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A Model Proposal on the Use of Creative Tourism Experiences in Congress Tourism and the Congress Marketing Mix

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Abstract: Congress tourism has a great importance for the extension of the tourism season, enhancement of employment opportunities and tourism revenues, promotion and efficient use of the facilities in the area. Creative Tourism provides an authentic feel for a local culture through informal, hands-on workshops and creative experiences. Ensuring that the attendants of congress tourism take part in creative tourism activities may be an example of the synergy to be achieved by including creative tourism in the congress marketing mix. In this study the tourism marketing mix, *programming, packaging, partnership, people, product, price, promotion, place*, are adapted for congress tourism and a model which illustrates how to use the creative tourism experiences and activities within the marketing mix is proposed.

Keywords: Creative Tourism, Congress Tourism, Congress Marketing Mix.

Resumen: El turismo de congresos tiene una gran importancia para la extensión de la temporada turística, el aumento de los ingresos derivados del turismo y las posibilidades de empleo, y para la promoción y el uso eficiente de las instalaciones en el área. El turismo creativo proporciona una sensación auténtica de la cultura local a través de talleres informales y prácticos, y de experiencias creativas. Asegurarse de que los asistentes del turismo del congreso participen en actividades creativas de turismo puede ser un ejemplo de la sinergia que se puede alcanzar incluyendo el turismo creativo en el marketing mix de congreso. En este estudio el marketing mix de turismo, *programación, empaquetado, colaboración, personas, producto, precio, promoción, lugar*, se adapta para el turismo de congresos y se propone un modelo que ilustra cómo utilizar las experiencias y las actividades del turismo creativo dentro del marketing mix.

Palabras clave: Turismo creativo; Turismo de congresos; Marketing mix de congresos.

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Introduction

As a reaction to mass tourism, other varieties of tourism products, such as yachting, cultural, health, and congress tourism are gaining in importance. Besides its season-extending effect for businesses and destinations, the importance of congress tourism is gradually increasing in Turkey due to its positive effects on economic, cultural and social areas. In parallel to congress tourism, creative tourism experiences lead to development in economic, social and cultural terms in the destinations where they are offered. Creativity allows destinations to develop innovative products relatively rapidly, giving them a competitive advantage over other locations. Creative production attracts enterprises and individuals involved in the cultural sector, generating important multiplier effects in the local economy and raising the aesthetic value of creative production locations (Richards, 2001).

Richards and Raymond defined "creative tourism" as, "learning a skill on holiday that is part of the culture of the country or community being visited. Creative tourists develop their creative potential, and get closer to local people, through informal participation in interactive workshops and learning experiences that draw on the culture of their holiday destinations" (http://www.creativetourism.co.nz/aboutus_ourstory.html). Raymond also indicated that interactive workshops that take place in small groups at tutor's home and places of work, allow visitors to explore their creativity while getting closer to local people. (Raymond, 2007). These workshops usually also include destinations' values such as art, culture, gastronomy and nature.

Some of the examples for creative experiences in New Zealand include creating own bone carving, claying or woodturning souvenir, learning to make silver, making a hand-forged knife, meeting wine makers and making own cheese, or olive oil (<http://www.creativetourism.co.nz/index.html>). But every destination has different kinds of creative experiences which should emphasize its own cultural assets and values. Making perfume in France, carving

and photography in Canada, folk music in Mexico and so forth can be some of the examples (Richards & Wilson, 2006).

Creative tourism offers visitors the opportunity to develop their creative potential through active participation in learning experiences, which are characteristics of the holiday destination where they are undertaken. The key point for creative tourism, therefore, is that the consumption involved is active rather than passive, and is aimed at developing the potential of the individual (Richards, 2001). The major difference between creative spaces, spectacles and creative tourism is that creative tourism depends far more on the active involvement of tourists. Creative tourism involves not just spectating, but also a reflexive interaction on the part of tourists who are usually thought of as "non producers" in traditional analyses (Richards & Wilson, 2007).

