

# COOPERATION AS A DRIVING FORCE OF INNOVATIONS IN DESTINATION MARKETING MANAGEMENT

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**Abstract:** Cooperation and its form in terms of collaboration, partnerships and networking represent main consequences of globalization and growing competition. All these forms of cooperation are connected with innovations in managing and marketing tourism offerings. The main aim of the paper is to document how cooperation enhances the innovative processes within tourism destinations. The material utilized by the authors are in major secondary data supported by the outcomes of the field research. The paper is based on qualitative research presented in the form of case study innovation processes in the High Tatras tourism region. The paper underlines the importance of innovations in destination marketing management in Slovakia and confirms that cooperation as a result of institutional innovations enhances other innovations processes in tourism destinations, mostly product and marketing innovations.

**Key words:** cooperation forms, destination marketing management, High Tatras tourism region, innovations.

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## Introduction

Nowadays, cooperation is inevitable in order to enhance networking among stakeholders as well as to ensure the competitive tourism product development. The tool ensuring cooperation and coordination stakeholders' is destination marketing management. Application of this concept enhances tourism development in destinations, systematic planning, price creating and distribution, with the purpose to achieve goals of stakeholders and destination. Its main objective is primarily to determine the strategic direction of tourism destination and to influence amount, composition, timing and spatial distribution of its supply. Responsibility for fulfillment of these objectives has destination management organization (DMO), which connects individual stakeholders and their different interests. The acronym "DMO" can be also interpreted as destination mar-

keting and management organization because its' crucial function is to perform destination marketing. For long term success of tourism development in destinations is inevitable to support innovation processes in destination marketing management.

The main aim of the paper is to document how cooperation enhances the innovative processes within tourism destinations. We underline that new forms of cooperation are being developed as an innovative organizational structures stimulating innovations processes in tourism destinations. The first part of the paper focuses on cooperation as the one kind of innovations and describes its basic forms used in tourism destinations. The second part characterizes common forms of cooperation utilized in Slovakia, their advantages and disadvantages. The third part is dedicated to characteristics how cooperation enhances innovations processes in chosen destination – The High Tatras region. The material utilizing by the authors are in major secondary data, professional books, journals, web sites and annual reports. The secondary data are supported by the outcomes of the field research presented in the form of case study on innovation processes in selected tourism destination. Empirical research was limited by the availability of data.

## **1. Theoretical framework**

Innovations can be characterized as a “the driving force of economy”. We can characterize them as a combination of production factors affecting business activity (Schumpeter 1987). The main goals of innovations are the growth of product's quality and increasing its value for customers, increasing competitiveness, market share and profit, improvement of working conditions, rationalization of processes and reduction impact on environment (Hall, Williams 2008).

In tourism, innovations are not widespread as in the other industries. Until recently, they were not the subject of systematical research. In the context of tourism destinations, we support definition that innovations are changes, focus on introduction new, better products or services and implementation new processes into destination marketing management. The result of these changes is to create added value and to satisfy customers' needs in conformity with the principles of sustainable development (Lencsésóvá 2015). The main reasons for innovations in tourism destinations are usually incessant changes in visitors' needs, an effort to be better than competitors, to increase market share and impact of life cycle of tourism destination and its products. According to Nordhorn (2015), innovations in tourism destinations, but also in general, consist of new products, services, business models and new markets. Through innovations gain tourism destinations competitive advantages – time advantages, costs advantages and potential for prices. It is important for tourism destinations to focus on innovations not only at the beginning of their activities, but during the

whole time of their existence. Nowadays, as a result of globalization and high competition, innovations are the base for success of tourism destinations.

