

# NONPROFIT MARKETING IN KOPAČKI RIT NATURE PARK AS TOURIST DESTINATION

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## Abstract

*Eastern part of the Republic of Croatia as a tourist destination is not fully valorized yet, despite its natural values and rich cultural heritage. Stronger contribution to touristic development could be ensured by Kopački rit Nature Park as potentially great tourist attractor. Its flora and fauna attract people for educational and tourist reasons. Tourism in nature parks has certain limitations due to primary goals which are protection and preservation of nature together with sustainable management of nature resources and ensuring an undisturbed course of natural processes. The aim of this research is to emphasize importance of marketing tools implementation in process of tourist activities development. Through application of marketing techniques and especially nonprofit marketing, primary goals related to nature protection can be harmonized with development of self-financing through tourism activities. Research was conducted by using case study methodology. Relevant persons for the topic were interviewed and from collected information SWOT analysis was made which may be used for policy suggestions in process of creation adequate tourist products and services together with ensuring quality education for visitors and minimizing visitors influence on natural resources.*

**Key words:** Kopački rit, protected areas, tourism in nature parks, nonprofit marketing.

## Introduction

Kopački rit Nature Park is a non-profit organization whose primary task is managing one of the most important protected wetland area in the Republic of Croatia. As a protected area of international significance and with unique features, Kopački rit Nature Park has strong potential for improving tourist activities. Currently, majority of visitors are organized groups that take a standard tour through the park which generally includes a short presentation of the Nature Park in the admission presentation center, a boat tour across some of the lakes and channels in the Nature Park and walk over the boardwalks. In order to increase number of visitors and make their visits longer, Nature Park management understands that they must be more proactive. Their biggest concern is how to expand tourist activities and at the same time ensure sustainable development and effective nature protection. The answer to their problems lays in marketing management implementation and especially nonprofit marketing.

Marketing management (Kotler, 2001) is a process of analyzing business opportunities and limitations on the market, planning strategies and marketing-mix, execution of marketing tasks and control of marketing actions effectiveness. It helps in process of creating values such as ideas, products, services, institutions etc. which are being exchanged on the market to satisfy consumers' needs, desires and demand with purpose of achieving business goals (Kotler, 2001). Marketing experts select target markets, position product and services on selected market and create specific marketing mix i.e. price, distribution, range of products or services and promotion. Kotler et al. define marketing management as selection of targeted

markets and creation of long term profitable relations with customers (Kotler et al, 2006). According to American Marketing Association “marketing management is the process of setting marketing goals for an organization (considering internal resources and market opportunities), the planning and execution of activities to meet these goals, and measuring progress toward their achievement. The process should be ongoing and repetitive (as within a planning cycle) so that the organization may continuously adapt to internal and external changes that create new problems and opportunities” (2016, October 25). Retrieved from <http://www.marketing-dictionary.org/Marketing+Management>. Marketing management begins with internal and external analysis. Through research and market selection based on present market condition and future demand assessment targeted market is being selected and marketing strategy is being defined. According to Meler marketing for nonprofit organizations such as nature parks, has been developed to increase their effectiveness (Meler, 2006). Basic problems of nonprofit organizations are insufficient financial resources, inadequate legislation and lack of professionalism in management structures (Meler, 2006). One of the ways for solving these problems is acceptance and implementation of marketing management.

The aim of this research is to give recommendations for more efficient marketing management in nature parks through management of their tourist offer. By increasing the range of offered products and accepting the fact that improvement of visiting system can be in accordance with primary goals related to nature protection, Nature Park management can gain certain benefits for Kopački rit Nature Park, local community and a whole region.

#### *Problem of Research*

Primary aim of this research is to contribute in development of appropriate marketing management strategy of Kopački rit Nature Park as tourist destination. Tourist demand for visiting protected areas is increasing as an answer to accelerated rhythm of urban life. Market is being divided on segments defined by life style, personal preferences and life circumstances. This particular elements can be used in process of creating and managing tourist products and services in Kopački rit Nature Park. Currently, Nature Park management is focused on primary goals related to nature protection. Visiting activities are only one part of their operations which have been stagnating. In order to improve these activities and ensure stabile income they have to be more proactive. Nature Park management has to implement marketing techniques and develop new products and services which will be in accordance to trends in tourist demand.

