

Education Sector as a Stakeholder of Destination Management Organizations: Cooperation of Local DMOs with Educational Institutions

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The main purpose of this article is to present the activities of local DMOs (destination management organizations) in the context of the development of the tourist education sector in Poland. The article provides the results of the authors' research on the collaboration between DMOs and the representatives of the educational sector in Poland, especially in the area of the training of professionally prepared personnel for the operation of the market of tourist services.

1. Introduction

The present-day tourism economy is based, to a significant extent, on cooperation between the individual sectors that are involved in its development. The so-called destination management organizations (DMOs) are those entities that are to a significant degree responsible for this issue. DMOs (in the relevant literature also referred to as destination marketing organizations)¹ are considered to be one of the more important entities that deal with tourism policy. This concerns various levels of governmental or local administration. The area of the activities of DMOs is extensive. It involves not only strictly marketing activities but to a significant extent any undertakings in the area of destination management.² The realization of these objectives is possible among others owing to a wide cooperation with different entities that are interested in the destination development. As a matter of fact, the very idea of the functioning of DMOs is based chiefly on the principles of cooperation (or even partnership). According to S. Klein, over a period of many years, DMOs mainly occurred in the form of governmental institutions. Nevertheless, increasing numbers of DMOs have been formed recently, which are based on the principles of public and private cooperation or even in the form of entirely private entities.³ The creation of

DMOs under public and private partnership offers definitely better possibilities of development and implementation of various marketing initiatives.⁴ It can be assumed that to a significant extent, those entities that represent the sector of education ought to be one of the more important partners of DMOs.

This article covers the issue of activities pursued by local DMOs in the context of the development of the education sector in Poland. Its purpose is an analysis of the cooperation between the DMOs analysed and those entities that represent the sector of education (chiefly in the area of tourism). The authors' primary intention was to depict this cooperation solely from the perspective of DMOs. It was not the intention of the authors to describe the activities of the education sector in the scope of joint initiatives with DMOs. Therefore, cooperation is presented mainly from the perspective of local DMOs. A discussion of the theoretical issues involved precedes the analysis of the results of the authors' research. A general characterization of the organization of tourism in Poland formed the point of departure.

2. Background and Literature Review

2.1. The Idea of DMO

Destination Management Organizations are defined by the World Tourism Organisation (UN-WTO) as '[...] those organizations which are responsible for management and/or marketing of individual tourist destinations'.⁵ According to Majewski⁶ these are '[...] organizations which are responsible for the coordination and supporting of the activities of all the entities involved in the marketing of destinations'. Collins and Buhalis define Destination Management Organisations as the providers of products and information technology services to customers, agents and suppliers in the sector of tourism.⁷ According to Gretzel, Fesenmaier, Formica and O'Leary,⁸ Destination Management Organisations are non-profit entities that aim at the generation of the visits of tourists in a given area. According to van Harsseel,⁹ DMOs mean organizations that lead a community's hospitality and tourism industry and are often a driving force behind local economic development plans.

Destination Management Organizations may occur in one of the following forms: national tourism authorities (NTAs) or organizations (NTOs) (responsible for management and marketing of tourism at a national level); regional, provincial or state DMOs (RTOs) (responsible for the management and/or marketing of tourism in a geographic region defined for that purpose, sometimes but not always an administrative or local government region such as a county, state or province) and local DMOs, (responsible for the management and/or marketing of tourism based on a smaller geographic area or city/town). According to other sources, DMOs may occur as: national tourism organizations, Regional/provincial state tourist organizations, City tourism organizations, Coastal resort organizations, Ski or other sports organizations.¹⁰

2.2. Scope of DMOs Activities

In the case of DMOs, one may talk about a considerable diversity of the activities undertaken and the scope of responsibilities. In the relevant literature, marketing

(in particular, promotion) is most frequently referred to as the primary area of research concerning DMOs. This view is maintained by many scientists. For example, the significance of marketing activities conducted by DMOs was emphasized by Morgan, Pritchard and Pride.¹¹ According to them, these should rather focus on emotional aspects, and not on emphasizing tangible benefits resulting from visiting a destination. Collins and Buhalis believe that DMOs deal with the promotion of the destination, i.e. a state, a region or a city as a tourist brand.⁷ The scope of the functions of DMOs is also emphasized by Getz, Anderson and Sheehan, who state that their basic objectives concern marketing and sales. What is interesting is that the authors claim that the other functions of DMOs, especially product design and development are 'ignored or play a minute role in practice'.¹² The first years of the 21st century demonstrate that the area of the basic activities of DMOs has been considerably extended to include among others non-marketing activities. It is to be explicitly emphasized that the area of DMOs activities is undergoing a change. This is observed among others by U. Wagenseil,¹³ who indicates three essential spheres of DMOs activities, i.e. marketing, product management and the so-called creation of an appropriate environment. However, as emphasized by Crouch,¹⁴ the 'M' in 'DMO' means comprehensive 'management' rather than merely 'marketing'.

