Strategic Vision of Sustainable Tourism Development: Municipality of Strážný 2020

Petr Štumpf1

Abstract: Strážný is a small town, which is situated directly on the border between the Czech Republic and Germany. The image and the public perception of the town are strongly influenced by factors connected with negative sociopathological phenomena such as criminality or prostitution. On the other hand, Strážný is surrounded by unique landscape and nature of the National park Bohemian Forest (Šumava). The competitive advantage in terms of Strážný as a potential tourism destination, lies in the strategic position and good accessibility on the main road between South Bohemia and Lower Bavaria. It is necessary to plan the future development of the town as a sustainable tourism destination. The area of National Park Bohemian Forest is one of the most popular tourist region in the Czech Republic, but the town of Strážný is not a favourite place for visitors in this time. Due to this fact, and thereby also due to the lack of the data about visitors from the past, the Delphi technique was chosen as a method for forecasting the future of the town as a tourism destination to propose the strategic vision, mission statement and strategic objectives. This method helped to find a consensus among stakeholders in the town and to discover common aims of all participants of the future development of Strážný as a tourism destination.

Key words: Tourism · Local Development · Strategic Vision · Delphi Method

JEL Classification: L83

1 Introduction
Strážný is a small town, which is situated directly on the border between the Czech Republic and Germany. The image and the public perception of the town are strongly influenced by factors connected with negative sociopathological phenomena such as criminality or prostitution. On the other hand, Strážný is surrounded by unique landscape and nature of the National park Bohemian Forest (Šumava). The competitive advantage in terms of Strážný as a potential tourism destination, lies in the strategic position and good accessibility on the main road between South Bohemia and Lower Bavaria, which makes a connection between the important towns of this region - České Budějovice and Passau. It is necessary to plan correctly and very carefully the future development of the town as a sustainable tourism destination. The area of National Park Bohemian Forest is one of the most popular tourist region in the Czech Republic. However, the Town of Strážný, due to the negative perception and the lack of tourism infrastructure, is not a favourite place for visitors in this time, despite the fact that the history and natural potential of this area are very high. Due to this fact, and thereby also due to the lack of the data about visitors from the past, the Delphi technique was chosen as a method for forecasting the future of the town as a tourism destination to propose the strategic vision, mission statement and strategic objectives for the planning period 2014 - 2020. This method helped to find a consensus among stakeholders in the town and to discover common aims of all participants of the future development of Strážný as a tourism destination.

1.1 Sustainable tourism in a destination
Sustainable tourism is defined as tourism that is economically viable, but does not destroy the resources on which the future of tourism will depend, notably the physical environment, and the social fabric of the host community (Swarbrook, 1999 In. Ritchie, 2003). Nasser (2003) comes with a similar definition. He adds, sustainable tourism is rooted in sustainable development, in the sense that if tourism is to contribute to sustainable development, it must be economically viable, environmentally sensitive, and culturally appropriate.

Tourism cannot be sustainable in its own right but may contribute to the sustainable development of some regions under some circumstances. (Moscardo, 2008) Farrell & Twining-Ward (2004) deal with a global change of tourism concept and the role of sustainability in this concept. Understanding of sustainability has shifted from the notion of a stable achievable goal, to the concept of transition based on multiple spatial and temporal scales in a dynamic landscape of evolving human values. (Farrell & Twining-Ward, 2004, p. 288)

Hall (2006) mentioned one of the most important aspects of sustainable tourism development when he claimed, the industry of tourism focused on and declaration of sustainable tourism related to activity at the destination. Rarely is attention drawn to the usually unsustainable transport and travel modes – aircraft, motor vehicles – that many tourists necessarily employ in order to be able to visit destinations.

1 Ing. Petr Štumpf, University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice, Faculty of Economics, Department of Trade and Tourism, Studentská 13, 370 05 České Budějovice, e-mail: pstumpf@ef.cju.cz
Paskaleva-Shapira (2007) and Holesinska (2012) confirm the relationship between sustainability and competitiveness with a tourism destination management. Every destination must examine its ability to maintain all dimensions of sustainability (environmental, economic, social, cultural and political) if it is to develop and preserve true competitiveness. "Competitiveness without sustainability is illusory." (Ritchie, 2003, p. 49)

Dwyer et al. (2009) deal with global trends, that should be implemented by destination management in the frame of sustainable development in a tourism destination: 1) Yield per visitor more important than numbers; 2) Economic-environmental trade-offs necessary; 3) Consumers should be educated to purchase tourism products which match environmental constraints; 4) Tourism development by and for community residents. Ritchie (2003) even uses a term „the sustainable destination“ for these types of tourism areas. The situation when tourism destinations, in long-term period, do not sustain all factors of their key potential and these, which are oriented only for short-term profit, is called myopia in sustainable tourism. Profitability of a destination is measured by a profit from one tourist rather than the quality of natural environment. These paths will lead to the long-term destruction of the environment and thereby to the depreciation of the tourism industry attractiveness in the destination for the future.