Creative tourism can be developed in a destination through a commercial business model. One of the key features of this model requires viewing creative tourism experiences as another tourism product. Creative tourism experiences need to compete with other products and be available through tourism marketing channels, using the commission structures that other tourism products also use. Other key features should include partnerships with tourism businesses that have an established client base. Such partnerships may be set up with accommodation providers or by including workshops in local festivals. (Raymond, 2009).

In the light of the explanations given above, this study proposes that creative tourism may be considered together with or as a part of congress tourism. Those attendants and/or delegates who come for a congress may participate in creative tourism activities, thus learning the social and cultural structure of the destination better. Furthermore the number of days of their stay may thus increase and they may contribute to the destination's economy through their extra spending. Those participants, who leave satisfied from the destination, may come again and they may also act as a positive reference for potential visitors. To achieve this, creative tourism

experiences should be included in the marketing mix, in order to positively affect the congress' marketing activities.

Therefore, the next section proposes a model of integration of creative tourism activities within the congress marketing mix. Furthermore, an interview was carried out to determine the congress tourism experts' opinion regarding the applicability of the model, from a practical perspective.

A model proposal for the integration of creative tourism within the congress marketing mix

The eight P's of *Product, Price, Promotion, Place, Programming, Packaging, Partnership, Person*, which are the components of the tourism marketing mix, have been adapted to congress tourism. Moreover, the mix has been enriched by including creative tourism activities and thus a model for "*Congress Tourism Marketing Mix*" is proposed (refer to Figure 1).

The basic factor affecting the saleability of the congress and meeting services is to be able to establish an efficient and right marketing mix. The marketing mix is a bridge of the relations between the business and its markets. Kotler (2003:15) defines the marketing mix as, "the set of marketing tools the firm uses to pursue its marketing objectives in the target market". Kotler's basic marketing concept applied to congress tourism focuses on the firms organizing the congress and meeting and on their aim of achieving customer satisfaction by using an appropriate marketing mix. Market mix refers to the relative ranking of business segments for a particular property, city, and area and is based on common segment classifications (Hoyle, Dorf & Jones, 1995). The marketing mix is comprised of every factor that influences the sales effort (Astroff & Abbey, 1988). The model proposed in Figure 1 aims to incorporate creative tourism activities into the congress marketing mix.

The model begins with the distribution mix. The distribution mix is evaluated from the viewpoint of congress tourism and creative tourism. As congress hotels and congress centres are service businesses, they make use of various distribution channels. However, first of all, one must identify the

customer requirements, expectations and needs as well as distribution options, establish the most appropriate distribution system, evaluate the practical options, design and apply distribution networks and monitor the performance of the distribution channels (İçöz 2005). Intermediaries in the travel distribution mix, i.e. hotel sales representatives, travel agencies, tour operators, meeting planners, meeting offices, internet, incentive planners, destination management businesses, must be included in congress tourism, so that the distribution mix may be formed. Intermediaries are provided with information about creative tourism and activities are illustrated through the model practices. Intermediaries tell their customers of such activities and may also organize familiarization trips. Thus, intermediary institutions act as a bridge to integrate creative tourism within the congress or meeting.

Demand for tourism destinations may display some instability due to some political, climatic or economic reasons. If this situation continuously persists, then the destination marketing managers need to make some arrangements in order to balance demand with supply. During the low seasons, creative tourism activities may provide an opportunity to create demand. Instead of reducing prices in times of low occupancy, differentiating the product is a better alternative. Furthermore, during the high season, creative tourism activities may also be used to justify higher prices. As guests look for something different to choose from, creative tourism may provide a distinctive advantage and a way to differentiate.

