Tourism product development and product diversification in destinations

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HIGHLIGHTS

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

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ABSTRACT

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

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1. Introduction

Destinations depend on their primary tourism products as key pull factors motivating tourists to visit them. The paper’s analysis focuses on primary tourism products rather than on products which are less likely to provide a substantial tourist draw to specific destinations, such as accommodation, food services and transportation (Jansen-Verbeke, 1986). The attraction of destinations for tourists normally depends on the destinations’ physical, environmental and socio-cultural characteristics or attributes as primary tourism products (Jafari, 1982). The physical and environmental attributes include the climatic conditions, landscape and ecology, and the socio-cultural attributes include the history, politics, art, economic activities, ways of life, monuments, individual buildings and built environment. They are legacies in destinations of physical features and environment, and also of society’s socio-economic and cultural history, and they are also inter-related. Various activities can be associated with these characteristics, such as packaging and promotion by the tourism industry, which make them more available to tourists and thus more readily consumed by them. Tourists can have expectations about the experiences they want to gain connected with the legacy of environmental and socio-cultural characteristics of specific destinations. The tourism industry often uses the environmental and socio-cultural attributes in destinations due to their availability and because of established tourist expectations, and there can be a range of such attributes that might be developed and promoted as primary tourism products. At other times, the tourism industry also creates new tourism products in a...
destination which are not associated with the place’s specific legacies.

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

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

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

First, in the case of tourism product diversity, this can enhance destination competitiveness by offering varied experiences and activities, greater potential for customized products that meet tourists’ individual needs and interests, and enhanced flexibility in response to changing tourist tastes and demand. Diverse tourism products can also be linked through synergistic relationships and cooperative arrangements, such as by creating thematic linkages, and by securing improved coordination and shared costs through joint marketing. Such linkages can package destination attractions together, thereby increasing tourist choice and also offering efficiencies and economies for individual attractions (Bramwell, 2004a; Brunori & Rossi, 2000; Farmaki, 2012; Nordin, 2003). Product diversification can also encourage “alternative” products that potentially are more socially and environmentally sustainable for destinations, such as because they encourage appreciation of a destination’s special character, involve businesses that are locally-owned, or because the products are small-scale in terms of tourist numbers and infrastructure requirements (Bramwell, 2004a; Brunori & Rossi, 2000; Nordin, 2003).

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

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

The paper meets a gap in current knowledge because there is only limited in-depth research focused on conceptualizing and analyzing the many relationships and issues associated with destination-based tourism product concentration and diversification. Much of the limited amount of analytical research relevant to this topic deals with it as only one aspect of another broader theme, or looks at only selected aspects of the topic. Dwyer and Kim (2003) and Ritchie and Crouch (2003), for example, discuss the appeal of tourism products as just one feature of the relative competitiveness of destinations. Butler (1980) examines tourism product development but as only one of several relationships in his conceptualization of evolutionary destination life cycles. Specific thematic and spatial linkages between attractions in destinations are evaluated by Weidenfeld, Butler, and Williams (2010, 2011), who see them as providing opportunities for the tourism sector from innovation and increased competitiveness (Nordin, 2003). Bramwell (2004a, 2004b) examines the potential benefits and costs for sustainable
development of destinations offering one or just a few concentrated mass tourism products, or of developing several diversified niche tourism products, considering this for coastal tourism contexts (Weaver, 2000).

The present study thus extends current research through a concerted analysis of the many dimensions, processes, linkages and development options associated with tourism product concentration and diversification in destinations. It also considers tourism product intensification, which concerns whether products cater for mass or niche markets, and whether developments and activities are quantitatively limited or large-scale. For simplicity, the paper focuses more on the rationales for different approaches to product concentration, diversification and intensification, and less on why approaches can have adverse consequences or fail.

The analysis develops two conceptual frameworks. These frameworks simplify the features and processes in order to make them more manageable and understandable, doing so through focusing on key elements, connections and processes, and with those then being analyzed and explained in more detail (Williams, 2008). Each of the frameworks provides a systematized structure to thinking, such as by identifying particularly important features and processes, and by grouping together related ideas and relationships. They are heuristic devices, therefore, that can assist researchers and practitioners to develop coherent potential explanations of the features and processes involved in tourism product concentration, diversification and intensification in destinations (Harvey, 1996; Peet, 1998). They can assist, for example, in establishing “the reason some destinations have been successful in adopting diversification whilst others have... failed” (Farmaki, 2012, p. 184).

2. Framework of tourism product concentration and diversification in destinations

Fig. 1 presents a broad conceptual framework identifying elements, connections and processes related to the concentration and diversification of primary tourism products in destinations. Tourism product features and processes, and notably product concentration and diversification, are the key concern here, so they are at the diagram’s center. The product features and processes can only be understood, however, when considered in relation to other associated elements and processes. Thus, while the paper focuses on tourism product features and processes (in the center of Fig. 1), these are connected to tourism product supply (the left side of Fig. 1) and tourist demand and product use (the right side of Fig. 1). The two-way arrows in Fig. 1 linking these three horizontal elements (tourism product features and processes, tourism product supply, and tourist demand and product use) reflect their reciprocal, interacting relationships. Tourist demand and consumption experiences, for example, are inseparable from tourism production and supply.

