

From sun and sea tourism to cultural tourism – the case of Split-Dalmatia county

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Abstract

This paper presents empirical research conducted for the purpose of designing a conceptual development model needed to gradually transform Croatia's Middle Dalmatia region from a sun & sea to a world-class cultural-tourism destination. The first step in the process involved conducting an inventory, classification and evaluation of regional cultural attractions in terms of their market potential, appeal, and stage of market readiness. Following this initial groundwork, and in order to define acceptable development principles and outline preferred courses of action, the second step of the process focused on a region-wide stakeholder consultation process which included organization of regional workshops, focus groups and semi-structured in-depth interviews with regional and/or local tourism and culture professionals, event managers, tourist boards' directors and community leaders. Following the input provided by the relevant cultural tourism stakeholders throughout the Middle Dalmatia region, distinctive development principles have been specified. Based on these development principles, a structured cultural tourism development concept has been proposed to ensure both, international competitiveness and long-term sustainability.

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Keywords: cultural tourism; Croatia; Middle Dalmatia region; development; conceptual model

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Introduction

On the supply side contemporary tourism is characterised by a constant increase in the number of attractive destinations competing for potential consumers. The competitive struggle among destinations is, therefore, less reliant on the market supply of more or less "tangible"

tourism products, and much more on the supply of creatively designed or orchestrated memorable experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Amin & Thrift, 2002). As a result, a tourism destination's competitive position in the global marketplace is largely a derivative of the (international) perception of the tourism

experiences being offered and the specific consumer benefits that potential and/or actual visitors could gain as compared to other tourist destinations. In this sense, the first step towards effective market positioning of a tourist destination involves defining an offering of tourism experiences that are more attractive to the desired set of potential visitors than those of competing destinations.

Tangible and intangible cultural heritage have always represented an opportunity for a distinctive market positioning (Palmer, 1999; McKercher & du Cross, 2002; Cabrini, 2002; Cooke & Lazzaretti, 2008; Yang, Lin & Han, 2010) and a solid basis for efficient destination differentiation. In this regard, the use of cultural heritage as a source of a sustainable competitive advantage in long-term market positioning has been well documented (Picard, 1997; Ritzer, 1999; Urry, 2001; Richards, 2002; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003; Hughes & Allen, 2005; Su & Lin, 2014). Cultural heritage, including a contemporary cultural production is, in fact, playing an ever greater role in the process of creating a unique image of a tourism destination that is, both, easily recognizable and hard to imitate, regardless of whether that involves improving the aesthetics of a public area (Morgan & Pritchard, 1998) or creating a suitable atmosphere necessary to meet the tourists' expectations (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993). Further, not only as the core of distinctive tourism positioning, but also as a new, vibrant, and evolving development concept, cultural heritage has become the central point in the economic rejuvenation of many cities and tourism regions worldwide (Lim, 1993; Ray, 1998; McCann, 2002; Sasaki, 2004; Mommaas, 2004; Mizzau & Montanari, 2008; Bandarin, Hosagrahar & Albernaz, 2012). The idea is, namely, to use cultural heritage not only as a mere resource endowment that needs to be safeguarded and protected in order to preserve the place's and/or people's identity, but as a productive force that can provide a source of inspiration for new entrepreneurial initiatives (Stern & Seifert, 2010). For these reasons, there is a growing awareness that regions and/or cities may build their overall, as well as tourism competitiveness leveraging their cultural

heritage (Cooke & Lazzaretti, 2008; Pereira Roders & Von Oers, 2011).

Regardless of the many connections and ever greater interweaving between culture, tourism and economic development at national, regional and local levels, Croatian tourism destinations (with the exception of Dubrovnik) have, so far, underutilized their wealth of cultural resources. This also applies to Middle Dalmatia, the region which is blessed with a concentration of three world renowned, UNESCO protected, cultural heritage sites – Diocletian palace in Split, medieval town of Trogir and the Greek Ager of Pharos in Starigrad (island of Hvar). In addition, the cultural heritage of Middle Dalmatia also includes well preserved archeological sites from the Roman times such as Salona near Split, impressive medieval fortifications and rich sacral heritage. At the same time, this is one of the most developed Croatian tourism regions, with a significant growth of the international tourist arrivals over the last decade.

Regardless of its cultural heritage affluence, the Middle Dalmatia region is not yet internationally recognized as primarily a cultural tourism destination. Traditionally focusing mainly on the natural beauty of the Adriatic and abundance of high quality beach space, the tourism development stakeholders of Middle Dalmatia have created somewhat of a sun and sea tourism monoculture. According to the recently conducted visitor survey - TOMAS Summer 2010 (Marušić, Sever, Čorak & Ivandić, 2011), out of 14 motives for visiting the region, cultural attractions were the second to last. Furthermore, the results indicated that most of the cultural heritage of the Middle Dalmatia region are still not market ready due to poor presentation, inadequate signage and/or lack of interpretation. Although about 60% of tourists who come to Middle Dalmatia visit cultural attractions, including locally organized cultural events, those are, using the terminology of Ashworth & Turnbridge (1990), mostly incidental cultural tourists, likely to visit the attractions once in the region, but not planning their trip around the cultural tourism experiences. As a result, tourism activity in Middle Dalmatia is still highly seasonal. Indeed, about 90% of total tourist arrivals is recorded in

the four summer months and, furthermore, 68% of all arrivals in July and August (SD County Tourist Board, 2011). Therefore, in spite of its well-developed tourism, the Middle Dalmatia region is still in the initial phase of building its identity as an internationally renowned cultural tourism destination while its cultural heritage has, in general, not yet reached the market-ready stage where well-conceived and implemented management plans would ensure adequate level of site protection, satisfactory experience to visitors and income generation for sustainable heritage preservation. Nevertheless, the regional tourism stakeholders have recently started to recognize the potential of cultural tourism to decrease the region's reliance on the 'sun and sea' product, but also to expand the season and spread tourism demand more evenly geographically.

