The consistency of a tourism product: A new conceptual framework

Gorazd Sedmak ^{1*} and Tina Kociper ²

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¹ University of Primorska, Faculty of Tourism Studies – Turistica, Obala 11a, 6320 Portoroz, Slovenia; tel. +386 5 6177000, fax. +386 5 6177020, email: gorazd.sedmak@fts.upr.si

² University of Primorska, Faculty of Tourism Studies – Turistica, Obala 11a, 6320 Portoroz, Slovenia; tel. +386 5 6177000, fax. +386 5 6177020, email: tina.kociper@fts.upr.si

* Corresponding author

Abstract

Although the importance of tourism product parts/elements consistency has often been emphasized in marketing and management literature, almost no academic attention has been given so far to the question concerning what determines the perception of its consistency and how it affects tourists' impression of the destination. The purpose of the research was to identify these elements, quantify their impact on overall perceptions of consistency and to make comparisons between tourist segments and two types of destinations – resorts and cities. The results revealed that whereas the majority of tourists do not consciously reflect on tourism product consistency, it is an important factor with regards to competitiveness and quality; although not to the same extent for all destinations and segments.

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Introduction

There are numerous definitions of the tourism product. Perhaps one of the most popular states that the product is the mirror image of the tourist's overall experience from the moment the person leaves home until she or he returns (Vanhove, 2005). As studies dealing with competitiveness in tourism prioritize competitiveness on the destination level (Boo, Busser, & Baloglu, 2009; Enright & Newton, 2004), our focus is on the same - the so called

“integral tourism product” (ITP) level, which is spatially and content-wise a rounded set of products, services and resources that enable tourists to have a wholesome experience (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). Thus, from the managerial point of view the destination can be understood as a complex interdependent services system (Briscoe, Keranen, & Parry, 2012). Murphy, Pritchard and Smith (2000) stress that alongside the “amalgam of products and services available in one location”, “atmo-

sphere” also affects experiences. Macchiavelli (2001) asserts “a destination becomes a product only if it provides tourists with an integrated supply system.” If a destination as a whole is not competitive and attractive, the number of visitors will be low, which cannot be compensated by the competitiveness of individual companies at a destination. This heterogeneous structure of the tourism product (Mehmetoglu & Normann, 2013) requires specific research approaches in order to understand relations among its components.

Major factors influencing destination competitiveness and purchase decisions of potential guests are, besides the price level, also DMO (destination management organization), which through its activities and umbrella branding co-creates the image of a destination (Garcia, Gomez, & Molina, 2011); “core resources and attractions” (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999; Crouch, 2011), such as climate and landscape, cultural and historical characteristics, tourism superstructure, special (onetime or occasional) events and activities; and the value of a destination brand that is added with the atmosphere and the story of a destination (Pritchard & Morgan, 1998). However, a single resource usually does not lead to competitive advantage, and not all combinations of these elements guarantee a satisfactory experience. Only suitable arrangement of specific bundles of resources leads to sustainable success (Pechlaner, Bachinger, Volgger, Anzengruber-Fischer, 2014). Inner consistency of the ITP as well as the compatibility of its competitiveness factors are important (Blain, Levy, & Brent Ritchie, 2005; Yang, 2012; Zhang & Murphy, 2009).

Within so-called “implementation resources”, the consistency of stakeholders’ delivery, which leads to positive synergies (Cole, 2012), plays a significant role as a source of competitive advantage (Pike, 2004). In addition, Benur and Bramwell (2015) stress the importance of the sensibly developed primary tourism product. The consistency is vital for a clear marketing position and the image of a destination (Blain, Levy, & Brent Ritchie, 2005; Echter & Ritchie, 1991; Murphy et al., 2000). The coherence of different individual market positions is essential for the overall destination marketing position

(Casarin, 1996), which is a precondition for a successful implementation of a destination brand (Blackwell, Miniard, & Engel, 2001; Blain, Levy, & Brent Ritchie, 2005). Furthermore, (in)consistency significantly affects the perceived quality of the product - through shaping and meeting tourist's expectations (Kelly & McGowen, 2011; Miyazaki, Grewal, & Goodstein, 2005; Park, Milberg, & Lawson 1991; Sedmak, 2006; Trotman, 2006). As Olshavsky and Miller (1972, 19) claim, “human nature abhors inconsistency”. And finally, the environmental compatibility of the tourism product elements has been recognized as an important sustainability issue (Duglio, Beltramo, 2014).