#### *Research Focus*

The most important research of national parks and nature parks consumers’ attitudes and consumption was conducted by Institute for Tourism in the study TOMAS 2006 prepared for the Ministry of See, Tourism, Transport and Development. Primary task of this research was to collect actual and exact data related to tourist demand and consumption in national parks and nature parks. This information was supposed to be the base for creation of tourist products in accordance to market demands, protected areas promotion and marketing management improvement. Research was conducted in six national parks and two nature parks. Our goal was to see which improvements were made in Kopački rit Nature Park in part of management improvement through marketing management implementation.

## Methodology of Research

### *General Background of Research*

Research in Kopački rit Nature Park was conducted by using case-study methodology which is often used for different business situations simulation. Information used are primary and secondary data. Primary data are collected through interviews of relevant persons for the topic. Secondary data are statistical data from publications of State Bureau of Statistics, legal acts, international agreements and conventions (RAMSAR), regulation and EU directives regarding nature protection and Strategy and Action Plan for the Protection of Biological and Landscape Diversity of the Republic of Croatia (OG 143/08). Primary data used are collected through research conducted by Institute for Tourism "TOMAS 2006 - National Parks and Nature Parks – Attitudes and consumption of visitors in National parks and nature parks in the Republic of Croatia". This research included visitors' socio-demographic characteristics, visitors profile related to life style, visiting frequency, motives for visiting protected areas, information sources about protected areas, activities during their stay and their intention to visit protected areas again. Research was conducted by interviewing randomly selected 2.258 visitors.

### *Instrument and Procedures*

The basic techniques of data collection were interviews with former and present employees including management structures, analyses of documentation, statistical data, legal acts, international agreements, conventions and EU regulation. Collected data were used in SWOT analysis which gives conceptual framework for strategic planning. As a result of SWOT analysis matrix shows which resources may be used to seize opportunities on the market. According to the results appropriate strategy can be developed: maxi-maxi, maxi-mini, mini-maxi and mini-mini strategy (Wehrich & Koontz, 1993).

### *Data Analysis*

Collected data through interviews with former and present employees was analyzed by qualitative methods such as analysis, synthesis, comparison and classification. Conclusions based on collected data are presented in SWOT matrix without ranking because of similar significance of each one.

## Results of Research

Republic of Croatia has extraordinary biological and landscape diversity which can be seen from the fact that 19 national parks and nature parks are declared till now. Each one of them attracts certain type of visitors. Importance and beauty of these protected areas strongly contribute to tourist image of the country. They are important tourist attractors which can positively influence tourist results. According to Nature Protection Act (OG 80/13) nature parks are managed by public institutions founded by Republic of Croatia. Their basic activity is protection, maintenance and promotion of protected area which helps them to protect and preserve nature, ensure undisturbed course of natural processes and sustainable usage of natural resources. Nevertheless, although public institutions are nonprofit organizations they have to respect marketing rules. Their primary goal is to protect and preserve protected area but also develop visiting activities.

According to research conducted by Institute for Tourism "TOMAS 2006 - National Parks and Nature Parks – Attitudes and consumption of visitors in National parks and Nature parks in the Republic of Croatia" socio-demographic research of nature parks visitors showed

that foreign visitors are majority in national and nature parks at the coast (NP Plitvička jezera 90%, NP Paklenica 88%). Visitors from Republic of Croatia were majority in Kopački rit Nature Park (73%) and Sjeverni Velebit Nature Park (69%). Average age was 41 years old, they have higher education and they are mainly not members of associations for nature protection or associations involved in recreation activities in nature. Visitors' motive for visiting national and nature parks was enjoyment in beautiful landscape, holiday and relaxation. The most important source of information about protected areas for respondents was internet (33%), brochures and advertisements (16%), friends and relatives (38%) and their previous experience during their stay in national and nature parks (22%). Activities taken during their stay were nature photographing (84%), food and beverages consumption (38%), visiting info center (31%) and souvenirs shopping (31%) (2016, October 17). Retrieved from [http://www.iztzg.hr/UserFiles/Pdf/Tomas/2006\\_TOMAS\\_NP\\_I\\_PP\\_HR.pdf](http://www.iztzg.hr/UserFiles/Pdf/Tomas/2006_TOMAS_NP_I_PP_HR.pdf).