Drawing on the concepts of experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1998) and differentiation as a means of generating a competitive edge (Porter, 1980), the aim of this paper is to present empirical research for the purpose of building a theoretical framework and conceptual model for long-term sustainable international market positioning of the Middle Dalmatia as a world-class cultural-tourism destination. Thus, this paper aims to: a) present the concept, characteristics and economic potential of cultural tourism on a global scale; b) make an inventory of the cultural resource base of the Middle Dalmatia region and assess its market readiness; c) specify appropriate development principles acceptable to all relevant cultural tourism related stakeholders within Middle Dalmatia, and d) propose a development concept that would, in a relatively short period, pave the way for Middle Dalmatia to become a globally recognizable cultural-tourism destination.

Cultural tourism – concept, characteristics and economic potential

In 2010 the international leisure travel exceeded 939 million arrivals, generating USD 919 billion in revenue (UNWTO, 2011). At the same time, the growing individualism and segmentation of the tourism demand exerts an increasing impact not only on the differentiation of well-established tourism destinations, but on emerging destinations as well. Accordingly, the

traditional tourism products are continuously being amended, improved and supplemented in order to meet tourist experiences. This includes local culture and/or cultural heritage which provide an additional experiential tapestry for a growing number of tourists (Richards, 2010; Prentice, 1993; Cohen, 1988). According to international statistics, cultural tourism accounted for some 40% of global tourist demand (OECD, 2009). As the cultural tourism market has expanded, so has the complexity of cultural consumption by tourists, resulting in the diversification and fragmentation of the cultural tourism market (Richards & van der Ark, 2013). In other words, 'the cultural tourism market ... consists of tourists with increasingly differentiated characteristics, needs, and expectations' (Pulido-Fernández & Sánchez-Rivero, 2010). Thus, visits to museums or art exhibitions, theatre performances or concerts, as well as experiencing local cuisine and customs (Lacher, Oh, Jodice & Norman, 2013) have all become an essential ingredient and often an unavoidable element of the integrated tourist experience in increasing number of travels, regardless whether the tourists' primary motive for travel is leisure, business, health or other (Leask, Fyall & Garrod, 2002). Although growing interest in cultural heritage opens new perspectives for the local economy in culturally rich destinations, this, in turn, brings about challenges for sustainable heritage management (Jansen-Verbeke & Lievois, 1999; du Cross, 2001; Landorf, 2009).

The concept of cultural tourism is extremely broad and theoretically still undefined (Galí-Espelt, 2012; Hughes & Allen, 2005; Hughes, 2002), while the cultural tourists present a market segment with fuzzy boundaries since the segment includes those tourists whose visit to a historic site, museum or cultural event was not the primary, but secondary, or perhaps even tertiary motive for visiting a destination (Richards, 1999). It is, therefore, very difficult to define more specifically the scope of cultural tourism. One of the oldest definitions of cultural tourism (WTO, 1985) describes it as travel that "satisfy the human need for diversity, tending to raise the cultural level of the individual and giving rise to new knowledge, experience and encounters". However, according to this

definition any leisure travel can be subsumed under the common denominator of cultural tourism. Most definitions that we use today are those developed during the 1990s. McKercher & du Cross's (2002) comprehensive overview of these definitions resulted in four broad categories: tourism-derived, motivational, experiential and operational. An example of motivational definition is that of Silberberg (1995:351) who defines cultural tourism as "visits by persons from outside the host community motivated wholly or in part by interest in the historical, artistic, scientific, or lifestyle/heritage offerings of a community, region, group or institution". Richards's early definition of cultural tourism as movement of people 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, 1996) is tourism-derived. This definition has underpinned the most widespread research programme ATLAS Cultural tourism with the addition of a technical definition specifying the type of attractions to be considered as cultural tourism. Both, conceptual and technical definitions used by planners subsequently reveal that cultural tourism is associated not only with visits to different attractions associated with 'high' culture (McKercher, Ho & du Cross, 2004), but also with sports, living heritage and everyday life of the local community (Howie, 2000). Consequently, the attractions of cultural tourism expanded from the tangible heritage of the past toward the movable, intangible and time limited contemporary cultural production (Richards, 2000) to creative pursuits (Richards 2011). Furthermore, with the growth of tourism activities, sophistication of the tourism market and specialization of tourism intermediaries, cultural tourism implies a steadily growing number of variations of the product, including, for example, cultural tours, city tourism, visits to festivals and events, gastronomy, pilgrimages, and increasingly highly creative "niche" products such as educational courses or volunteer programs requiring the active participation of tourists. Because of these characteristics, and considering the fact that the cultural tourist is typically a well-educated and affluent person with a higher than average purchasing power (Gilbert & Litozze, 1998;

Holcomb, 1999), cultural tourism not only helps to establish a desirable destination image, but also attracts the type of tourists that most destinations prefer (Holcomb, 1999; Richards, 2001; Yunis, 2001).