We can state that the emphasis on the management of a sustainable tourism destination can enhance the economic performance and competitiveness of the destination and, at the same time, new tourism development respects needs of local communities and the natural environment. (Novacká, 2010)

1.2 Strategic planning and strategic documents of tourism development in a tourism destination

Rodriguez-Diaz & Espino-Rodriguez (2007), understand tourism destinations as being complex systems that need planning and modelling to improve their overall management. Their model of strategic evaluation of a tourism destination includes different factors affecting the competitiveness of destinations. These are then evaluated according to their internal and relational strategic value. Their empirical study shows that the tourism supply chain is the destination’s focal point and develops its operations according to a destination’s resources. In this context, the geographical, environmental, and sociocultural factors, the service companies factor, the political factor, and public infrastructure are all essential to define a destination’s singularity and its ability to attract tourism.

According to Soteriou & Coccossis (2009), for strategic destination planning, it is necessary to integrate sustainable development principles and show how to integrate these principles into the strategic planning process. These factors fall into three categories; namely: 1) exogenous factors (sustainable development strategy), 2) organisational factors (resources and commitment of top management team factors), and 3) system design factors (internal and external orientation, use of appropriate tools, participation, comprehensiveness, functional integration, level of consideration of sustainability in strategic planning).

In German-speaking areas, authors, such as Bieger (2008), Freyer (2004) and others, further define the "Tourismusleitbild" (enlarged mission statement of a tourism destination) and "Destinationstrategie" (destination strategy) as the basic tools of strategic planning for the development of tourism destinations. These tools cannot run independently, but must be implemented in a hierarchy between superordinate documents and subordinate business plans. The Tourismusleitbild, as a strategic document, crossed the political (= normative) level, the implementation of specific activities of tourism organisations (= strategic level) and business activities (= operational level).

A general strategic document was, primarily, formulated as a basic tool for destination planning in the phase of tourism growth. The document was not specific and contained only vaguely defined directions of tourism development in the destination. The specific destination marketing concept was further developed from the basic document. (Bieger, 2008)

Vystoupil et al. (2007) and Holesinská (2007), focus on the issue of strategic and tactical documents of tourism development in the Czech Republic. Vystoupil et al. (2007), show specific features that appear in the issue of tourism documents in the Czech Republic. The concept is becoming more detailed and, so, takes on the characteristics of a plan.

Generally, the aim of a destination strategy is to build and maintain its competitiveness in the tourism market. It provides information about how to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage through the identification, development and utilisation of key competencies; how the destination may be profiled in the market; and in which markets it wants to present and with which products. (Bieger, 2008)

In destination planning, it is also necessary to predict future developments and trends in the tourism market. This is recognized by Formica & Kothari (2007), who argue that the formulation of a destination strategy is directly related to forecasting future events and their impact on a destination.

1.3 Delphi technique as a tool for strategic planning in tourism

The Delphi method of forecasting has attracted considerable attention in the tourism. This technique aims to obtain expert opinion about the future through questionnaire surveys of a group of experts in the field, and is particularly useful for long-term forecasting. (Moutinho, 2000)
The Delphi technique belongs to a set of qualitative research methods that rely on the judgment of individuals presumed to be experts in the subject under consideration. Delphi technique represents a very flexible research method, and one that can lend an added dimension of rigor to addressing the kinds of questions and issues that are difficult to research using more conventional methods. Delphi technique is a method in which experts provide further insight into the nature of the topic of interest that would otherwise be unavailable to the researcher. (Ritchie et al., 2005; Woodside & Martin, 2008)

Delphi studies are carried out anonymously in order to minimize conforming influences; thus, rather than meeting physically to debate the various issues under consideration, the experts are kept apart so that their views are not affected by dominant personalities, social pressure, etc. Delphi studies involve several iterative rounds, and at each stage the derived group opinion is fed back to the participants in the form of the range and distribution of responses. The panel members are requested to re-evaluate their previous replies in the light of the summary group opinion and to justify any answers which would still differ greatly from the overall group opinion. The experts are thus able to try to convince one another about their views. (Moutinho, 2000)

Ritchie (2003) deals with Delphi technique as one of the most popular and most effective approaches, currently in use for policy formulation, planning and research in tourism. Delphi technique is a method for decision support, prevention and solving of specific problems and can be also used for formulating the strategic vision of a tourism destination or defining the strategic objectives and action plans. (Vystoupil et al., 2007)

The advantage of the Delphi approach over other consensus of expert opinion forecasting approaches where participants do meet needs to be balanced against the disadvantages of being unable to engage in debate with the other experts in order to exchange ideas, clarify points, etc. and the fairly long time period required to carry out the exercise. (Moutinho, 2000)