One may also view the scope of activities undertaken by DMOs with respect to the so-called internal and external objectives. All the objectives of DMOs were presented by Batarow, Bode and Jacobsen³ and categorized in two groups, i.e.:

- external destination marketing (EDM) any activities aimed at attracting tourists to the destinations, also by means of marketing activities on the Internet, via publications and brochures and trade fairs, and
- internal destination development (IDD) activities aimed at the development of tourism in the destination among others through the development of human resources, proper arrangement of attractions and tourism resources, sustainable development, etc.

To sum up, the scope of the activities and responsibilities of present-day DMOs is quite wide. This issue is dealt with by many scholars. Bornhorst, Ritchie and Sheehan carried out a detailed analysis of the current status of research related to DMOs.¹⁵ A review of research demonstrated a diversity of research methods applied, results achieved, period covered by research as well as the subject of analyses (including research focused on the selection of the destination and purchasers' behaviours, finance management, marketing, information and research, membership in organizations and operational strategy). The research results analysed mainly focused on marketing including promotion, i.e. traditional objectives realized by DMOs. Research in this area covered a number of issues, including the effectiveness of various forms of promotions, the measurement and management of the image of the destination, or cooperation in the area marketing activities. The authors demonstrated that considering the whole spectrum of current research related to DMOs, the issue paid least attention to was the financial one.

2.3. *Cooperation with External Environment as an Element of DMOs Activities. Stakeholders of DMOs*

How collaboration affects the market performance remains an important issue.¹⁶ It is hard to talk about the development of a destination and simultaneously about the success of the activities pursued by DMOs without considering cooperation with the external environment. As emphasized by Wagenseil, the objectives of DMOs should concentrate on several spheres, i.e. planning, information, design of tourist offer, marketing communication, sale and lobbying.¹³ With regard to the latter, special significance is attributed to the issues of cooperation with external entities. Many authors emphasize cooperation as one of the pillars of the functioning of present-day DMOs. For example, Majewski argues for a recognition of all those entities that may be interested in development, and for 'attracting these'.⁶ Morrison, Bruen and Anderson stress the importance for the realization of the objectives of the organizations of:

- an 'industry coordinator' providing a clear focus and encouraging less industry fragmentation so as to share in the growing benefits of tourism,
- a 'quasi-public representative' adding legitimacy for the industry and protection to individual and group visitors.¹⁷

Partnership or areas of cooperation with DMOs may occur at different levels, e.g. between individual administrative levels (regional or local), or between individual entities (private or public sectors). Increasingly, the role of DMOs is to assist in the development and maintenance of those partnerships, particularly to facilitate the planning and delivery of destination management to ensure a quality experience to visitors.¹⁸

The tourism industry involves a wide range of stakeholders.¹⁹ The problem of the stakeholder has been frequently defined and analysed in literature.²⁰ As Freeman⁵³ puts it, a stakeholder is 'any group or an individual who can affect, or is affected by, the achievement of a corporation's purpose'. Stakeholders are also defined as various players at a destination, who are involved in or have an interest in tourism planning and development.²¹ A number of other definitions differ to, a certain extent, one from another depending on the kind of economic connections with an organization.^{22–24} Another issue concerns the significance of stakeholders in the various aspects of the functioning of the tourist market, such as public administration,²⁵ tourism planning²⁶ or place branding.²⁷ Regardless of the differences in the understanding of the definition of the stakeholder, it is to be emphasized that present-day DMOs potentially have a great diversity of stakeholders. However, no one has provided empirical evidence as to their identity.²⁸ Apart from theoretical deliberations, the relevant literature also comprises a significant number of empirical studies on stakeholders.^{29–35}

It is worth recalling that a significant part of stakeholders are members of various DMO-type structures. The trend of DMOs offering various types of commercial memberships is growing and, accordingly, the number of businesses applying for membership with DMOs is increasing. No longer is it only stakeholders of the tourism industry that become members of a DMOs, but any business 'that feels it might be attractive to individual leisure travelers or convention attendees might join a bureau'.³⁶