The typical feature of innovations in tourism destination is distinctiveness, derived from basic nature of tourism and its product:

- intangible character of tourism product (services) with high necessity of human labor. Subsequently, innovations depend on knowledge and skills of people participated in the product creating process;
- in the case of personal services is needed to integrate the customer into the process of their production. According to this, customer directly affects providing services, their quality and other characteristics. These make possible to innovate product in the customers' opinions and to improve satisfying of their needs;
- tourism product usually occurs in the form of "package", consists of some services produced by tourism and the other industries. In this way, innovations in tourism are result of innovation activities in these industries as well as changes in external environment (e.g. new technologies, trends in customers' behavior) (Gúčík 2012).

The approaches towards defining the innovations vary in the literature sources as well as the approaches towards its differentiations'. We adopt the classification of Hjalager (2002, 2010) which creates a framework for the research presented. According to the author, innovations can take place in one or a combination of these five categories:

- product innovations represent the altered or completely new products or services, which new features are evident for customers and can become the key factor influencing their buying decisions;
- process innovations mean the change in existing operations, which goal is to increase efficiency and productivity in consequence of their replacement new or better technologies;
- management innovations are related to new ways of work organizing, education, employee' management and motivation;
- marketing innovations consist of the regulation of information and building relationship between the providers of services and customers;
- institutional innovations include establishment forms of cooperation (e.g. collaboration, partnerships, networks, clusters, associations) at the tourism destination level, which help tourism to develop.

Cooperation is not such a new topic in tourism literature and many authors are interested in this issue (Bartl, Schmidt 1998; Franch, Martiny 2002; Pásková, Zelenka 2002; Carter, Fabricius 2007; Ryglová 2008; Gúčík 2010; Wang 2011; Maráková 2012; Morrison 2013; Gursoy et al. 2015). Cooperation among different stakeholders in tourism destinations and synergy following from their

networking creates a starting point for following innovation processes. Application of cooperative behavior in tourism destinations depends primarily on tradition, legislation, phase of development, quality of business environment and existence of business ethics and culture. Stakeholders usually need some motivation to initiate the joint activities. The primary motives enhancing cooperation are strategic (better utilization of sources and long-term tourism development, creating complex products, higher competitiveness, penetration into new markets), costs (decreasing costs for marketing activities and new technologies, economies of scale), marketing (common promotion and image) and information motive (transfer of knowledge and skills). Stakeholders are looking for direct benefits as an outcome of cooperation. We consider as the most important benefits introducing common brand, creating product portfolio, higher quality of services, permanently improving of all activities, division marketing cost, building mutual trust and establishment of partnerships. Specific forms of cooperation depend on the level of tourism development in destination, the tourism destination's stage of life cycle, current economic, political, cultural conditions and the stakeholders' willingness to share responsibility. Following the recommendations of domestic and foreign authors we briefly explain the most common forms of cooperation: collaboration, partnerships, clusters and networks.

Collaboration in tourism destination is a process, where two or more stakeholders work together to achieve shared vision and objectives. It is deep, collective determination to reach goals by sharing knowledge, know-how and learning how to make compromises and agreements (Gursoy et al. 2015). J. Wood and B. Gray (in Czernek 2012: 84) define collaboration in tourism destinations as voluntary connection among independent stakeholders in which mutual bonds are created and are approved common decisions about tourism development in destinations. Collaboration enables the prosperity of stakeholders as well as tourism destinations and is the key assumption securing its sustainable development. Collaboration usually arises when some stakeholders face the same problems. Its formation in tourism destinations is desired at local, regional, national and also at international level.

Partnership in tourism destination is considered as the base for achievement of competitiveness. The most common definition of partnership refers it as the form between two or more businesses in which partners cooperate to achieve joint goals. In tourism destinations can be partnership considered as the strategic alliance of different stakeholders, which follow the same interests. All the partners' activities are coordinated to achieve set goals, to create complex product or to achieve others common activities. The basic principles of partnership are conception (fulfilling of strategic goals), cooperation (active cooperation based on mutual trust), communication (among partners and to external

environment), creativity (e.g. in all marketing activities), coordination (joint action) and complexity (considering all linkages, benefits, threats and cost of partnership) (Palatková 2011; Nejd1 2010).