While the growth of cultural tourism demand is evident (OECD, 2009), there is also a high competition between destinations to attract this segment. More than a decade ago Richard (2001) has argued convincingly that supply has already outstripped demand. Richards & Wilson (2005) have identified four broad strategies that destination are employing in order to develop cultural tourism:

- Establishment of a destination's cultural icons as world-known symbols of a destination's identity. Apart from the Eiffel Tower (Paris), the Sagrada Familia (Barcelona), and the Statue of Liberty (New York), a good recent example of such positioning is Bilbao and its Guggenheim Museum;
- Organization of mega-events has also become a fairly popular and widely accepted way to position tourism destinations, particularly cities, to attract cultural tourists. This is best illustrated by the "rush" for organizing major sports events (the Olympic Games, world championships), world exhibitions (e.g. EXPO), and the competition for the prestigious title of the European Capital of Culture;
- Theming is also ever more popular in positioning cultural-tourism destinations, both cities, and rural areas alike. Since it is especially suitable for destinations that are lesser known, such positioning frequently takes advantage of famous historical figures or events, topographic features, unspoiled environment, etc.;
- Revaluation of tangible cultural heritage is a logical solution for market positioning, especially for destinations that in the near or distant past had gone through a "golden age" followed by a long and painful period of recession. Good examples of such positioning are Florence, Bruges, Girona, and Dubrovnik.

Most recently, the creativity came to the fore in tourism development. While some singled out this trend as creative tourism involving tourists'

engagement with local culture through participatory experiences (UNESCO 2006; Raymond 2007 in Richard 2011), Richards (2011) argues that creative tourism is more than a niche product of cultural tourism as it is directed towards more authentic and engaged experiences with emergence of creative spectacles, creative spaces and creative tourism as new models of development.

Methodology

In order to develop a model of cultural tourism development for Middle Dalmatia region, a two-step approach was used that combined several qualitative research methods. However, the underlying assumption was that the future of a tourism destination, understood as the turning of a desired development vision into reality (van der Helm, 2009; Wehrmeyer, Clayton & Lum, 2002), will be performed better if a greater number of relevant stakeholders share a similar view on the destination's preferred future (Butler, 1980; Getz, 1992; Simpson, 2001; Reid, Mair, & George, 2004; Butler, 2009).

The first step in the process was to conduct an inventory, classification and evaluation of regional cultural attractions. For this, the System of tourism attractions developed by Kušen (2010) was used, where identified cultural heritage was classified in several categories and evaluated in terms of both, their market potential/appeal, and stage of market readiness. The data collection lasted from May 2009 to February 2010. The most important source for identification of tangible cultural heritage was the official registry of protected cultural heritage. Additionally, local registries and historical sources, combined with local expert knowledge were utilized for identification of intangible heritage such as cultural events, important historical figures and events or contemporary culture and lifestyle. Finally, the market appeal and stage of market readiness (market willing, market able, market ready) were further assessed by the site inspections and/or consultation with local tourism and culture experts.

Following an inventory of cultural attractions, during the second step of the process, primary data were collected by means of a region-wide stakeholder consultation process. The adopted

community based planning approach entailed three focus groups with relevant representatives of regional and/or local cultural institutions and/or event managers in order to investigate the attitudes of tourism and culture professionals, as well as community leaders regarding both, Middle Dalmatia's cultural tourism development potential, and preferred courses of action. Further, five regional workshops were conducted in order to objectively assess the market appeal of previously identified cultural attractions on local level, and to verify the state of their market readiness. In addition, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with the municipal leaders, cultural experts and tourism board directors during the site-inspections lasting from one to two hours each. Individuals to be interviewed were selected via a snowball sampling technique originally developed by Goodman (1961) and used in relevant tourism research (e. i.e. Stylianou-Lambert (2011) in art museums settings; McLennan, Ritchie, Ruhanen, Moyle (2014) in tourism planning). Each key informant was asked to indicate a list of other prospective contact persons and then reiterating the process. Interview schedules were deliberately presented in as neutral a way as possible so as to invite interviewees to interpret issues in a way they considered most appropriate. In total, 38 individuals were interviewed, involving municipality mayors, tourism board directors, art/museum/festival directors, conservationists, tourism and cultural entrepreneurs. The underlying logic of data analysis during the second step of the process was grounded theory building, which involves inducing insights from field-based case data (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Grounded theory building was chosen in order to discover the participants' ideas and main concerns regarding cultural tourism development in the region and ways to resolve them. This theory building approach is often used in tourism when there is a prospect of learning something completely new, especially when there is a paucity of theoretically oriented research (i.e. Lumsdon and McGrath, 2011). Following all aforementioned activities, two rounds of public presentations of the proposed development concept and related policy actions have been carried out in order to verify their logic and viability from the stakeholders' perspective.