Thus the relationships in Fig. 1 are fluid, dialectically inter-related, and mutually constituted so that each embodies its reciprocal relationships with the others, and they should not be seen as rigidly divided or as binaries. This means, for example, that “the factors that make up consumption and production are constantly feeding back on one another, thereby influencing the development of tourism products and their appeal to customers” (Cooper & Hall, 2008, p. 5). The conceptual framework can assist in understanding the constituent elements and processes of product concentration and diversification, but it should not be seen in a reductionist way, dissecting complex relationships into their component parts, which are then considered in isolation. Instead, the elements can only fully be understood through their dialectical relations with each other (Bramwell, 2007; Bramwell & Meyer, 2007).

At the center of Fig. 1 are the primary tourism product features and processes in tourist destinations, with the central concern here being with the concentration and diversification of tourism products. There are many related features and processes within this central part of the diagram. For each destination they include the mix of niche and mass tourism products, as well as the balance between parallel and integrative diversification of the tourism products. Other key features and processes in destinations include the spatial synergies between the tourism products, and the presence and types of thematic synergies between the products. Each of these categories of tourism product features and processes is explained subsequently. These primary tourism product features and processes are closely inter-connected, as indicated by the two-way arrows between them; and they are also intimately associated with the processes of tourism product supply and of tourist demand and product use, and to which they are similarly connected through two-way arrows.

On the left side of Fig. 1 is the product supply in destinations, with this substantially affected by the legacy of physical, environmental and socio-cultural characteristics or attributes. Market forces are also vitally important, notably through businesses making commercial decisions about products based on current and potential future levels of demand. The character of that supply can also be much influenced by destination civil society, interest groups and government according to their views about tourism’s impacts and desirable forms of development, including through destination governance affecting tourism (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Dwyer & Kim, 2003: Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). The government’s influence on product supply can often include influence through its ownership of some attractions. On the right side of Fig. 1 is tourist demand for tourism products and also the tourist uses of those products. Tourist demand reflects interactions with tourist needs and motivations, including tourists’ desires to “build their wellbeing in ways consonant with their character strengths” (Pearce, 2014, p. 48). That demand is also affected by tourists’ expectations, images, experiences and level of satisfaction with the destination products. Tourists may have particular expectations, for example, about the specific character of the climate and culture of a destination. There are also important influences on tourism product processes from the ways in which tourists decide to use the products that destinations offer, including how they combine the mix of products.

The reciprocal relationships between the different elements of Fig. 1 are emphasized by the black two-way arrows between the different parts of the diagram. Dwyer and Kim (2003, p. 379) note, for example, that “Actual visitation will depend on the match between tourist preferences and perceived destination product offerings. A destination’s product must develop in a way that ‘matches’ the evolving consumer preferences, if the destination is to enhance or even maintain competitiveness”. Another illustration is that tourist demand for a destination may increase through such innovations as increasing product quality and the range of product offerings, and this in turn highlights the importance of understanding how tourists plan and mix product elements in terms of the central part of the diagram (Fig. 1) and tourist demand and product use (the right side of Fig. 1). The two-way arrows in Fig. 1 linking these three horizontal elements (tourism product features and processes, tourism product supply, and tourist demand and product use) reflect their reciprocal, interacting relationships. Tourist demand and consumption experiences, for example, are inseparable from tourism production and supply.

In all parts of the framework, the elements and their interconnections (represented by two-way arrows) also bring together the varied tangible and intangible elements of tourism products. For example, it is argued here that, while tourism products in destinations are often based on a complex set of physical, environmental and socio-cultural attributes and infrastructure, the
product images and their meanings are also highly important. Further, it is suggested that what tourists are looking for is largely the experiences provided by the attributes and infrastructure, rather than the attributes and infrastructure themselves. Researchers increasingly suggest that tourists are interested in the opportunities that destination products offer them to help create their own experiences, sensations, lifestyles, identities and social status, albeit within the context of the product offering and wider society (Cooper & Hall, 2008; Hayes & Macleod, 2007). It is also argued that tourism product experiences are assembled to meet market demands through an increasingly careful engineering of experiences to match specific market expectations, which involves the detailed choreographing of activities, encounters and experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

From this perspective, destinations can be depicted as environments where tourism product experiences are co-produced or co-created by both the producers of the products (on the left side of Fig. 1), notably tourism staff and the host community, and by the products’ consumers (on the right side of Fig. 1), who actively create their own personal experiences, lifestyles and identities (Chang & Huang, 2014). This occurs, however, within various and often important constraints, including the legacy of environmental and socio-cultural characteristics of destinations and the society’s organization. Thus, Kastenholz, Carneiro, Marques, and Lima (2012, p. 212) contend that the tourism experience “must be understood as a complex whole, co-created and shared by tourists, service providers and the local community, and shaped by the destination-specific resources that provide the significant ingredients of this experience”. This co-creation of tourism product experiences in destinations can also helpfully be conceived as an interactive learning process for tourists and also for the service providers and local community. Service providers, for example, can accumulate additional knowledge over time through the co-creation processes, and this can assist them to refine the products and to build relationships of trust and reputation with tourists (Stamboulis & Skayannis, 2003). Innovative destinations may strive to learn from such co-creation processes and to apply the resulting ideas in product development (Guia, Prats, & Comas, 2006; Lee, Tussyadiah, & Zach, 2010). Such reciprocal processes bring together all parts of Fig. 1.