Kopački rit Nature Park is located in the northeastern Croatia. "It has a typical relief structure because of the river's water activity and the floodwaters that flood the area. Rivers create banks and islands called "ade" and armbands called 'dunavac' or 'old Drava' in their live streams. On the other hand, the water in the floodplain deposits sediments in one place but deepens the ground in another, so the whole area obtains a specific undulate appearance. This kind of pond and beam layout gives the area a unique appearance. The entire floodplain obtains a delta kind of look and is extremely exceptional because the Danube creates a so-called "inland delta" in its middle stream with the assistance of the Drava. A phenomenon like this is not notable for other European rivers in this form and therewith gives this area a global significance." (2016, July 05). Retrieved from <http://pp-kopacki-rit.hr/about.html>. Due to the importance as a wetland habitat and habitat of a large number of birds, in 1986 it was included in the inventory of Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBA) and in year 1993 it was included on the List of Wetlands of International Importance, under the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar).

Basic activity of Public Institution that governs Kopački rit Nature Park is protection of nature. One of the activities is also development of visiting system through professional guidance, sightseeing and visitors' transportation within Nature Park together with education about ecology and nature protection. People are usually attracted to wetlands because of their unique ecological values, aesthetic appeal and specific beauty of nature. Visiting activities in Kopački rit Nature Park are currently within reception center "Mali Sakadaš" which has various facilities for visitors such as reception, souvenir shop, coffee bar, multimedia exhibition and board walks which includes educational boards, children's playground and parking space for buses, cars and bicycles. There are also visiting activities in the part of special zoological reserve but only by boats, rowboats and canoes. Recreation in nature is possible in many ways in Kopački rit Nature Park. There are many biking trails and bicycles can be rented. It is also possible to take a train tour, amphibian tour or walks on bridges of Kopački rit Nature Park. There are several canoe tours, bird watching program, photo safari program and ranger junior program. Occasionally, special events are being organized. After complete renovation, Tikveš castle complex will have special role in future development of visiting system because of historical and cultural values.

Contemporary analysis of tourist market demand are stating that ecotourism, cultural tourism, thematic tourism, adventure tourism etc. are the most dynamic market segments. Kopački rit Nature Park can develop its offer on tourist market covering all this market segments. Ecotourism has developed from ecologically and socially acceptable way of traveling to important element of tourist offer regarded as tourism with strong nature component. It gives an opportunity for growth to less developed tourist areas. Consumer market of Eco tourist destinations has two segments. First segment are small groups of tourists which have special interest for ecotourism and they are spending whole vacation in that way. Second segment are great number of those who spend vacation in classical tourist destinations and take excursions to national and nature parks. This type of tourism together with adventure tourism and tourism in rural areas is potential type of tourism activities in national and nature parks.

**Table 1. Kopački rit Nature Park SWOT analysis.**

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Measures for protection of ecosystems are set and defined.</li> <li>Highly motivated nature parks management and employees.</li> <li>Good cooperation with users and wider society.</li> <li>Unique nature.</li> <li>Exceptional biological diversity.</li> <li>Adequate transport infrastructure.</li> <li>Brand familiarity on European level due to international convention (Ramsar).</li> <li>Member of protected areas network along the Danube River Danubeparks.</li> <li>Well established relations with present customers/clients.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undeveloped and insufficiently differentiated tourist offer.</li> <li>Tikveš castle complex is still not completely renovated and ready for visiting activities.</li> <li>Lack of awareness in local community regarding importance and uniqueness of Kopački rit Nature Park.</li> <li>Insufficient uniformity in business operations related to complementary services in surroundings of Kopački rit Nature Park.</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is market segment for excursions in nature.</li> <li>It is possible to enter new markets and market segments.</li> <li>Stronger product differentiation can be done.</li> <li>New technologies such as internet can be used in promotion and sales of nature parks product and services.</li> <li>It is possible to develop tourist offers by networking with other nature parks.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Negotiating power of customers/clients is increasing.</li> <li>Just one same product can't be profitable on the long run.</li> <li>Low purchasing power of local inhabitants.</li> <li>Long period of recent recession.</li> <li>Possible ecological threats to ecosystem.</li> </ul>