Whereas the need for consistent tourism product has often been emphasized – explicitly or implicitly – the concept itself has not been given any systematic and holistic academic attention so far. The role of consistency in tourism has been dealt with partially, e.g. in connection to destination branding (Blain, Levy, Brent Ritchie, 2005; Garcia, Gomez, & Molina, 2011, Marzano, Scott, 2006), approaches towards sustainable tourism development (Kask, Kull & Orru, 2016) or in terms of destination personality and its congruity with visitors’ personalities (e.g. Fiorentino, 1995; Perdue, 2001; Sirgy & Su, 2000). Furthermore, so far the term consistency in tourism context was used very generally, without a clear definition. No evidence of which elements have impact on the perceived overall consistency exists. Thus, at present stage it is only reasonable to carry out an exploratory research in order to set a foundation for further use of the concept as such. Accordingly, the aim of our research was to identify these elements and evaluate their impact on ITP consistency.

Consistency of tourism product

Although the problem of inconsistency is a major issue in tourism development (Tosun, 2001), a clear definition of the concept practically does not appear in the academic literature. In the Oxford Dictionary (Oxford Advanced Learners’ Dictionary, 1995) consistency is defined as the quality of being consistent, i.e. being “always present or the same” or “in harmony with something”. Definitions in the field of logic speak about a

lack of inner contradictions (Tarski, 1995; Tryfona & Egenhofer, 1997). In product management, the consistency is defined as agreed or logical coordination/coherence among the parts of a whole (Roget's, 1995; <http://www.thefreedictionary.com>). In the case of a tourist destination, this whole does not apply only to physical characteristics but also to e.g., promotional activities (Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011), price level, different segments of visitors etc., in short, anything affecting the tourist's experience. Contradictions spoiling a logical picture, the image of a destination, can appear among the elements of the same kind (e.g. the contents of different events) as well as among elements of different kinds (e.g. natural environment and architecture type).

In contrast to the field of tourism, consistency has been subject to extensive academic research in some service industries (Weidlich, Barros, Mendling, & Weske, 2009). Branco, Xiong, Czarnecki, Kuester and Voelzer (2014), for example, suggest five-step consistency management for IT process models in banking. These are: 1) defining consistency properties, 2) matching the models, i.e. identifying correspondence relations among different elements, 3) checking consistency, 4) diagnosing causes of inconsistencies and 5) fixing inconsistencies. Although causes and effects of inconsistency in the IT field are quite specific and not always applicable to other areas, some of them can be easily transferred to tourism. For example, the reasons for inconsistencies can, as in the IT world, lie in conflicting stakeholders' goals or, simply, mistakes - in tourism, this could refer also to a wrong judgement or lack of communication and coordination between stakeholders. Furthermore, service delivery inconsistencies can be according to Branco et al. (2014) categorized into three groups: 1) coverage differences, 2) behavioural/execution differences and 3) differences in level of detail. Sensibly transferred to the field of tourism, this refers to: 1) differences in availability of distinct services, 2) service performance and 3) features/quality of service.

A distinct characteristic of the destination as an entity under consideration is that tourism is not the only economic activity occurring at the

majority of them. Moreover, because some of them have gone through relatively spontaneous development and often have multiple personalities, some kind of inconsistency in terms of the multifaceted complexity of images (Richards, 2004) is almost inevitable. Benur and Bramwell (2015) see the main reason for this in the fact that "destination product features are often determined by uncoordinated individual market-based decisions rather than by coordinated destination-level policies and market interventions." Nevertheless, despite the fact that DMO does not have control over all the elements and components (Laws, Scott, & Parfitt, 2002) that create the ITP, information on the most disturbing inconsistencies might be very useful for its operation.

Research

As consistency in tourism is a dynamic, and to a great degree subjective category, it is reasonable to measure it through the eyes of tourists (Blain, Levy, & Brent Ritchie, 2005; Boo, Busser, & Baloglu, 2009). Tourists are ultimately the ones who at the end of the line "reward" the consistency of tourism product with their "(re)purchase." In present research, we adopted "subtle realism" ontological approach of research which claims "the social world does exist independently of individual subjective understanding, but that it is only accessible to us via the respondents' interpretations" (Snape, Spencer, 2003, 19). According to this approach, respondents' different vantage points and their own interpretations of the relevant research issues are important (ibid.).

We decided to perform our research in two steps. A structured in-depth interview was chosen as the method for the qualitative exploratory stage, while field survey among tourists represented the quantitative stage. Preceding qualitative enquiry is a traditional role of qualitative research, which is "particularly valuable in studies where the subject matter under investigation is new or underdeveloped" or "when the subject matter is complex and where some identification of the underlying constructs is needed before relevant questions can be structured" (Ritchie, 2003, 40).

