



# Tourism product development and product diversification in destinations



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## HIGHLIGHTS

- The assembly of primary tourism products varies between destinations.
- Conceptual frameworks of destination product development and diversification.
- There are niche, mass, integrative and parallel destination product features.
- Spatial and thematic product links and synergies often develop in destinations.
- A typology of destination product intensification and diversification options.

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## ABSTRACT

Primary tourism products are key draw cards which attract tourists to particular destinations. The diversification, intensification and linkage of these products can be crucial for the competitiveness and sustainable development of destinations. Yet these diverse features and relationships of primary tourism products in destinations are neglected in existing research. This paper develops two conceptual frameworks which assist with analyzing and understanding the features, relationships and strategic options associated with tourism product development, concentration, diversification and intensification in destinations. Tourism product features and options considered here include the development of niche and mass tourism products, parallel and integrative diversification, and thematic and spatial synergies between products. A typology of strategic options for tourism product development and assembly in destinations is presented which is based on the degree of intensification and of concentration and diversification of tourism products.

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## 1. Introduction

Destinations depend on their primary tourism products as key pull factors motivating tourists to visit them. The paper's analysis focuses on primary tourism products rather than on products which are less likely to provide a substantial tourist draw to specific destinations, such as accommodation, food services and transportation (Jansen-Verbeke, 1986). The attraction of destinations for tourists normally depends on the destinations' physical, environmental and socio-cultural characteristics or attributes as primary tourism products (Jafari, 1982). The physical and environmental attributes include the climatic conditions, landscape and ecology,

and the socio-cultural attributes include the history, politics, art, economic activities, ways of life, monuments, individual buildings and built environment. They are legacies in destinations of physical features and environment, and also of society's socio-economic and cultural history, and they are also inter-related. Various activities can be associated with these characteristics, such as packaging and promotion by the tourism industry, which make them more available to tourists and thus more readily consumed by them. Tourists can have expectations about the experiences they want to gain connected with the legacy of environmental and socio-cultural characteristics of specific destinations. The tourism industry often uses the environmental and socio-cultural attributes in destinations due to their availability and because of established tourist expectations, and there can be a range of such attributes that might be developed and promoted as primary tourism products. At other times, the tourism industry also creates new tourism products in a

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destination which are not associated with the place's specific legacies.

The development of primary tourism products in destinations is complex due to the many elements associated with these products. Smith (1994) argues that primary tourism products comprise a complex amalgam of elements, such as physical plant (including natural features and weather), the input of services, hospitality, choices for tourists, tourist involvement in the delivery of services, and also experiences. Among these elements some are more tangible and others are more intangible. The more intangible elements, for example, include the representations and images of primary tourism products, which the tourism industry or other communication channels may promote, as well as the cultural and symbolic meanings tourists associate with these products (Morgan, 2014; Murphy, Pritchard, & Smith, 2000). Smith (1994, p. 582; Xu, 2010) also contends that “tourism products are fundamentally experiences”, with experiences seen as central to tourist choice and satisfaction (Smith, 1994, p. 582; Xu, 2010). Consideration needs to be given to both more tangible and more intangible aspects of primary tourism products in destinations, together with interconnections between them. A further complication is that destinations often develop with several primary tourism products, and among them there are usually complex relationships, synergies and tensions. The paper's assessment of primary tourism products in destinations recognizes these complexities for individual products and their combinations within destinations.

The analysis considers the development of primary tourism products in destinations, notably their concentration and diversification. The elements and processes associated with product concentration and diversification are highly important for tourist destination development. There are many reasons for their importance, and thus why we need a fuller and more conceptually-informed understanding of them. In particular, there is a need for destinations to develop their primary tourism products appropriately, such as by ensuring there is a sufficient number and diversity of these products, they have coherence, and there are synergies and linkages between them (Farmaki, 2012; Jansen-Verbeke, 1986; Lawton & Weaver, 2006). Destinations require a suitable number and mix of such products, and also mutually beneficial and cooperative relationships between them, so that they can meet such strategic objectives as having profitable products and working toward sustainable development and competitive advantage. Thus, destinations have fundamental strategic options for their tourism product diversity, that is whether there is product concentration or diversification, and for their tourism product intensification, that is whether they develop niche or mass tourism products according to the desired market size and physical scale of development. Yet these destination product features are often determined by uncoordinated individual market-based decisions rather than by coordinated destination-level policies and market interventions.