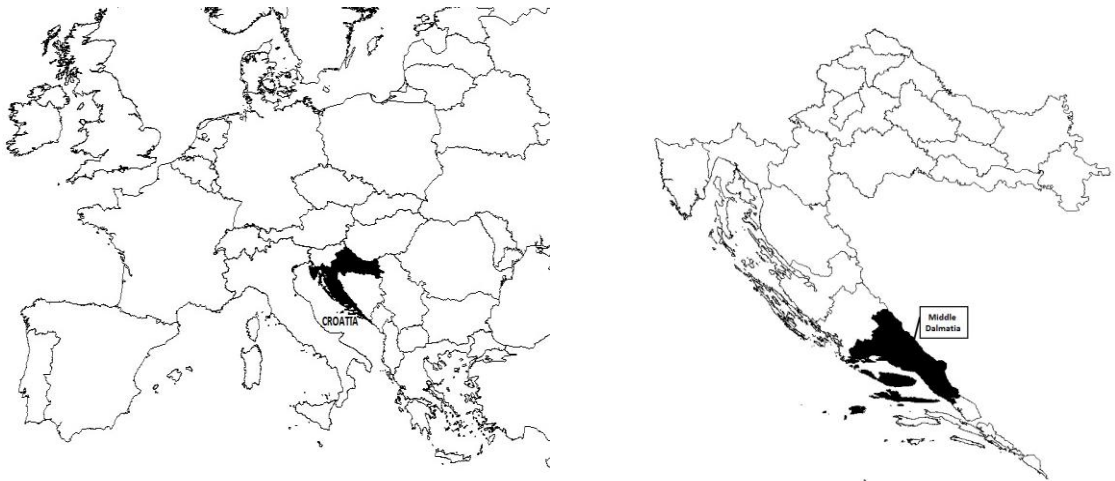


Figure 1. Croatia and the Middle Dalmatia Region (Split-Dalmatia County)

Results and Discussion

Middle Dalmatia and its cultural attractions

Middle Dalmatia represents the 'heart' of the historical region of Dalmatia (Figure 1). The region spreads over 14 thousand km² and accounts for about 8% of the Croatian territory. It has a population of 465,000 (some 10% of Croatia), out of which 41% live in Split, the region's administrative centre. Physically, the entire area can be split into three geographic zones: the coastal strip with the historic cities of Split, Trogir, Omiš and Makarska, b) the islands - Vis, Hvar, Brač and Šolta, and c) the hinterland with the few historical towns (Sinj, Imotski, Vrgorac and Vrlika). The whole area is well connected to the major European source markets by the Zagreb – Split highway and the Split international airport.

In addition to its exceptional natural resources and mild climate, the Middle Dalmatia region is largely characterized as the hub of Croatian contemporary cultural production, entertainment and sport. This, together with the common perception of the Dalmatian residents as optimistic and easy-going, gives the whole area a distinguishing cultural identity on which internationally recognizable image can be founded. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the region was extremely important in shaping the Croatian history which is reflected in its distinctive historical and cultural heritage - an abundance of well-preserved archaeological

sites, historic artefacts, ancient buildings, medieval towns, Renaissance or Baroque palaces, churches and monasteries. The results of classification of cultural tourism resources of Middle Dalmatia using Kušen's (2010) system of tourism is presented in Table 1.

Other cultural resource categories of potential interest to tourists are the famous historical figures, legends, myths and historical stories and folklore. Despite the fact that they can be used as the foundation for interesting and creative interpretations of other cultural products (castles and forts, urban entities, events, etc.), unless presented through events or festivals, the majority of these resources can be considered as tertiary attractions in the market-willing stage.

As a conclusion, the inventory of the cultural resources of the Middle Dalmatia reveals a rich, physically dispersed and diverse attraction base that might be appealing to various types of cultural tourists. Nevertheless, one must also be aware of the fact that many of the existing heritage sites and/or cultural tourism resources are neither market ready, nor interesting enough to attract visitors on their own.

Cultural tourism development in Middle Dalmatia – stakeholders' views

Apart from the systematic inventory and state of market readiness assessment of cultural