Considering the lack of previous research in the field, complementary use of qualitative and quantitative research is sensible pragmatic approach in such cases (Snape, Spencer, 2003, 15). The purpose of the qualitative part was contextual and explanatory, namely "to describe and display phenomena as experienced by the study population" (Ritchie, 2003, 27) – in our case to define the term itself and identify those ITP elements that define and are relevant for general perception of consistency. The results of the first part served as the input for the development of statements in the questionnaire. The quantitative survey among tourists was carried out in four destinations in Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The obtained grades of level of agreement with statements on 1-5 Likert type scale were in turn used for development of regression models. These were developed in order to discover which elements affect perceived overall consistency, and comparisons between segments and two types of destinations were made. Finally, we tried to find out if the overall impression of the destination is actually influenced by the perceived consistency and elements defining consistency.

Qualitative phase methodology

As in literature review we found only very limited information on which elements of ITP and which relationships between them could be important for impression of consistency and competitiveness of the destination we decided to do a preliminary qualitative research. In-depth interviews were carried out with six experienced experts and managers from the field of tourism in order to identify the elements/factors that in their opinion define the consistency of ITP or cause potentially disturbing contradictories as weak links in overall tourism offer and destination marketing process. A purposeful sampling was adopted for interviewees selection. This is a common approach when the research requires information from "individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest" (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, Hoagwood, 2013). As concept as such is relatively complex and unknown, we decided to interview experienced, strategically-thinking and successful

professionals from tourism industry at destination and company level, as (in)consistency problem is relevant for both levels.

In practice, the choice was made on inquiry among academic staff and their suggestions basis. This seemed to be the best solution as one has to bear in mind that getting a suitable and available co-speaker with "willingness to participate, and the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner" (Palinkas, et al., 2013, 2) is not something that goes without saying.

In-depth interviews make it possible to get an insight into different perspectives, which enable the researcher to construct a picture of the "reality" (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007). Interviews were performed on a personal face-to-face basis. Approximate length of the interviews was 45 minutes, they were recorded and transcriptions were made. The lead questions stemming from literature review and definitions were:

1. How do you understand the concept "consistency of the tourism product"?
 2. Do you agree consistency has to do with "coherence among parts of the overall product, lack of inner contradictions"?
 3. How important is consistency for tourists?
 4. Are there, in this regard, any differences between the segments?
 5. Consistency of which elements is the most important for the general impression of "a sensible whole"?
 6. What are the main weaknesses of inconsistent product?
 7. How important is the consistency of: destination marketing and management activities (promotion, branding, development decisions etc.), hospitality industry products (hotels, restaurants); attractions, events, in terms of their coherence with the destination image, price level, type of destination etc.?
- The interviewees are presented in Table 1.

Results of qualitative phase

The analysis was carried out by manual coding, whereby answers with the same meaning were grouped into specific statements (tagged as S)

encompassing all relevant contents. In brackets is also shown whose answers fit into specific statement (tagged as I). The answers to the first question revealed that a consistent tourism product is understood as one: which follows a “main thread” (S1: I1); is in concordance with the development strategy and common basic values (S2: I1, I5, I6); does not change too much in time and between the tourists (S3: I1, I5); which/whose contents are not contradictory (S4: I1); where all suppliers/functions act in coordination (S5: I2, I5); that is in accordance with tourists’ expectations and global trends (S6: I3); whose component elements/parts are supplementary (S7: I4); which is harmonious (S8: I4); where promises are kept (S9: I5); that is “a high quality product” (S10: I1, I2); and which is in accordance with the destination identity (S11: I5, I3) and location (S12: I4).

The supporting question “Do you agree that is: coherence among parts of the overall product, lack of inner contradictions?” evoked some additional emphases: consistency of promotional activities and marketing communication (S13: I1, I4); congruity of offer elements/parts (S14: I1, I2, I3, I4); it operates

as a system (S15: I3, I4); all actors/ stakeholders can identify themselves with the product (S16: I3, I4); consistent/coordinated price policy (S17: I3, I4); prices adequate to the quality level (S18: I5); congruency with the location (S19: I4); employees have to be locals (S20: I3, I4); local products have to be included (authentic gastronomy offer etc.) (S21: I5); realistic promises given through promotion and brand (S22: I6).

From the answers, we can see that possible reasons causing perception of inconsistent tourism product originate from failure in one of the product determinants identified by Branco et al. (2014): performance, contents, and quality. Besides, two tourism specific determinants turned out to be important: strategic management and authenticity. Leading and coordination among different suppliers and stakeholders is something that is a typical DMO problem (Morrison, 2013), while the authenticity challenge is a strategic task of site specific marketing communication (Fyall, 2011, 106). In Table 2, classification of the 22 statements into five determinants is shown.