Cluster can be defined as “geographic concentrations of interconnected companies, specialized suppliers, service providers, firms in related industries and associated institutions (e.g. universities and trade associations) in particular fields that compete, but also cooperate” (Porter in Michá1ková 2010: 47). In essence, cluster emphasizes innovation processes, connection with universities, financial and research institutions. In tourism destination is cluster a system within are created closed ties among its members. Clustering can generate several benefits including economies of scale, a focus on innovations, increased synergies, productivity, knowledge transfer and competitiveness of tourism destination (Sotiriadis et al. in Gursoy et al. 2015).

Networks are widely used forms of cooperation in tourism. They “consist of a series of direct and indirect ties from one actor to others” (Smith-Ring in Michael 2007: 46) and stress on self-coordination and self-organization of networks’ members to achieve strategic goals. In tourism destinations they increase their flexibility and enable to use the benefits of synergy (Scott et al. 2008). The main reasons for their establishment are to simplify accession to domestic and foreign markets and to financial and human resources, the exchange of know-how and skills, development of competitiveness and joint visions. Networks are advantageous for smaller tourism destinations. In this way, they can moderate the drawbacks following from size of tourism destinations.

The key function of all these forms of cooperation (DMOs) is to secure destination marketing management. This conception is based on principles destination management and marketing and consists of activities typical for them. This process includes market research and analysis of current situation, determination of vision and aims of destination, identification of strategic business units (business activities of destination) and new opportunities on the markets, formulation strategies, creating and realization marketing mix and evaluation of all these activities. According to this, we can classify this process on strategic and tactical destination marketing management. Strategic destination marketing management is the base for all performed activities in destination and to determine future tourism development in it. After formulation strategies is possible to implement tactical destination marketing management – creating marketing mix, its realization and evaluation (Morrison 2013).

Destination marketing management is continuous process through DMOs plan, research, implement, control and evaluate activities designed to satisfy visitors’ needs and the goals of individual stakeholders and destination. It represents activities focus on creating added value for visitors and to developing long-term relationships with them, in way bringing benefits for all subjects.

The majority of DMOs are mostly concentrate in tactical than strategic tasks in this process. They are usually focused on market research (market segmentation, targeting and positioning), creating new and improving existing products and services, programming (creating new events, festivals) and to ensure common brand and promotion of tourism destination. DMOs have responsibility for mobilizing resources among individual stakeholders and for identifying the processes leading to integrated marketing management of tourism destination.

## **2. The analysis of cooperative forms within tourism destinations in Slovakia and its functioning**

In the modern age of Slovakia the most frequently applied forms of cooperation within the tourism industry are: tourism associations, clusters, local and regional DMOs. The longest traditions in Slovak tourism destinations have tourism associations. They can be defined as “voluntary, nonpolitical interest associations of subjects established on the basis of public-private partnership. They are based on common interests and unified vision to satisfy customers’ needs and to support prosperity its members and tourism destination” (Gúčik et al. 2012: 71). The members of tourism associations can be villages, cities, natural and juridical persons with the relationship to tourism. The first tourism association in Slovakia was established in 1994. The establishment of tourism associations can initiate both private and public sector. The aim of tourism associations as nonprofit juridical persons is to coordinate and to create conditions for tourism development and to defend interest of their members. They are usually active in the field of product, price, distribution and communication policy and their specific activities are result of agreement of all members. The importance of tourism associations is in support of product creating process, exchange of know-how, introduction new technologies and in realization marketing activities focus on education residents in tourism. However, in the conditions of Slovak tourism destinations, activity of these associations, do not bring so many benefits as they could. As the main cause of this situation we consider insufficient amount of members, consist mainly of tourism businesses and local self-governments. The absence of businesses from other industries decrease ability of associations to influence all components of product created for visitors. We perceive it as a problematic, that tourism associations suffer from a lack of financial and human resources, too. Thus, these facts decrease their ability to support tourism in destinations. In consequence of this in 2008 started to establish in Slovakia new forms of cooperation – clusters. Tourism clusters contrary to associations should boost tourism development, make relationships among different stakeholders more flexible and encourage the key stakeholders to be a part of them. Regrettably, researches show that tourism clusters mostly focus on marketing activities and missing strong ties inside them. The most tourism clusters in Slovak destinations do not fulfill the basis