Table 1. Profile of cultural tourism attractions of the Middle Dalmatia

Category	Description
Archeological sites	The region has an abundance of archeological sites mostly from ancient times and early Christianity. In terms of their attractiveness to tourists, of particular interest are several preserved sites from the ancient Hellenistic and/or Roman era such as Diocletian's Palace and Salona, Issa on the island of Vis, Ager of Pharos – a latest addition to the Croatian UNESCO heritage sites, and roman army camp Tilverium. However, regarding their market readiness, only two of these are at the market-ready stage. These are Diocletian's Palace and the ancient site of Salona.
Medieval towns	About thirty protected historical settlements characterized by the stone architecture, narrow streets and squares, dominated by church towers and fortified buildings, represent one of the most significant and distinctive cultural attractions of Middle Dalmatia. Often developed on the foundations of Hellenistic and Roman urban layout, their continuous development through the centuries has left numerous well preserved sacred and profane cultural monuments from the Romanesque, Gothic and Renaissance periods, and, to a lesser extent, the Baroque. In addition to Split and Trogir, which are both on UNESCO's world heritage list, the township of Hvar is certainly of primary interest as a cultural attraction, and impressive enough to attract a significant amount of cultural tourists autonomously. Beside their unique urban harmony and physical ambience, the attractiveness of these urban entities is further enhanced by the ever-present street folklore, so typical for the Dalmatian lifestyle. Most of these towns are already established tourism attractions and, in terms of market readiness, they need to be further boosted by introduction of quality theming to create a sense of place, interpretation, events and promotion
Stone villages	Recognized by the historians as extremely valuable cultural resources, numerous rural settlements in the agricultural hinterland and on the islands, characterized by tightly knit cluster of stone houses interspersed by cobbled narrow passageways, small gardens, all blended with beautiful scenery, represent a unique variation of open-air museums. While highly attractive, with a potential for development of village hotels, art and craft centers to revitalize local customs, local markets and authentic gastronomy, these villages, mostly abandoned by their former residents, are still at market able stage.
Castles & fortresses	Throughout the history located at the borders of empires, the region is interspersed with stone fortresses and fortified castles. Of those, the most outstanding are the medieval fortress of Klis, fortress Kamerlengo in Trogir and Fortica in Hvar which are already functioning as tourist attractions. A number of medieval guarding forts along the main transit routes (i.e. along the river of Cetina) are also connected in a themed route and, therefore, market ready. Nevertheless, the vast majority of the fortifications within the region have to be prepared for visitations and are, thus, at the market-able stage.
Palaces & summer residences	Located either in the urban core or in the scenic country-side, they document the lifestyle of Dalmatian nobles and their economic prosperity through the medieval era to late 19 th century. While a number of them is market ready, the most of them are at a market able stage and, hence, considered of tertiary importance in terms of their tourism attractiveness.
Churches & monasteries	From the very many religious buildings of almost all historical styles, only a few (the St. Dominus Cathedral in Split, the St. Lawrence Cathedral in Trogir, St. Stephen's Cathedral in Brač, and the Church of Our Lady of Sinj in Sinj) are considered as primary cultural tourism attractions. In addition, highly unique and attractive are fortified churches in Vrboska and Jelsa on the island of Hvar, which date back to the Turkish conquests and a cluster of monastic hermitages on the island of Brač, of which the Blace complex is the largest. These heritage sites are between market able and market ready stage, needing some improvement in interpretation and visitor organization as well as promotion.
Museums, collections & galleries	There are some 60 different museums, collections (religious, regional, archaeological, malacological, ethnographic, library and archival) and galleries, mostly located in Split and operated by the public sector. However, due to outdated and insufficiently attractive displays, the peculiar opening hours unadjusted to the tourism demand, and the uninterested staff, most of these cultural institutions should be treated as conditionally market-ready tourism products of tertiary relevance.
Events & festivals	In spite of their relatively large number, only a few events or festivals that take place in the Middle Dalmatia region can be characterized as market ready cultural attractions. Such events include the Sinjska Alka in Sinj, Split Summer Festival, and Dalmatian a Cappella Choir Festival in Omiš.
Work & lifestyle	Since cultural tourists seek to learn more about the destination they are visiting by socializing with the local people and participating in various (traditional) activities and customs, several lifestyle products could be of interest to the market. These are related to seamanship and (traditional) wooden shipbuilding, fishing, olive growing, viticulture and wine production, and stone-masonry. With the right approach and presentation, all these have a very good chance of developing into one of the key cultural attractions of primary importance. Nevertheless, most of these resources are, currently, at the market willing stage only.

Table 2. Strategic directions for the Middle Dalmatia cultural tourism development

Strategic direction	Description
Prioritize investment so as to upgrade several most attractive cultural heritage sites	Since Diocletian's Palace and the old town of Trogir, the two well-established sites under UNESCO protection, and ancient Salona in the vicinity, represent a concentration of world-class tourism attractions that are already attracting significant tourism demand, it is of utmost interest that these sites position themselves as the core 'must-see' cultural attractions of the region. This should help the whole region establish itself as an internationally renowned cultural tourism destination.
Create necessary conditions for sustainable and spatially balanced development	While the most attractive heritage sites serve to boost the region's image internationally and attract predominantly purposeful cultural tourists, this initial demand has to be spread evenly across the region to less visited secondary and tertiary attractions. The key is in finding the right balance between: a) the growing demand for the UNESCO heritage sites and their protection, and b) the demand for the UNESCO heritage sites and other market-ready, not internationally known secondary and tertiary attractions in other parts of the region. In any case, the number of visitors to the cultural and historical attractions must be kept within sustainable limits.
Build a demand driven cultural tourism product	As opposed to the supply-driven development of cultural tourism in Middle Dalmatia that is prevalent today with most tertiary, secondary and even primary tourism attractions, the approach to cultural tourism product development should be more demand driven. Accordingly, apart from transforming the region's most famous heritage sites into world-class tourism attractions, maximum focus should be devoted to the development of the several market-ready products featuring creative tourism (fishing, olive growing, wine producing etc.) in all parts of the region. Namely, products based on the promotion of the Dalmatian work culture and lifestyle will enable: a) investment in the creative potential of local communities and individuals, which will directly generate jobs and additional sources of revenue, as well as b) preservation of ancient customs and traditions, which is an essential part of the regional cultural identity.
Ensure rational and focused investment	Regardless whether scarce public funds are allocated for the development of culture or tourism, budgets are always limited and never fully meet actual needs. Focused investment implies increased investment in the development of products and/or cultural tourism sites that are the most market-ready. In other words, the process should start with investment in the UNESCO protected heritage sites and gradually expand along the range of other market-ready products.
Ensure coordinated action of tourism stakeholders and cultural policymakers	The development of cultural tourism in Middle Dalmatia must be based on recognizing the common interests and creating synergy between culture and tourism from which both sectors, but also the community as a whole, would benefit. Simultaneously, instead of its current (passive) role as guardian of heritage, history, and culture, the public institutions in charge of the cultural heritage should become a more active participant in the region's cultural, social and economic development.

tourism resources of Middle Dalmatia, the process of drafting a cultural tourism strategy relied heavily on the input of tourism and/or culture professionals, city/municipal mayors, local residents, public institutions and/or entities, as well as non-governmental associations. Direct involvement of a large number of local stakeholders resulted in the identification of the strategic directions succinctly outlined in Table 2.