It is easy to see that proper cooperation between DMOs and stakeholders brings about numerous effects in the area of marketing initiatives. These are evident even in spite of small financial expenditures.³⁷ What is more, such cooperation brings with it definitely greater benefits than those achieved by individual entities that function on their own only.³⁸

2.4. Activities of DMOs in the Area of Education. The Educational Sector as a Stakeholder of DMOs

Education and training are essential in the process of performance management.³⁹ They are particularly important for gaining a competitive advantage on the tourism market. Without the efficient use of comparative resources, such as human resources and the skills and availability of the region's labour force, no competitive advantage can be achieved.¹ As Kamann states, education and training can take on different forms: it can take place by means of in-house or on-the-job training, external workshops or seminars or by visiting trade events and conventions and can be related to a specific field or cover a broad subject area.³⁹ The activities themselves may address: the personnel of DMOs, the members of DMOs and the partners of DMOs. The author examined 61 Destination Management Organizations across Europe. As far as the allocation of current budgets was concerned, activities related to education and training only ranked ninth of 17 categories examined. As far as future allocation plans were concerned, activities aimed at training and education ranked sixth.³⁹ As to why education and training come in so low, Kamann observes, among potential causes, financial considerations (51.43%)³⁹ and, further, time limitations (17.14%) and a shortage of appropriate training personnel (11.43%). The duration of vocational training (857%) also makes DMOs refrain from offering opportunities for training and development to its staff members.

Among the various types of stakeholders of DMOs the educational sector, widely conceived and including higher education, can be safely assumed to be one. The cooperation between DMOs and universities is addressed by Lee and Wicks.⁴⁰ They see the DMO employees' role as dual: communication with the students and communication with the stakeholders of the tourism business. Hankinson also emphasizes the significance of the educational sector, ranking it with the media, one of the four categories of stakeholders.⁴¹ What is more, the educational sector is recognized as one of the main actors in the tourist destination. It is included in the so-called public entities, one of six groups, i.e. economic tourism agents, economic agents from other sectors, non-profit organizations, public entities, local population and tourists.⁴² M.R. K. Mohd Nor lists two elements of the educational sector as a stakeholder of DMOs, i.e. educators and students.⁴³ The role of the educators in tourism is important to develop human resources with the skills and knowledge needed by the industry.⁴⁴ On the other hand, tourism education and training are sometimes considered to be irrelevant to the needs of the employer.⁴⁵ Indeed, the tourism industry has been largely dissatisfied with the theoretical approach in tourism education, which fails to provide the skilled labour needed.⁴⁶ To sum up, the university sector may (and should be) treated as one of the stakeholders of DMOs. However, opinions on this topic vary. A review of the literature demonstrates that this sector is not treated as a typical

stakeholder of DMOs. For example, the research carried out by Sheenan and Ritchie shows that in the opinion of 91 CEOs, the following were seen listed as the most important stakeholders of DMOs: hotels/hotel associations (62.6%), city/local government (60.4%) and regional/county government (29.7%).²⁸ The university/college sector ranked only twelfth (4.4%). Based on a detailed analysis of data, the authors created a matrix that depicts the influence of the individual stakeholders in the activities of DMOs (as a potential for cooperation and a potential for threats). Universities/colleges were found in the group that had a high potential for cooperation with simultaneously a low potential for threat.

3. Methodology

DMOs have a number of tools at their disposal to achieve their goals. The most essential tasks of local DMOs include the following: to conduct campaigns to drive business, particularly for SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises), to provide unbiased information services, to operate/facilitate bookings, destination coordination and management, to take care of visitor information and reservations, provide training and education, give business advice, product 'start-ups', encourage and facilitate events development and management, attractions development and management, strategy, research and development.¹⁸

In what follows we present the results of our own research into the cooperation realized between DMOs and the representatives of the educational sector. The area we focused upon constitutes one of the seven tourist macro-regions of Poland as defined by the Institute of Tourism in Warsaw, i.e. the Region of the Baltic Sea Coast and the Pomeranian Lake District (Pomerania), covering the provinces of Pomorskie and Zachodniopomorskie. The choice of this region for research purposes is not accidental. The following factors are decisive in terms of what attracts tourists to Pomerania: the vicinity of the sea, the length of the shore line (ca. 500 km), a large area of inland waters (Pomorskie Province: 9.6%, Zachodniopomorskie Province: 12.0%), a high level of forestation (35.4% and 34.2% respectively), an ecologically clean environment as well as a favourable stimulative bio-climate by the sea.⁴⁷ Pomorskie Province is one of the most attractive provinces in Poland, enjoying significant popularity among foreign tourists (6.4% of arrival movement to Poland)⁴⁸, and even more among national tourists (13.3% of national tourism movement).⁴⁹ What makes Pomorskie Province particularly distinctive is the fact that it hosts the highest number of local tourism organizations: 23, or 19% of all such organizations in the country.⁵⁰ In Zachodniopomorskie Province there are currently 11 local tourist organizations, or nearly 9% of all the organizations of this type in Poland.

