

A Model for Developing the Arts as a Tourist Product

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Abstract

Cultural organizations need to work in collaboration with communities to develop a cultural tourism sector. Traveling to experience is not a new activity. In the US its history started with the marketing of the American West. Developing a cultural tourist industry works best for cities that are in economic transition. These cities do not have any established tourism sector and therefore may underestimate the cultural experience the city has to offer. A thorough product analysis of the art and culture city needs to be conducted by members of the community. The core cultural product is then packaged with complimentary tourist services to provide a complete cultural experience.

Key Words

Culture, tourism, art, economic development.

Introduction

Cultural and arts organizations are often wary of marketing to tourists. They believe that when tourists attend the arts they are simply looking for entertainment. Therefore cultural organizations believe tourists have little or no interest in a true cultural experience. Unfortunately cultural organizations sometimes misunderstand marketing as only selling; with the organization trying to convince the tourist to experience culture in which they have no interest without regard to the effect such unappreciative attendance will have on the arts organization. However the definition of marketing is that it is an exchange that satisfies both the organization (in this case the arts organization) and the individual (the tourist). Successful marketing will result in an exchange that will benefit both the cultural organization and the tourist.

Fortunately there is a model that can be used by arts organizations to market to tourists while retaining their mission and integrity. This can be accomplished by repositioning the product and branding it as a complete experience that combines the experience of culture with the experience of visiting the city. After all, a product can be a physical good, a service, or an experience. Marketing the arts as a tourist product is unique because it is a product composed of a physical good (the city) tourist services (hotels, dining, etc.) and the experience of the cultural event.

Cultural organization must work collaboratively with the entire community to attract visitors. Of course the packaged art event is an important element in attracting visitors to the city. However, tourists are much less likely to visit a city, even if it has great art, if the physical aspects of the

city, such as its buildings, parks and streets, are unattractive. The image of the arts and the image of the city are both important components of the visiting experience.

History of Urban Tourism

Cultural tourism is not new. The cultural activities and institutions of cities and towns have always been of interest to people. Postcards of city scenes produced in the late 19th century were designed to show Main Street bustling with markets, parades and festivals. In fact when Main Street developed, one of the most important criteria in planning the layout of a building's site was to maximize each building's exposure to the traveling publics. (Francaviglia, 1996)

The marketing of cities in the US can be traced back to the selling of the Western frontier to American citizens. Once the railroads had connected the populated East with the sparsely populated West, efforts were initiated to motivate people to travel. The 'See America First' movement, an early example of such an effort, was started to encourage US citizens to use the new cross-continental railroads to visit the West. While enjoying the natural splendors was the first inducement to tourism, it was only a short time later that experiencing the excitement of the new cities, including their cultural attractions, also became a reason to travel West. Early promotional messages contrasted the adventure of exploring the culture of US cities with visiting the old civilizations of Europe. (Shaffer, 2001)

The construction of the trans-continental railroads also resulted in people settling permanently in the vast geographic region between the two coasts. These fledgling towns located in the US heartland marketed to Easterners to encourage them to also move West. Many cities were successful by marketing the advantages of their new town in comparison with other older established cities. For example the city of Wichita, Kansas grew from 50 people in 1870 to 40,000 in 1888. This growth was the result of a collaborative effort between the local newspaper, business people, and civic organizations that positioned Wichita as a new, and better, Chicago. (Ward, 1998) This included advertising Wichita's own cultural amenities.

The recent growth of the tourism industry results from three social changes: development of the transportation infrastructure, increased disposable income and improved access to communication technology. The development of the transportation infrastructure has resulted in the ability to easily visit locations that were once considered remote. In addition more people now have sufficient disposable income to use for travel, the cost of which has meanwhile has decreased due to competition between companies in the tourism industry.

Access to improved communications technology has also sparked a growth in tourism. People now have an increased awareness of different countries and their cultures. This awareness can in part be credited to the vast amount of global information provided by the Internet. This knowledge of other people and cultures combined with transportation systems and money to undertake the trip means that people are motivated to travel further to new destinations including cities.

Tourism and Economic Development

The idea of using tourism to encourage economic development is now new. The City Beautiful movement, which was influential at the beginning of the twentieth century, believed physical improvements to a city's infrastructure would in turn help to improve the social relations of its

citizens. They specifically focused on cultural and civic improvement projects, such as civic centers, performance halls, parks and town squares. Of course these improvements cost money that taxpayers were not always willing to spend. Therefore those involved with the movement reminded local citizens, particularly those with businesses, that not only would the improvements make the city a more pleasant place in which to live, they would also attract tourists. The movement's supporters argued that these visitors would spend money which would increase business revenue and therefore indirectly benefit all citizens. (Cocks, 2001) The same argument is still being made today.