Table 1. Interviewees

Code	Function	Type of Destination/Company
(I1)	DMO manager	A (non-predominantly touristic) seaside municipality, a very propulsive destination
(I2)	Rooms division manager	The leading, luxury, high quality, clear standards chain hotel in the most important country seaside resort. The destination, however, has a rather confused market positioning
(I3)	Tour operator manager	As above – the most important country seaside resort with rather confused market positioning. One of the most propulsive tourism product developers.
(I4)	Hotel manager	An inland town hotel – the only in the town. The main actor and creator of the town tourism image.
(I5)	Hotel manager	A picturesque historic (very touristic) town with very rich cultural heritage
(I6)	Retired DMO manager	The second most important (inland) resort in the country

Table 2. Consistency Determinants

Determinant	Description	Statements
Strategy	Strategic destination management	S1, S2, S5, S15, S16
Performance	Stability of performance	S3
Contents	Strategic marketing (product development communication and pricing)	S4, S7, S8, S13, S14, S17
Quality	Quality/no gap between expectations and experience	S6, S9, S10, S18, S22
Authenticity	Embedment in local natural and cultural environment	S11, S12, S19, S20, S21

Regarding the importance of product consistency to tourists, we received the following answers: tourists do not (consciously) think about consistency of tourism product (I1, I3); nevertheless, they arrive with some expectations formed by promotion (I1); mostly they do not notice inconsistency (I2); experienced tourists notice the right or wrong price/quality ratio (I5); (in)consistency affects their well-being and tourist experience (I3); if the product is consistent they perceive it as high quality (I4); if the product is consistent, tourists feel the professionalism and they trust the destination (I6); consistency of tourism product on its own promotes the destination (I4).

The fourth question tried to identify potential differences between segments. While some interviewees think there are no substantial differences (I1) - once the destination is "defined", tourists visiting it do not differ much (I3); other claim price sensitive tourists put less attention on consistency than more demanding guests (I4, I5, I6); likewise consistency is believed to be more important for regular/repeat visitors (I6).

The following elements of the tourism product were recognized by the interviewees to be important for the general impression of a consistent "sensible whole": consistency of the contents and the overall image (I1), the relationship guest-host (I2), congruence of appearance – brand – promotion – slogan (I4), quality-price ratio (I4, I6), suppliers compatible with the destination market position (I5), compatibility of tourist segments (I4).

The unpleasant consequences of inconsistent product/destination are supposed to be: confusion and disappointment of visitors (I1, I3, I5), fall in number of arrivals and bad financial results in the long run (I2, I4), dissatisfaction and incompatible segments of tourists (I4), deficient, low-quality overall experience (I5), loss of trust (I6), unconvincing service (I6).

With the last question, we tried to get an insight into the relationships between different destination elements in connection to its consistency. Interviewee (I1) stressed DMO is the key factor, i.e., it has to develop a clear

vision and animate the suppliers in the destination to adhere to it. The second interviewee (I2) agreed the DMO and suppliers are the ones who determine consistency; the weakest part of the chain is the one that is limiting. The fourth interviewee (I4) stressed the necessity for networking. Only strategic cooperation among the stakeholders can prevent structural gaps. Local, authentic elements (food, culture etc.) should be sensibly included into the tourism product. The first step, however, is to get to know your visitors and adopt the product to the target segment. The fifth interviewee (I5) also agrees with this statement. Furthermore, she raised the question of the suppliers' heterogeneity – namely, it is difficult to implement the same quality standards for all suppliers in the destination. The last interviewee (I6) emphasized that overall consistency is also hard to obtain, insofar as marketing and promotion are done by DMO as well as by independent firms, while price policy is completely in the domain of companies. She also stressed that novelties and trends in competitive destinations have to be taken in consideration, as tourists bring some expectations deriving from their previous experiences with them. Finally, she thinks events and activities deriving from local culture/heritage are an important promotional lever and can enhance the destination's recognisability.

Quantitative phase methodology

In the second phase, a quantitative survey on a sample of tourists in four destinations in Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina was carried out in autumn/winter 2014/15. Two city destinations (the capitals Ljubljana and Sarajevo) and two main seaside resort destinations in both countries (Portorož and Neum) were chosen for this purpose. As proved by Blázquez. Molina and Esteban (2012), resources that determine the tourists' satisfaction and quality perception differ considerably between different types of destination. Thus, we decided to make comparisons between the two types of destinations, insofar as due to different development dynamics and their very nature we intuitively expected the importance of consistency and expectations among those

surveyed probably vary according to destination. The surveying was performed by previously well trained students of tourism and economics. Although in principle sampling was random – by intercepting tourists on the seashore and streets, due to the low number of tourists in the resorts during winter, a part of those sampled was actually approached intentionally on premises of hotels where conventions took place.

The core part of the first version questionnaire was comprised of 39 statements deriving from the definitions and the results of the qualitative stage - denoting the consistency of ITP. This stage was rather complex. As information gathered through interviews could not be straightforwardly transformed into statements, scholars working on the project had intense debates on how to do it in such a way that tourists could be able to actually assess the ITP in the destination they were staying in, without at once losing any content and nuances expressed by interviewees. Therefore, some same information were elaborated in more than one statement. In Table 3 information that were used as sources for formulation of individual statements are listed.

