

AN APPROACH FOR SERVICES IDENTIFICATION OF EXPERIENTIAL TOURISM, BASED ON THE CHARACTERISTICS OF MARKET SEGMENTS AND DESTINATION.

THE CASE OF NAXOS

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Abstract

This paper analyses and presents the characteristics and the profiles of various segments of tourism market, as analysed by tourist organisations in Canada. Furthermore, it summarises the characteristics of Naxos as they found by local research and appear on Municipality's web page and various tourist agents. Moreover, it matches the requirements of some segments of tourism market with some of Naxos' characteristics, based on the experiential tourism and on a sustainable point of view. It exports proposals to develop new experiential services, based on the brand of "Mediterranean Lifestyle" and identifies the main requirements in infrastructure to develop these services.

1 Introduction

The main purpose of this paper is to apply a methodology and evaluate it in the case of Naxos by a SME (Small Medium Enterprise), based on well-established practices of international organisations such as the Canadian Tourism Commission (CTC). We selected the methodology of CTC because it is recent, analytical and psychometric. In addition, it is applied on experiential tourism, adopted by a major tourism organisation and also is available to everyone.

The main target of the study is to investigate the effectiveness of the methodology in the case of Naxos, and to identify experiential tourism services based on market requirements (demand) and particular characteristics of the destination (offer).

For better understanding of the experiential tourism concept, it would be helpful to refer to the research of B. Joseph Pine and James H. Gilmore¹. This research analyses the conversion of the economy of providing services to the economy of providing experiences, with a distinction of goods, products, services and experiences which are offered in a specific market. Experience must combine the first three of them and use them to create a “lasting memory”. The scope of the experiential tourism is to involve the visitors in inherently personal and memorable activities. In order to achieve that, the tourism professional needs to trigger the whole of the five senses in a physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual level. The visitors need to connect with the place, the people, the culture the history and the community which they choose to visit, through the contact with the nature and the inhabitants of the place.

There are many approaches for the segmentation of the market, which are based on various criteria. Main references for classification, based on the socio-psychological criteria, are the papers of Cohen^{2,3} and Plog⁴. Furthermore, there are recent researches, such as the one from the Canadian Tourism Commission⁵ and another one from the Irish Authority tourism development⁶.

In order to analyse the tourism market it is necessary to understand what motivate the traveller to travel. How he likes to travel and what activities he likes to do in the place visited. The CTC made an effort to understand the visitors that will serve. The research concludes, in general, that the profiles of tourist market should be analysed and also the marketing, communication and social media must be combined with photos and videos to create a unique experience for someone who is visiting Canada. In 2011 CTC published the second edition of a toolkit for the experiential tourism⁷, which seeks to identify the steps for developing experiential tourism. An important tool for planning the steps was the study of the characteristics and requirements of the various segments of tourism market⁸, where three main international profiles were analysed.

Subsequently, this paper presents the four basic profiles of visitors and the steps for approaching the experiential tourism, as published by the Canadian Tourism Commission⁹. The second part of the paper presents the implementation effort of the first four steps in the case of Naxos.

2 Travellers profiles

According to the Canadian Tourism Commission, the main profiles of travellers can be summarised to the following 4 categories:

Learners: which include the subcategories of Authentic Experiencers, Cultural Explorers, Personal History Explorers and Cultural History Buffs.

This category of travellers represents almost the 20% of the global market that visited Canada. Although there is a common characteristic between all the four of them, which is the love for constant travel and the opportunity to discover the culture, the people and the special landscapes of the destination, they are usually distinctive travellers, who are looking for an authentic experience and also they are interested in learning the history of the destination.

Enthusiastic Indulgers: which include the subcategories of Free Spirits and Social Samplers.

This category of travellers represents almost the 13% of the global market that visited Canada. They are sociable, extrovert unprejudiced, enthusiastic about life and so they behave to their travels. They prefer to choose activities that can share with others, so they are the travellers for the “must see” sightseeing.

Family Seekers: which include the subcategories of *Gentle Explorers, No-Hassle Travellers, Group Tourists and Virtual Travellers*.

In this category belong the travellers that are extrovert and searching for vacations that will help them to escape from the obligations of the daily routine. They prefer group travel and also to be in a comfort and luxurious environment.

Escapists: Rejuvenators.

Mainly they are vacationers, that prefer to travel with their family and escape from the everyday problems. They mostly prefer to rest, recharge, renew and travel with others. They usually take short vacations to familiar places. They want their travel experiences to be as comfortable and relaxing as possible. Many of them (around 50%) spent a few time to see the main sightseeing of the destination.

3 Implementation steps for developing experiences

The first step is to record the type of visitor who arrives, his social and travel profile, why is he travelling, what kind of experiences he is looking for and which are the ways for promoting the experiences. The second step is to record the specific characteristics of the destination, which are the special places that make the destination unique. The third step is to match the activities as recorded in the previous step with visitor’s profile. The result should lead to a special and unique experience for the visitor. Finally, by choosing a theme or a story to frame the experience that traveller is going to live, creates a feeling of uniqueness and authenticity. The last step is the design and the implementation of the tourism experience with a particular subject.