The tourism product features and processes identified in the central part of Fig. 1 can be further understood using ideas developed by Schumpeter (1934), an influential thinker about contemporary capitalism who saw entrepreneurship as the creation of opportunities for profit from consumers through “new combinations” or innovation in the supply of commodities by firms as economic actors (thus closely linking the three horizontal elements in Fig. 1). According to Jessop and Sum (2000), Schumpeter...
identifies how innovation may occur by introducing a new good or a new quality of a good, the introduction of a new method of production or of handling a product commercially, the opening of a new market for a good, the establishing of a new source of supply for the product, or by creating a new organization of the industry for the production of the product. These processes identified by Schumpeter can help to suggest new ways that destinations may improve their tourism competitiveness by finding innovative product assembly strategies (which connect the three horizontal elements of Fig. 1), such as through introducing new products, creating new thematic or spatial linkages between products, combining or bundling different products, matching products to new mass or niche markets, combining markets (mass and/or niche) in new ways with the same products, or through cooperation between product suppliers in the destination.

Product assembly in destinations can be depicted as involving the emergent processes of gathering together, combining and composition. It also concerns the dialectical relationships between elements and processes, notably between the three elements in Fig. 1 of tourism product supply, tourism product features and processes, and tourist demand and product use. There are usually choices or options for product assembly, especially because products include both tangible and intangible elements and because of the potential to alter the tangible or intangible, theming and narrative aspects of products. For Sternberg (1997, p. 952), destination products are based on the composing of experiences so as to endow them with dramatic content and desirable images. He sees this as involving two key processes of touristic composition: staging, “which consists of setting up, arranging, and contextualizing the attraction”, and thematizing. “which meaningfully situates the attraction through themes”. In such ways product assembly options can entail carefully orchestrated experiences assembled to meet market demands.

Yet there are also significant constraints for destinations in their product assembly options, such as due to the legacy of environmental and socio-cultural attributes, the existence of financial limits, competition and resistance from tourism businesses within and outside the destination, the influence of established tourist expectations, the importance of commercial viability, and the potential negative consequences of some options. There can also be significant pressure for and against certain options among different actors. Further, some options will prove to be unsuccessful, such as because they adversely affect sustainable development or because they fail commercially.

The elements and processes associated with tourism product concentration and diversification — in the central part of Fig. 1 and the focus of the present study — require explanation next. The categories presented here are not exhaustive.

2.1. Tourism product concentration and diversification

The paper’s focus is on the number or range of tourism products in destinations, conceptualized here in terms of product concentration and diversification, so this is placed at the centre of Fig. 1. Product concentration entails there being only one or a few primary products in a destination, with this limited offering potentially providing tourists with a strong and coherent destination image and identity, and with product familiarity. It might also assist tourism businesses by it encouraging greater market knowledge, easier coordination of the provision of supporting facilities and infrastructure, and by it facilitating economies of scale, such as through the development of standardized packages. Residents might also favor tourism that concentrates on one or a few of the characteristics of their community if it highlights especially distinctive community features or establishes a high profile positive image for their community. According to Getz, Svensson, Peterssen, and Gunnervall (2012, p. 48), concentrating on one product, such as a hallmark event, can be competitive and sustainable if it can “deliver clear benefits to residents and sustain the support of all key stakeholders”. Yet the lack of a diverse mix of destination products, images and experiences may reduce opportunities to customize experiences for individual tourists, and it may reduce a destination’s ability to compete with other similar destinations which develop a more diverse offering. A limited range of products can also result in higher risks and vulnerability, such as to market fluctuations and to competitor destinations which improve their products (Bramwell, 2004b). When a destination’s product portfolio is both limited in range and dependent on weather conditions, then this may also result in seasonality problems.

The diversification of primary tourism products in destinations, by contrast, involves offering more diverse products, which potentially adds value by broadening the experiences of existing tourists at the destination, or attracting different types of tourists who might not otherwise have visited (Moraru, 2011). Such product diversification can provide destinations with the benefits of economies of scale and scope, as distinct from economies of scale (Greffe, 1993).

One approach to product diversification in destinations involves the packaging and promotion of existing products in order to create new bundles or combinations of products in destinations, which can then become additional new products. Tourists themselves can also create their own customized combinations of existing products, an approach encouraged by increasing tourist use of information technologies. A second potential approach is for destinations directly to add new tourism products to the existing destination portfolio. This can include developing new products that quite closely relate to existing destination products, such as through diversifying beach tourism to include outdoor and indoor water sports. On the other hand, it can involve diversification into highly different new products, such as by connecting established mass tourism products, such as beach resorts, with new niche tourism products, such as wildlife safaris and cultural tourism (Weaver, 2001). One reason for the latter approach is that mass tourism can supply the tourists required for niche tourism products, which means they may complement each other and develop side by side (Christou, 2012; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2004, 2009). New combinations of existing and new tourism products will diversify the tourist product experiences, and that can help with attracting new markets and retaining existing markets.

Other specific directions may be taken when destinations diversify with new tourism products. One involves “developing new, large-scale tourism products, such as golf courses, marinas, casinos and exhibitions and conference centres, with these often intended to attract high spending visitors” (Bramwell, 2004a, p. 2). These developments may be aimed at specialized but large markets. While they may also be directed at “exclusive”, “up-market” audiences, they may have mass tourism features as they can be large facilities that attract substantial numbers of users. Another direction for such diversification entails “developing alternative tourism products that, at least initially, may be provided on a small scale and may draw on unique features, such as a destination’s history, culture or ecology” (Bramwell, 2004a, pp. 2–3). The products, however, may just be additional tourist experiences which could be experienced at many destinations, and they may also develop over time into large-scale, mass tourism activities.

