tourism product for which the demand continuously grows after its introduction can achieve significant commercial effects as a recognisable component of an integrated destination product (Šerić & Marušić, 2019; Šerić, Mihanović, et al., 2020). Therefore, the specialised tourism offer should be positioned according to the location's geographical and climatic specificities (Barros et al., 2011; Boes et al., 2016; Jafari & Xiao, 2021). To realise the synergistic effects of a specialised tourism offer with an integrated destination product, mutual harmony in identity and image is essential (Boes et al., 2016; Šerić et al., 2011). For this reason, the idea of a new specialised tourism product should also be considered geographically, related to a tourism destination whose offer the new content can easily fit into (Becken, 2005; Beeton, 2006; Cracolici et al., 2008).

Destination's tourism stakeholders are interested in developing new specialised content, as they are the basis for selective tourism forms (Cooper, 2021). A selective tourism offer is a prerequisite for a year-round tourist visit (Jafari & Xiao, 2021). By introducing new specialised content into the destination offer, visitors are indirectly encouraged to extend their stay (Jakšić Stojanović & Šerić, 2019a). The differentiation and originality of specialised tourism products make them practical for branding, and the striking impression of their brands contributes to strengthening the visibility of their destination (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019; Morrison, 2013). The evolution of tourism as a specific social phenomenon encourages the development of specialised tourism products (Buhalis & Park, 2021; Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019). Economic development and technological changes contribute to this (Bi et al., 2011; Prorok et al., 2019). Capital encourages new investments, especially where it is possible to ensure a higher rate of returns (Bilandžić, 2008). Given that many specialised tourism products offer premium prices, it is always possible to interest potential investors in such investments (Barros et al., 2011; Boyer et al., 2011; Drucker, 1994; Fletcher, 2003; Šerić, Jakšić Stojanović, et al., 2023).

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The global market of specialised tourism products is dynamic nowadays. Such offers are developing with the growth of tourist trips (Dolnicar, 2019). The internet and the intensive informatisation of society enable the rapid exchange of data and information, resulting in the development of new ideas for tourist content and offer (Borges et al., 2009; Chaffey et al., 2003; Jerkić & Šerić, 2014; Sheth et al., 2001). In the structure of the global tourism offers, specialised tourism products show a high growth rate during the last two decades and have increasingly significant implications for the growth of national tourism economies (Barros et al., 2011; Hadad et al., 2012; Prorok et al., 2019). Thus, specialised tourism products today represent one of the most dynamic and fastest growing categories of tourism. In contrast to seasonal tourism products, specialised tourism products are characterised by intensive growth and encouraging tourists to travel throughout the year. Specialised tourism products are also catalysts for faster tourism growth and the extension of the tourism season (Buhalis & Park, 2021). Specialised tourism products thus become the basis of the competitiveness of the national offer and a critical development factor of the tourism economy (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019). Tourism stakeholders face a series of challenges and dilemmas in developing specialised tourism. This indicates the need for a more complex elaboration of proposals and ideas (Šerić & Jurišić, 2014; Šerić & Luković, 2010). Dealing with creating, developing, and commercialising specialised tourism products requires awareness of a systematic approach. It is the only way that contributes to the market success of the specialised tourism offer (Šerić, 2014). Managing the development of specialised tourism products implies the cooperation of destination stakeholders with partners in the sales chain (Phillips & Louvieris, 2005; Prorok et al., 2019; Šerić, 2018).

In addition to economic and social perspectives, developing new specialised tourism products also contributes to the growth of international openness and more intensive geographical connection and cross-border cooperation (Šerić et al., 2012). This impacts the continuity of population income growth and infrastructure development, indirectly contributing to a higher quality of life (Cooper, 2021; Jafari & Xiao, 2021; UN, 2020; Zhang et al., 2021). Managing the development of specialised tourism products implies specialist knowledge and a multidisciplinary approach (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019). The good practice of managing specialised tourism products could be used to remove institutional and financial barriers in the commercialisation of valuable national resources (Šerić & Talijančić, 2011). Institutional obstacles to tourism commercialising valuable resources are particularly pronounced in post-transition countries. Representatives of local authorities are often not familiar with the possibilities of contributing specialised offers to the local tourism economy. The tourism economy represents a sustainable long-term development concept in all countries with resources for specialised tourism products (Jenkins, 2020; Prorok et al., 2019). Recent research on the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism economy indicates that specialised tourism products are more resilient than seasonal tourism products (Girish, 2020; Hall et al., 2020). Seasonal tourism products, unlike specialised ones, are more sensitive to all economic and social disturbances (Barros et al., 2011; Šerić & Meža, 2014).

The specialised tourism offer is a labour-intensive segment of the tourism economy because it often implies a year-round offer and engagement of various tourism specialists. The premium prices of such products are based on tourists' perception of added value (Buhalis & Foerste, 2015). Hired specialised tourism workers also contribute to the impression of added value. Thus, continuous development of specialised tourism products encourages self-employment, new jobs and positive implications for the growth given the local population's income in the receiving destination (Prorok et al., 2019). Many specialised tourism products are based on natural and cultural–historical resources (Jakšić Stojanović et al., 2019a; Šerić & Talijančić, 2011), which are largely well preserved in economically less developed countries.