4 The case of Naxos

Based on the toolkits presented by CTC, we implement the proposed steps:

Step 1: Who visits Naxos?

In order to find out and analyse the visitor's profile that prefer Naxos, we use three sources to collect information.

- a) International and local survey
- b) Discussion with local stakeholders and entrepreneurs of tourism
- c) Direct contact with visitors

a) International and local survey. The most recent market survey, in local level, conducted in 2012 from a group of collaborators of the Hotel Association of Naxos, on behalf of municipality of Naxos and small Cyclades¹⁰. This survey analyses some demographic data of visitors and the activities they prefer during their staying in Naxos. The main points for our approach are the limited use of internet from the Greek visitors for their information about the island and the high percentage (78%) of foreign visitors that combine their visit to Naxos with other nearby destinations (Island hopping).

b) Discussion with local stakeholders and entrepreneurs of tourism. The most entrepreneurs, who were asked about the types of tourists that visit Naxos, showed that didn't have any familiarity with the segmentation of the market. On the other hand, when we explained to them the segments that the CTC identified, everyone agreed and came down to these types of visitors. The main findings from local stakeholders and entrepreneurs are the following:

- There are visitors that are interested in trails and hiking tourism (category of Learners). Usually they come in groups while they are interested in the nature, ancient monuments, museums and minerals. It is estimated that this type of travellers don't visit Naxos in the high season.
- 30% of visitors have already been to Naxos before. 50% of visitors coming either because they had visited the island before and enjoyed it or because someone suggested it (word of mouth).
- The elder Greek visitors are interested in the villages and churches. On the other hand the younger Greek visitors are interested in beaches and nightlife. (category of Enthusiastic Indulgers).
- The foreign visitors interested in monuments, local products (e.g. marble, cheese, potato, gastronomy). Many visitors interested in authentic living cultures, seeking contact with the locals (e.g. the farmer, etc.)
- Americans are more interested in experiential tourism

- Scandinavians are mostly vacationers (escapist) and they are coming with their families.
- French are interested in vacations (escapists) and in exploration (learners).
- Germans mainly come in groups and they prefer to explore the island. Of course there are also individual travellers who they don't seek for luxury.
- Some Italians prefer to use the all-inclusive packages. Other Italian travellers prefer to explore the island. They are mostly alone and they prefer to combine their visit in Naxos with others islands.
- The vacationers fall off year by year
- Groups prefer to learn more about the nature and the monuments of Naxos. There are specific groups interested in specific topics e.g. for potatoes growing, for ancient monuments etc.
- The groups usually combine the visit in Naxos with other islands.

c) Direct contact with visitors. The survey shows that there are two types of travellers. The first one are the foreigners who are staying a few days in Naxos, visiting neighbouring islands (island hopping) and searching for authenticity, nature, quiet, culture and beaches. They visit Naxos mainly in May, June and September. The second one are Greeks and foreigners who are staying more than 7 days in Naxos, mainly interested in beaches and food as they spend only one day for discovering the island. They visit Naxos in July and in August.

Step 2: What does Naxos offer?

In order to make a list of the special characteristics of Naxos as a holiday destination, with the activities and experiences that can be offered, we use 4 different sources: a) Local research b) Discuss with local entrepreneurs of tourism c) Visitors reviews from OTAs and d) Direct contact with visitors

a) Local Research¹⁰. The research concludes that visitors mainly prefer Naxos for the food and the local products, the nature and the landscape, the villages/mainland, the city of Naxos (chora) and the hospitality. Finally as mentioned above, a large proportion (78%) of the foreign visitors combine the visit in Naxos with other nearby destinations (island hopping). On the other hand this trend appears limited in Greek visitors.

b) Discuss with local stakeholders and entrepreneurs of tourism. Based on the research of the CTC, we asked some people that are involved with tourism in Naxos. Some of the questions are: What makes Naxos a special destination? Why they stay in the island? What activities do the locals that it would be interested for visitors to do or learn? What impresses the visitors (places, people, events etc.)? Are there any alternative activities?

Bellow we summarise the answers for Naxos characteristics:

- Variety of nature: Sea, mountains, villages, rocky landscape.

