

PECULIARITIES OF PROJECT PLANNING IN TOURISM

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Abstract: The dynamic changes in the environment, in which the tourism companies work, make it necessary to search for a situational solution of a series of innovation tasks and for an introduction of new projects not described in details in the strategic or operative plan of the tourism company. Along with the periodic planning project teams are established with competences covering (and limited to) the solution of individual, we would rather say, many times unique problems.

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The managers of tourism companies are required to search for new solutions in order to meet the growing needs of consumers in tourism through the development and offer of new destinations and products. They more and more frequently show pursuit of creation of new tourism products that would let them enter new market niches. A major role to that regard is played by planning of tourism business.

The planning system of a tourism company is relatively differentiated and is an integral part of the management applied by it in time and space. The specialized literature provides a fairly clear differentiation of the system of concepts describing the contents of the planning process in the company. There is a particularly strong differentiation between the strategic, tactic and operative planning. Besides the stated major planning varieties some businesses apply in practice also (Weber, 1993):

- "Mobile" ("roller") planning at which the plan horizon is extended every year. The year passing "moves" the planning period one year ahead;
- Block planning - tasks are planned for implementation within the frames of "packed" periods - 2, 3 or 4 years. In practice this type of planning is rather of a nominal than of a practical significance;
- Project planning - individual plans are prepared for large-scale projects (for example housing construction, involvement of new business partners, technological renovation projects, etc.) These plans have one-time character and inter-subject complexity.

Strategic and operative planning studied and applied in their pure state describe objectives, tasks and activities that should be implemented in the conditions of a "regular", permanent development. The dynamic changes in the environment, in which the tourism companies work, make it necessary to search for a situational solution of a series of innovation tasks and for an introduction of new projects not described in details in the strategic or operative plan of the tourism company. For the solution of individual unique problems project teams are established together with periodic planning. The nature of work of those teams is such that the projects are much of a large scale, and on the other hand their implementation plays a role in the improvement of management quality in future, and therefore the project planning itself has a strategic significance.

The essence and organization of the project activity of the tourism company can be illustrated with the following conditional example from practice. By the means of an innovation of its information system a tourism company aims at the improvement of efficiency of its logistic activity. "Logistics is a leading management-supporting functional service that covers various fields: informatics, HR management and qualification, process and technological management and many others" (Bazhin, 2004, p.210). The project team established can comprise representatives of the departments of Marketing, Sales, operational organizers, system analysts, data processing specialists, as well as other types of experts. It is very important for the "project team leader to have at his/her disposal efficient means of identification and transmission of the activities planned and their interrelation" (Kamenov et al., 2005, p. 93).

A system for computer-aided planning and surveillance is required. "Planning techniques applicable in network conditions of work as the CPM (critical path method) or PERT (program evaluation and review technique, first developed by the US consulting company (Booze-Allen-Hamilton), are very useful in such systems" (Dimitrov, 2007, p. 80).

The choice of a team leader and his/her subordinates is an essential and responsible preliminary activity, on which the success or failure of the project naturally depends. The team leader should have the required competence allowing him/her to examine, analyze and systematize the individual steps in the project planning and implementation. He/she is in charge of the provision of the time and resources required for the implementation of the project objectives. In addition to the peculiarities of planning in tourism "the good project leader should be aware of a variety of scientific subjects and techniques. This is of a particular significance as more and more projects contain technical, financial, marketing and organizational niceties which can spoil even the best plan" (Houser and Clausing, 1988, p.68).

The Project Management Institute in the USA defines six major functions related to the project leader (Shtub et al., 1994):

1. Manages the scope of project by defining the objectives and activities that are to be performed;
2. Manages the human resources involved in the project;

3. Manages the communications so that the participating parties have at their disposal sufficient information for the project implementation;
4. Manages the time by time-schedules planning and implementing;
5. Manages the quality so that the results from the project implementation are satisfactory;
6. Manages the expenses so that the project is implemented at the least actual cost and if possible within the budget frames.

In the event of projects of particular importance (development of a new product or introduction of an innovation), taking long time and requiring full devotion, the implementation can be controlled by a project team. Staff employed on full-time basis is involved in the project and is placed among the other members of the team. The project has its own management structure and budget, but can also be a section within the company structure (McCullum and Sherman, 1991).

Once the team has been formed it proceeds to the virtual activity. Due to the fact that the project planning produces “products” that will be useful to the strategic and operative management, it to one extent or another takes into consideration the nature of the organizational structure of the tourism company. “The organizational structure, process organization and corporate culture have a significant influence on the information system architecture. As in building of an edifice, the development of an information system should be planned and projected before the use of the system itself” (Kilgus, 1994, p. 109). Figure 1 provides an illustrative notion of the contents of the process of building and commissioning into operation of an information project in tourism.