Following the distribution mix, the product and creative tourism experiences should be programmed in relation to the target market. This programming stage is followed by the creation of the product mix. In this stage, congress centres and congress hotels, which are the major components of congress tourism, must be evaluated as a tourism product. Traditionally, a tourism product may appear in two ways. It may relate to the natural, historical and cultural resources a country or area possesses. Secondly, it may include all the services that allow consumers to move and have a holiday, that is to say, all of the touristic

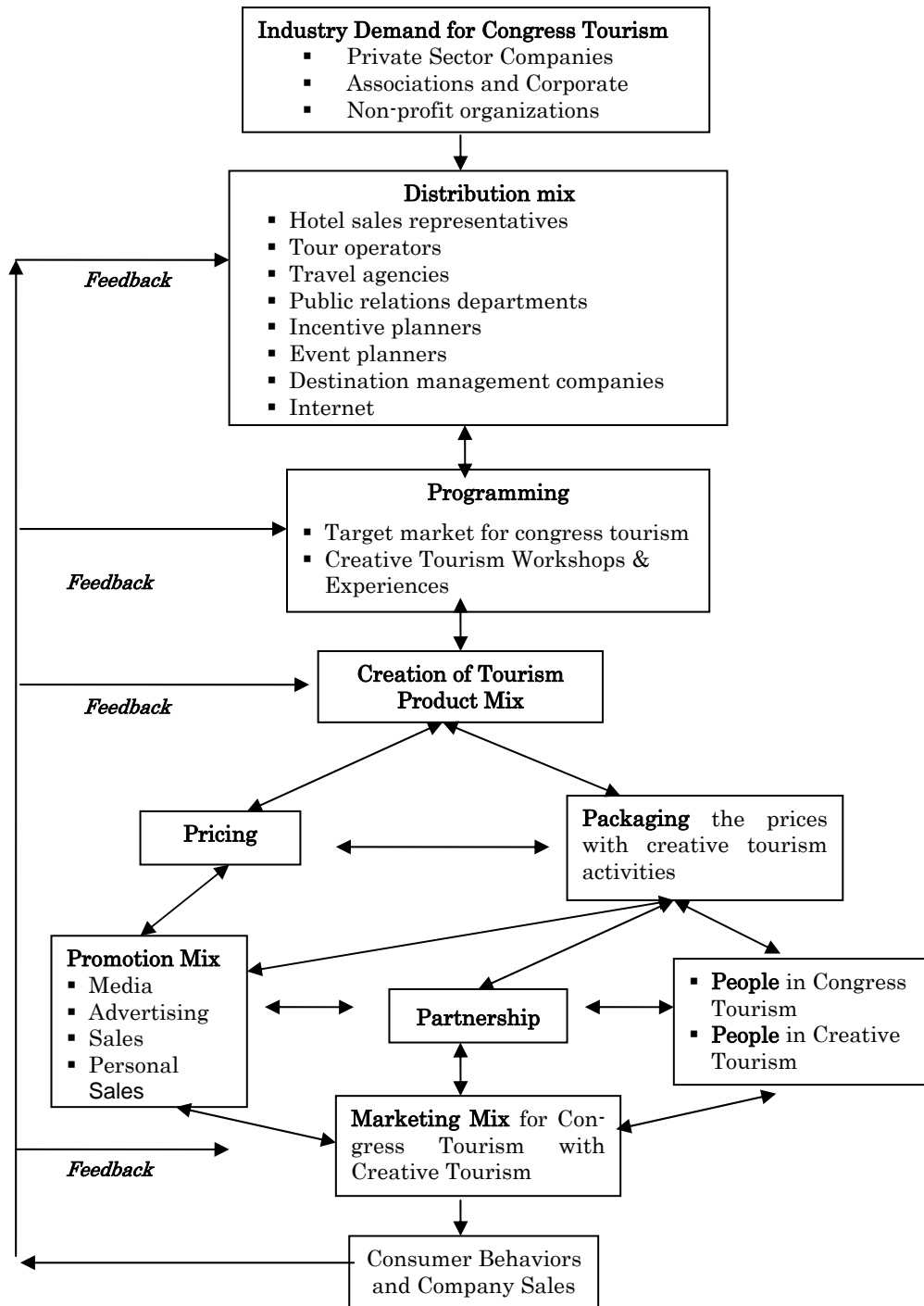


Figure 1. A Model for the Integration of Creative Tourism within the Congress Marketing Mix

services that create a package tour (Hacıoglu, 1991).