Thus, tourism product diversification in destinations includes many potential types of innovative assembly processes, as suggested by Schumpeter (1934) in relation to the supply of commodities by firms. There are often also significant constraints on the options, however, such as because of the endowment of potential tourism resources in destinations and due to market pressures, including established consumer expectations about destination products.
2.2. Niche and mass tourism products

Strategies for primary tourism product diversification and concentration in destinations often concern whether to develop mass or niche tourism (Fig. 1) (Gartner, 1996; Smith & Eddington, 1992). Intensively developed and used tourism products have conventionally been labeled as mass tourism (Vainikka, 2013). Mass tourism is often depicted as a large-scale activity involving substantial numbers of tourists, and one that often stands out prominently from a destination's surroundings. Some also present it as involving highly standardized and inflexible tourism products (Milne & Ateljevic, 2001; Mowforth & Munt, 2009; Torres, 2002). Niche tourism products, by contrast, are generally seen as appealing to smaller and perhaps more specialist markets, and the lower numbers involved can mean that less infrastructure is required (Novelli, 2005). The products may be seen as more specialized, individualized, small-scale and flexible.

The mass and niche categories might be considered largely as simplifications to aid understanding about destination features. They can be seen as “ideal types” on a scale or continuum, with mass and niche at either end of the scale. In practice these extremes rarely fully characterize tourism across a large destination; rather, they are usually only tendencies at that geographical scale. Tourism in smaller places is also more likely to be perceived as large-scale. The absolute extremes are also unlikely to occur for other reasons. Torres (2002, p. 93), for example, argues in relation to mass tourism that there is often a failure to recognize “the ability of Fordist modes of production and consumption to become highly specialized and flexible, while retaining a mass scale”. Another complication is that products that may be considered to cater for fairly specialist markets, such as golf courses, casinos and marinas, actually can attract quite large tourist numbers and may require large-scale facilities (Bramwell, 2004a).

Despite such complications, the mass and niche categories remain analytically useful in understanding broad product tendencies in destinations. These categories suggest important questions about the scale or the intensification of tourism and about the diversity and mix of products. Scale issues are highly relevant, for example, for sustainable development objectives. Developing a range of niche market products in a destination, for instance, rather than a few mass tourism-related products, might enable tourism to draw on distinctive local cultural and environmental features, but it might also lead to more socially intrusive forms of tourism that disturb community life. Similarly, when destinations concentrate on a few mass tourism-related products, such as beach tourism, this might limit the geographical spread of tourism’s adverse impacts, but it may also hinder economic linkages with the local economy and restrict the local availability of tourist jobs (Christou, 2012). It is increasingly argued that either mass or niche tourism can be relatively more sustainable depending on the specific local circumstances, such as whether there are local quality control measures and whether local actors are committed to implementing such controls (Panakera, Willson, Ryan, & Liu, 2011; Weaver, 2000).

2.3. Parallel and integrative diversification of tourism products

Tourism product diversification in destinations can occur either in parallel or in an integrative manner (Fig. 1). First, parallel diversification occurs in destinations when primary tourism products attract significantly different customers, and when they are developed, managed and marketed as separate entities from each other. Parallel products do not tend, for example, to share their costs or find synergies and complementary linkages, and thus they may not reduce risks through cooperation. Parallel diversification can occur circumstantially, as a consequence of unplanned development, or it may be a deliberate strategy. It might be a deliberate strategy if there are marked cultural or lifestyle differences between tourist groups, and especially if the differences could lead to tension and conflicts. An example occurs in some Muslim countries where what have been called “halal tourism” hotels and other facilities can be isolated from “Western tourism” facilities (Jafari & Scott, 2014). Similarly, geographically separate resort enclaves of high quality hotels for relatively well-off international tourists can emerge in some less developed countries. Such enclaves located at a geographical distance from tourist areas for domestic tourists and less well-off international tourists are found along certain coastal stretches of the island of Mauritius (Nunkoo & Ramkisson, 2010).

Second, integrative diversification occurs when tourism products are linked together in a destination, with complementary products being combined — in organized packages or in informal patterns of visits — and with potential for cooperation in business activities between the product providers. An example is the linking of heritage tourism together with coastal resort tourism in parts of the Mediterranean, with heritage enhancing the coastal resort experience by offering possibilities for excursions and cultural performances (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2005). Integrative diversification can be seen as a form of combining existing products, developing entirely new products, modifying existing products, or various combinations of these, and it may be directed at maintaining current tourist markets or at attracting new markets. Integrative product assemblage often depends on there being complementary features between the products, and on various synergies and connections being built up. Integration can be encouraged through cooperation and collaboration between the suppliers of the different tourism products so that they create coherent packaging, themes and imaging, and also undertake joint marketing and cooperate in information technology (Buhalis, 2000; Go & Govers, 1999). Such joint promotion and working can be encouraged when compatible sites and attractions are spatially adjacent, near to existing tourist routes, or are combined within new tourist routes (Jansen-Verbeke & Lievois, 1999; Nordin, 2003; Weidenfeld, et al., 2011).