While cities welcome the money spent by visitors, cultural tourism is not the total answer to improving the economic health of economically troubled cities and towns. However it can be one part of the solution to increase business revenue, provide employment opportunities and even attract both new residents and new businesses. Developing a tourism industry can also change the image of the city, and this new more positive image can be the catalyst for other positive economic changes such as attracting new residents and new businesses. (Kotler, 1993)

Cities can be described as being in one of three stages of economic health: economically strong, in decline, or in transition. An economically healthy city will have expanding business and industry sectors that result in new residents moving to the city because of employment opportunities. Such a city probably will already have strong cultural institutions that attract tourists. In fact local attendees might even complain about the negative effects caused by the many tourists visiting the institution.

However there are two reasons that even economically strong cities must still think about promoting their culture. First, if their tourism strategy is successful, it may be copied by a competing city that offers similar cultural attractions with less crowding. Secondly, even if the city has no fear of competition, a change in the public's opinion of the city or a desire for a new experience, can cause a decline in tourist numbers. For these reasons, even cities that are successful destinations for cultural tourists must remember that marketing is an ongoing effort.

On the other end of the spectrum are cities that have lost businesses and industry and are in economic decline. This decline may be the result of industries becoming outdated or because businesses have moved elsewhere taking with them jobs and tax revenue. The result is an out-migration of the city's residents who must look for new opportunities in other cities. Many of the citizens, who still live in the city, suffer from a high level of unemployment and as a result need a variety of social services. Unfortunately at the same time the city is less prepared to meet these needs because of the loss of tax revenue. To find the funds to help unemployed citizens, cities often must neglect maintaining the city's physical infrastructure including cultural institutions. This neglect results in a further decline in the city's image.

This type of economically depressed city may find it too difficult to attract tourists because of the neglected infrastructure and the city's negative image. If the city does put its resources and energy into using culture to develop a tourism market, it can result in developing a cultural enclave surrounded by an economically depressed community whose residents feel shut out from any benefits tourism might bring. (Lippard, 1999).

Developing a new tourism sector where one does not already exist, works best for a city that is in a state of economic transition. The city may decide to focus on developing cultural tourism as a result of external influences, such as the loss of business and industry. Rather than waiting until the number of lost jobs results in an economic crisis, cultural tourism is seen by the city as a way to diversify the economy. Because the city is not yet in decline, it still has the ability to

attract the funds necessary to improve the city's infrastructure. Citizens will support investing in cultural institutions because they understand that besides attracting visitors the strategy will also retain and attract new businesses and residents. A city in economic transition is able to develop as a tourist destination because it still has the available tax revenue and citizen enthusiasm to support the implementation of a marketing strategy.

Cultural Tourists as a Market Segment

Growth in travel opportunities and improved communication systems has contributed to an increased awareness of global culture. Consumers are now familiar with the art and music of many other countries besides their own. It is natural that they would want to visit cultural organizations to experience these art forms when they travel. Heritage sites and museums, along with theatres and other performing arts venues, are a significant reason why tourists visit the major urban areas (Hughes, 1997).

As government funding provided to cultural organisations for operational expenses has decreased, cultural organisations have become increasingly interested in attracting cultural tourists to their venues. Targeting cultural tourists is a means for cultural organisations to earn additional revenue, while still being true to their mission.

Besides offering an opportunity to increase its audience, a cultural organization should market to tourists for the same reasons it would wish to market to anyone – to expose others to its art form. In addition, by marketing to the cultural tourist, the organization provides visitors with a cultural opportunity unavailable to them at home.

The cultural organization faces a unique challenge of providing a worthwhile experience for the cultural tourist. The tourist is traveling to gain both an understanding of culture and is also traveling for enjoyment. Cultural tourists want an experience that is both exciting and memorable, so that they can share the experience with friends and family when they return home. Even so cultural tourists are also interested in education programs – as long as they are enjoyable – that will help them understand what they are experiencing.

While the idea of having access to an additional target market interested in their art form may be attractive to cultural organizations, the organization must consider carefully whether to promote to tourists. If the cultural organization feels that the potential tourist market segment desires benefits that conflict too dramatically with the organization's mission, it might not wish to market to tourists. In addition if meeting the needs of tourists, means the organization is not be able to meet its responsibilities to the established local market segments it already serves, it may not wish to market to tourists.

Segments of the tourist market that are attracted to culture include older visitors who naturally inclined toward culture because of their socialization experiences. Most likely these tourists also patronize cultural organizations when they are at home. Another group interested in cultural organizations is younger tourists who consider attending a cultural event while traveling as an adventure. They may not attend the same event at home, where it would be considered less exciting. For this reason, cultural tourism is an excellent means of exposing young people to cultural experiences in which they might not otherwise participate.