The questionnaire also included questions on socio-demography (gender, age, education, income), motives for travel, tourist behaviour (consumption, first or repeated visit of the destination), and the company on travel. Additionally, tourists were asked to indicate: what importance do they generally ascribe to the tourist offer consistency; what is their overall impression of the actual destination; and how do they evaluate the consistency and integrity of the destination product. The latter question was explained “does it function as a sensible integral whole?”. The aim was to evaluate which factors shape the perceived (in)consistency of the ITP and to explore if and how the overall impression of the destination is affected by the perceived consistency. Finally, we asked them to state on the five grade semantic differential scale: “If you have to choose between low price and better quality, you usually go for ...”. This was included as a proxy variable for “more demanding guests”.

In summer 2014 a test survey on a sample of 90 tourists was carried out in order to identify potential weaknesses of the questionnaire. In fact, high correlations between the values of some statements and expressed lack of comprehension directed us towards the reduction, merger and reformulations of some statements. The final set of 22 statements is presented in Table 3. All the statements except S8 were anticipated to be positively related to perceived overall consistency.

Results of quantitative phase

Final sample comprised 536 tourists (122 in Sarajevo, 78 in Neum, 255 in Portorož and 81 in Ljubljana), however only 529 questionnaires were eventually usable for analysis (some had missing data). The average age of interviewees was 39 years; 9.6 % were traveling alone, 34.3 % with spouse/partner, 36.8 % with family and children, and 4.5 % with friends. Rest/relaxation (47.9 %), entertainment/party/experience (8.2 %) and wellness/wellbeing (5.4 %) were the main motives for visiting the destination. Approximately one third (33.9 %) finished vocational or secondary school, 50.7 % college or university and 10.7 % master's or PhD.

Generally, the importance of consistency turned out to be quite high. The average values (on one to five scale) of answers to the question: “Please, indicate how important is it for your overall satisfaction that tourism services’ offer of a destination is well coordinated and meaningfully supplemented?”, were 3.99 (std. dev. = 1.02) for whole sample, 4.04 (std. dev. = 1.05) for resorts and 3.93 (std. dev. = 0.97) for cities.

In this phase, however, our main goal was to identify which elements/statements affect the perceived overall consistency. OLS regression was employed for this purpose. The two dependent variables were: the perceived consistency of ITP (models 1, 2, 3, Table 4) and overall impression of the destination (models 4, 5, 6, Table 5). After identification and exclusion of outliers usual data tests were performed. Breusch–Pagan and White tests showed the presence of heteroscedasticity, and there was also some considerable multicollinearity between the independent

variables. Thus, we decided to transform explanatory variables applying a logarithm, and to reduce the number of variables by factor analysis. In fact, as shown in the qualitative part of the research, specific determinants exist

in which different reasons causing the perception of inconsistency can be grouped. It turned out, however, that only one factor explains almost half of variance, while the others explain only 6 % or less of it. Bearing in

Table 3. Statements on destination consistency

Code	Statements	Source
S1	It seems that service providers at the destination know what the visitors search for	"that is in accordance with tourists' expectations"
S2	The development of the destination seems to be planned and coordinated	"is in concordance with the development strategy" "which follows a 'main thread'"
		"it operates as a system"
		"congruity of offer elements/parts"
		"all actors/stakeholders can identify themselves with the product"
		"necessity for networking"
		"no structural gaps"
S3	It seems that the service providers at the destination, for instance tourist info centres, restaurants, hotels, cooperate well	"all suppliers/functions act in coordination"
		"congruity of offer elements/parts"
		"no structural gaps"
S4	Services of providers are of a reliable quality (when revisiting, I always get the same service)	"does not change too much in time and between the tourists"
		"if the product is consistent they perceive it as high quality"
S5	What the destination has to offer really sustains/meets my interests and needs	"that is in accordance with tourists' expectations"
S6	The tourism offer (hotels and restaurants style, equipment etc.) at the destination follows general/international trends	"that is in accordance with global trends"
S7	Everything at the destination goes well together	"which/whose contents are not contradictory"
		"whose component elements/parts are supplementary"
		"which is harmonious"
S8	I find other tourists at the destination disturbing	"compatibility of tourist segments"
S9	I don't miss any services at the destination	"whose component elements/parts are supplementary"
		"no structural gaps"
S10	The services offered at the destination suit the destination image	"consistency of the contents and the overall image"
S11	Prices at the destination meet my expectations	"suppliers compatible with the destination market position"
		"consistent/coordinated price policy"
		"prices adequate to the quality level"
S12	The offer at the destination includes traditional elements, such as typical local food, traditional events, architecture, etc.	"local products have to be included (authentic gastronomy offer etc.)"
		"events and activities deriving from local culture/heritage"
S13	It seems that hotels and restaurants mainly employ local inhabitants	"employees have to be locals"
S14	Generally, I would say prices at the destination suit the quality	"consistent/coordinated price policy"
		"prices adequate to the quality level"
S15	I can see the destination is strongly connected with the hinterland/region (provision of produce, excursions to the hinterland etc.)	"Local, authentic elements (food, culture etc.) should be sensibly included into the tourism product"
		"events and activities deriving from local culture/heritage"
S16	The destination is like it was promised in the promotional material	"consistency of promotional activities and marketing communication"
		"realistic promises given through promotion and brand"
		"congruence of appearance – brand – promotion – slogan"
		"which is harmonious"
S17	Everything I have seen at the destination belongs there	"congruency with the location"
S18	Categorization of hotels, the labelling of restaurant etc. is realistic	"where promises are kept"
		"realistic promises given through promotion"
S19	The destination is in harmony with its natural surroundings	"which is in accordance with the destination identity and location"
S20	Tourism offers at the destination suits the local cultural heritage	"which is in accordance with the destination identity and location"
S21	Performances and other events suit the soul of the destination	"which is in accordance with the destination identity and location"
S22	The offer here is suitable for this destination	"which is in accordance with the destination identity and location"
		"congruency with the location"