A study by Kontogeorgopoulos (2005) illustrates the integrative diversification of primary tourism products through spatial overlaps and other connections between mass tourism and ecotourism products in Phuket, Thailand. He notes that there “the bulk of recent ecotourism activities … have grown out of, and adjacent to, ‘typical’ mass sites such as the hotel complexes and urban centres”, and he argues that this is not coincidental because “Without close ties to mass tourism, [ecotourism] companies such as Sea Canoe and Siam Safari would fail to survive financially” (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2005, p. 5). Phuket’s ecotourism companies are identified as closely dependent on the area’s mass tourism industry, with their clientele using the area’s substantial mass tourism infrastructure (such as the city’s airport), often staying in large and luxurious hotels, and often using local travel agents to book their ecotourism trip.

Integrative product assembly that brings together different products and experiences can create cumulative effects and synergies in people’s perceptions, emotions and attachments that add up to more than the individual product component parts. These effects can enhance a destination’s symbolic images and meanings, and also improve the overall tourism experience of the destination, thereby increasing destination competitiveness. Such effects are identified by Brunori and Rossi (2000, p. 411) in relation to the integration of different tourism products on wine routes. They argue that “the creation of a tourist experience around a wine route is not simply the sum of the outputs from individual farms. The integration of farmers’ efforts creates a structured coherence of
symbolic and material elements, which adds value to the single products whether it is wine, gastronomic products or accommodation”.

At times the integrative diversification of tourism products serves merely to extend holiday packages without there being strong compatibilities and complementarities between the products. Such poorly integrated product assembly can result in unclear images and in unsatisfying tourist experiences. In a discussion of Turkish tourism product differentiation, Duman and Kozak (2010, p. 104) argue that “most tours appear to emphasize seaside vacation features along with added sightseeing tours to well-known places and [they] do not necessarily have an identifiable unique theme that would characterize and differentiate the tour and make it more competitive”.

Achieving greater competitiveness through integrative diversification is likely to be most effective when add-on products offer distinctive cultural meanings and enjoyable experiences that clearly add value to tourists’ holiday experiences. In the case of Phuket’s product assembly, which integrates mass tourism and ecotourism, Kontogeorgopoulos (2005) argues that the close physical proximity of the mass tourism resorts to the “natural” ecotourism area means that the area’s ecotourism operators have often employed “communicative staging” to highlight the distinctive tourist experiences of natural authenticity and geographical remoteness. This has involved engineering the meanings and experiences by finding more dramatic scenic locations, providing “hands-on” experiences with rock formations, water and vegetation, using green-painted Land Rovers, having guides that wear khaki adventure gear, and communicating authenticity and discovery in the textual discourses and images in promotional material for the tours. In such ways the ecotourism operators have carefully orchestrated the assembly of the tourists’ expectations, encounters and experiences.

2.4. Tourism product thematic synergy

Linkages and synergies can emerge between diversified tourism products in destinations based on their thematic compatibility and complementarity (Hunt & Crompton, 2008; Weidenfeld et al., 2011). Weidenfeld et al. (2010, p. 2) describe compatibility among tourist attractions as “the degree to which two businesses interchange customers”, with that often based on the synergies of appeal and symbolic meanings between the attractions. Product assembly linkages between tourist attractions in destinations might develop circumstantially or they can be deliberately fostered in order to achieve mutual benefits. There are synergies and linkages through the compatible and complementary appeal between attractions, and the attractions may also develop cooperative working, such as through sharing marketing and imaging, specialist training, and ticketing activities. According to Brunori and Rossi (2000, p. 410), synergies among attractions involve “linkages between two or more entities, whose joint effort produce effects that are quantitatively and qualitatively more far reaching than the effects of similar entities when they operate alone”. Developing synergies among products and attractions can help to avoid negative competition, improve cooperation, prolong the holiday season, and enhance overall destination performance (Torres, 2002; Weidenfeld et al., 2010, 2011). For example, the synergy between outdoor and indoor water sports in beach tourism destinations can help to reduce seasonality due to poor weather.

Destinations can assemble together tourism products with either similar or dissimilar features. With the first of these approaches, that of combining similar products, the products are likely to share some common characteristics and to offer some related meanings and experiences, features that can provide a basis for the development of synergies (Brunori & Rossi, 2000). Yet, connecting together very similar products and attractions in a destination could be seen as a product concentration strategy, rather than as a diversification strategy. If the products and attractions differ a little, however, then this might be seen instead as diversification into associated but more specific products. That might be the case, for example, with beach tourism resorts that add such products as outdoor and indoor water sports, spas, scuba diving and whale watching.

The second approach to linking diversified destination products is to connect dissimilar products and attractions. According to Lue, Crompton, and Stewart (1996), tourists may prefer destinations with varied attractions based on different product features as that variety is more likely to satisfy all tourist group members (Weidenfeld et al., 2010, 2011). Further, general leisure tourists are not always seeking a specific type of tourism product, and thus they may appreciate some diversity. Effective diversification based on dissimilarity entails the assembly of dissimilar products and experiences which are compatible and complementary (Brunori & Rossi, 2000). Non-complementary dissimilar tourism products are unlikely to develop synergies, and they are more likely to remain as separate and parallel attractions (Weidenfeld et al., 2010). The effective integration of dissimilar products in destinations will encourage tourists to become immersed in the destination and to have more varied experiences, features that can promote destination competitiveness.

