

Defining the Mining Tourism. Case Study Idar-Oberstein

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ABSTRACT

In order to be successfully promoted in the targeted markets, a destination must be favourably differentiated from its competition, or positively positioned, in the minds of the consumers. A key component of this positioning process is the creation and management of a distinctive and appealing perception, or image, of the destination.² The paper introduces the area of Idar-Oberstein belonging to the “German Route of Gemstones”.

KEYWORDS

Tourism, Mining, Revitalization, Gemstones

JEL Classification

L72, L83, Q26, Q56

Introduction

Destination image is commonly accepted as an important aspect in successful tourism development and destination marketing due to its impact on both supply- and demand-side aspects of marketing. Destination images influence a tourist's travel decision-making, cognition and behaviour at a destination as well as satisfaction levels and recollection of the experience. One of the most significant marketing challenges arising from this situation is the need for an effective destination positioning strategy.

Revitalizing urban tourism³

Currently, we are witnessing reconsidering urban values that give content to motivate significant tourist attraction and tourist flows to increase the share of business tourism, congresses and meetings and travel for shopping or leisure facilities for the leisure and entertainment. By organizing its functional urban space is the venue for a range of tourism activities, municipalities have to be constantly concerned with spatial organization of recreational, conservation and protection of tourist attractions to attract a large number of tourists.

Tourist offer of a city is extremely varied and includes elements of order cultural, artistic, entertaining - and sometimes social spa, so it attaches great importance to promoting the city as a tourist reception center. Thus, more people in rural areas choose to spend holidays in urban centers, but even those who live in cities prefer to visit other cities and capitals at the expense stations. Activities to attract tourists are known not only in large cities, where urban diversification takes place, but also, in the small traditional tourism destination. Both authorities and travel agencies are increasingly interested in the possible ways to increase the attractiveness of cities. One of the main methods that should be given attention is animation tourist road through its specific forms mentioned above or even classical concerts, festivals and sports competitions.

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² Charlotte M. Echtner and J. R. Brent Ritchie, *The Meaning and Measurement of Destination Image*, *The Journal of Tourism Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 1, Mai 2003, p. 37

³ European Retail Academy, European Retail Institute; Publisher of City and Regional Marketing; Concepts, Trends, Case Studies, Moscow 2010

Mining city turns into a tourism destination

Idar-Oberstein⁴ is a German town of 32,000 inhabitants based in the triangle of Frankfurt Koblenz-Saarbruecken. It has a beautiful landscape of hills and mountains – and a small river called "Nahe". Actually Idar-Oberstein is a merger of several small villages like Idar, like Oberstein and some others. Traced back up till 1075 the villages changed several times between landlords - sometimes belonging to Northern Germany (Oldenburg), to Austria (Habsburg) or to France.

Phase 1 of the city was gemstone-mining. Hidden between rolling hills there are many little villages grouped along the rivers and streams. This was the main energy source for powering the lapidary industry. Some old buildings still have a water wheel to power the lapidary machines inside. They tell an interesting story of past time⁵s. But mines are only one part in the total chain to create value from mining. It was a gemstone mining and lapidary center for several generations. Mostly stones like agate, amethyst were found up till the end of the 17th century.

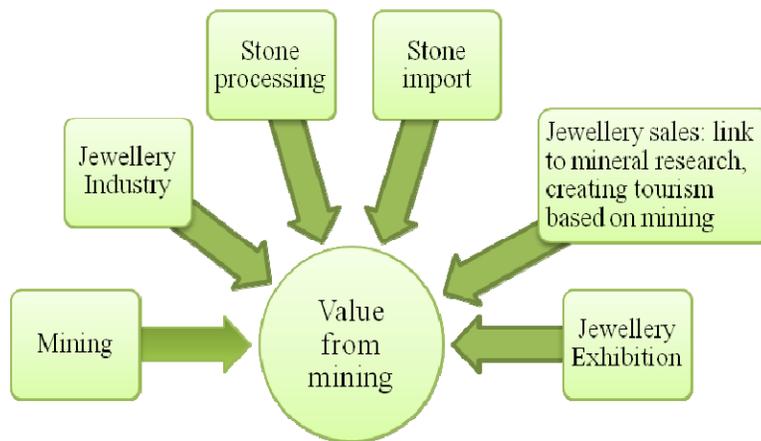


Figure no. 1. Value chain components of Idar-Oberstein city

Idar-Oberstein's competence grew in **phase 2** by stone-processing and the jewels industry. Along the river Nahe many water-driven mills were used to polish gemstones. Even the Romanov's family used the craftsmanship from Idar-Oberstein to furnish a bath with agate. Other companies from Idar-Obersteine became famous due to procedure/design art-decorating based on gemstone.

In this **phase 2** businesses flourished even without mining: the stones were imported from Brazil, India, Africa!! Emigrants from Idar-Oberstein discovered in Rio Grande do Sul/Brazil the world's biggest agate-mineral area. Today Idar-Oberstein has worldwide the only stock-exchange for diamonds and gemstones! Additionally Idar-Oberstein has its annual-fair. But of course the products are not only sold to external areas - but are part of an overwhelming display at the local shops. The success factors of urban marketing explain the motives by which some municipalities succeed in implementing economic development strategies using the specific elements in this marketing specialization. We can consider a real success factor to be the ability and capacity of the municipality to identify a problem and to solve it through urban marketing practices. Eight success factors have been identified in the processes specific to urban marketing (Rainisto, 2003):

1) **Planning group**: this group, also named the management group, is a structure responsible for the planning and execution of processes specific to urban marketing within a municipality.