The tourist market can also be further segmented by the benefits sought by the tourists (Boniface, 1995). Some cultural tourists seek escapism. They want an experience that is

different from what they experience in daily life. Other tourists want their visit to a cultural organization to provide them with a feeling of status. They want a unique experience unobtainable elsewhere, of which they can boast when they have returned home.

Some of the benefits desired by tourists visiting a cultural organization may be similar to the benefits desired by other visitors, but cultural tourists do have some additional needs for which the cultural organization must provide. Because cultural tourists are unfamiliar with the country's culture, and not just the cultural product, they need to be provided with even more information about the history and meaning of the art form. Cultural tourists will not bring the same assumptions and knowledge as the local residents and need additional information so that they can understand and enjoy what they experience.

Because they are visitors, cultural organisations should ensure that tourists are especially made to feel welcome when visiting the venue. The tourist market gives cultural organisations an excellent means to attract people to a new experience that they may feel uncomfortable with at home. The tourist might not visit a cultural organisation at home because they feel they don't belong, but while travelling, they may be ready to take the risk.

Tourists who are travelling a long distance to visit the cultural organisation have a need for the experience to be as they expected it to be. The cultural organisation must provide a certain amount of dependability in the cultural product presented to tourists. The experience needs to be consistent over time so that tourists will have a similar experience to that of their friends, who may have visited last year. This does not mean that the product must be absolutely the same, but that it needs to be of the type expected.

Because the cultural tourist is unfamiliar with the local area, it is also very important that all marketing and media messages contain sufficient information on location, including information on how to travel to the site using public transportation. If the organization is located in an out-of-the-way area, cultural tourists also need to be provided with information that addresses any safety concerns they may have. And, because they are tourists and want to have fun, they need information on opportunities for shopping and eating.

Cultural Tourism & the Community

The wider community increasingly sees cultural organizations that serve tourists as a source of revenue and employment (Broadway, 1997). Government agencies have become aware of the positive effect cultural tourism has on economic growth and are starting to collaborate with cultural and tourism groups to promote such tourism. In fact, besides promotion of the art itself, one of the main rationales for having music festivals or major exhibitions is to attract tourists to visit an area.

Because of the generation of employment and income for profit businesses used by tourists, cultural tourism may also be supported by the businesses in the community in which the organisation is located. Cultural tourism can help the entire community through regeneration of an economically-depressed area and, as a result, increase the status of the community. If cultural organisations work together in attracting cultural tourists, they will be seen as others as an integral part of the community.

Model of the City and Arts as a Cultural Product

| City | Services | Art Experience |
|---|--|---|
| Architecture Street patterns Public parks Historic buildings Ocean, mountains | Hotel rooms Dining Entertainment Shopping Transportation Historic Tours | Festivals Music Plays Cinema Ethnic Public Art |

While the traditional marketing process and the marketing process for the arts as a tourist product may seem similar, the differences are crucial. The traditional marketing process starts with an examination of the external environment to discover if forces such as social, political, legal and technological changes have resulted in a potential consumer market.

The marketing process for the arts as a tourist product starts differently. The first step in the process of marketing is a product analysis. This is so that the art product can be repositioned as a tourist activity. The city and the arts are then developed and packaged together and branded as an experience that will appeal to specific target market segments.

The product audit is a thorough and honest analysis of what both the city and the arts have to offer. First the physical infrastructure of the city must be analyzed to determine what is unique and attractive and also what needs to be improved. Secondly a survey of both the local businesses and nonprofit arts organizations must be conducted to determine which offer services or events that might be of interest to tourists, even if they currently not marketing to visitors. The complete package of city, services and the arts is then branded and promoted to potential tourists. (Kolb, 2005)

Analyzing the City's Cultural Attractions

While some cities do not have a large number of established arts organizations or institutions, that does not mean they do not have art and culture that can be used to attract tourists. In fact the city may have more art and culture than local citizen realize. One method to discover what might be available to offer tourist is to analyze the city to find the hidden art and culture.

Conducting a thorough place audit of all the products and services a city has to offer tourists is a large undertaking that will require the commitment of considerable time and resources. For this reason it is not recommended that it be conducted by a single person or even two or three. It may well be that the person put in charge of developing the cultural tourism marketing plan is working alone or with a small staff. In their desire to start work and have a finished plan as soon as possible, they may attempt to conduct an audit on their own. However culture is a complex product consisting of organizations, for-profit businesses, performances, visual arts and artists. Even if they feel they have the necessary time and resources they should resist the temptation to work alone.