2.5. Tourism product spatial synergy

Primary tourism products in destinations may form spatial clusters, and their co-located agglomeration may have an enhanced appeal for tourists. Such clusters can emerge in unplanned or planned ways. The combination of spatial proximity among products and attractions, combined with synergies of appeal between them, can result in an increased likelihood that tourists who visit one attraction will visit others. Weidenfeld et al. (2011, p. 597) describe how the geographical clustering of attractions “creates spin-off benefits in terms of generating increased aggregate visitor numbers and provides a critical mass of activities to attract visitors”. They suggest that spatial clusters of similar or different tourism products can help in assembling “a narrative structure that will lead visitors through thematically interrelated sub-attractions and create business opportunities and extend length of stay” (p. 600). Michael (2003, p. 137) further contends that, where the circumstances are favorable, such clusters may have multiplier and externality effects, “accelerating opportunities for new forms of economic wealth by creating a demand for a host of complementary activities which in turn generate their own effects”. The notion of “co-opetition” suggests that geographical clustering between tourism attractions provides the attractions with mutual synergies and other shared benefits that can help the attractions to compete more effectively with others outside the cluster that offer a similar product (Brandenburger & Nalebuff, 1997).

Spatial proximity among diversified destination products creates a greater local density of products that in turn can encourage mutual linkages and synergies, such as through joint marketing, cross-selling, shared buying groups, and the formation of local tourism associations. At the same time, however, spatial proximity between products and attractions can also encourage competition among them. The balance between cooperation and competition, and the extent of the linkages and synergies, may vary between different types of spatial product clusters. In their study of the geographical clustering of tourist attractions in Cornwall, UK, Weidenfeld et al. (2011) suggest that the balance between competition and cooperation between nearby attractions will vary according to the various...
attractions' strategic decisions. But they found that “In most cases, the greater the spatial proximity and the thematic product complementarity between attractions, the higher the level of cooperation” (p. 624). They also noted that “co-located similar product attractions are likely to be less cooperative, whereas thematic complementary ones are likely to become the closest allies and achieve the highest levels of interdependency” (p. 627). Similarly, in a study of Chinese national parks, Ma, Ryan, and Bao (2009) suggest that when national parks with similar features are spatially clustered, then there may be substitutive effects and intense competition among them for market share. They also assert that when national parks with different characteristics are spatially clustered, then synergies will arise, “and the attractiveness of a cluster of national parks as one destination will be improved” (p. 28).

3. Framework of tourism product development options in destinations

The first conceptual framework examined the elements, connections and processes of concentration and diversification for primary tourism products in destinations, and it was based on a broad and integrative perspective on the complex and reciprocal relations between the associated elements. Attention next focuses on a more specific conceptual framework (Fig. 2) that considers strategic options for tourism destinations. It is based on just two features of the development of primary tourism products in destinations: the extent of their product concentration and diversification (on a scale from low diversification to high diversification), and the extent of their product intensification (on a scale from low intensification in one or more niche products to high intensification in one or more mass tourism products). These two features of primary tourism products in destinations were chosen as they are fundamental dimensions of destination development and of related planning strategies. The two scales help in identifying broad options for tourism product development in a destination, as well as potential strategic directions for destinations between the options, as indicated by the arrows. There are five broad options, although consideration of parallel and integrative diversification further increases the options.

The framework assists in distinguishing analytically between strategic options for tourism development in destinations. The options are simply “ideal types”, however, and when specific destinations are compared against the framework’s options then the actual situation is usually more complex. In any destination, for example, there may be elements of more than one of the five options in various combinations and relationships. Often it is also difficult to distinguish between mass and niche tourism products, especially as niche products can begin to appeal to large tourist numbers, and especially so when there are synergies between a destination’s products. Another complication is that some “ideal types” indicated in Fig. 2 may tend only to be found in small geographical areas, with a higher likelihood that more complex tourism product diversification patterns will be found in destinations with a larger geographical area, where there tend to be more diverse tourism resources and more communities with differing development needs. In addition, the numbers of tourists attracted by a tourism product may be considered a niche market in a busy urban tourism destination, while the same numbers might be perceived as mass market in a remote rural destination.

There are also transitional features as primary tourism products evolve within destinations, and thus Fig. 2 uses indicative arrows to suggest some potential development trends between the “ideal type” options. As time passes, for instance, it is increasingly likely that destinations will pass thresholds in terms of tourist numbers, business development and capital accumulation, which will then encourage greater product diversification and complexity. Yet, it is also possible that some products will fail to thrive, so that product diversity in a destination can reduce over time. Such temporal trajectories in destinations are affected by the operation of the market and also by tourism’s regulatory frameworks, such as through the use of tourism and general development plans, moratoria laws restricting new development, and constraints on building height. Another complexity in relationships between the extent of product diversification and the degree of product intensification is that they are often interrelated dimensions. It can be useful, therefore, to consider that these dimensions co-evolve together over time.

Despite the complexity of primary tourism product elements and relationships in destinations, it is contended that the simplified “ideal type” framework can assist researchers and policy makers to identify potential options for tourism product development and for related destination planning and growth management. The categories also help us to slice analytically into more contingent and complex real world situations. Many tourists and local residents in
destinations in their discussions about tourism often intuitively refer to the scale of development and to distinctions between mass tourism and special interest tourism, which suggests these dimensions may assist in our thinking (Chaperon & Bramwell, 2011). Critical insights can also be gained, both analytically and empirically, by exploring the categories in Fig. 2 against specific cases and by evaluating the complexities that are less easily related to the simplified typology. Next, each of the five “ideal type” tourism product development options is briefly explained and illustrated.

