

(PP) LITHUANIAN SPORT TOURISM AND LEISURE ENTREPRENEURSHIP. HOW BRIGHT THE FUTURE IS?¹¹

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Introduction

Lithuania's accession to the European Community in 2004 has been of special significance to the development of tourism in Lithuania. Income from inbound tourism - increased 23% in 2005 over that of 2004. Preliminary data shows that 2 million tourists visited the country in 2005. The Capital city, Vilnius, attracted the vast majority of tourists, but we have seen increased tourist visitations in other parts of the country as well. Lithuania has a great and attractive potential for cultural and natural tourism. Five national as well as thirty smaller regional parks, thousands of ecologically clean lakes, five Lithuanian themes are inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

So far, however, leisure and entertainment infrastructure has surely been underdeveloped in Lithuania. Therefore, within the last 2-3 years, in addition to the existing infrastructure, attention was paid to the development of leisure and entertainment tourism objects, i.e. construction and reconstruction of bicycle and pedestrian routes, water tourism routes, beaches, recreation grounds, camping areas, parks, berths and piers, public sports facilities, water entertainment areas, etc. Therefore, the participation in the project title "Valorisation of Leonardo da Vinci tourism products in new contexts and countries" (Valeourism) in the partnership with main institutions Patras University (Greece) and Intercollege (Cyprus) was extremely important.

Project and partners

The specific aim of the project is to develop valorisation activities to further disseminate and exploit existing Leonardo da Vinci products related to tourism in new countries (i.e., Greece, Lithuania, Cyprus) and new contexts, which relate to alternative forms of tourism (leisure and sport tourism). The project was based on several in advance planned logical activities. One of the first realised activities was research based on the identification of the situation of the sport tourism organizations and tourism enterprises acting in three different countries. Therefore, this paper presents the results of the Lithuanian situation.

The survey was conducted through self-administered questionnaires completed by Lithuanian sport tourism organizations and tourism enterprises by post, fax and e-mail during January-February, 2006. The research data has been processed applying SPSS 13.0 software.

Results

The survey results revealed that Lithuanian sport tourism organizations have been in business for four years in average and tourism enterprises – for eight years. By the form of ownership the major part of both sport tourism organizations and tourism enterprises are private companies, however the survey also included non-for-profit organizations.

¹ This research has been supported by the Leonardo da Vinci Project titled "Valorisation of Leonardo da Vinci Tourism Products in New Contexts and Countries", Contract nr 2005-1980-001LE273VAL.

The programs and/or types of services provided by sport tourism organizations are active sport tourism and learning or practicing a sport or physical activity. These organizations arrange various sport events and sport competitions all year round irrespective of the season.

HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Sport tourism organizations are more numerous in staff than tourism enterprises. Tourism enterprises have 60 percent of full-time employees while sport tourism organizations have more employees working part-time. All surveyed sport tourism organizations and almost all tourism enterprises employ women. However not a single sport tourism organization has women in management positions. Sport tourism organizations apply the principles of human resource management in personnel selection and recruitment process and for employee training.

VOCATIONAL NEEDS & TRAINING

The survey results revealed that the majority of respondents from both groups do not have any structured systems of vocational needs analysis and training. However, more than half of the respondents assess the efficiency of employee training. Assumingly, sport tourism organizations and tourism enterprises find employee training and assessment important, but lack systematic approach to this matter. Service quality, customer relation's management, health and safety are the core skills for the staff of sport tourism organizations to achieve the goals of the organization in the most efficient manner. IT related skills, such as e-marketing, e-sales and booking, are least mastered and therefore, hinder the successful development of the organization.

MARKETING ACTIVITIES

The survey results revealed that both sport tourism organizations and tourism enterprises pursue similar marketing goals: attract new customers, provide better products and services than those of competitors and retain customer satisfaction.

The basic activities and services offered by sport tourism organizations are: active recreation, arrangement of sport camps and sport events, arrangement of sport competitions, etc. The survey proved the assumption that Lithuanians make up the biggest market (85%). Sport tourism organizations use TV as an advertising means more often than tourism enterprises.

The philosophy and practice of both sport tourism organizations and tourism enterprises is based on paying great attention to customer satisfaction, assessing their needs and maintaining regular contacts. The survey has revealed that sport tourism organizations do not appreciate the variety of their products and services perhaps due to yet underdeveloped range of services.

USE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES

The basic information and communication technologies (ICT) employed by sport tourism organizations are intranet, Internet, e-mail and homepage. Respondents of both groups most often use their homepages to promote and advertise the company's products, services and abilities, to respond to the clients about the availability of products, booking terms etc. Sport tourism organizations find their homepages very important for creating and updating customer database, for sending e-mails at least one a year to inform the market about new services and for retaining their customers. Homepages of survey respondents are in Lithuanian; half of homepages are also in English. Tourism enterprises also use other languages – Russian, German and French.

Discussion

Lithuanian tourism policy statements cover active tourism promotion. The human resource management, the marketing activities and the usage of ICT in sport tourism organizations are important factors to be developed for a more efficient supply in the market. The local customers as well as the foreigners have become more demanding, thus, the requirements for the sport tourism organizations rise.

References

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