of clusters in generally and do not cooperate with universities and research institutes. The positive change in destination marketing management came in 2010. In this year was passed the law no. 91/2010 about the support of tourism development in destinations. This law make possible to establishment national and regional destination management organizations based on the public-private partnership. In this law are clearly defined competencies of these organizations, duties and ways of their financing. Great attention and a lot of discussions caused just the last mentioned point – financing. The possibility to gain subsidy from state budget caused that in 2016 in 21 tourism region we have 36 local DMOs and 5 regional DMOs. The primarily purpose of subsidy was to motivate stakeholders to establish these forms of cooperation in destinations. But, after 6 years of their functioning we can note, that some of them do not fulfill their purpose and they were establish only to gain financial support. They focus mostly on promotion and do not manage tourism development comprehensively. For better future development in Slovakia is necessary not only the financial support, but teach stakeholders approach to tourism development responsibly.

### **3. The case study analysis: Cooperation as a driving force of innovations in the High Tatras tourism region**

The importance of innovations in destination management marketing and its affirmative effects will we demonstrate on example of The High Tatras tourism region. This region belongs to the most favorite tourism destinations in Slovakia for domestic as well as foreign visitors. It is situated on the north of Slovakia and consists of two sub-regions: The High Tatras and The North Spiš. The administrative centers are cities Poprad, Kežmarok and Satoria Ľubovňa. Tourism development started in this region in the end on 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the beginning was their reason for coming health and treating of respiratory system. They were usually interested in hiking, too. This was the main impulse for creating trails, bulging chalets, accommodation, restaurants and the other tourism facilities. Into permanent awareness of visitors is this region from 1970, when took place here world ski championship.

Tourism development in this region summarizes Table 1. We can see that the numbers of selected indicators changed from 1995 to 2008 considerably. Year 2008 was for the region very successful, but in 2009 become evident consequences of global crises and euro adoption. Fortunately, the situation has become better every next year.

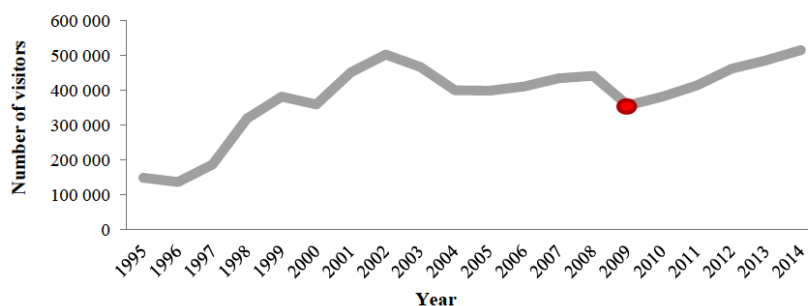
Table 1. Selected indicators of tourism development in the High Tatras region

Year	Number of accommodation facilities	Occupancy rate %	Number of visitors	Number of overnight stays	Average overnight stays
1995	36	26,1	148 540	594 128	4.0
2008	302	37,1	441 183	1 471 120	3,3

<b>2009</b>	296	32,5	356 768	1 255 746	3,5
<b>2010</b>	291	34,0	381 333	1 281 015	3,4
<b>2011</b>	271	35,0	414 051	1 333 916	3,2
<b>2012</b>	362	35,0	461 635	1 449 157	3,1
<b>2013</b>	349	36,0	486 281	1 538 902	3,2
<b>2014</b>	373	36,0	515 345	1 574 499	3,1

These data is possible to use in the theory of destination life cycle (Butler 2009) for illustration, in which stage the region currently is. If we connect the data (e.g. number of visitors) with this theory we will see, that in 2009 changed the stage decline to the stage of rejuvenation (Picture 1). The stage decline was distinguished by reduced number of visitors, accommodation facilities, overnight stays and occupancy rate, too. On the contrary, for the stage rejuvenation in this region is characterized increasing number of all indicators mentioned before and mostly the institutional, product and marketing innovations. We illustrate these innovations on some particular examples in this region.