mind the exploratory goal of the analysis, interpretation in this case would not be very meaningful. Accordingly, we decided to choose the path of narrowing the model using the method "from general to specific" (Hendry, Learner, Poirier, 1990), and comparing/controlling the results with those obtained with the stepwise regression. The two approaches produced quite similar results; the key drawback of the stepwise regression was the inclusion of variables in the model that had the opposite sign to what was expected.

In the next step, explanatory variables that were not significantly correlated with the dependent variables were excluded - one (S8) variable for models 1-3 and two variables for models 4-6 (S8, S11). Furthermore, one variable being highly correlated with the majority of other explanatory variables and without clear interpretative contents (S7) was excluded from models 1-3. Finally, in line with the approach suggested by Gunawardana and Havrila (1996), after the first regression explanatory variables with coefficients having a sign contrary to what was expected or those with t-statistics absolutely less than 1 were excluded from the model. It turned out that narrowing of the models did not reduce their

explanatory power by any significant amount. Thus, the evaluated models were:

for the whole sample

$$PERCEIVED\ CONSISTENCY = \alpha + \beta_1 \ln S2 + \beta_2 \ln S4 + \beta_3 \ln S6 + \beta_4 \ln S10 + \beta_5 \ln S12 + \beta_6 \ln S14 + \beta_7 \ln S15 + \beta_8 \ln S16 + \beta_9 \ln S19 + \beta_{10} \ln S20 + \beta_{11} \ln S21 + \varepsilon \quad (1)$$

for resorts only

$$PERCEIVED\ CONSISTENCY = \alpha + \beta_1 \ln S2 + \beta_2 \ln S4 + \beta_3 \ln S12 + \beta_4 \ln S14 + \beta_5 \ln S16 + \beta_6 \ln S19 + \beta_7 \ln S20 + \beta_8 \ln S21 + \beta_9 \ln S20 + \beta_{10} \ln S21 + \varepsilon \quad (2)$$

for cities only

$$PERCEIVED\ CONSISTENCY = \alpha + \beta_1 \ln S3 + \beta_2 \ln S6 + \beta_3 \ln S11 + \beta_4 \ln S12 + \beta_5 \ln S15 + \beta_6 \ln S16 + \varepsilon \quad (3)$$

for the whole sample

$$OVERALL\ IMPRESSION = \alpha + \beta_1 \ln S1 + \beta_2 \ln S4 + \beta_3 \ln S7 + \beta_4 \ln S9 + \beta_5 \ln S16 + \beta_6 \ln S17 + \beta_7 \ln S18 + \beta_8 \ln S21 + \varepsilon \quad (4)$$

for resorts only

$$OVERALL\ IMPRESSION = \alpha + \beta_1 \ln S4 + \beta_2 \ln S9 + \beta_3 \ln S15 + \beta_4 \ln S17 + \beta_5 \ln S18 + \beta_6 \ln S21 + \beta_7 \ln S22 + \varepsilon \quad (5)$$