4. Results and Discussion

A determination of the participation of the education sector as a potential stakeholder of DMOs was the point of departure for an assessment of the tasks performed by local DMOs in relation to the development of education. Considering the wide scope of the

potential spheres of cooperation, it was only the percentage of those entities that belong to DMOs (members) and represent the education sector that was determined. The research was carried out via direct telephone contact and an analysis of the websites of local tourism organizations in Poland. Data were collected for 45 entities (36.3%) out of 124 organizations of this type. In the group of 45 organizations examined, only 12 (26.7%) counted a representative of the educational sector among their members.

An analysis of the various aspects of cooperation between local tourism organizations and educational institutions that function in the area examined (including vocational schools, post-secondary schools and universities) was another element of the research carried out. To a great extent, the research carried out concerned the role of local tourism organizations in the activities aimed at raising the level of tourist education in Pomerania. Forty-six all the local tourism organizations that function in the territory of Pomorskie and Zachodniopomorskie Provinces were covered by the research. A diagnostic survey method with the use of a questionnaire technique was used in the analysis. A questionnaire form consisting of six closed questions was used as a research tool. Replies were obtained from 34 local DMOs (73.9% of the total of organizations). The investigations covered various aspects of the cooperation of local tourism organizations with educational institutions in the area of tourism development in Pomerania.

The analysis carried out demonstrated that cooperation of this type was declared by only 32.4% of the sample examined. The remaining local tourism organizations examined (i.e. 67.6%) do not undertake any activities in this regard. In what follows, the results presented concern this part of the research sample, and reveal any form of cooperation (32.4%, i.e. $N = 11$).

Those educational institutions that local tourism organizations cooperate with are educational institutions that provide education both to pupils and students at different levels (including vocational schools, secondary schools with a vocational profile, post-secondary schools and schools) – see Table 1.

A prevailing majority of local tourism organizations (63.6%) that do cooperate with the educational sector do so with universities, while only 36.4% of the local tourism organizations concerned cooperate with post-secondary schools.

The cooperation of local tourism organizations with educational institutions takes many forms. The most frequent forms consist of accepting pupils and students for traineeships (63.6% of the sample examined), the organization of lectures and speeches by the personnel of local tourism organizations at schools and universities (45.5%), and participation of the personnel and members of local tourism organizations in the process of education (36.4%, including elaborating curricula for the individual fields of study, individual subject programs, conducting didactic classes: lectures, classes, seminars, and so on) (Table 2).

The remaining forms of cooperation include the organization of branch conferences, the organization of scientific conferences, the realization of research projects, and the organization of workshops, tourist fairs and labour fairs for the graduates of secondary schools and universities (Table 2).

Of the local tourism organizations analysed, 54.5% counted representatives of educational institutions (including teachers) or people of science (academic teachers)

Table 1. Educational institutions with which local tourism organization cooperate.

Educational institutions	Cooperation (in %)
Postsecondary schools	36.4
Secondary schools with vocational profiles	45.5
Vocational schools	54.5
Higher schools	63.6

Source: Authors' own research.

Table 2. Forms of cooperation of local tourism organization with educational institutions.

Forms of cooperation	Cooperation (in %)
Joint organization of workshops, tourist fairs and labour fairs	10.0
Participation in research projects	18.9
Joint organization of scientific conferences	18.9
Joint organization of branch conferences	27.3
Participation of the personnel and members of organizations in the education process of pupils and students	36.4
Lectures and speeches in schools	45.5
Professional training	63.6

Source: Authors' own research.

among their members, pointing to a quite a significant involvement of the representatives of education in the functioning of such organizations.

The analysis carried out also concerned the level of satisfaction on the part of those who manage tourist organizations in cooperation with educational institutions. In fact, a majority of the local tourism organizations examined are not satisfied with the forms of cooperation realized (63.3%). In the replies submitted, the following problems were most frequently cited: lack of cooperation in the implementation of specific tourism projects of various types (85.7%) and too narrow and limited a nature of cooperation of this type, chiefly because of the representatives of education (71.4%) – see Table 3.