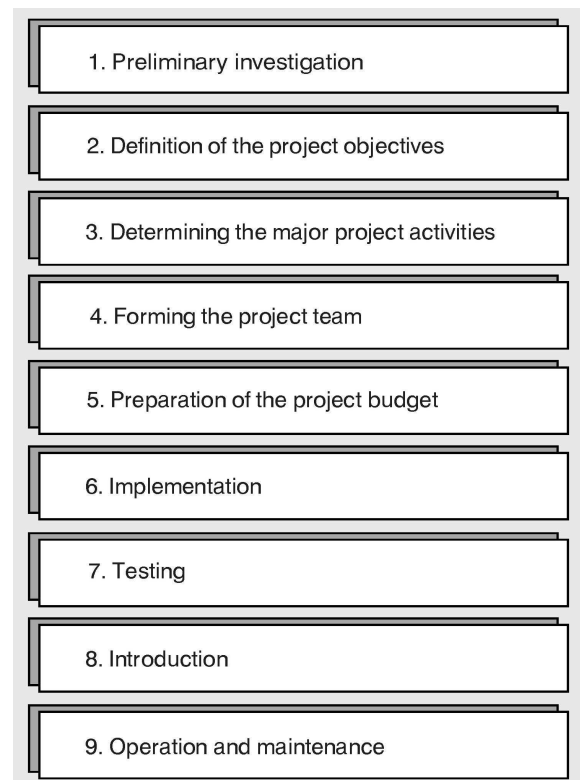
During the first phase the particular objectives to be achieved are defined. The team summarizes variants of individual economic activities and prepares a detailed plan of the following phases. Many times it is on the phase of projecting when a conclusion is made that the further activities will be inexpedient or that corrections and improvements should be made.

The project itself is a competent solution describing the organizational algorithm and backed by solid computer support. Prior to proceeding to the project implementation a team is formed that will implement and be in charge of the implementation of the major activities and a budget of the project is set, too. At the stage of implementation the so-called standard software is adjusted to the needs of the tourism company or own programs and data banks are created. At testing the project team together with specialists – the future project users, checks if the organizational algorithm and the belonging software meet the practical needs. This is followed by the introduction of the project solutions, which eventually require additional support from organizers and information. During the maintenance and operation some errors and inexpedient solutions (prescriptions) are removed, as well as possible claims made by the immediate user – the office of “Logistics”.

For the purposes of logistics projects are developed, too, concerning the joint work in the field of system engineering and preparation of joint information platforms with other

tourism companies, e.g. within a holding. These external projects, incl. the Outsourcing-projects contribute to the maximum use of synergy within the holding. With the help of such projects problems related to accountancy can be solved, as well as individual tasks related to offering of extra services in customers’ attendance in the tourism company.

FIGURE 1. CONTENTS OF INFORMATION INNOVATION IN TOURISM



Another area of application of project planning is the integration of other tourism companies to the logistic “platform” of a given company, called Insourcing-projects. The project planning is also a serious support of cross-border cooperation in tourism. The list of targets of project planning in the tourism companies is complemented by targets in the field of construction - new construction or reconstruction of the existing buildings, for HR management, for consolidation and automation of the processes in booking and documents processing, for the development of a new tourism product, etc.

One of the greatest advantages of the project planning is its solid grounding - in the form of targets, algorithm, budget and time lines. Its carriers normally are sufficiently competent specialists in tourism which guarantees preciseness at the introduction of planned procedures into the system of mobile (“rolled”) planning. The latter, as already explained, every year moves the planned horizon one year ahead.

A serious disadvantage of project planning is that “the focus on the respective planned tasks brings with it the danger to lose from sight the tourism company in general with all its capacities and restrictions, and to put only an isolated project in the centre of attention” (Hax and Majluf, 1991, p.109).

In order to overcome eventual problems of similar nature it is necessary to optimize the project planning activity of the tourism company. The common methodological prerequisite for that is the clear definition of the management objectives of "production" and "non-production" sense. That lies within the competence of strategic management. The scale of the project planning itself depends to a large extent on the presented real and feasible results from the project activity. Of course, the results from the project activity can hardly be predicted and even hardly can the necessary conditions be fixed requiring an "extraordinary" project planning.

For the optimization of the project planning it is necessary to have also:

- clear definition of the project objectives and activities, of the persons commissioning and implementing it;
- project structuring in terms of time, activities and stages, in terms of implementers;
- introduction of project controlling as a tool by the means of which the current project expenses are established, as well as the deviation from their planned levels, economy of funds, the weak points of the projects are shown and the problems for future implementation of project activities are discovered.

The project teams of the large tourism companies work in close cooperation with the management body of the tourism company. Its task is to facilitate the activity of the planning instances in regard to the "roller" planning already mentioned. This on its part reveals the necessity of coordination between the latter and the project planning.

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