- Variety of beaches: Both big and small size beaches, beaches with waves and also calm beaches, sandy beaches and rocky beaches as well.
- Variety of local produced products: Meat, cheese, potatoes, vegetables and fruits.
- Different style of architecture: Houses, Towers, Castles.
- People: Most of the businesses (80%) belong to the locals or working locals.
- Archaeological monuments, Byzantine churches, history.
- Mild climate and good temperatures.
- Potential events that visitors could involve to. Potato harvesting, picking olives, etc.
- Sports activities: Surf, kite, diving etc.
- Gastronomy: Tasty food, variety of local food products.
- Hiking.

c) Visitors reviews from OTAs. Tourist web pages and the visitor's reviews become more and more popular and also a way of promoting and advertising. Hereafter are some of the activities or places that visitors consider as specials. The Old town, Portara, Agios Prokopios beach, Plaka beach, Mikri Vigla beach, Cedar forest of Alyko, Demetra's temple, Bazeos tower, Venetian museum of Naxos, tours by boat, wind surf, diving, cycling, walking and riding.

d) Direct contact with visitors. The main points from the conversations with travellers are: 1) Compared to nearby islands, Naxos is appropriate for relaxation, 2) It is not so touristic 3) It is authentic, 4) Locals are too friendly and open, 5) Good weather and climate conditions, 6) Variety of local products and landscape. In general visitors are satisfied with their visit.

Step 3: How to create an experience?

The analysis from steps 1 and 2 shows that there are visitors who are interested in learning the history of the place they are visiting, meet new cultures and experience the culture of the habitants. In addition, they are looking to contact with nature and to participate in events. Furthermore in Naxos you can find the category of visitors that want to combine contact with nature and relax. Based on international categorisation and especially the EQ profiles⁸, we considered the Learners and Escapists as the most important visitors because they represent the profiles that were analysed before.

Learners are divided into two categories, those who prefer to travel on their own and those who prefer to travel in groups. Escapists on the other hand prefer to visit Naxos especially during the high season of summertime for vacations. The main target is to create services for the non-summer months (e.g. May, September), in order to attract these profiles. The aim is to promote Naxos as a destination which can offer unique and authentic experiences and it is better to discover the island the non-tourist months, to meet the habitants and follow their Mediterranean lifestyle.

According to our approach there are 3 ways to enter into the market.

a) The first way refers to travellers that prefer to travel alone and not in groups. The hotels or the travel agents can organise local "Reception Events" for this kind of travellers in order to present "à la carte" services and information. The travellers will be informed for the social events of the island, the history, the culture and the myths of Naxos. The main aim is the socialisation and promotion of experiential services. In order to achieve this collaboration between drivers, touring guides, museums and local authorities is needed in order to plan, organize and support local events.

b) The second way refers to visitors in groups. The object, the purpose and collaborations are the same as in plan A, but the entry in the market will be achieved by promoting experiences to these visitors through the tour operators.

c) The third is to create clusters with local actors and to develop a marketing plan with the aim to attract visitors that are interested in this kind of tourism. In this case, it is very important to use promotion and advertising by the internet and also to focus on the "do it yourself – DIY" plan of vacations.

Step 4: Mediterranean Lifestyle

Naxos, compared with other islands of Cyclades, has a variety of landscape and several agricultural products. This is its comparative advantage. The local residents are mainly involved in farming and agriculture and they are living in a traditional way. In 2013, UNESCO placed The Mediterranean Diet as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. As mentioned above, many visitors are interested to experience such kind of heritage. The Mediterranean diet is mainly a lifestyle, the "Mediterranean Lifestyle". According to UNESCO, the Mediterranean diet includes a set of skills, knowledge, symbols and traditions relating to harvesting, crop, fishing, farming, preservation of food, cooking and especially distribution and consumption of food. The basic characteristic of a Mediterranean community is to eat people together. It's a moment of communication, strength the institution of family and creates the identification among residents. The Mediterranean diet emphasizes to the values of hospitality, neighbourhood, dialogue and creativity. Creates a way of life based on respect of difference. It plays an important role in cultural events (such as festivals) by keeping in touch people with different ages and social classes.

Our suggestion is to promote the "Mediterranean lifestyle", as defined above and to combine it with a trekking experience, local myths, history and culture. Even for visitors that prefer the island hopping and will not stay long in Naxos, we should promote to them the local lifestyle through the revival of local festivals. Moreover, we suggest organising more hands on activities like engraving paths, cleaning beaches, picking olives.

5 Conclusion

The methodology suggested by the Canadian Tourism Commission and applied in the present work, is comprehensive and presents clear steps. It is easy to implement from small companies and can combine results from various streams.

Like all industries, so tourism can have negative environmental, economic and social impacts. These effects are mainly related to the constructions, the infrastructure and the activities chosen by visitors to do in the destination. The result of the combination of these factors with the transports and CO₂ emissions is an increased pressure on the "tourist destinations". Naxos could be an example of conversion of tourism development model from the sun, sea, sand, to a more sustainable form of tourism, such as experiential tourism, exploiting its special characteristics and advantages. A well organised and efficient plan which takes into account best international practices that have been applied to other destinations, it can reposition its touristic product. The methodology we developed shows that Naxos should focus on nature, culture and its people and using the framework of the sign 'Mediterranean lifestyle' could become a sustainable destination.

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