The representatives of the local tourism organizations of Pomerania further complained that the representatives of education (mainly higher education) do not collect recommendations from local tourism organizations when it comes to the creation of new fields of education (or specialties) in line with the dynamically developing tourist services market in a region with a huge tourism potential.

Those local tourism organizations that are satisfied with the cooperation with educational institutions emphasized that the greatest benefits are: strictly educational activities and realization of joint projects connected with tourism. In both cases, such answers were provided by 100% of the local tourism organizations analysed (Table 4).

Table 3. Main indications of dissatisfaction on the part of local tourism organizations with cooperation with educational institutions.

Main indications of dissatisfaction	Indications (in %)
No collection of recommendations by educational institutions to create new fields of education	42.8
No cooperation in the creation of teaching curricula	57.1
Limited scope of cooperation	71.4
No cooperation in the realization of tourism projects	85.7

Source: Authors' own research.

Table 4. Main indications of satisfaction on the part of local tourism organizations with cooperation with educational institutions

Main indications of satisfaction	Indications (in %)
Creation of tourism clusters	50.0
Exchange of experience	75.0
Benefits from taking in trainees	75.0
Realization of joint projects connected with tourism	100.0
Strictly educational activities	100.0

Source: Authors' own research.

Other positive aspects resulting from the cooperation of local tourism organizations with educational institutions include benefits for both parties in connection with taking in trainees in local tourism organizations. After the completion of school, part of them may expect to be employed by a given local tourism organization or by those organizations that are its members. It is undoubtedly a benefit for universities whose essential tasks currently include offering help to their graduates in building professional careers. Benefits for local tourist organizations mainly consist of the recruitment of a theoretically and practically well-prepared employee. Furthermore, the advantages of cooperation include a widely understood bilateral exchange of experience and cooperation in the creation of tourism clusters.

To sum up the current deliberations, one needs to emphasize that the cooperation of local tourist organizations with educational institutions is a positive phenomenon. It is important for Pomerania, with its many tourist attractions and concurrently huge potential for the development of tourism, that it can count on professionally prepared and educated personnel to attend tourists. Otherwise, competition with other tourist European regions, where the education and training of professional personnel for the needs of tourism has been in progress for several decades, will be extremely difficult. The fact that among those local tourism organizations, which do not currently cooperate with educational institutions, almost 72% declare an intention to take up such cooperation in the future is also a positive phenomenon.

5. Conclusions, Limitations and Future Development

Present-day DMOs face a number of challenges. Morrison states that trends connected with DMOs will concern the following: the product, price, place, promotion, programming, packaging, people and partnership.⁵¹ Cooperation with tourism organizations is currently enjoying a growing priority, and cooperation with entities from outside tourism is becoming increasingly common. Moreover '[...] collaboration and partnerships will be key to future success'. What is more, strong coordination between the DMOs and destination stakeholders in shaping a common vision and developing consistent visitor experiences can help ensure that visitors expect, and receive, a high-quality destination experience.⁵²

Gretzel, Fesenmaier, Formica and O'Leary divide the challenges facing present-day DMOs into six groups: adapting to technological change, managing expectations, from destination marketing to destination management, confronting new levels of competition, recognizing creative partnering as the new way of life, finding new measures of success. To face these challenges, they stress the need for cooperation between individual entities.⁸ It can be assumed that this also concerns the sector of education.

When examining the planes of cooperation between local DMOs (local tourism organizations) and the representatives of the educational sector, one needs to emphasize that certain limitations characterize the analysis presented. These chiefly concern the number of local tourist organizations examined and the aspects of such cooperation presented. In the first case, it should be emphasized that only 34 local tourism organizations that operate in Pomerania were covered by the research. This constitutes only 27.4% of all the local tourism organizations that exist in Poland. Moreover, part of these have been functioning for a relatively short time, i.e. since 2012. In the second case, limitations connected with the volume and contents of the questionnaire form, which comprised six general questions only, and the form of the examination carried out (sending questionnaire forms by e-mail) might have been one of the causes why only relatively superficial results were obtained. This certainly limits the research value of the results obtained.

Nevertheless, it seems that the analysis presented offers grounds for further research as, in the opinion of the authors of this study, the potential planes of cooperation between local tourism organizations and the educational sector are in full development. For this purpose, however, a coordination of the activities of this kind by both parties is essential so that they have a planned and cyclic nature that brings benefits to both parties. Professionally prepared personnel to operate the tourist market should be the result of such cooperation.

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