2) **Vision and strategic analysis**: the vision in the urban marketing represents future projections in the computational position held by the city within the market. Strategic analysis implies

⁴ Idar-Oberstein might be an interesting place to exchange students within a Tempus programme. Take your chances – use www.european-retail-academy.org and www.european-retail-academy.org/urban-revitalization to initiate international contacts! Write BA-, MA- or PhD-theses about comparing the cities, about cooperating research.

⁵ <http://www.free-form.ch/minereports/idar.html>

a detailed examination of information about the strategic process elements. Implementing a market strategic plan for a community is more difficult than for private companies.

3) The city's image and identity are elements helping to form the city's brand. It is impossible to create a city image without establishing the content of the urban identity at the strategic level. At the same time, with a clear establishment of the desired identity, major image elements are formed.

4) The public-private partnerships: these partnerships imply cooperation between the representatives in the two sectors (public/private) as a necessity determined by the new changes the cities face.

5) Political consensus represents the agreement between the political decision-making factors on public affairs administration. At the municipality level, there are conflicts of interest, which can compromise the urban development efforts.

6) The world market and local development: these are considered together, local and global city developments are strongly related. The world market term suggests that cities have to take part in international competition to attract resources and acquire new markets. Local development indicates the importance that the municipality has to apply to local urban development to become a strong competitor in the international market.

7) Fortuitous events deserve a special mention because of the active role they may have in the urban marketing process. These do not have a high frequency, but can affect the performance of the municipality, sometimes influencing the investment decisions.

8) Leadership: within urban marketing, leadership represents the general capacity of the municipality to coordinate the complex processes of this specialized marketing field, to set strategies and to obtain organizing power. Municipalities should involve stakeholders so that they can be heard and understood and, at the same time, to accept the decisions.

The implementation of tourism policies and plans is a responsibility of both the government and private sector. The public sector is responsible for establishing tactics, realizing plans and research, developing basic infrastructure, developing tourist attractions, establishing and administering the standards, facilities and services, establishing measures for managing and exploiting the environment and setting standards. The private sector is responsible for the development of the accommodation, tour operations and commercial enterprises with specific tourist activity. Political commitment to develop tourism in a planned and sustainable manner is essential. Also, NGOs are increasingly involved in more aspects of tourism development (Stănciulescu, 2004).

That phase 3 of sales from shops is part of the city marketing. It is also part of the ambience of the city! Some houses are 500 years old! However, if potential visitors are confused by the benefits the words and image communicate, the branding may be noticed, but it will not attract them. However, the branding should be clever enough to be memorable, because a dull branded message will not be remembered, which is the purpose of building the brand identity (Kolb, 2006). Idar-Oberstein is immediately distinguishable from other towns in Rhineland-Palatinate thanks to its impressive 15th-century Felsenkirche, or Church of the Rock. You will see the white-walled church watching over the houses below from its prominent niche in the hills that overlook the town. It was built by baron Wyrich IV in 1482-84, allegedly in remorse for killing the brother of a knight⁶.

Inside the church you is an extraordinary altarpiece, a natural trickling fountain, the famous agate cross, and an original silent organ. Take note of the Gothic baptismal front and the Renaissance paintings of apostles by Stephan Graf. This is a unique and exquisite sanctuary.

Neighboring the church are the ruins of two medieval castles that you will surely want to see. Although not much remains of the Bosselstein, erected in 1197, the Schloss Oberstein, with its double defense parapets, has been largely restored to the glory of its beginnings in 1320. Down in the marketplace, at the foot of the church, you will encounter the Town Museum with its tributes to the history of gemstones and local craftsmen, engravers, gem cutters, silversmiths and goldsmiths.

⁶ <http://www.mygermancity.com/idar-oberstein>

The touristic-office also promotes *as phase 4* of course the museums and exciting sites. The two museums have a fantastic display of stones. The German Gemstone Museum nearby is also worth a visit for its extensive collection of artfully crafted sculptures, engraved treasures, and some 10,000 raw and polished gemstones – the most comprehensive collection of its kind. A special show was in 2011 dedicated to the moon -having an original stone in the shoe-case! Tourists can dig for gemstones under supervision at some fields! One of the mines is open for visitors. Tourists are offered appropriate places (hotels or private beds) for their stay. Restaurants offer local food – sometimes wild animals from the woods or fields.

Other tourists pick their mushrooms while walking through the wood..... or they enjoy just the surrounding. Last but not least the city of Idar-Oberstein attracts young students who work there in a specialized institute for gemstones and laser-technology.

Conclusions

With the need to balance the demands of tourists and local communities and environmental needs, is more than necessary, urban tourism will seek to improve the living conditions of residents by providing access to public services and affordable housing for all residents, efficient use land in compliance with the functions of individual urban areas, tourist implantation controlled expansion, protection and enhancement of natural and cultural history, etc..

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