Table 4. Factors of perceived consistency

Statement/ Independent Variable	B	t (sig.)	Determinant
Whole Sample (1)			
S2 – The development of the destination seems to be planned and coordinated	0.42	4.79 (0.00)	Strategy
S6 – The tourism offer at the destination follows general/international trends	0.33	2.50 (0.01)	Strategy, Quality
S16 - The destination is like it was promised in the promotional material	0.29	2.57 (0.01)	Contents, Quality
S21 - Performances and other events suit the soul of the destination n = 519, R ² = 0.43	0.25	2.02 (0.04)	Authenticity
Resorts (2)			
S2 – The development of the destination seems to be planned and coordinated	0.43	4.08 (0.00)	Strategy
S4 - Services of providers are of reliable quality	0.36	2.32 (0.02)	Performance
S14 - Generally, I would say prices at the destination suit the quality	0.25	2.18 (0.03)	Contents, Quality
S21 - Performances and other events suit the soul of the destination n = 322 , R ² = 0.48	0.36	2.60 (0.01)	Authenticity
Cities (3)			
S12 - The offer at the destination includes traditional elements	0.32	2.27 (0.02)	Authenticity
S16 - The destination is like it was promised in the promotional material	0.72	4.35 (0.00)	Contents, Quality
n = 196 , R ² = 0.32			

for cities only

$$\text{OVERALL IMPRESSION} = \alpha + \beta_1 \ln S1 + \beta_2 \ln S3 + \beta_3 \ln S7 + \beta_4 \ln S9 + \beta_5 \ln S12 + \beta_6 \ln S13 + \beta_7 \ln S16 + \beta_8 \ln S17 + \varepsilon \quad (6)$$

Only statistically significant results are shown in the Tables 4 and 5. In the last column also determinants related to specific statements are stated.

The results show that only few independent variables have statistically significant explanatory power of the dependent variable variability and there are considerable differences between the two sub-samples. The three models explain from 32 % to 48 % of the dependent variable variability. In the resorts, consistency is perceived through impression of coordinated and well planned development, reliable quality of services, "fair pricing" and congruence of the events with the soul of the destination. In the cities, in contrast, presence of traditional elements in the offer and honest and realistic promotion reflect the notion of consistency. Additionally, for the whole sample comparability with similar international destinations turned out to determine the sense of consistency.

The chosen statements explain a smaller part of variability of the second dependent variable

"overall impression" – from 25 % to 33 %. Absence of certain services at the destination influences the overall impression the most. Again, there are differences between the two sub-samples. It does not come as a surprise that realistic categorization of hospitality venues and reliable quality of services do have an influence on the overall impression of destination. On the contrary, perhaps, the fact that local employees are an important factor influencing overall impression of a city is somewhat surprising.

Perceived consistency of ITP is weakly, but with high statistical significance, positively correlated with overall impression of the destination for the whole sample $r = 0.23$ ($p = 0.00$) and for the seaside resorts $r = 0.31$ ($p = 0.00$), while there is no significant correlation between the two variables for the city destinations.

The results indicate consistency of the ITP is less important for city destinations than for resorts, which is understandable. Cities by their nature are more complex and have multiple personalities. Since tourism is just one of many activities going on in cities, tourists expect inconsistencies or even a certain degree of "chaos" when visiting them. On the contrary, in resorts the development of tourism

Table 5. Factors of consistency affecting overall impression

Statement/ Independent Variable	B	t (sig.)	Determinant
Whole Sample (4)			
S4 - Services of providers are of reliable quality	0.53	2.34 (0.02)	Performance
S9 - I do not miss any services at the destination	0.74	4.50 (0.00)	Strategy, Contents
S18 - Categorization of hotels, the labelling of restaurant etc. is realistic $n = 507$, $R^2 = 0.29$	0.50	2.28 (0.02)	Quality
Resorts (5)			
S9 - I do not miss any services at the destination	0.93	5.16 (0.00)	Strategy, Contents
S17 - Everything I have seen at the destination belongs there	0.39	2.04 (0.04)	Strategy, Authenticity
S18 - Categorization of hotels, the labelling of restaurant etc. is realistic $n = 319$, $R^2 = 0.33$	0.86	3.49 (0.00)	Quality
Cities (6)			
S9 - I do not miss any services at the destination	0.95	2.76 (0.01)	Strategy, Contents
S13 - It seems that hotels and restaurants mainly employ local inhabitants $n = 195$, $R^2 = 0.25$	1.07	2.46 (0.02)	Authenticity

agglomeration is seldom completely spontaneous, but is also a result of response of suppliers to tourist's demands for ITP (Yang, 2012).

Furthermore, as interviewees claimed consistency is not equally important for all tourists, we decided to make few comparisons between the sub-samples. Some interesting differences between segments were identified. Those tourists that stated to usually put quality before price (less price-sensitive) graded importance of consistency higher (4.14, std. dev. = 0.95, $n = 183$) than more price-sensitive tourists (3.74, std. dev. = 1.09, $n = 312$; $t = 4.10$, sig. = 0.00).

