

Quality and Quantity in Tourism

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Commentary

Over the past half century, mass tourism with a focus on serving large numbers of tourists has led to some regions suffering from 'saturation tourism' and over-crowding, especially in mature, well established tourism regions. This is often accompanied by relatively low tourist spending on site, which leads to limited economic benefits at a local level. There are many different organisations and perspectives within the tourism industry that shape the nature of tourism marketing. Different tourism organisations have different goals to achieve and operate to different agendas. At a macro level, some governments and regional authorities are increasingly championing the need to reduce tourist numbers and replacing them with fewer, better quality tourists who potentially will spend more. This view may be justified on the grounds of protecting both the general environment and social needs (such as quality of life) of an indigenous population. The quality over quantity argument often assumes that the extra spend from fewer tourists will negate any reductions in numbers of tourists to a tourist region. This commentary paper discusses the role of quality and quantity in the context of mass tourism in well established tourist regions.

From Quantity to Quality

In practice moving from mass tourism to a more focused or specialised tourism approach has considerable implications. There are many obstacles to implementing such a policy and some contradictory issues to consider in relation to what might be an appropriate tourism strategy. Given the existing tourism infrastructure and industry custom and practice created around mass tourism it is difficult to envision any region being able to start with a 'clean slate'. For example, it would be a challenge to find a green field site in a developed tourist area in the Mediterranean. If such a site were found it might be possible to build a perfect model for quality tourism from scratch. In a limited way, this has been done in Cyprus for example, with the 'quality' resorts such as Elysium near Paphos. However, most Mediterranean tourist resorts are mature and have been built in a different era when visitor expectations were different (lower) than today.

Following the popularization of the concept of sustainable development, sustainable tourism as a concept developed during the late 1980s and early 1990s. This concept evolved in line with growing recognition of the potential for tourism to have a negative impact on the environment and social fabric of tourist regions. The importance of trying to achieve a social, economic and environmentally balanced approach to managing and marketing tourist sites was recognized in the Brundtland report carried out by the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987. However in practice, some interpretations of sustainable tourism are overly focused on a need to conserve the resources on which the tourism industry depends; indeed

some conservationists argue for de-marketing and stay away messages to be given to tourists [1]. In contrast the core aim of the social and economic perspectives of tourism is to encourage more tourists to visit and promote the growth of tourist value; and the focus is on creating employment, achieving good revenue return and developing some local engagement and interaction with tourists [2]. Thus it would appear that the environmental focus of tourism is at a different end of the spectrum to the economic and social perspectives.

Mass Tourism in the Mediterranean Region - Quantity or Quality

The mass tourism, marketing led tourism industry define tourists as people from anywhere in the world who want to travel and visit other places. These tourists use mass transport services such as airlines, railways, ferries, coaches or self-drive transport to travel. While there may be many specific tourist segments represented (walkers, climber, cyclists, special interest groups), they all have mass market requirements such as accommodation, food, information and guidance hence they are part of mass market tourism.

The tourism infrastructure operates within a competitive environment. It is comprised of many public and private enterprises that provide a range of tourism products and services. Traditionally marketing and business activity in tourism focuses predominantly on promoting countries, regions and sites at a global and national level. The marketing and business activity is carried out and dominated by key players in the tourism infrastructure such as international tour operators, transport operators, hotel chains and travel companies. The activities carried out by these operators focus on attracting tourists to particular sites by using services and products such as organized tours, package holidays, short breaks and day trips. Marketing activity involves promotional activity from websites, brochures and other merchandising material in addition to the use of agents and mass advertising campaigns using a wide range of media. Further, there is a plethora of media programmes and articles extolling the pleasures of areas and places. This promotional activity (whether carried out by private or public sector) is predominantly off-site marketing promotion. Marketing-led initiatives are aimed at the mass market and the overall focus is on economic gains.

Mass tourism is based upon large numbers of people seeking a relatively homogenous tourist experience or package. Underlying much of the concerns about saturation tourism is the apparent dichotomy of quantity over quality. The desire for greater quality is based upon reducing quantity; and that if quantity is reduced, only quality must be offered. In simple terms, this appears to be manifested in turning holiday resorts into exclusive top quality destinations with high quality, up-market accommodation and infrastructure.

To counter mass tourism, attempts have been made to practice more specialised or focused tourism that aims to protect and to conserve the

environment and the culture of tourist sites. In practice, environmental players (such as public bodies, government agencies, special interest groups) give emphasis to environmental issues, and only peripheral attention to economic and social well-being. Environmental issues are mostly addressed by on-site management, with only lip service from off-site management. On-site managers often advocate environmental issues but do not use marketing language, techniques or activities – for example they focus on using de-marketing messages, limited market segmentation and focus on small site tourism (with a lack of facilities for mass tourism groups). This clearly has the potential to lead to on-site contradictory activities where the environmental focus is on conservation and protection but the economic focus is on revenue generation and profit maximization together with some effort to bring social well-being to tourist regions.