Even if the principal objective of con-

gress and meeting services is different from mass tourism, congress tourism is a tourism product in that it is supplementary to

mass tourism. From the viewpoint of the phrase “those businesses serving tourists or people” as indicated in Hacıoğlu’s definition above, congress hotels and congress centres are basically tourism products. According to Richards and Raymond, historical, cultural and artistic assets of the country or any area are used within creative tourism, which should encompass the culture of the destination and its community (<http://www.creativetourism.co.nz/>). The activities that may be used for creative tourism, such as carpet weaving, olive oil making, soap making, molasses making, pottery, weaving, local embroidery, point lace, fruit wine making, etc. should also be viewed as a tourism product. However, the complexity of these products results in the need to consider and market them in the form of a package. Furthermore, congress participants, planners and organisers must go the place where the service is provided. Thus, there is an opportunity to enhance the interest of the participants in the culture of that area through their involvement in creative tourism activities. For instance, in an excursion to *Şirince village* organised for those attendants who come to the province of İzmir for a congress, the participants join creative tourism activities and discover the culture of the region by learning how to make wine.

Needs and expectations of the local people, cultural compatibility and touristic standards are extremely important for the creation of any tourism product. As number of visitors increase, and tourism activities assume some regularity, local residents will become involved and begin to provide services and facilities primarily or even exclusively for visitors. Contacts between visitors and locals can be expected to remain high and increase for those locals involved in catering for visitors (Butler, 2006). Development of a tourism destination depends on the sincere desire and goodwill of the local governments and communities to make their living space a developed tourism destination, and on their adoption of differentiation strategies (Olah & Timur 1988). International and national congresses organised at congress centres and congress hotels enhance the quality of the destination. This is due to the high educational and cultural level of the visitors and

the effect on the living standards of the inhabitants. In such a way, the basic objective of creative tourism, which is sharing something with the local people, is also achieved.

After studying congress centres and congress hotels as products, the price factor may be analyzed together with creative tourism in the context of congress tourism. Typically two factors determine the price. First, the event manager must determine the financial philosophy of the event. The second factor is related to the competition from similar events. These two factors - the cost of doing business and the marketplace competition - influence the price. (Goldblatt, 1997) Also price plays both economic and psychological roles in the service sector. The psychological role of price is seen as essential in services since the consumer only relies upon price as an indicator of quality, when other service quality indicators are not available (Zeithaml, 1988). In terms of its economic role, price determines the income of the business and affects the profitability (İçöz, 2005). One of the factors which makes price important in terms of marketing is the fact that its effect on sales may be monitored more easily than any other marketing component (İslamoğlu, 2002, as cited by Özer, 2004).

Delegate expenditures are even greater in the meetings sector (Hoyle et al., 1995). Due to their higher income and education level, congress attendees are more sensitive towards the quality of the service, while they also expect a reasonable price. The challenge is to set a price that both satisfies the consumers and brings profits to the business. When creative tourism activities are packaged in the congress or meeting, the value of the overall product may be increased. Therefore, creative tourism activities included may be used to differentiate from competitors and enhance preference.

Leisure time and personal disposable income factors are different to some extent in the marketing of congress tourism. This is because the congress delegates participate in congress tourism for business purposes and this time is not included in their holiday periods. Furthermore, as their travel expenses are usually paid by their respective companies, their personal incomes are

not affected and this partly reduces the effect of price as a factor from the viewpoint of the participants. Therefore, those congress attendants who participate in the creative tourism activities included in the programme of a congress are willing to take part in such endeavours and enjoy them as they do not pay for it themselves. Therefore such activities further enhance the motivation of the participants.

In congress centres and congress hotels, a package tour means presenting services, accommodation and space (Hoyle et al., 1995) in the form of a package. Transportation, half-board or full-board accommodation, some rebates to be used within hotel premises and coffee breaks are usually included into such services. Their being economical is pre-eminent among the reasons why such services are preferred in the form of a package. Therefore, creative tourism activities are also included in such package tours. These activities will be part of the agenda and included in the social program of the congress. Thus, both their promotion and their practicability is enhanced.

Entertainment, shopping, excursion, recreation and professional opportunities as included in the extra conference opportunities are among the factors affecting the area choice of congress and meeting organisations (Crouch & Louviere 2004). If we define creative tourism as entailing the tourist's participation in activities at the destination, we may also conclude that congress tourism often includes creative tourism.

