

Developing a Model for an Integrated Tourism Product: A Critical Analysis of Approaches and Territorial Perspectives

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Abstract This study represents an attempt to analyze the scientific approaches used in tourism sciences concerning the integrated tourism product. Both international and domestic scientific studies on the concept of the integrated tourism product to date demonstrate a gap in research. Current works focus primarily on discussions about the evolution of the terminology of the tourism product and its structure, which are addressed similarly by various disciplines and in the theoretical framework. This raises the question of whether the integrated tourism product is a pure expression of the diversification of mixed forms of tourism or represents the development of the tourism product of the territory as a comprehensive offer. For this reason, the objective of this paper is to continue with the analysis and proposal of an integrated tourism product model that combines the diversification of forms of tourist mobility with a territorial approach, aiming at sustainable development and increased destination attractiveness. The methodology used in this paper involves critical literature analysis, logical operations, and heuristics. The outcome of the study is the creation of a structured model for an integrated tourism product. Although the work is theoretical in nature, the issues discussed are of a practical nature.

Keywords: Integrated tourism product, territorial tourism product, integrated tourism product model.

1 Introduction

The concept of the tourism product has long been the subject of theoretical and methodological debate in international literature, owing to its complex,

multidisciplinary, and constantly evolving nature (Panasiuk, 2017; Smith, 1994). In particular, the development of the integrated tourism product has been challenged by the lack of a unified theoretical framework, even as industry practice has advanced in offering increasingly sophisticated solutions to the needs of the contemporary tourist (Steven & Dimitriadis, 2004). While product development in industrial sectors generally follows clear paradigms of innovation and design, in the service sector—especially in tourism—this process remains fragmented and is often driven by intuition and individual experience (Menor et al., 2002).

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2022), tourism products are defined as combinations of tangible and intangible elements—such as natural and cultural resources, hospitality infrastructure, and related activities—that together create a coherent offer centered around a specific travel purpose. However, in many cases, the design and delivery of these products occur in a fragmented and uncoordinated manner, particularly at the regional level, where multiple public and private actors operate independently (Benur & Bramwell, 2015; Grigorova & Shopova, 2013). This presents a significant challenge for the integration of various components of the tourism offer and the creation of a consistent and coherent experience for the visitor.

The absence of a structured theoretical framework for the integrated tourism product has been emphasized by several scholars who have called for the development of new models that go beyond the traditional supply-side components (Panasiuk, 2017; Grigorova & Shopova, 2013). On the other hand, the concept of *integrated tourism* has been used to describe efforts to link tourism development with broader socio-economic and environmental contexts, with the aim of fostering sustainable and inclusive development (Benur & Bramwell, 2015; Bousset et al., 2010).

This paper aims to analyze and synthesize contemporary literature concerning the conceptualization, structure, and design of the integrated tourism product. Through a critical review of scholarly contributions from the past five years, the paper will examine current gaps in the literature, the challenges associated with practical implementation, and the role of institutional and commercial actors in creating a competitive and integrated tourism offering. In this context, the study seeks to address key questions, such as how the integrated tourism product is conceptualized in academic discourse, what its core and interactive components are, and what best practices exist for its successful implementation at the destination level.

To achieve these objectives, the paper will be structured into several main sections: first, it will explore theoretical approaches to the nature and definition of the tourism product; second, it will examine the concept of integration in the tourism context; and third, it will review models and components of the integrated tourism product. Finally, the study will present international case studies and best practices that may serve as reference points for the sustainable and effective development of this type of product across different destinations.

2 Literature Review

The concept of the tourism product remains a subject of considerable debate in international literature, due to its interdisciplinary nature and continuous evolution in both theoretical and practical dimensions (Panasiuk, 2017). This semantic ambiguity arises from the broad usage of the term across various academic disciplines, including economics, marketing, management, and geography—each offering distinct perspectives on the structure and substance of a tourism product.

While product development in the manufacturing industry is well-established and extensively researched, the services sector, including tourism, lags significantly behind. Steven and Dimitriadis (2005) argue that this research gap is unjustifiable, particularly given the growing importance of the service sector in advanced economies. One of the core challenges lies in the conceptualization and development of new services. According to Menor et al. (2002), unlike tangible goods, services are often perceived as spontaneous creations—emerging from intuition, talent, or sheer luck—rather than outcomes of structured development processes. This approach leads to a lack of standardization, weak preparatory phases, and limited customer involvement in the product development lifecycle.