Figure 1. Development of number of visitors in The High Tatras tourism region 1995-2014



### **Institutional innovations**

Cooperation as the result of institutional innovations was formed in this region in 1994, when was established the fist tourism association in Slovakia at all – Tourism association The High Tatras. The aim of this association is to enhance competitiveness of this region compared to the others tourism destinations in Slovakia, but also in surrounding countries like Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Austria. Its main tasks are to coordinate its members' activities and to direct them in products' creating process, to enhance communication among its members, to promote this region, to collects statistics data and last, but not least to support sustainable tourism development in this region. In 2015 association has 190 members from both public and private sectors. The financial sources for all its activities consist of membership dues, accommodation tax, gifts and its own commercial activities. In the beginning, was cooperation between private and public sectors fragile and was necessary to make a lot of



compromises and to learn to mutual trust. Another form of cooperation was established in this region in 2010 as a result the law no. 91/2010 about the support of tourism development in destinations. After this year, one by one, have risen local DMOs. In 2016 exist in the region 4 local DMOs: Region Vysoké Tatry (6 members including Tourism association The High Tatras), Tatry-Podhorie (13 members), Tatry-Spiš-Pieniny (26 members) and The North Spiš-Pieniny (16 members). Their members are mostly local governments, tourism businesses and other services' providers and their long-term vision is to integrate this region into strong and complex destination. As we have mentioned before, local DMOs' tasks follow from the law and they are mostly focus on support creating products and strategic documents for future tourism development, promotion in Slovakia and abroad, to secure sustainable tourism development and to provide consultancy for all DMOs' members. In contrast to the association they should focus on qualitative goals and to secure benefits for residents, local business and environment.

Previous researches have shown that cooperation among different stakeholder from public and private sector within individual DMOs is strong and stakeholders in the region are willing to cooperate (Gajdošík 2015). On the other hand, cooperation among existing DMOs does not develop in the same way. DMOs perceive themselves as competitive entities fighting for visitors and for gaining financial support from state. The platform for their functioning is insufficient and their activities do not support creating the integral image of the High Tatras tourism region (Gajdošík et al. 2015).

### **Product innovations**

The original product of this region are services connected with spa, health care and hiking. The target markets for these services were solvent clientele and middle class. Afterwards the establishment of DMOs has this traditional core of product changed and nowadays, its focus on entertainment and fun. The target groups of visitors have changed, too. Now it is only the domestic and foreign solvent clientele. The most important products' innovations in the region are reconstruction of accommodation and mountain transport facilities, modernization of ski slopes and building new facilities for sport and relax, too. Moreover, accommodation facilities have created every season new thematic oriented products mostly for younger people and families. In an effort to support selling these products, services providers usually connect them with some events regularly organizing in the region. The most favorite events for visitors are in winter season "The ice cathedral on Hrebienok", "Bears' day on Hrebienok" during summer and sport event "Tatras in move", which attract every year thousands of visitors. New, but very popular product for young active people is also Geocaching. Especially for families was in 2015 created product "Tatras' fairytale kingdom". The main idea of this product is to teach children

something about the High Tatras region, its nature, peaks, mountain lakes and animals playful and interesting way. For the future is preparing product “Route via mineral springs”, which aim is to create network of paths linking the most important mineral springs rising in this region and its surroundings. This product and its specialization are based on typical attractions and we assume it as a good example for future DMOs’ products.