Moreover, preserving these resources is an incentive for the continuity of developing new specialised tourism products. But tourism practice indicates that the creation of new specialised tourism products is often not standardised (Pivčević et al., 2016; Šimundić et al., 2016). Such an approach results in an uncontrolled intensity of valuable resource consumption and can make the specialised tourism offers in such countries unsustainable and unacceptable from a social point of view in the long term (Kušen, 2002; Meler & Magaš, 2014). This is why standardisation and a conceptual approach to developing specialised tourism products are essential. Developing specialised tourism products in post-transition tourist countries characterised by the seasonality of the visit has a positive influence on the extension of the tourism season (Prorok et al., 2019). However, conservation and diversity of resources are not enough. Namely, innovative ideas are needed (Jakšić Stojanović & Šerić, 2018; Meler & Škoro, 2013) and a systematic approach to the development of new specialised tourism products (Lehman & Winner, 2005; Šerić, 2020). In the area of Mediterranean countries, the growth of specialised tourism offers contributes to the balancing of regional economic development (Prorok et al., 2019).

In the global tourist market, the demand for specialised tourism products is growing (Šerić & Jurišić, 2015). From this perspective, it can be noted that there are significant opportunities to increase tourism income from specialised tourism products. This is especially important for countries with preserved resources for which the interest of tourists is growing (Prorok et al., 2019). With relatively modest investments in this offer segment, it is possible to achieve significant financial effects on the entire tourism economy. Despite the possibilities, preserved resources and existing infrastructure, many Mediterranean countries only earn a modest off-season tourism income (Prorok et al., 2019). This results from the slow transformation of existing resources into new specialised tourism facilities. The cause of the inefficient commercialisation of national resources is an unsystematic approach and a lack of tourism workers educated for developing specialised tourism products. Although the marketing practice of developing, promoting and selling specialised tourism products has begun to be researched in recent years, the modest literature is a problem in the education of tourism staff and practice.

The development and management of specialised tourism products have attracted the public's and scientists' attention in recent years (Buhalis & Foerste,

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2015; Richards, 2019; Šerić, Jakšić Stojanović, et al., 2023). The requirements for tourism demand are changing rapidly, especially following the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic (Gossling et al., 2020). The global recession and the growth of competition in tourism impose the need for changes in the management of national tourism offers (Prideaux et al., 2020). Large emission tourism markets have the most significant potential for the economic recovery of countries strategically oriented towards tourism. Changes in the perception and behaviour of tourists are also evident in these tourist markets (Wen et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2021).

The specialised tourism offer is based on original and innovative content that often implies commercialising valuable natural, cultural, historical and other national resources. The sustainability of the specialised tourism offer is based on responsible spending and management of the valorisation of these resources (Ruhanen et al., 2019). These facts argue the need for a systematic approach to developing and managing specialised tourism products. The literature on this subject is very modest because people engaged in developing and managing specialised tourism content rarely publish their experiences. Recent tourism practice indicates that the target tourism segments do not recognise certain specialised tourism products. The promotion of these contents is often inappropriate, many are not branded or their brands are not managed effectively (Šerić, 2011, 2014; Šerić & Meža, 2014; Šerić & Perišić, 2012). In addition, the activities of marketing management of such content are ignored. Thus, many of the new specialised tourism products, after several years of commercialisation, end up in the graveyard zone of the receptive tourism offer (Šerić, Jakšić Stojanović, et al., 2023), which is similar to what happens with a brand if it is not systematically managed (Kotler et al., 2009).

The first author of the book was the leader of several projects for the development of specialised tourism products (Šerić, 2004, 2008, 2017; Šerić & Luković, 2010, 2013; Šerić & Perišić, 2012). In particular, lighthouse tourism is globally positioned as one of such projects (Šerić, 2004). This specialised tourism product was also featured on the cover page of Yahoo on the 12th July, 2005, with the headline 'Croatia's lighthouses lure adventure seekers'. After the commercialisation of the Stone Lights project, he and his collaborators have continued new projects for the development of specialised tourism products in neighbouring countries as well (Jakšić Stojanović et al., 2020; Jakšić Stojanović & Šerić, 2018). Existing experiences are continuously tested in business practice (Jakšić Stojanović et al., 2019a, 2019b; Šerić, 2018; Šerić, Jakšić Stojanović, et al., 2023; Šerić & Perišić, 2012).