Congress hotels and congress centres provide consumers information about their own respective services and use the communication channels to promote their sales. Being components of the marketing mix, such promotional instruments as advertising, sales promotion, personal sales, public relations, direct marketing, sponsorship and written communications (Cooper 2005) become especially important in those periods when demand is low. Promotional activities make the intangible character of congress tourism tangible. In addition, such activities may be used together with creative tourism, thus ensuring a greater attention and desirability. Promotion is vital in creating awareness of the event and a de-

sire to participate (Hoyle, 2002). For instance, a congress organiser may watch, practise and record an activity - for example the wine making activity - during the inspection trip which is organised at the marketing stage of a congress, and then may present this process to his/her customers to enhance the preference of the organization.

Partnership is also important for congress tourism, which is an integrated industry. Without transportation, there is no point in having a self-contained accommodation facility. The purposes of the most excellent airports lose their economic value without accommodation facilities. All corporations as included in the field of partnership with congress centres are potential customers for creative tourism. While participants who are coming for a congress are directly included in the creative tourism activities, their friends and colleagues can be potential customers, if they get positive feedback.

People are a vital element of the marketing mix. While the importance attached to people management in improving the quality within companies is increasing, it assumes a much greater importance within the service sector (Palmer, 1994). Two major groups of people can be mentioned in service marketing, employees and customers. Marketing's main focus is consumers, who must be guided to the services and must be satisfied through new and different proposals. Most important of all, there must be some interdepartmental cooperation within the business for the satisfaction and repeat purchase of customers. It is the employees who will ensure such cooperation and accomplish this aim. In creative tourism, the people factor has a special importance, as it is a person who will teach and implement the creative activities and workshops. Furthermore, interaction with the local community to achieve a mutual learning experience is stated as one of the aims of creative tourism (Richards & Wilson, 2006). Therefore the integration of the community within the congress tourism marketing mix is essential in order to increase the attractiveness of the product and ensure that the benefits of tourism are passed through to the community.

The above model focuses on how creative

tourism activities may be integrated into the congress tourism marketing mix. It has the merit of pointing to the added value and differentiation capabilities that creative tourism activities provide at the various stages of the marketing mix. The following section provides a discussion on its practical applicability, based on an interview with a congress organizer.

Applicability of the Model

In order to get insights into practical aspects of the model, an interview was held with an organisation company in June 2009. The specialty of the company is congress and meetings in the Izmir region, in Turkey. The practicability of this model for the marketing mix of an international congress which the company will be organising in the near future was evaluated, together with the general manager of the company. The future congress is organised by an association for its members under the theme “changing and strengthening”.

The starting point in the development process starts with planning the best season for this congress. Creative tourism activities suitable to the characteristics of the region are also considered within the congress. A programme and an offer will give way to the offering and pricing stages. In this phase, such components as accommodation, transfers, operational services, guiding, rental of the place chosen for workshops, instructors, etc. are included into the price.

Due to the fact that the topic of the congress is related to women, an activity concerning the use of olive oil as the women’s secret of beauty is organised within the social activities of the congress. The participants are offered the opportunity to participate in the production of soap and shower gel with the help of an olive oil company operating in the region. It is also planned that such shower gels and soaps produced shall be offered for sale at the stands to be erected at the foyer of the congress, and that the profit made shall be credited to the association.

The company first organised such promotional activities as preparing an e-bulletin, distributing posters to the members of the association, using the sales rep-

resentatives of the company to visit the members of the association and distributing promotional booklets, interviewing with the person who shall be the workshop instructor and the head of the association about the importance of the congress. Moreover, an academician, who may lecture on the importance of the use of olive oil for beauty and health, and an international speaker, expert on the topic of “changing and strengthening”, which is the main theme of the congress, are invited as well. Furthermore, dressmaking and cake-making workshops are also organised as part of the social activities of the congress within the hotel. In order to do this, the hotel’s chef and the kitchen area of the hotel are used for a workshop. One of the halls of the hotel is prepared as a sewing area and training is provided under the supervision of the X sewing machine company, which is a sponsor.