3.1. Concentrated niche tourism

This option represents a destination with one or a very small number of primary tourism products that attract a fairly small number of tourists. It might occur at an early stage of tourism development, when limited numbers of tourists discover a new destination and when a few local businesses recognize this activity as an economic opportunity (Godfrey & Clarke, 2000; Weaver, 2000). This might be similar to Butler’s (1980) exploration stage of destination development, when it is suggested that adventurous tourists initially discover a place. However, the niche tourism development option may also be one that destinations desire in the longer term, for such reasons as seeking a more balanced economy, due to a lack of infrastructure, or because of limited local interest or government will concerning tourism development.

An example of concentrated niche tourism is wildlife tourism in parts of Tanzania, where this specific tourism focus has partly resulted from a lack of infrastructure, trained staff, legal frameworks, and marketing and promotion (Wade, Mwasaga, & Eagles, 2001). Yet, wildlife tourism in some areas of Tanzania, such as in the northern game and mountain parks “circuit”, which includes the Serengeti National Park, has grown in scale to a point where some might consider that it no longer represents niche tourism (Nelson, 2008). Further, Tanzania’s wildlife tourism has in places also incorporated community-based tourism initiatives, and there the product has diversified to also include cultural, ethnic and craft tourism.

3.2. Concentrated mass tourism

This development strategy involves tourists being attracted to the destination in large numbers based on a single or just a few primary tourism products which are intensively developed and used. In “concentrated mass tourism” destinations there is often rapid development of secondary and conditional products (Jansen-Verbeke, 1986) around a single or a few closely related primary tourism products. In some places, particularly some coastal resorts, the mass production and consumption features concentrated on a limited product range have encouraged a relatively modest quality of development. Destinations with concentrated mass tourism characteristics include Cancin in Mexico (Martínez, Nechar, & González, 2013) and Phuket in Thailand between 1990 and 1996 (Kontogeorgopoulus, 1998). The Mexican concentrated mass tourism beach resort of Los Cabos was developed in the early 1980s, and it now has 40 hotels, numerous timeshare apartments and tourist condominiums, seven championship golf courses, and its beach-based activities are supplemented with deep-sea sport fishing, scuba diving, snorkelling, surfing and windsurfing (Agarwal & Shaw, 2007).

When mass tourism is successful, destination policy makers may be unconcerned about substantially diversifying the tourism products, or reluctant to take risks in investing in alternative cultural and environmental tourism resources. Slinger-Friedman (2009, p. 18) comments that “The development of sun, sea, and sand tourism in the Caribbean has meant that many islands have been slow to promote their other environmental assets”. Concentrated mass tourism development which is inflexible and low quality, however, may start to lose its attraction for tourists with increasingly sophisticated interests and requirements. In Turkey it has also been argued that “traditional seaside tourism should be linked with inland tourism, based on the rich culture and natural landscape of the latter”, with this diversification being proposed in order to “allow tourism demand for big coastal cities to be dispersed inland, thus enabling development to spread more evenly via infrastructure and tourism facilities” (Duman & Kozak, 2010, p. 102). Diversification within concentrated mass tourism resorts may also evolve out of its core products. Indeed, the range of beach activities and other facilities in some resorts might be argued to involve features of niche market tourism, or at least of diversified mass tourism.

3.3. Diversified parallel/integrative niche tourism

In this form of product diversification the primary tourism products in a destination are largely based on a niche market, small-scale products. On the one hand, the destination’s niche products may develop separately and in parallel, with discrete tourist market segments being attracted, and with the producers of the different niche products possibly failing to cooperate for mutual commercial benefit. Alternatively, the destination’s niche products may be used in more integrative ways, with tourists interested in several of the niche products, and with producers of these products potentially successfully cooperating together.

The small Caribbean island nation of Dominica has developed through a variety of relatively niche tourism activities related to nature and the island’s indigenous population of Caribs, with tourist visitation of only 84,000 in 2006. Dominica’s rocky shores and black sand beaches, as well as the physical difficulty of expanding airport provision, have deterred traditional resort-based mass tourism (Slinger-Friedman, 2009; Weaver, 2014). Diverse eco-, cultural and adventure tourism activities have developed based on the island’s abundant biological and natural assets, such as its tropical rainforests, hot sulphur springs, flowering plants, waterfalls, whale watching opportunities, diving sites, the Boiling Lake, and large bat and bird populations. There are hiking and biking trails and adventure tourism opportunities associated with the rivers, lakes and waterfalls, and cultural tourism has developed around the presence of the indigenous population of Caribs, who sell handicrafts and operate guesthouses. Yet, on Dominica there are threats to this small-scale tourism, notably from cruise tourism, with almost 300,000 cruise tourist visits during 2011—12, and from opportunistic development. Weaver (2014, p. 528) suggests that “This pervasive opportunism portends a mass-tourism future for Dominica”.

3.4. Diversified parallel/integrative mass tourism

With this form of product diversification the destination products are largely based on intensively developed and used primary tourism products. It entails several, but possibly related, large-scale activities which attract large volumes of tourists and that may well stand out from their surroundings. As with the previous category, these mass tourism products may develop in parallel for relatively separate tourist markets and with possibly limited cooperation between the providers, or else there may be substantial numbers of tourists who consume several of these products during their visit to the destination, so that they are integrated in terms of tourist use, and cooperative arrangements might also be in place among the tourism operators.