Along the above stated development principles, and in accordance with prevailing stakeholder

views, the cultural tourism development concept within the Middle Dalmatia region relies predominantly on the simple mechanism: (i) attract the maximum possible number of visitors to the narrow Split-Trogir area using the market potential of several internationally recognized cultural attractions, (ii) having visited these, depending on the individual interest, by means of a well-designed regional promotion system, disperse the tourists to other secondary and tertiary cultural tourism attractions in the region. The attractiveness of such areas, particularly in the situation of

scarce financial funds and hard budgetary constraints, should be stressed primarily through assuring availability, better visibility and innovative promotion of numerous intangible cultural-tourism resources, especially those related to the culture of work and lifestyle, creative tourism and themed events.

A conceptual development model

Taking into account the aforementioned guidelines, the approach to the development of the cultural-tourism product of Middle Dalmatia entailed focusing on the creation of a diverse and interrelated system of memorable experiences capable to effectively respond to the trends in the contemporary tourism demand. Apart from more effective use of available funds, and directing the majority of investment into several most attractive heritage sites, this can be achieved mainly by creatively (re)packaging the region's market-ready cultural tourism products, as well by introducing thematically layered interpretation, and organizing high quality themed cultural events. With this in mind, the gradual repositioning of the regional prevailing 'sun and sea' tourism orientation towards a more preferred cultural tourism image asks for the introduction of three-step approach comprising of mutually interrelated and interdependent activities. These are summarized as follows:

1. Establishment of cultural icons as world-class attractions through continuous enhancement of the quality of visitor experience and simultaneous improvement in their promotion should represent the first and crucial step that should enable generation of significant international interest and attract larger volumes of cultural tourism demand into the region. Based on their already established high market appeal and market readiness these should be the two UNESCO sites within Split and Trogir as well as the township of Hvar.

2. Development of several 'regional jewels' i.e. heritage sites appealing enough to act as primary tourism attractions that can further boost international tourism demand. In other words, the establishment of 'regional jewels' should open up most of the yet unknown area of the region to the cultural tourism demand. Taking into consideration

factors such as the market readiness, the theme they embody, and/or the possible connection with other attractions in the immediate and wider environment, most appropriate candidates for the 'regional jewels' include ancient Salona, the Blaca Desert monastic hermitage (island of Brač), Sinjska Alka (history inspired traditional event within the old town of Sinj), and the Klis fortress (close proximity to Split).

3. Fostering and preservation of traditions in order to start-up, launch and effectively commercialize numerous creative tourism products based on the traditional work culture and local lifestyle. Since they go beyond just idle observation and education and put the emphasis on active participation as the core source of tourist experience, the demand for such products is increasing in global terms (Richards & Wilson, 2006). While the cultural icons and regional jewels act mainly as crowd pullers and focal points for attracting tourism demand, their visitation involves mainly sightseeing, lasting a few hours. Once they have been visited, they provide little reason for revisiting. On the other hand, activation of the small local entrepreneurs in cultural tourism through creative and/or educational workshops, as well as through creative theming and packaging would stimulate interest for these products and create conditions not only for a longer stay, but for repeated visit to the region as well. Meanwhile, for the local residents this would open up new business opportunities, extend the tourism season and reduce the pressure on the available beach space.

While it is expected that the transformation of the cultural icons into world-class tourism attractions and the launching of regional jewels on the international market would be predominantly conditional upon the quality of partnerships between cultural institutions, local/regional tourism boards and public administration, as well as upon the availability of financial, organizational and human resources, the market launching of creative tourism products should remain largely in the domain of the enterprise-oriented private sector. Nevertheless, communication among stakeholders is vital at all times in order to activate and mobilize the regional individual and collective creative potential. The main

challenge the cultural-tourism participants of the Middle Dalmatia region are currently facing is the absence of development 'ambassadors', i.e. local and/or regional cultural tourism stakeholders that could professionally and financially manage cultural-tourism development of the existing icons and potential regional jewels. At the same time, in order to establish a variety of market-ready products in the domain of creative tourism based on local lifestyle and tradition, the entrepreneurial individuals and groups willing to learn and invest in the development of creative tourism products should not only be identified, but integrated so as to form clusters. Also, theming and linking of cultural attractions and/or products requires interaction of various stakeholders with often vague or even contradictory objectives that need to be reconciled in order to achieve the desired synergies - grouping of individual attractions and products in a unique cultural-tourism product.