At first sight the model looks different and hard to organise for the company. Especially the workshops must be prepared carefully, as they will constitute an important marketing tool for this congress. However, after arranging the details of the organization the company was more positive towards the idea. The general manager indicated that the social program is very important for the participation, so that including creative marketing activities within the congress’ program will make it more attractive and increase the willingness to attend. Furthermore, the possibility for profit of the organization is also thought to increase not only because of the more appealing program, but also because of the sponsorship capabilities that it provides. So the managers of the company became generally convinced about the applicability of the model and its ability to increase the number of participants and the profit for the company.

The manager interviewed also indicated that this kind of model can not be used for every congress or meeting. Especially those meetings which have an intensive program can not use this model, as the creative workshops or activities take too much time to learn and to practice. He also suggested that other target groups, such as spouses, could be included in the model. While the group is having the meeting, their spouses

can attend the workshops. This may increase the revenue derived from the meeting, and provide an incentive for participants to attend with an accompanying person.

The applicability of the model can only be conclusively evaluated after the meeting has taken place. Therefore, the authors plan to continue the research with follow-up interviews. After the company uses the model, feedback on its effect on the organization's marketing activities will be obtained.

Conclusions

The importance of the model is due to the considerable demand for a congress and meetings from private companies, associations, unions and non-profit organisations. Hotel sales departments, tour operators, travel agencies, DMCs, event planners, which are included in distribution channels, carry out target market surveys for congress tourism and evaluate the incoming demand. They schedule such demand according to the seasonal conditions and make a proposal for dates. Moreover, depending on the seasonal conditions, creative tourism activities are also considered and decisions are made as to what workshops and experiences shall be used. Then, a product which is suitable for the target market is identified and the pricing stage commences. During this phase, the product may be priced both as a package or on an individual basis. While pricing a package tour, the rental for the place where the creative tourism experiences will be organised, the instructors for the workshops, the catering services, and the costs of congress tourism activities are included. Once the price of the product is fixed, promotional activities start in cooperation with transport companies and catering firms, considering the attractive aspects of the destination selected. Sales promotion activities are especially important for the promotion of the creative tourism experiences. Personal sales and advertising activities are used in the marketing of congress tourism as well. In the latest periods, congress centres are frequently promoted in the media. Finally, the mix is completed with the people factor, which is the last element of

the mix. The producer and instructor of the creative tourism experiences is a person. At the same time, the organisation and success of the congress activities also depend on the people factor, given that tourism is a labour-intensive sector. The mix is formed after the completion of all these stages and sales are planned to be realised, considering the consumer behaviours. Feedback is derived from the behaviour of consumers and the company sales. Accordingly, the marketing mix, the product mix, the program and the distribution mix are evaluated and controlled. The expected results from the model include increasing the number of participants and enhancing the motivation of the group.

Although the basic objective of congress tourism is formed by meeting organisations, a congress programme does not only consist of meetings. Leisure times of the meeting or after the meeting, various animation or cultural events, shopping, trips, excursions, etc. are organised. Therefore, congress activities must be compatible with other types of tourism in terms of time and space. In this context, the combination of creative tourism and congress tourism may occur. Creative tourism experiences are combined with the marketing mix of congress tourism, thus making congress tourism more efficient.

Although creative tourism has been discussed for more than a decade, the integration of the concept within current frameworks has not been analyzed. In this sense, the current article aims at providing some thought about the fit of creative tourism activities within the congress tourism marketing mix. Furthermore, the study also identifies the areas where creative tourism may add value and increase the competitiveness of the congress product. In this sense the study pointed to the importance of creative tourism as a profit enhancing capability for the organization. However, researchers also determine that this form of tourism may be used to increase the learning experience of the tourists. This in turn may result in greater satisfaction, while the values and culture of the destination can also be preserved. Therefore, it is also important that the topic be analyzed from the tourists and the local community perspectives. Further research needs to be

carried out to understand in more detail how effective creative tourism activities are to accomplish these objectives.

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