Case Example of Mallorca

Let us examine the nature of mass summer tourism in Europe by considering the island of Mallorca as an example. The Mallorca Tourist resorts are mature, they were established in the 1970s and 80s as part of a mass tourism offering, focusing on serving large numbers of tourists. Some commentators say that Mallorca has grown too popular for its own good; mass market resorts such as Magaluf and Palma Nova are suffering crackdowns on drunken misbehaviour [3]. Following television series such as Rick Stein's Traditional foods of Mallorca and more recently the miniseries *The Night Manager*, the popularity of Mallorca has increased further. To counter this, in recent years the Mallorcan Government appear to be champions of reversing 'saturation' tourism.

To this end there has been considerable infrastructural investment in the quality of tourist accommodation in the Mallorcan tourism private sector over the past 5 -8 years. The focus of this investment is on refurbishing the older models of 3, 4 and 5 star hotels to a higher specification so that there is an upward trend towards better quality accommodation in line with 21st century expectations. Such a trend might eventually achieve an infrastructure that reduces saturation and enables a greater return from fewer tourists.

Given that Majorcan tourism is on the crest of a wave, what is wrong with current practice? For some commentators the question is: how realistic it is to reduce the quantity of tourists that leads to saturation and instead focus on quality, aiming for a greater economic return from fewer tourists? Indeed it is difficult to see how this might be achieved in the short term.

Whilst it is acknowledged that there is some upward trend, Majorca still remains a mass summer tourism destination which attracts and serves a mass tourist population in the summer months. In addition to advertising the traditional mass tourist resorts, current off-site marketing of Mallorca focusses on the lesser-known attractions, and promoting the mix of beaches, mountains, arty ports and good food to appeal to more sophisticated visitors [3] – thus creating a new mass tourist market, albeit one with a focus on visitors who will spend more money on site than the traditional package tourist.

A key solution to the quantity versus quality challenge is not to over concentrate on one only but to aim to present a balanced approach to managing environmental, social and economic perspectives and offer both quality and quantity within a geographical tourist region. Is it entirely feasible to combine quantity and quality? A first step is to offer the highest attainable quality within a mass market. Mass tourism calls for a range of offerings such as 3-5* hotels, hostels, 5* exclusive and

luxury villas, both self-rentals and managed butler service. Careful planning of the tangible and intangible aspects of the range of tourist accommodation can help reach different segments. Different customer segments will favour and choose different levels of physical, tangible infrastructure. The quality of buildings and décor should be designed in line with the segment expectations of build and décor. The intangible nature of the tourism product can add value, delivered through attention to detail, personal service, greater range of options and offers, and a greater range of quality options and offers. In order to be successful it needs to beat the competition elsewhere, focus on differentiation and positioning the destination image to reach the most appropriate mass market.

Delivering quantity at mass tourism sites will require tourism services and products for the mass market to be provided in relevant places and in adequate numbers. To achieve this, large investments may be required for the tangible aspects of tourism services with both public (for physical infrastructure) and private sector (for accommodation and attractions) financial support. Development of the tourism product needs to focus on meeting market deficiencies and delivering both tangible and intangible services and experiences. Given the scope and range of tourism service products there is a considerable managerial role implied in co-ordinating this service delivery.

Delivering quality at mass tourism sites requires focus on delivering effective and consistent service delivery. The tourism product is experienced in relation to its perceived value and how it is delivered through attention to detail; added extras; personal service; with a good range of quality options and offers. All that remains is for the media, market, business, government and wider tourism sectors to recognize that such a dedication to quality within the context of mass market tourism helps to differentiate the region from the competition elsewhere. The value of the whole market economy is enhanced, so that there is a win-win for all if the outcomes are properly managed.

Conclusion

Achieving a balance of quality and quantity will require community involvement and participation in addition to enlightened tourism policy. Regional tourism development requires community support and engagement; as many studies have shown that the lack of engagement of key stakeholders and community groups in the tourism planning process is likely to lead to non-realization and lack of implementation of tourism development plans [4]. To achieve a balance of quality and quantity, tourism marketing activities need to address the needs of different customer segments and take account of the multi-dimensional nature of tourism service products by careful management of the entire tourism product, delivering effective and efficient services, and using appropriate communication messages and media.

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