1.2. Tourism Practice

The idea of a new specialised tourism product should be focused on potential new tourist needs (Jakšić Stojanović & Šerić, 2018; Šerić & Jurišić, 2015; Šerić & Marušić, 2019). In practice, a mistake is often made at the idea development stage by focusing on one exclusive resource that is considered to be commercialised

with another contents. The focus is primarily on the resource instead of the final content of the offer. A resource that is a prerequisite for developing a specialised tourism offer is the platform, but it must not be a limitation of the whole idea (Lehman & Winner, 2005). Each destination resource can be valorised through several specialised tourism products. The attractiveness of a particular specialised tourism product will depend on its differentiation (adapted from Solow, 2008). So the focus should be on the originality of the new tourist content, not on the resource on which it is based. A diversified approach to tourist content based on the same destination resource is a prerequisite for implementing sustainable tourism standards (Peypoch, 2007). Concerning the sensitivity to commercialisation and the non-renewability of some resources, an unsystematic approach can result in degradation, i.e. a decrease in their value (Šerić & Luković, 2010; Šerić & Perišić, 2012). The findings of several studies have proven that in many countries, this is not taken into account (Cuccia et al., 2013; Prorok et al., 2019; Šimundić et al., 2016). The result is a multitude of economically unsustainable tourist attractions that endanger non-renewable resources.

The existing global offer of specialised tourism products stimulates new tourist needs, so this issue should be viewed in a broader context. Tourism opting for specialised content is a valuable source of new ideas. And this fact imposes a systematic approach to developing specialised tourism products. Systematic management of the valorisation of valuable destination resources, which are a prerequisite for an attractive and competitive specialised tourism product, guarantees their preservation. Despite their content and originality, many specialised tourism products do not achieve significant sales. Their life cycle is short; they are quickly introduced on the market and promptly withdrawn from the offer (Šerić, Peronja, et al., 2020). A small part of the specialised tourism offer manages to be maintained in the long term and thus contributes to the competitiveness of the particular destination.

A systematic approach to developing and managing a specialised tourism product presupposes a scientific foundation and argumentation based on examples of good practice with rational use of the destination's resources. Ideas for potential new specialised tourism products should be sought between the existing destination offer and loyal visitors' desires. In practice, ideas for new tourism content are generated exclusively according to the current logistics infrastructure. Destination possibilities and available resources are an assumption, but they should not be a limitation for the ideas of new specialised tourism products. The flexibility of thinking and the willingness to modify existing ideas of new content prolongs the process of developing a new tourism offer but enables valuable knowledge about the necessary characteristics.

A specialised tourism product that has reached maturity is often characterised by routine provision/service and a price acceptable to tourists. Such a market-successful specialised tourism product results from a clear idea of future content that targets certain segments of the tourism population. As a result, the specialised tourism offer should be positioned in a market niche where it will be visible, thus ensuring a satisfactory return on investment. When monitoring global tourism trends, it is worth determining the order in which tourists choose unique tourist

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destinations, accommodation entities and specialised tourism facilities. Facts are often not what they seem (UNWTO, 2020). Deviations in tourists' reactions and purchasing decisions from what was expected in the post-COVID era are even more challenging to understand (WTTC, 2020). For this reason, much more time should be devoted to developing and planning the future specialised tourism product than 20 or more years ago. A creative and attractive specialised tourism product is not based solely on the genius of the idea but also on the appreciation of relevant market facts, rational thinking and the connection of stakeholders that will ensure the necessary quality through synergy. Focusing on a narrower tourism segment does not stimulate mass demand. Still, it allows the content to be adjusted to the expectations of the target population, which is a prerequisite for a higher price. Such a specialised offer's long-term sustainability and profitability can be based on high quality and evident added value. In current tourism practice, especially in the post-transition Mediterranean countries, it is often about incomplete content that is sometimes characterised by a lower quality of service. This is often the result of an unsystematic approach to developing and commercialising specialised tourism products.

1.3. Specialised Tourism Products as Tourism Growth Catalysts

Specialised tourism offer is an essential competitive component of every national tourism offer (Prorok et al., 2019). Such facilities stimulate the growth of tourist visits and draw the attention of the global tourism public to a receptive tourism country (Buhalis, 2000). A systematic approach to developing and managing a specialised tourism offer significantly impacts the economy of receptive countries with a relevant tourism share regarding the gross national product (Cvetkoska & Barišić, 2014). This is especially important for small post-transition countries with the prospect of tourism growth (Prorok et al., 2019). Such countries should use special policies and measures to support and stimulate the development of specialised tourism products.

1.3.1. Argumentation

Today, the tourism economy in Europe represents one of the most dynamic and fastest growing activities (Toma, 2014; UN, 2020). During the last two decades, it has been characterised by continuous growth (Cooper, 2021). In many post-transition countries, tourism is an important catalyst for developing the national economy (Prorok et al., 2019). This indicates the need to face the challenges imposed by global tourism trends. Concerning the growing interest of the tourism public in specialised tourism products, this issue needs to be systematically regulated by national policies (Jafari & Xiao, 2021). The positive economic and social implications of the tourism economy on a receptive tourism country are part of the possible repercussions on the living standards of the local population (Beeton, 2006). Developing specialised tourism content results in greater international openness of the country, cross-border cooperation and