2 Methods

The research is based on Delphi technique as a qualitative research method. The Delphi technique was chosen as a method for forecasting the future of the Town of Strážný as a tourism destination to propose the strategic vision, mission statement and strategic objectives. A panel of 10 experts drawn from the important organizations, entrepreneurs or municipality deputies (see Table 1) was put together for the purposes of the Delphi study. The research was carried out anonymously per on-line questionnaire in order to minimize conforming influences. The experts involved in the panel were kept apart so that their views could not be affected by one and other.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INSTITUTIONS</th>
<th>NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Czech Tourist Board (CzechTourism Agency)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local entrepreneurs</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management of the National Park Bohemian Forest (Šumava)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Local Development of the Czech Republic</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipality of Strážný</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novi Solutions (regional consulting company)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Authority of South Bohemia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of South Bohemia, Faculty of Economics</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: author

The Delphi study involved three iterative rounds (see Figure 1), and at each stage the derived group opinion was fed back to the participants. The panel members were requested to re-evaluate their previous replies after the first round in the light of the summary group opinion (strategic vision and mission statement) and to justify other following factors (strategic objectives). While experts were mainly asked for verbal formulation of a strategic vision, a mission statement and strategic objectives in the first round, in the second round, they were asked to revise the vision and mission and to quantify specific objectives for their future measurability. The third round was carried out for final review and revision of the complete set of strategic vision, mission and objectives. All process of the survey lasted from March 2012 to June 2012.
A public discussion of the proposals was organized in the Town of Strážný with the participation of various stakeholders after finishing the expert part of the research. Local residents, entrepreneurs and town officials had the opportunity to comment on the proposals.

3 Research results

3.1 Strážný – a town on the Czech-German borders

The Town of Strážný is located near the Czech-German borders in the Region of South Bohemia and it was strongly influenced by the development of the local community and also by the so called Iron Curtain in the past. Historical roots go deeper, Celtic settlements are proofed by the magical stones, which can be found in the surroundings of the town. The town has also a cultural potential. Four cultural sights can be found in this area.

The natural potential around the town is very high and it was influenced by the life in the border area and near the border crossing in a history. The nature is almost intact there, retains its traditional character and that is way the nature represents the most important tourist attractor of the area. The town is located in the area of the National Park and Protected Landscape Area Bohemian Forest.

425 inhabitants live in this small town (2013), but only 2 collective accommodation establishments (i.e. with 10 beds and more) it is possible to find there. The total accommodation capacity is 90 beds and there are 6 restaurants in the town. There is also a small ski centre for downhill skiing located in the area of the town but it is not competitive with the biggest ski centres in the region due to the unmodern infrastructure.

The image and the public perception of the town are strongly influenced by factors connected with negative sociopathological phenomena such as criminality or prostitution. On the other hand, Strážný is surrounded by unique landscape and nature of the National Park Bohemian Forest. The competitive advantage in terms of Strážný as a potential tourism destination, lies in the strategic position and good accessibility on the main road between South Bohemia and Lower Bavaria, which makes a connection between the important towns of this region - České Budějovice and Passau.

3.2 Delphi as a method for strategic planning of sustainable development in Strážný

The Delphi technique was chosen as a suitable method for strategic planning of sustainable development of tourism in Strážný. The town of Strážný, due to the negative perception and the lack of tourism infrastructure, is not a favourite place for visitors in this time, despite the fact that the history and natural potential of this area (National Park Bohemian Forest) are very high. Due to this fact, and thereby also due to the lack of the data about visitors from the past, the Delphi technique was chosen as a method for forecasting the future of the town as a tourism destination to propose the strategic vision, mission statement and strategic objectives for the planning period 2014 - 2020.

The social factor of sustainable development was also taken into account by strategic planning of tourism development in the Town of Strážný. The positive approach of the residents to the visitors in the town is one of the crucial fac-
 tors of sustainable tourism development in this area. The experiences from other towns or villages in the area of the National Park Bohemian Forest were the warning of quick tourism development that does not take into account the needs of the locals. The result can be a high irritation of the local residents to visitors in the area.

This research was exceptional in the Czech Republic. It was demonstrated that the Delphi technique can be used as a method for a strategic planning also for the small towns or villages as a tool of sustainable development of tourism.