In the tourism sector, product development is frequently influenced by independent, market-based decisions made by various actors, rather than by coordinated policies or destination-level strategies (Benur, 2015). This fragmentation often results in disjointed offerings that may not align with tourists' expectations, thereby hindering innovation in designing new tourism products. Earlier studies have shown that most existing tourism product development models date back to the 1980s and tend to complement each other rather than introduce novel approaches.

To address this gap, Debadyuti and colleagues propose a model that integrates two strategic analytical frameworks: the **Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP)** and **Quality Function Deployment (QFD)**. The aim is to establish a standardized, objective framework for the development of intangible tourism products by actively involving industry experts in the identification and prioritization of tourist needs. AHP facilitates the hierarchical comparison of factors using both quantitative data and expert judgments, while QFD translates these needs into actionable operational strategies.

The integration of these tools offers significant advantages by improving the alignment between development strategies and tourist needs, enabling decision-making that is based on structured analysis rather than solely on intuition or isolated experience. Furthermore, this model helps identify synergistic or conflicting relationships among strategies, thereby building a logical decision-making structure for integrated tourism planning. In conclusion, the literature points to a clear need for a shift from fragmented and intuition-based approaches toward systematic and scientifically grounded models in tourism product development. The application of

AHP and QFD provides an innovative and integrated approach capable of addressing the complexity and dynamism of the modern tourism sector.

3 Methodology

To ensure a rigorous and comprehensive literature review, a structured search protocol was adopted using reputable academic databases, namely Lens.org, Emerald Insight, and Google Scholar. The review focused exclusively on peer-reviewed, open-access journal articles published in English between 2020 and 2024, thereby capturing the most current academic discourse and empirical developments in the field. Eligibility criteria were defined to guarantee scientific quality and relevance. Only scholarly articles with recognized citation potential, published in peer-reviewed journals, were considered. The studies were required to explore key dimensions of the integrated tourism product (ITP), including its definition, structural configuration, and design methodologies, as well as the perceptions of tourists and key stakeholder groups. A meticulous search strategy was implemented using a combination of Boolean operators (e.g., *AND*, *OR*) and targeted keywords such as: "*definition of integrated tourism product*", "*ITP structure*", "*design model for tourism products*", and "*stakeholder engagement in tourism*". These search terms were iteratively refined to maximize both sensitivity and specificity of the results retrieved. To ensure consistency and analytical depth, each retrieved article was subjected to a two-stage screening process: first, through title and abstract review, followed by full-text analysis. Articles that met all inclusion criteria were then coded thematically, enabling structured data synthesis and comparison across studies. The findings were analyzed using a narrative synthesis approach, which allowed for the integration of qualitative insights and theoretical contributions. This approach not only highlighted thematic convergences and divergences across the literature but also identified research gaps, methodological limitations, and opportunities for future inquiry in the domain of integrated tourism product development.

4 Assessment of the Structure of the Tourism Product and Destination Offer from the Perspective of UNWTO and Contemporary Literature

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines the tourism product as "a combination of tangible and intangible elements, such as natural, cultural, and man-made resources, attractions, facilities, services and activities around a specific center of interest" (UNWTO, 2024). From a narrower perspective, the tourism offer

refers to the range of goods and services made available to tourists (Gołembski, 2002), which can be examined either at the destination level (macro perspective) or from the standpoint of individual tourism enterprises (micro perspective) (Kurek, 2007). Tourist supply is typically concentrated in areas with distinct touristic value, and it is demand that drives movement toward these locations. Unlike most other forms of economic activity, the tourism product necessitates the physical presence of the consumer at the place of consumption.

In market terms, the tourism offer of a destination does not function as a conventional offer with civil law implications. Rather, it is conceptualized territorially, viewed through two interpretive lenses: the subjective, as constructed by the destination itself, and the psychological, shaped by tourists' expectations and perceptions. This dual framework delineates the specific elements of a destination's tourism offer, which include the intrinsic touristic values, attractions, and services provided.

The core components of the destination offer comprise:

1. **Accommodation systems and supplementary services**, including pre-tourist services, which vary depending on the type and pattern of tourist flows and preferences of different visitor segments.
2. **Events**, which serve as temporal extensions of tourism activity across the year. While generally considered supplementary, in cases where events constitute the main reason for visitation, they are treated as primary tourism attractions.
3. **Tourism information**, which facilitates the integration and interpretation of disparate tourism elements, enhancing the coherence and attractiveness of the overall offer.
4. **Public services**, which are essential for ensuring a secure, clean, and health-conscious environment, thereby supporting tourist comfort and satisfaction throughout their stay.