Finally, in order to be successfully implemented, the proposed approach to cultural tourism development in Middle Dalmatia requires adequate organization. The notion implies the creation of the necessary human resources, as well as organizational and financial conditions for the development of a series of project-oriented strategic/operational regional/local partnerships. Ultimately, the cultural-tourism product of the Middle Dalmatia is an amalgamation of individual experiences, attractions and products that need to be integrated into one memorable experience that would enhance the satisfaction of visitors, thus realizing greater economic effect, and permanently establishing the value of the region's culture and cultural heritage internationally. The foundation for establishing an effective 'organization for success' boils down to the notion of transparent and efficient stakeholder collaboration, as well as to clear prioritization of objectives and mutually orchestrated actions. Pursuant to the foregoing, the cultural-tourism development process in Middle Dalmatia should follow a few basic principles.

Firstly, taking into account of the current state of tourism development and dominate tourism

product of sun and sea, cultural tourism development should start from heritage tourism and move gradually to creative tourism. While the relatively strong position of Middle Dalmatia on the international tourism market should facilitate the development of cultural tourism, its current image as a 'sun and sea' destination could be an obstacle to its desired repositioning. The current 'sun and sea' market perception connotes leisure, hedonism, relaxation and fun, in which it might be somewhat difficult to incorporate more sophisticated high culture products (music, art, literature, museums and galleries). At the same time, in order to be successful, the regional future market positioning would have to, among other things, be largely related to the easy-going Dalmatian lifestyle, the history and evolution of which is manifested not only in its cultural and historical heritage, but also in the way of life that created it. Therefore, the best market positioning of the region as a cultural-tourism destination would have to be a modern presentation of its historical heritage, combined with a variety of experiences (products, events) compatible with the traditional way of life.

Secondly, heritage tourism, as it is practiced in the Middle Dalmatia today, is based on touring and sightseeing, i.e. visual perception. There are only few opportunities for casual learning through site specific interpretation which is, in most cases, based on an outdated scientific approach focused on years, styles, dates or chronology. Moreover, each cultural attraction is interpreted separately, so visitors remain unaware of its broader historical context. This is true regardless of the importance and size of the heritage attractions, even in the case of those under UNESCO protection. Apart from the visual impressions, the overall experience of the visit does not give the tourists much to remember the site, to talk about it (oral promotion) or to revisit it. The new approach in the presentation of the regional cultural-tourism attractions is, therefore, to focus on enhancing the quality of experience. For this to be achieved theming, creative interpretation and active participation of the visitors is necessary which, in turn, requires additional training of a number of development stakeholders – guides, curators, artists, local historians and all those who can offer creative courses and workshops.

Since it should be easier to direct the already existing tourism demand toward cultural tourism products and activities than to attract totally new market segments, all cultural tourism stakeholders should focus their efforts on transforming the present summer holiday visitors to purposeful cultural tourists. Thus, third principle is to move from existing market to specialised (cultural) niche markets. This should result not only in more visitors and associated revenue, especially to 'regional jewels' and other less known cultural attractions dispersed throughout the region, but in enhanced guest satisfaction and prolonged stay. At the same time, development of cultural-tourism experiences, products and services will gradually create the conditions to attract specialized niches in the off-season, and more opportunities for cultural-tourism businesses for the local residents. Finally, the cultural tourism product should focus on authenticity combined with international service quality. As elsewhere, the cultural tourism market is becoming ever more

competitive worldwide. Cultural tourists are generally better educated, wealthier and more experienced travellers than most and know exactly what they want, why they want it and how to get it. At the same time, their sense of value for money and time needed for a visit is based on their previous experience in other parts of the world. Meanwhile, well-established tourism destinations are diversifying their products by developing cultural tourism, while numerous new destinations that are increasingly appearing on the global tourism market often build the distinctiveness of their offer on the quality of their cultural attractions. To stay competitive over the long run in such market conditions requires uniqueness not only in the 'hardware' part but also in the 'software' part of the integrated tourism product. In this regard, apart from the quality of the hardware, the uniqueness of the offer relies predominantly on the professionalism of the destination's management of cultural attractions, including their interpretation, as well as the quality of supporting services.