### **Marketing innovations**

The successful products’ selling and its promotion are not possible without innovations in marketing. Very successful marketing innovation – “Tatry card” was created in 2011. Tatry card is special card for visitors providing them discounts from 5 to 50%, some services for free or some other benefits and it is accepted in a lot of different services’ providers. The card can visitors buy in selected accommodation facilities and it is valid for 5 days (with the possibility to prolong). Except benefits in chosen restaurants, cafés, accommodation facilities, ski schools, rental and services, museums, fun and aqua parks this card is valid as a travel ticket for all trains of Slovakia Railways Company on selected routes and includes mountain insurance covers costs of Mountain Rescue Service operations (Región Vysoké Tatry 2016). On the same way works another “Spiš Pieniny card”, which is valid in sub-region the north Spiš as a part of the High Tatras region and in Pieniny. Important innovation is also the incoming travel agency Region Tatry Travel, Ltd., which establishment was approved in January 2016. In the beginning will be the travel agency focuses on two target countries – Great Britain and Israel and its main goal will be to create new products and to cooperate with foreign travel agencies.

### **Conclusions**

Nowadays, innovations are considered as a key success factor of tourism development in destinations and the essential condition their long-term competitiveness. Cooperation is not such a new topic in tourism literature, but in last decades its importance within the tourism research is growing due to the effort to achieve higher competitiveness. Both, academics and practitioners agree that cooperation in tourism destinations is inevitable. The challenge is to determinate its optimal form, which will contribute to the competitive advantage of the tourism destinations. Cooperation is the result of innovations in destination marketing management as the main consequence of globalization, high competition and fragmented nature of tourism destinations. In the research of cooperative forms within tourism destinations, uniqueness of tourism industry and services should be considered.

Tourism in Slovakia has over a long period been stagnating sector. Its existing potential is not fully using and tourism development in Slovak destinations is confronted by several issues. We considered as the most serious issues the

absence of continuity of national tourism politics, the missing complex product and its quality and insufficient promotion of tourist attractions. Even though are they regularly mentioned in strategic documents, usually have declarative character and we miss systematic attitude to improve this situation. On the other hand, academics and also managers representing tourism destinations agree, that the key factor changing this current situation is innovation in destination marketing management based on cooperation among public, private sector and residents. In Slovakia are the most common forms of cooperation tourism associations, tourism clusters and local and regional DMOs. These organizations are primarily focused on destination marketing, mostly on creating new products, programming, implementation common brand, promotion and on developing new ways of distribution. We analyzed forms of cooperation and innovation following from their activities in The High Tatras region. We argue that the establishment of tourism association and local DMOs encourage development of product and marketing innovations. But, existing product is focus on entertainment and stakeholders forget about traditional attractions typical for this region. In this region exist 5 DMOs which do not cooperate very well and their responsibilities and tasks overlap.

We can conclude that applied cooperation patters within tourism industry in Slovakia do not fully utilize the potential of the sector and thus do not contribute fully to a higher competitiveness of Slovak republic on international market. Only few of them were established with the truly vision to support tourism development in destinations and not just to reach financial support from state. Despite this, fact that stakeholders are willing to be a part of these networks and are willing to cooperate is promising for the future tourism development in Slovakia. Thus, stakeholders need some time to experience mutual trust and to make compromises to achieve their vision and synergy effects. For the future success of tourism development in Slovakia should further research develop in two directions. The first should focus on the quality of relationships among the stakeholders of DMOs and also the relationships across DMOs in tourism destinations. It is necessary to evaluate the efficiency of DMOs' performance which is influenced by these relationships. The second direction of research should concentrate on innovation processes within tourism destinations on local, regional and national level. Previous researches published were focused mainly on innovations in tourism businesses (micro-level) which have not taken into consideration special features of tourism destinations (local, regional and national level).

Sustainable tourism development requires systematic approach towards creation of financial framework. Tourism support act which was adopted in Slovak republic in 2010 creates platform for innovations in destination marketing management in Slovakia. For the long term competitiveness of tourism industry it

is inevitable to ensure support of productive and meaningful partnerships of public and private sector within the industry.

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