5 Conceptualizing, Structuring, and the Role of Stakeholders in the Development of the Integrated Tourism Product

A review of the academic literature reveals a frequent yet often unelaborated use of the term *integrated tourism product*. In numerous studies, the concept is taken as self-evident, with minimal attention paid to its formal definition or theoretical underpinnings. Few works attempt to delineate a comprehensive structure for what constitutes such a product. In some cases, the term is applied pragmatically

depending on the regional context under study, while other scholars treat it as a subcategory of regional tourism products or within the broader framework of integrated tourism development.

Among the limited definitions available, the most explicit is offered by Aleksander Panasiuk, who states:

“An integrated tourism product should be understood as an offer of a tourist area developed by entities providing services in the tourism market, including commercial actors (hotels, restaurants, transport providers, vendors, operators of cultural, entertainment, recreational and sports facilities, etc.) and public actors (tourist destinations, i.e., local government authorities), as well as tourism organizations that provide direct regional services, tourism bodies, regional authorities, direct collaborations, organizations, and possibly tourism clusters.” (Panasiuk, 2017)

This definition, however, lacks further theoretical development, particularly with regard to its internal structure. A noteworthy attempt to conceptualize a structural framework for the integrated tourism product is presented by Bulgarian scholars Zlatka Grigorova and Ivanka Shopova, in the context of the Smolyan region. Their proposed model outlines a multi-step process for the development of competitive integrated tourism products, involving: the identification of tourism resources; evaluation of regional uniqueness; segmentation and market targeting; quality assurance; authenticity and innovation; and ultimately, integrated management involving multiple stakeholders (Grigorova & Shopova, 2013).

While there is broad consensus in the literature that commercial entities play a crucial role in the development and delivery of tourism products, there remains an open question as to the timing and scope of stakeholder collaboration. Is cooperation more productive during the creation phase, or after the tourism product has already been developed, when stakeholders focus on marketing and delivery?

Grigorova and Shopova’s model indicates that integration is more prominently reflected in the management phase of tourism products, rather than in their initial conceptual design. Stakeholder involvement, in their view, is instrumental for facilitating the implementation and delivery of an already-defined product. In contrast, Panasiuk (2017) proposes a closer identification between the integrated and territorial tourism product, emphasizing the need for institutional engagement to effectively satisfy tourist demand.

Given that responsibility for product development lies with both public and private stakeholders, their respective roles become critical. Public authorities are expected to contribute through infrastructure development, destination branding, policy frameworks, and tourist information services. Meanwhile, private entities hold primary responsibility for service provision and commercial operations.

While public tourism services are offered by national, regional, or local institutions, the attractiveness of a destination is often generated by private-sector offerings (Panasiuk, 2017).

Panasiuk (2016) also draws attention to the issue of information asymmetry between service providers and tourists. A substantial portion of the structural components of the tourism product remains unknown to individual tourists. Conversely, there are specific elements of a territorial tourism product that are only evident from the perspective of the visitor, and often go unnoticed by product managers—namely, the implicit motivations that draw tourists to a specific destination.

Thus, the development of an integrated tourism product requires more than the mere coexistence of supply-side actors or isolated tourism services within a defined territory. Rather, it necessitates the intentional creation of conditions for coordinated action among tourism enterprises, local authorities, and regional tourism organizations. These actors must actively support territorial cohesion and foster collaborative mechanisms that ensure the integrated development, management, and delivery of a tourism product aligned with regional competitive advantages.

6 Integrated Diversification of the Regional Tourism Product

The diversification of tourism products represents a complex process of sectoral restructuring within the tourism system, driven by the emergence and development of new types of tourism and recreational activities in a given region (Korn & Kol, 2018). Benur (2015) identifies various forms of diversification, including *parallel* and *integrated* diversification. He characterizes integrated diversification as a form of tourism product assembly that may involve combining existing products, developing entirely new ones, modifying current offerings, or various combinations thereof. This strategy can target both the retention of existing tourism markets and the attraction of new ones.

Integration is often encouraged through collaboration among providers of different tourism products, enabling them to create coherent packages, themes, and destination imagery. Such collaboration may also extend to joint marketing initiatives and shared information technology platforms (Buhalis, 2000; Go & Govers, 1999). Cooperative promotion efforts are more likely to succeed when compatible sites and attractions are located in close spatial proximity, near established tourist routes, or integrated into newly designed travel itineraries (Jansen-Verbeke & Lievois, 1999; Nordin, 2003).