In the previous period Kopački rit Nature Park established itself as Eco touristic destination. Nevertheless, it has great potential for developing these activities through thematic tourism, adventure tourism and cultural tourism. Thematic tourism is one of the major development initiators of growth in less developed areas. It is based on 3E principle "Entertainment, Excitement, Education" because it includes tourist offer which combines these three elements. Kopački rit Nature Park due to potential in nature beauty, cultural and historical values has prerequisites for development of thematic tourism. In that way, new market segments can be entered and new potential visitors can be attracted. Adventure tourism in global market of tourist services represents market niche which has significant growth tendency. Because of its natural potential, Nature Park has numerous ways of developing an offer for adventure tourist services such as canoeing as only one of them. Cultural tourism can become an important part of tourist offer in Kopački rit Nature Park. Today, it is existing but it is not sufficiently presented and promoted. For that purpose, improvement must be done in marking of cultural and historical monuments, further installing information boards, completing renovation of Tikveš castle complex and presentation of cultural values within the nature park and its surroundings. All these activities would significantly improve quality of tourist offer in this segment.

## Discussion

The only relevant research regarding this issue was conducted by Institute for Tourism "TOMAS 2006 - National Parks and Nature Parks – Attitudes and consumption of visitors in National parks and nature parks in the Republic of Croatia". There are only several studies covering this topic but related to organizational aspects in management of nature parks.

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can bring numerous benefits to Nature Park through increased self-financing but also to a neighborhood area and whole northeastern Croatia. Unique ecosystem, biological diversity and abundance of preserved nature is competitive advantage of this area related to other protected areas in the Republic of Croatia and neighborhood countries. Results of SWOT analysis showed that there are strengths that enable Kopački rit Nature Park to use opportunities on the market especially in a segments of ecotourism, cultural tourism, thematic tourism and adventure tourism. Nevertheless, Nature Park management has to implement marketing way of thinking and procedures which are necessary for entering new market segments. Without that stagnation will be continued and current opportunities on the market will not be used for further development of tourist activities in Kopački rit Nature Park.

## Conclusions

High quality management of visiting activities which is in accordance with primary goals meaning protection and preservation of nature, is key to a successful marketing management nature park. This may be achieved through careful management of visiting capacity for each location within the nature park. By implementation of visitors dispersion regarding visiting time and space, the most visited locations will be relieved, seasonal crowds decreased and peace will be provided in protected areas. Through that dispersion it is possible to expand visiting season from nine months at present, to the whole year. New possibilities for increase in visiting activities can be achieved through networking with other national and nature parks which would provide an opportunity for creation an offer of excursions to several protected areas. Distribution channels for products and services provided by Kopački rit Nature Park should be improved by establishing long term business relationships with mediators on the tourist market. One important part of activities is definitely customer relationship management (CRM) which can contribute to better and more quality communication with customers together with collecting data regarding customers' habits and behavior. Promotional activities should be intensified and include new technologies such as applications for mobile phones and social networks which may reinforce communication with customers, especially younger population. In accordance to primary goals of nature protection, management should consider establishing educational center in Nature Park especially for younger population. In that way they would contribute to activities in Nature Park and help in process of establishing connection with future consumers.

Organizational structure in Nature Park is set in a way to achieve planned goals primary related to nature protection. For improvement of present situation in tourist activities management Nature Park management should consider new possibilities in organizational structure based on marketing orientation, promotion improvement, coordination and synchronization of business operations in total. All that should result with customer orientation and better position on the tourist market.

It must be noted that Kopački rit Nature Park is perceived as destination for one day or half day excursions so further research should be done regarding that issue.

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