3.3 What the Delphi shows

The experts that were involved in the panel should answer the following question in the first round: “How do you imagine the Town of Strážný for 7-8 years in terms of tourism? Please describe the ideal image of the town in 2020.” Subsequently, the content analysis and the framework analysis of the answers were carried out. The mission statement was proposed according to the results as follows:

STRÁŽNÝ – A FRIENDLY GATEWAY TO THE COUNTRY

The first basic question was followed by the additional questions that helped to define the strategic vision for tourism according to the responses of the experts in two versions – the basic vision and the expanded vision. The additional questions were defined as follows:

- What should the town primarily endeavor to achieve the ideal image? What specific real objectives should be set for the town to 2020
- What is needed to do for achieving the objectives according to your opinion? What specific plans / projects / actions for achieving these objectives do you suggest in the next few years (7-8 years) for the development of tourism in the town?
- What do you consider as the most important competitive advantage of the town in tourism and how it can be used?

The strategic vision for tourism was defined as the target state, respectively a shared vision of the experts, how the town should look like in 2020. The strategic vision was proposed according to the results as follows (the basic version):

"The Town of Strážný is a safe place where the prostitution has disappeared from, with a good image for the regional and traditional trade on the border and it is the basis for an active holiday in the summer, winter and off-season."

The expanded strategic vision is more specific and there are also mentioned needs of the most important stakeholders of the town development in tourism – locals, entrepreneurs and visitors. The expanded strategic vision was proposed as follows:

"The Town of Strážný offers a tourism and leisure infrastructure and services in high quality, not only for visitors, but also for the improving a quality of life of the locals. Tourism and leisure services as well as the offer in the case of bad weather are the basement of business activities of the town and create a good image that promotes unity and identity of the local citizens."

After the first round, also the verbal statement of strategic objectives were proposed, but without any quantification. The strategic objectives of the Town of Strážný as a tourism destination were devided into two parts (offer vs. demand) and defined as follows:

The strategic objectives from the tourist offer point of view:

- To build or to expand tourism superstructure (accommodation + catering facilities)
- To build or to expand tourism infrastructure (e.g. hiking and cycling routes, infrastructure for downhill and cross-country skiing, tourist information centre, etc.)
- To improve the quality of tourism services

The strategic objectives from the tourist demand point of view:

- Increase the number of visitors (one-day-visitors and overnight tourists)
- Increase the number of overnight stays

In the second round, the experts were asked if they agreed with the proposed vision and mission statement of the Town of Strážný. 80% of experts fully agreed with the proposed strategic vision and mission statement, 20% had some recommendations to the proposals, which were taken into account.

The experts should also quantify, specify and revise the strategic objectives in the part of tourist offer and tourism demand while respecting the principles of sustainable development. The strategic objectives were specified and attached to the appropriate priorities of the strategic development (see Table 2).
Table 2  Strategic objectives and priority areas of the tourism development in Strážný

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRIORITY AREA</th>
<th>STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Tourism superstructure</td>
<td>To double the accommodation capacity from the current number of beds (90) to 180 beds in a required quality and at least to double the number of overnight stays in Strážný</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To increase the number of catering facilities about at least 2 new facilities in a required quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Tourism infrastructure</td>
<td>To build and expand of the tourism infrastructure (downhill skiing centre, sport facilities, cultural facilities, biking and hiking routes, cross-country skiing infrastructure, nature trails) to stimulate a tourism demand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Development of human resources, services and tourism products</td>
<td>To support a lifelong education of the locals and to develop an active cooperation of the stakeholders in the field of tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To build a destination management and attractive destination products, including an efficient marketing communication</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: author

In the third round, the results from the previous phases of the research were finally reviewed and validated by the experts. The basic strategic tools for Strážný as a tourism destination, were defined as a complete set of strategic vision, mission and objectives.

Afterwards, a public discussion of the tourism strategy was organized in the Town of Strážný with the participation of various stakeholders. Local residents, entrepreneurs and town officials had the opportunity to comment on the proposals. Their recommendations and ideas were taken into account. This was the final step, how to bring them together and how to find a consensus among stakeholders with various opinions. It was helpful for discovering the common aims of all participants and the common approach to the tourism development of Strážný was set.

4 Conclusions

The Town of Strážný is not a favourite place for visitors in this time, despite the fact that the historical and natural potential of this area are very high. Due to the lack of the data about visitors from the past, the research was based on the Delphi technique that was chosen as a method for forecasting the future of the town as a tourism destination. The aim of the research was to propose the strategic vision, mission statement and strategic objectives for the planning period 2014 - 2020.

According to the literature review, the Delphi technique has not been used for defining strategic vision, mission and objectives in so many cases in the Czech Republic before. This research creates a methodological framework for application of this method as a tool for strategic planning of tourism development in destinations and brings the opportunity for future research. An application of this method in the small town in the Region of South Bohemia shows that it is possible to find a consensus among various stakeholders in the destination using this technique and to discover the common aims of all participants of the future development of a tourism destination. The future research could be oriented not only to the small destinations on the local level but also on the regional or national level.

Acknowledgement

The author wishes to acknowledge the assistance and support given by the Novi Solutions consulting company as well as the Town of Strážný.

References