The importance of integrated tourism product diversification lies not only in its potential to add value for tourists—by broadening the range of travel motivations and expanding tourism movement forms—but also in its capacity to stimulate regional growth and development through a wider portfolio of tourism products. This, in turn, addresses key challenges in optimizing regional tourism (Korn & Kol, 2018), while also contributing to the long-term development of regional space through the emergence of new mechanisms for unlocking its tourism and recreational potential (Korn & Kol, 2018).

The creation of an integrated tourism product ensemble can generate cumulative effects by connecting the perceptions and emotional experiences of tourists—offering more than the sum of individual product elements. In doing so, integrated products enhance destination image, increase tourist satisfaction, and strengthen regional or destination competitiveness.

On the other hand, the integrated diversification of regional tourism products implies the need for the formulation of a strategic framework for both the development of recreational areas and for the region itself as a tourism destination. The realization of such strategies requires the active involvement of all relevant stakeholders in the regional tourism development process.

For integrated diversification to avoid merely extending holiday packages without real complementarity among the component products, it is essential to engage tourism actors in the product design and proposal phases. Failure to do so may lead to poorly constructed integrated products, resulting in inconsistent destination branding and unsatisfactory tourist experiences.

Furthermore, the tourism industry is spatially fragmented, with development concentrated in a few high-growth poles. Its current distribution is highly uneven—both between and within countries, regions, and localities—raising additional concerns regarding equitable regional development and the need for spatially balanced diversification strategies.

7 The Integrated Tourism Product Model: The Role of Stakeholders and Negotiations in Co-Creating the Product

The development of an integrated tourism product represents a complex process of interactions among multiple stakeholders operating at various local, regional, and national levels. Within this framework, the concept of integrated tourism has been proposed as a way to better understand the role of tourism in the development of

rural areas, taking into account its complexity and cross-sectoral nature. This approach is not limited to the economic dimension of tourism but also encompasses social, cultural, environmental, and institutional aspects, creating a wide network of relationships among actors operating in diverse yet interdependent contexts that influence the content and functioning of the tourism product (Benur & Bramwell, 2015).

According to Bousset et al. (2010), integrated tourism requires a clear structuring of relationships among stakeholders, encompassing the local economy, natural and cultural resources, and public and private institutions. For such integration to be successful, negotiations among stakeholders emerge as a crucial factor, as they enable consensus-building, interest alignment, and the management of power asymmetries between parties.

To better conceptualize these complex interactions, this paper proposes a conceptual model built upon four foundational pillars that do not function as separate linear steps, but rather as interwoven and co-active processes. Initially, attention is given to identifying and categorizing the actors involved in the creation of the tourism product. These include the local community, representing the human and cultural resources of the territory; public authorities, which hold competencies in institutional governance and strategic planning; and the private sector and tourism organizations, which possess the technical expertise and market capacities to structure and promote the tourism offer.

Following this identification, the process continues with defining the scope of action and common objectives. Stakeholders engage in a dialogue phase where they articulate their interests, goals, and capacities they bring to the collaborative table. This process allows the construction of a shared vision while simultaneously identifying points of convergence and divergence. It is precisely at this juncture that the fundamental importance of negotiations is highlighted—as a mechanism for managing divergences, building consensus, and ensuring that decision-making is the outcome of a fair and inclusive process. Negotiations contribute not only to harmonizing interests but also to fostering a culture of cooperation in which all parties feel represented and committed.

The outcome of this collaborative process is the formalization of cooperation through strategic and operational documents that define the components of the integrated tourism product, the governance mechanisms, and implementation strategies. Such a product is not merely a package of offerings, but a complex construct that reflects deliberate agreements among stakeholders regarding the content, function, and values to be transmitted to the visitor. It is also the result of a social process in which trust-building and the resolution of challenges through negotiation play a vital role.

To visually illustrate this theoretical approach, the following conceptual diagram synthesizes the way in which stakeholders interact and how the integrated tourism product is built through a structured process of negotiation. The diagram presents the local community, public authorities, and tourism organizations as interconnected links through a mechanism of interaction in which negotiation forms the functional core of product creation. This interaction, through dialogue, partnership, and institutional coordination, leads to the development of a tourism product that is contextually appropriate, economically sustainable, and socially inclusive.

