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Innovation – a useful tool in the rural tourism in Romania

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Abstract

The tourism industry, especially rural tourism, is largely dominated by small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) and is often considered less innovative than other industries. The aim of the paper is to give a picture of the innovativeness in the Romanian rural tourism industry. The study analyses product/ service and marketing innovation implemented in rural tourism companies. The definitions and the types of innovation considered in the present study are those used in the Community Innovation Survey, conducted by Eurostat. In order to survive in an increasingly competitive and global environment, tourism companies, especially the small ones, must differentiate from the competitors using innovation tools. Innovation in tourism must be seen as a permanent, global and dynamic process.

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, tourism is often defined as being segmented and customized to the tourist's needs and wishes (Hudson S., 2008). At international level, the idea that services are non-innovative is recently replaced with theories according to which innovation plays an equally important role in services sector as in manufacturing industry. Use of new technologies and organizational and structural changes that generate new services and new ways of distribution gain a higher importance (Andersson, T., and M. Henrekson 2003). According to the clusters theory, there is a link between competitiveness and business ability to improve product offerings and innovate constantly (Nordin, S. 2003). On the other hand, there is a correlation between tourism growth and degree of innovation (Nordin, S. 2003). Innovation can be defined as "...a process of creating new value ... geared first towards customers, as the main arbiters of business competitiveness, but one that can also involve other

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stakeholders as major beneficiaries, such as the organization itself (employees), shareholders (profitability), external partners, etc” (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2006).

The focus on the topic of innovation in tourism increased in the last years. Several authors classified the types of innovation in: product innovation - new products, process of innovation- new method of production, market innovation - the exploitation of new markets, organizational or management innovation - new ways to organize business, and institutional innovation - a framework within which people interact (Fagerberg, J., Mowery, D. C. et. al., 2005) (Hjalager, A. □M. 1997) (Hjalager, A. □M. 2010).

The aim of the paper is to give a picture of innovation level and awareness of the importance of innovation for businesses in Romanian rural tourism industry. The definitions and the types of innovation considered in the present study are those used in the Community Innovation Survey, conducted by EuroStat. The Community Innovation Survey (CIS) is a survey conducted every 4 years by EU member states to measure the progress in the area of innovation. For the Community Innovation Survey (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Statistical Office of the European Community 2005):

- The innovation of a tourism product means to bring on the market a new or a significantly improved product. The tourism product (new or improved) must be new to the company but it does not need to be new to the tourism sector.
- The innovation of a process means to introduce a new or a significantly improved process, distribution method or support activity for the tourism products. The innovation (new or improved) must be new to the company but it does not need to be new to the tourism sector.
- The organizational innovation is the implementation of new or significant changes into the company structure or the management methods, which should be used to improve the company’s efficiency.
- The marketing innovation means the implementation of new or significantly improved product design, placement, or promoting. Another goal is to increase the appeal of the tourism products or to enter on new markets.

A main area of change and innovation in tourism concerns the use of information and communication technologies (ICT). The production and the marketing for tourism products are different compared with those from industrial products. The tourism product is a complex of tangible and intangible components: accommodation; transport; food and beverages; recreation and entertainment. For Middleton and Clarke the tourism product is the complete experience of a tourist starting with leaving from home until the time of returning at home (Middleton, V.T.C. and Clarke, J. 2001). Given the intangibility of tourism products, Weiermair said that the tourist may feel uncertain about the quality of the services. Because of this intangibility, tourism products can be enhanced through adding also sensations (design, fragrance, light, colour, emotional attachment etc.). As a result of such product changes, the emotional value of the “tourism experience” will be enhanced (Weiermair, K. 2004). In order to survive in an increasingly competitive and global environment, companies involved in the tourism sector, especially the small ones must differentiate from the competitors using innovation tools. It can be stated that in the future it will be important to create a rewarding tourism experience through innovation and product development instead of offering singular tourism elements. Bartaletti said that the new holiday forms, which are offering experience, will be the main motive for the holiday decision (Bartaletti, F. 1998). Innovation in tourism must be seen as a permanent, global and dynamic process.

The review of the literature also indicates that the innovative ability increases with the size of a company. The majority of the rural tourism companies are small ones (Rønningen, M. 2010). The tourism industry from Romania, especially the rural tourism industry is largely dominated by small and medium sized enterprises (SME’s) and is often considered to be less innovative than manufacturing industry (Toader, V. 2011). The starting point of this investigation was the situation of the rural tourism in Romania. In 2011 in Romania were 1210 agro-tourist boarding houses, representing 24% from all Romanian accommodation establishments.

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