This is because people's opinions on what culture the city has to offer will vary. Everyone experiences the city's culture differently depending on their demographic and psychographic characteristics. Therefore their personal beliefs as to the benefits the city provides will vary. People's opinions will also vary because of differences in gender, age, occupation, religion,

ethnicity, social class, values and lifestyle. Older people will perhaps not notice the nightlife music scene while younger people may pass by sites of historical significance without a glance. In addition it is very important that members of any local religious and ethnic communities be involved. Members of a religious community may know of choral groups that could perform concerts of religious music for visitors. In addition members of ethnic community may point out that their city has historical sites related how members of their group have impacted local history. All of these differing views and opinions on the city's culture including both its benefits and deficiencies are needed for a complete analysis. In fact the more differing views that are obtained the more useful the resulting information will be. A guide for starting to conduct a cultural product analysis would be to answer the following questions:

- What music, of any type or style, can be listened to in the city?
- Where can this music be heard?
- Where can people watch dancing or dance themselves?
- Where is any type of visual art on display both in buildings and in public?
- Where can people learn arts and craft skills?
- Where do artists live and work?
- Are there people in the community who practice traditional art and culture?

After the analysis is complete, the next step is to map out where all the art and culture is located in the city. And, finally the tourism marketer must find ways to package this art and culture for visitors. These ideas could include live music tours in the evening, community art walks, open studio days, art displays in restaurants and stores and arts festivals. (Arts Resource Network, 2003)

An Example

Williamsport Symphony Orchestra is a small community orchestra with professional management which conducts five performances a year. Williamsport, Pennsylvania is a historic city blessed with beautiful scenery and many lovely Victorian homes. The orchestra recently decided to reposition the orchestra as a regional cultural asset. This meant attempting to attract an audience from outside the local community. Because Williamsport is physically isolated from any nearby communities, this meant attracting overnight tourists to the town.

While the orchestra could certainly extend their marketing reach on their own by simply buying media time in other communities, they knew this would not be enough. Instead they realized that attracting an audience from outside the community was dependent on attracting people to the city of Williamsport.

Williamsport City and Arts as a Cultural Product

| City | Services | Art Events | Packages |
|--|--|---------------------------------------|--|
| Historic buildings Victorian homes Beautiful scenery | Rooms at historic hotel Dining in Victorian mansion Italian food | Symphony Museums Historic tours | Symphony package for serious music lovers Museum package for family fun |

To accomplish this task collaboration between the arts organization and the city was necessary. Not only the orchestra but also the city had to be repositioned as a cultural asset for the whole region. This required that the orchestra promote jointly with the city and other arts organization. It also required that other tourist services such as hotels, restaurants and stores commit to offering packages of services when the arts organizations had events.

After a product audit, the positioning strategy chosen was to package the orchestra along with the historic image of Williamsport. An audit was conducted of the physical features of the city that could be used in the promotion. Local businesses and other arts organizations were then contacted to see if they were interested in offering a package price on lodging, dining and tickets. After the package was developed, the local tourist organization was contacted about joint promotion. The package was positioned to be of interest to serious music lovers.

Companies that produce consumer goods spend considerable effort and money on the design of product packaging. Of course the packaging of products is important because the package protects the physical product until it is sold. How the packaging of products is also an important marketing issue because the package is also used to communicate information. This information on the package will include the name of the product. It might also include information on ingredients, where the product was produced and the product price. In addition the design of the package is used to communicate promotional information regarding the benefits the consumer will receive by consuming the product. An attractive package that uses words and images to convey the benefits of the product helps the consumer to make the purchase decision.

Once this positioning strategy was chosen, a brand image was created. It is this image of enjoying the arts in a beautiful historic city that was actually communicated. Orchestra attendance was packaged along with a night's stay at an historic hotel and dining at an Italian restaurant run by the same family for three generations.

This branding is necessary to reassure potential visitors of what the arts and culture the city has to offer so they will commit the time and money to travel. Of course there is no purpose in developing a brand unless it is promoted. The same model of packaging culture with tourist services has been adopted by two local museums. Visits to the museums will be packaged with trolley tours of the historic district. This is a model that many small arts organizations may find useful. This package will be positioned to be of interest to families.

In cultural tourism marketing the word packaging takes on a new meaning. Tourism packaging doesn't involve a physical package surrounding a product. Instead packaging is the process of putting together, or bundling, the core cultural product with additional services. This packaging is then promoted so that travelers can easily purchase the desired cultural experience. This bundling of goods and services helps attract cultural tourists by reducing the amount of time they will need to spend researching what culture the city has to offer.

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