Destinations often face particularly difficult choices around tourism product diversity. For example, both a tourism product diversity strategy, and alternatively a strategy of concentrating on just one or a few products, have potential advantages for destination competitiveness and sustainability.

First, in the case of tourism product diversity, this can enhance destination competitiveness by offering varied experiences and activities, greater potential for customized products that meet tourists' individual needs and interests, and enhanced flexibility in response to changing tourist tastes and demand. Diverse tourism products can also be linked through synergistic relationships and cooperative arrangements, such as by creating thematic linkages, and by securing improved coordination and shared costs through joint marketing. Such linkages can package destination attractions together, thereby increasing tourist choice and also offering

efficiencies and economies for individual attractions (Bramwell, 2004a; Brunori & Rossi, 2000; Farmaki, 2012; Nordin, 2003). Product diversification can also encourage “alternative” products that potentially are more socially and environmentally sustainable for destinations, such as because they encourage appreciation of a destination's special character, involve businesses that are locally-owned, or because the products are small-scale in terms of tourist numbers and infrastructure requirements (Bramwell, 2004a; Brunori & Rossi, 2000; Nordin, 2003).

Second, in the case of product concentration in destinations, based on only one or a few tourism products, then this can also have some advantages for competitiveness and sustainable development. Such destinations may succeed in establishing a coherent image and reputation that appeals to many tourists with interests in the tourism products' specific features and experiences. In such contexts tourism businesses might also benefit from specialization as well as from their accumulated expertise in satisfying the well-understood requirements of a specific tourist market. They might also benefit from cooperation with other businesses, which may be easier as they have some clear shared interests. If the product in such destinations appeals to a mass market it may have economic advantages in terms of economies of scale and through sharing tourist infrastructure and facilities (Bramwell, 2004a; Fyall & Garrod, 2005). Thus, in some circumstances tourism product concentration can encourage destination competitiveness, although inevitably there are risks in focusing only on one or a few products. This destination strategy can at times also have certain advantages for sustainable development. The strategy, for example, is often evident in mass tourism coastal resorts, and there can be benefits from concentrating tourism pressures within these resorts as the impacts are localized and thus can be better managed.

In such ways, both tourism concentration and diversification have potential advantages for business profitability, destination competitiveness and sustainable development. Importantly, both strategies also have potential disadvantages for commercial viability and for sustainability, and those disadvantages can be very substantial. It is necessary for policy makers, planners, businesses and citizens to be aware of such potential advantages and disadvantages, and to consider them carefully in the specific context and circumstances of each destination. Before such assessments can be made, however, a sound appreciation is required of the elements, processes and linkages involved in primary tourism product development in destinations. To assist with these assessments, the paper identifies and evaluates several of the most significant elements, processes and linkages. The paper makes a new contribution by providing a fuller understanding of these crucial issues for destinations, including by developing conceptual frameworks to aid understanding.

The paper meets a gap in current knowledge because there is only limited in-depth research focused on conceptualizing and analyzing the many relationships and issues associated with destination-based tourism product concentration and diversification. Much of the limited amount of analytical research relevant to this topic deals with it as only one aspect of another broader theme, or looks at only selected aspects of the topic. Dwyer and Kim (2003) and Ritchie and Crouch (2003), for example, discuss the appeal of tourism products as just one feature of the relative competitiveness of destinations. Butler (1980) examines tourism product development but as only one of several relationships in his conceptualization of evolutionary destination life cycles. Specific thematic and spatial linkages between attractions in destinations are evaluated by Weidenfeld, Butler, and Williams (2010, 2011), who see them as providing opportunities for the tourism sector from innovation and increased competitiveness (Nordin, 2003). Bramwell (2004a, 2004b) examines the potential benefits and costs for sustainable

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