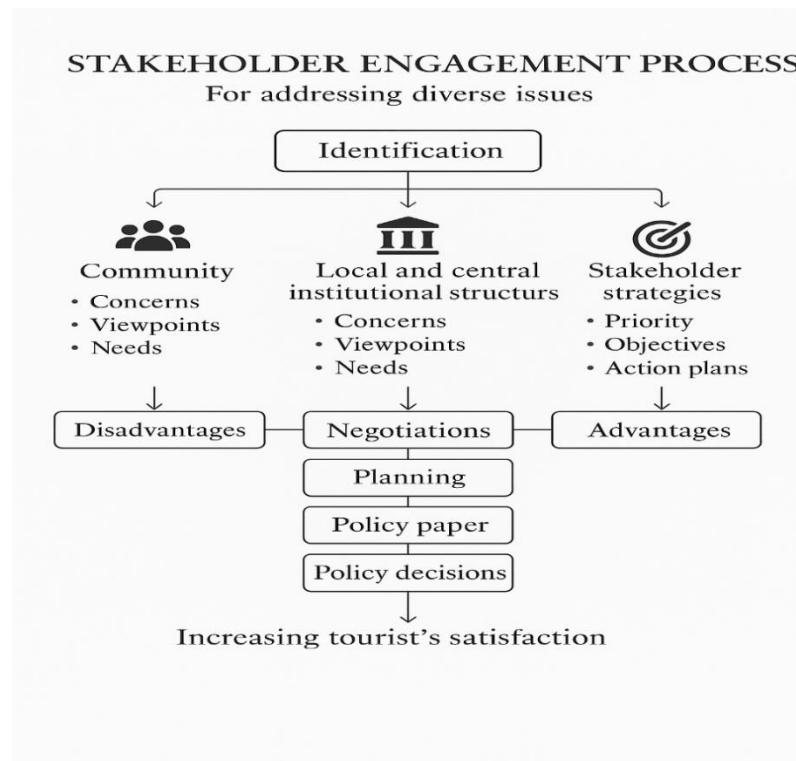


Figure 1
Stakeholder Engagement Process
Source: Authors

In conclusion, the proposed model does not offer a universal solution but provides a suitable framework for application in different contexts, particularly in rural territories with diverse resources and underdeveloped collaboration among stakeholders. Integration, both as a concept and practice, remains the core challenge, and negotiation is the key element that connects stakeholders to transform tourism potential into a sustainable developmental reality.

Conclusions

This study provides a comprehensive conceptual and theoretical contribution to the discourse surrounding the development of integrated tourism products (ITPs), highlighting the pressing need to transition from fragmented and intuition-led approaches to a strategically structured and stakeholder-driven model. The integrated tourism product is here reconceptualized as a dynamic, multidimensional construct that emerges from the deliberate alignment of institutional, commercial, and community interests through negotiated cooperation.

The literature analysis and conceptual synthesis demonstrate that stakeholder engagement is not an ancillary element to tourism product development, but rather a foundational condition for its success. In contrast to prevailing models that situate integration predominantly within the implementation or marketing stages, the model advanced in this study positions **negotiation** as a **core mechanism within the creation phase** of the ITP. This repositioning elevates negotiations from a technical procedure to a strategic function capable of fostering consensus, managing asymmetries in resources and power, and ensuring procedural equity among all actors involved.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes that integration should not be interpreted merely as structural assemblage of tourism components, but as a strategic, participatory, and territorially contextualized process. The proposed model reinforces the role of institutional frameworks, governance coherence, and local identity in shaping a product that is economically viable, socially inclusive, and environmentally responsive.

By embedding negotiation at the heart of stakeholder interaction, the model contributes a novel paradigm to the field—one that advances beyond linear or unidirectional planning approaches. The integrated tourism product, in this sense, becomes not only a tool for tourism competitiveness but also a **catalyst for sustainable territorial development**, fostering regional cohesion, identity consolidation, and value co-creation.

This research encourages future empirical validation of the model across diverse geographical contexts, particularly in rural or underdeveloped areas where tourism potential remains underutilized. In doing so, it invites further inquiry into the mechanisms through which stakeholder negotiations can be institutionalized as part of destination management systems, thereby reinforcing the practical relevance and transformative potential of the integrated tourism product concept.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the University of “Aleksander Moisiu” in Durrës for the institutional support and academic environment that made this research possible. Special thanks are also extended to colleagues from the Department of Tourism and the Department of Management for their constructive feedback during the development of the conceptual model. The authors acknowledge the value of the scholarly works reviewed, which significantly informed the critical perspectives and theoretical foundation of this study.

This article was developed within the framework of the research project “*The Integrated Tourism Product (ITP) in Function of Responsible and Year-Round Tourism along the Adriatic Coast*”, funded by the **National Agency for Scientific Research and Innovation of Albania** (*Agjencia Kombëtare e Kërkimit Shkencor dhe Inovacionit – AKKSHI*).

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