Although there was no statistically significant difference regarding graded importance of consistency between the first time ($n = 247$) and repeat visitors ($n = 276$), separate regression analyses for the two subsamples showed that different elements shape impression of overall ITP consistency. For both groups impression of planned and coordinated development is important factor of consistency ($B = 0.45$ and 0.55). But, while for repeat visitors "adherence to general/international trends" ($B = 0.49$), and "events that suit the soul of the destination" ($B = 0.49$) are those that significantly determine overall consistency impression, "services that suit the destination image" ($B = 0.37$), inclusion of "traditional elements" ($B = 0.37$), and "realistic promotion" ($B = 0.62$) denote overall consistency for first time visitors.

Since more educated tourists tend to be more demanding and critical in their assessments (Buhalis, 2003, 129) we checked if education has same impact on attitude towards consistency. Again, there was no statistically significant difference in explicitly ascribed importance to consistency between two education sub-segments (1 - finished secondary school or less, $n = 193$; 2 - finished college or more, $n = 333$). Again, impression of planned and coordinated development turned out to be the common factor of consistency for both groups ($B = 0.47$ and 0.38). Besides, impression that "service providers know what the visitors search for" ($B = 0.44$) and that "destination is in harmony with its natural surroundings" ($B = 0.44$) are important for the

overall impression of ITP consistency for less educated segment; while "services offered that suit the destination image" ($B = 0.36$), realistic promises in promotional material ($B = 0.52$) and "performances and other events that suit the soul of the destination" ($B = 0.32$) turned out to be important for the higher educated sub-sample.

Discussion

Despite the fact that an overall destination consistency is practically impossible to obtain and the vast majority of tourists probably do not even think about it while being on vacation, the results show ITP consistency does have an impact on their impression of the destination and overall tourist experience – especially in the seaside resorts. According to experts included in the qualitative part of research, lack of consistency leads to confusion and disappointment of visitors and, consequently, in the long run, decline in number of arrivals and bad financial results. It turned out, this is especially true for the destinations opting for less price sensitive, more demanding guests.

Regarding elements influencing the overall impression of a consistent "sensible whole" some minor differences in emphasis appeared between the opinions of experts and the perceptions of tourists. The former believe the foremost elements are: consistency of the contents and the overall image; congruence of appearance, brand and promotion, through the communication of realistic promises; congruity and complementarity of offer elements/parts; quality-price ratio; and identity of the destination that should mirror the location and its authentic features. Furthermore, compatibility of tourist segments might also be problematic, although bearing in mind the destination conspicuousness concept (Sirgy & Su, 2000), one can raise the question of causality at this point. On the other hand, tourists implicitly expressed consistency is above all denoted by: the impression of planned and coordinated development, adherence to general/international trends, realistic promotion and congruence of events with the soul of the destination. Especially, realistic promotion has, beside services that suit the destination image and presence of "traditional elements", important impact on overall consistency impression for the first time

visitors.. Distinctions emerged also between the two segments formed on education basis. The higher educated segment seems to think about consistency in more analytical manner – to the effect that factors that can be to greater extent managed by DMO are seen as more relevant. Thus, realistic promises in promotional material and sensibly chosen events and performances seem to be more relevant to more educated tourists, while “harmony with natural surroundings” and services that suit visitors’ needs were stressed by less educated segment.

Additionally, reliable quality of services and suitable prices turned out to be important for resorts. Thus, “strategy” and “performance” as determinants seem to be more relevant for resorts than for cities. Consistency obviously also affects the overall impression of destination. Above all, integrity of service, fair categorization of hotels and restaurant, and reliable quality seem to have an important role in this regard.

In the research, our main challenge was with the formulation of the statements that should be kept simple and understandable enough while still preserving all the input from the qualitative stage. The multicollinearity problem indicates that despite considerable effort put into this phase from the researchers, tourists did not always differ between some similar statements, which is perhaps the main weakness of the quantitative part of the research. On the other hand, as two of the experts-interviewees stated, the majority of tourists do not consciously think about the consistency of tourism product and it cannot be expected they are all capable and willing to respond very analytically and contemplatively in the limited time when approached by the interviewer. We believe that the relatively weak explanatory power of the models at least partially originates from this problem. Another limitation should be mentioned here. The Shapiro-Wilk test demonstrated the assumption of normality of residuals distribution is violated in the models 4-6. Field (2009) claims that in such cases we can use models to draw conclusions about our sample, however, the findings cannot be generalized beyond this sample.

Conclusion

The results lead us to the following conclusions: ITP consistency is an important factor of competitiveness and quality, although not to the same extent for all destinations. Moreover, there are considerable differences between tourist segments. To achieve a consistent ITP, DMOs, together with the representatives of all stakeholders, should develop a generally accepted strategy with a clear vision of the destination’s development and animate the suppliers in the destination to adhere to it in order to prevent or at least limit non-coordinated actions. Furthermore, there should be continuous coordination and networking among the stakeholders so as to avoid structural gaps. And lastly, but not less important, the identity of the destination should not ignore or be in contradiction with the authentic/“organic” identity of the place, which stems from the local people and their culture.

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