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# Guidelines for developing tourism products and travel itineraries

**PANHERA** Pilgrims Accommodation and New Host Expertise in Rural Areas

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**PROJECT**

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## **INTRODUCTION / FOREWORD**

This handbook was written following discussions with PANHERA project partners with a view to providing operators and public bodies in different areas with practical steps for developing tourism products.

It deals with the topic of tourism and what strategies can be adopted in order to increase tourism and facilitate the economic growth of the area, and provides guidance on how to develop your own offer for tourists, based on the features and potential of the destination and in particular the tourism projects.

## 1. TOURISM AND TOURISTS

Defining tourism and tourists is not straightforward, but, put simply, tourism is the set of activities and relationships associated with travelling somewhere and staying there, or, in any case, the result of people travelling from their usual residence to another place temporarily, for a variety of different reasons.

The UNWTO defines tourism as: a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes. These people are called visitors (which may be either tourists or excursionists; residents or non-residents) and tourism has to do with their activities, some of which involve tourism expenditure).

From an economic point of view, tourism is the spatial mobility of consumption, wherever it may be.

This widest sense of this definition can be found in the American concept of the *hospitality industry*, which describes all the companies which offer the public the possibility of eating, drinking and sleeping away from home, including consumption not made by tourists. It also includes a range of different reasons for travelling somewhere or staying there, taking into account that tourists may travel for all sorts of different reasons: for pleasure, for entertainment or relaxation, or to visit distant friends or relatives; to visit a place of outstanding natural beauty, or to visit a particular museum or a city; for health reasons; to go on a pilgrimage; but also for personal, business or study reasons.

The UNWTO has also provided a definition of "tourist", which is the traveller whose trip includes at least one overnight stay in the tourist destination/travel area (the length of stay cannot exceed one year).

To sum up, therefore, the topics discussed when talking about tourism and tourists mainly refer to trip and the length of stay, the place or the destination, the purpose of the trip, as well as the whole system in place to provide this, i.e. the whole infrastructure that includes the type of accommodation, the facilities it offers, and the range of services that need to be provided in order to meet the requirements of the tourists.

Tourists are people who purchase trips that consist of various components: first of all, it is a set of elements that enable tourists to satisfy their wishes and respond to a specific need linked to the purpose of their trip.

Tourists buy travel, accommodation and catering services, i.e. the range of services specifically required and provided for them during their trip.

However, tourists also consume banking and financial services, health services, insurance, food, medicines, newspapers, clothes, books, artisanal products, souvenirs, and much more besides.

The tourism product, therefore, is a complex, multi-faceted product involving a range of different economic categories, and differs from other types of products found in other sectors.

As a consequence, both supply and demand are uneven.

Nowadays we should talk about tourisms rather than tourism, in the same way as we talk about tourists and not the tourist, i.e. the demand is made up of a wide range of different people having a wide range of different interests and travel preferences, who have different requirements compared with those associated with the mass tourism of the past.

Over the last twenty years, tourist behaviour has changed substantially.

For the tourists of today, travelling and going on a holiday is much more than just looking for a place to relax so that they can re-charge their batteries for the remaining eleven months of the working year.

The new consumer trend, which focuses on expressive values, has led to completely different tourist behaviour.

A tourist is a person in search of his/her social identity who yearns to find content and meaning in his/her existence.

Tourists are no longer confined to socio-biographical and economic categories and predictable behaviours and are therefore less easy to categorise.

A new kind of tourism is rapidly emerging, one in which tourists are both consumers and active participants, who seek in their holiday destinations and in the areas they

visit different ways of spending their time and enjoying the places they visit and who wish to travel to many different places, all of which is evidence of how tourists are changing and becoming less homogeneous.

These changes reveal a much more demanding customer compared to those in the past.