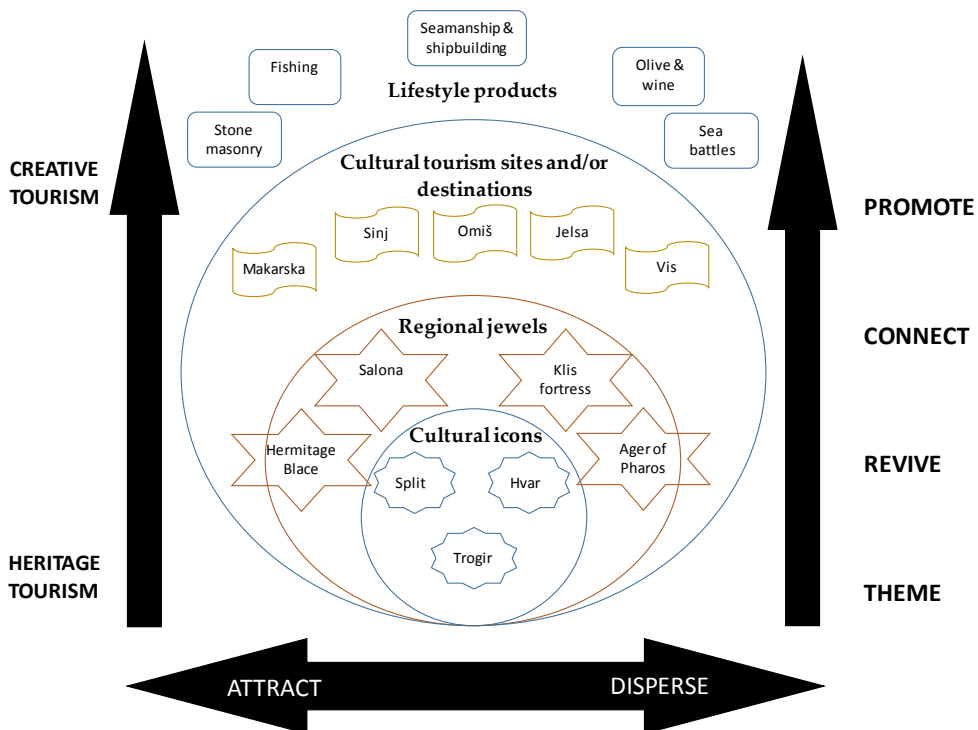


Figure 2. Agenda for development of the cultural-tourism product of the Middle Dalmatia region

All of the previously outlined strategic guidelines and development principles are entailed in Figure 2 which presents the proposed agenda for the cultural tourism revival in the Middle Dalmatia region. The central section portrays the hierarchy of the cultural-tourism products based on the 'attract and disperse' approach to development. The right side reflects the actions to be taken – theme, provide infrastructure, revive with events, link with themed and/or integrated cultural routes, and promote. The left side reflects the necessary notion to adjust the current, static, old fashioned and unorganized presentation of the regional cultural tourism attractions in order to create a tailor-made system of creative experiences well suited to current trends in cultural tourism demand.

Conclusions

Due to ever greater segmentation of the tourism demand and increasing individualization of tourist interests, cultural tourism represents a specific, clearly motivated, and highly market-segmented form of leisure travel. However, in the case of the Middle Dalmatia region, it would be more appropriate to comprehend it not only as an essential upgrade of the existing tourist experience, but also as an effective tool for the qualitative repositioning of the region's integrated tourism product in the global market. Namely, without strengthening the cultural aspect of the integrated destination product, it will be very difficult to change the currently prevalent 'sun and sea' tourism image of the whole region and ensure a gradual transition towards a more year-round tourism activity.

Cultural tourism does not comprise only of travel related to understand the cultural and historical heritage of a certain destination, but can also be related to enjoying in a destination's contemporary cultural production, indulging in its lifestyle and experiencing its overall atmosphere. In this regard, the stakeholders included in its development are numerous and diverse. The successful development of cultural tourism, therefore, requires quality communication and cooperation between various stakeholder groups and especially among the leading cultural institutions, tourism companies, local

administration and the institutions/organizations responsible for the overall destination's management. This also applies to the Middle Dalmatia region.

On the other hand, one must be aware of the fact that the economic conditions in Croatia, particularly in the context of a stagnant economy, decreasing budgetary revenues, and lack of cooperation from the relevant ministries, i.e. the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Tourism, are not encouraging the development of cultural tourism. Even in such circumstances, it is possible to implement the proposed development agenda, provided it is approved by the relevant stakeholders and conditional upon the identification of common interests and rational use of budgetary resources so as to achieve quick-wins and/or synergies beneficial to the cultural institutions, tourism entities, and the entire region (including its residents). In doing so, the tourism sector has to recognize that the sole existence of the cultural attractions is not only related to the generation of ever-increasing numbers of tourists, but also in the preservation of the destination's cultural and historical substrate as a unique, authentic and credible testimony to the past. At the same time, the cultural sector needs to accept the fact that tourists are legitimate consumers of cultural attractions, that the tourism agencies will continue to organize visits to cultural heritage sites, especially if they are raised to a higher level of market readiness, and that the tourism activity should also be exploited in order to achieve culture specific, development goals.

In accordance with the above statements, the development of the Middle Dalmatia's cultural-tourism product should be built on the mutual respect and understanding among the cultural institutions and tourism entities as a result of their respective business missions. Nevertheless, the cultural sector, in contrast with the market success criteria, should be predominantly focused on its role as a guardian of national heritage and cultural identity. Regardless of its core mission, however, in the forthcoming period the cultural institutions of Middle Dalmatia should proactively and with more conviction engage not only in improving the present, but also in shaping the region's

new cultural tourism product, especially along the line of the experience economy concept. Only in this way will they manage to become an important participant in both the cultural and economic development of the region. This would require a significant change in the prevailing attitude and/or dominant behaviour of most public institutions currently in charge of cultural-tourism development. On the other hand, the change in attitude and proactive approach in shaping the region's cultural tourism product should have a positive impact and induce changes in the current utilization of budgetary revenues. Since there is little doubt that tourism is a key economic activity and source of well-being for an increasing number of inhabitants of the Middle Dalmatia region, the development of cultural tourism, as a means of extending the rather short tourism season, should become a strategic imperative for the regional government. In this regard, finally, the provision of additional finance from the available budgetary receipts, targeting not only the establishment of the cultural icons and the development of regional jewels, but also the start-up of a range of creative tourism products, seems not only a logical, but a much needed novelty to the present 'steady as she goes' type of tourism activity management throughout Middle Dalmatia.

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