The features of diversified mass tourism are evident in many more mature, large coastal resorts around the Mediterranean. On
the Mediterranean island of Malta, for example, the north coast resorts have seen the development of large-scale tourism products, notably large marinas at Sliema's Hilton Hotel complex, at Manoel Island (between Sliema and the capital city of Valletta), and at Cottonera (a historic area opposite Valletta), as well as a large sea life tourist attraction near the major resort of Bugibba, and casinos in the resorts of St Julian's and Qawra (Bramwell, 2007). Many hotels have also developed business tourism facilities, such as conference, exhibition and meetings spaces, in order to attract business tourists and to increase year-round hotel occupancy. These products are often quite large-scale facilities that appeal to large numbers of tourists, even if only as a backdrop for a visit as in the case of the marinas, although it is possible to see some of them as niche market products. To further add to the difficulties of categorization, Malta is also developing other products which traditionally have been seen as niche tourism products, as discussed next.

3.5. Diversified parallel/integrative mass and niche tourism

Malta is a good illustration of a destination combining both mass and niche tourism products. That diversity is increasingly evident when the spatial scale of analysis is widened to include the smaller Maltese island of Gozo. There are several significant niche tourism products on Gozo, a largely rural island that is doubly peripheral because access to it from the main island of Malta involves a sea crossing (Bramwell, 2007; Chaperon & Bramwell, 2011, 2013). While the main island has much resort development with related mass tourism products, this is far less evident on Gozo. Overnight tourist numbers for Gozo are modest, with many tourists attracted by its good quality diving sites, walking opportunities to experience the attractive scenery and small rural settlements, heritage sites, and its traditional ways of life. The integrity and small scale of these tourism activities is more feasible due to Gozo's physical separation from the main island's mass tourism resorts. Gozo's circumstances have encouraged its overnight tourism industry to develop its niche products more in parallel rather than in an integrated way with Malta's mass tourism.

Since 1989, however, the Maltese government has sought to diversify the main island's own tourism products to include cultural, heritage and rural tourism, with these often seen as niche tourism products (Bramwell, 2007; Markwick, 1999). The main island's heritage sites include the ancient temple of Mnajdra and the 16th century city of Valletta, both World Heritage Sites. While depicted by some as niche tourism, some of the island's heritage and cultural sites are visited by large volumes of tourists, and many tourists who visit those sites are principally attracted to Malta by the beach tourism offer, or are on day excursions from cruise ships. Thus, some of the main island's heritage and culture sites may be better depicted as mass tourism rather than niche tourism sites.

4. Conclusions

The paper has argued that there is a need for more research with a consistent focus on understanding the features and relationships associated with primary tourism products in destinations. A broad, relational perspective on destination product assembly can assist with this research as it directs attention to the relationships involved with tourism products and product development processes, including with their wider contexts. Primary tourism products are key draw cards that prompt tourists to visit a destination, and yet there are surprisingly few conceptually-focused studies examining their varied elements, the processes through which they operate and are inter-connected, or how those features and processes are manifested in different destinations. The concept of tourism product assembly in destinations can help to direct attention to these issues. This paper has begun to examine analytically and conceptually the different elements, processes and relationships that are involved with this assembly.

Two conceptual frameworks were developed which consider the elements, processes and strategic options connected with primary tourism product assembly in destinations. The first framework considered the broad relationships in destinations between product features and processes, tourist demand and product use, and tourism product supply. It focused in particular on the features and processes associated with tourism products in destinations, notably those connected with product concentration and diversification. The second framework presented a typology of strategic options for the development of primary tourism products in destinations, this being based on the degree of product intensification and also of concentration and diversification. These frameworks are systematized, simplifying heuristic devices that identify particularly important features and processes, and also group together related ideas and relationships. They are intended to add to our understanding of destination primary tourism products by assisting researchers and practitioners to develop broad and coherent explanations. The frameworks highlight potential combinations of primary tourism products and processes in destinations, with these also indicating product options for the future strategic development of destinations. These product development options include developing niche or mass tourism products, diversifying in parallel or integrative ways, and developing spatial or thematic synergies; and they also involve inter-related tangible and more intangible elements.

Future studies of the assembly of primary tourism products in destinations could explore in more depth the product features, processes and strategic options identified in the paper. These studies might usefully apply the broad and relational frameworks presented here. The specific features, combinations and processes will vary according to each destination's context, but assessments of such contingent variations between places will help in understanding more general processes. This study has focused on rationales for different approaches to product concentration and diversification, but we also need more detailed assessments of why some approaches in different contexts have adverse consequences or fail, such as for reasons of lack of commercial viability or unsustainable development. More specifically, further research could examine the temporal dimensions of product diversification, which were not explored in Fig. 1. Some primary tourism products, for example, may emerge in a destination only during particular seasons, such as when climatic conditions are suitable or during religious celebrations, and we need to understand their relationships with other destination products.

It would also be helpful for future work to explore in more depth how tourism product features and relationships are manifested in the co-creation of tourism experiences through the activities of both producers and consumers. Further, there is scope for research on how tourism product features and relationships reflect the legacy of environmental and socio-cultural attributes, market-based processes, and also public policy decisions and market interventions in different situations. Further, there is a need for assessments of the relationships between choices and constraints in tourism product assembly in destinations. More broadly, future studies could usefully trace how tourism products in destinations are assembled relationally as actors, ideas, material and market forces, local attributes, techniques, aspirations, power relations, governance and practices interact both within and beyond the geographical scale of the destination.

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