There are many reasons why demand for tourism is changing. They are mainly sociological, environmental and technological factors:

- the fragmentation of annual holidays, i.e. the tendency to take several short holidays spread over the year.
- the emergence of profound changes in the values sought (leading to more personalised holidays);
- the changes in the reasons why people travel;
- the search for personal, authentic and exciting experiences when tourists visit an area for the first time and experience its traditions and culture.

There is an increasing range of tourist activities which all have in common the desire to enjoy the natural environment and normally include the practice of a sporting activity, such as:

- Hiking along trails surrounded by nature
- Birdwatching
- Wildlife trails in nature parks and protected areas, both on land and at sea.
- Archaeological routes outside urban areas and archaeological surveys.
- Food and wine tours and slow food itineraries in rural areas or in inhabited areas in protected areas
- Walking, cycling or horse-riding along designated long-distance routes of ecological, cultural or religious value.

Among the factors which have contributed to the changes in demand, technological factors have had the most impact. Over time digitalisation has led to a sort of reconfiguration of the previous tourism system, breaking down the process of buying and selling and consequently introducing new roles for new players. These trends include:

- the gradual rise of *e-tourism*, i.e. the provision of tourism services online. This has become one of the most important sectors in global *e-commerce*;
- the ever-increasing role of social media in the tourism purchasing process, thanks to real-time access to information and the sharing of experiences;
- the expansion of services for mobile phones: people use their smartphones to find information about their destination and it is estimated that 85 % of tourists look for information online before choosing their holidays.

The WEB is a huge source of all kinds of information and the wide range of choices available enables tourists to design their own trip based on their personal needs.

Consumers not only use the Web to buy a package holiday online, but increasingly use it to design, step by step, their own holiday, including booking their accommodation and their travel tickets. In addition to being more aware, more demanding and more powerful as customers, the consumers of the digital age have become their own travel agents. Furthermore, they do not end their experience once the holiday is over, but use the Internet to share information about their holiday with others, posting photos, videos, reviews and opinions. Today, the Internet and e-commerce have a huge influence on the decisions people going on holiday make to buy and book their holidays and to share their experiences with others online. As a result of the increasing use of these new technologies and social media, demand has grown to the point where it has become completely dominant, influencing and redefining in many respects the nature of the supply.

Dealing with an increasingly competitive market requires commitment on two fronts:

- market specialisation
- product diversification

In today's market, it is not enough for the tourism offer to be aimed at one market segment only; on the contrary, it must be differentiated while being specialised at the same time, focusing on products of proven interest and in line with tourism consumption trends.

Competition among companies is not based on the supply of standard products, but increasingly on the ability to develop products and solutions that include more dynamic, less static features, based on the specific purposes of individual trips; competitiveness hinges on how successfully one creates the contents of a tourism product.

## 2. THE TOURISM PRODUCT

The tourism product is the *mid-point* between supply and demand.

This is why we talk about a 'tourism product': because tourism is not just about providing a place or asset which has the potential to attract tourists, whether it's a city of art, a seafront in a beautiful bay, a green countryside, a picturesque mountain village or something else. The environment and culture are not worth much in terms of tourism if they are not adequately promoted, included in tours that enrich them and transform them into destinations which have good transport links and where good-quality accommodation is available.

The tourism product is therefore the sum of a number of elements, not an asset existing in nature waiting to be enjoyed (or exploited, as we used to say in the past) for its natural beauty.

The tourism product exists not only because of the presence of places (attractions and services that make them available to tourists) in a place (destination), but above all because of the existence of markets, i.e. of buyers who wish to spend money and time to respond to the need for tourism consumption.

### 2.1 The fundamental elements of the tourism product

The tourism product is made up of a number of elements, each of which is administered and offered to the tourist by various service providers and can be purchased by the tourists themselves either individually or in various different combinations.

The elements that contribute to the tourism product relate to the following four categories:

- a) **attractions**, i.e. those that encourage the tourist choose a specific type of product. Attractions can be natural, cultural-historical, environmental or artistic;
- b) **facilities**, mainly consisting of hotel- and non-hotel accommodation, campsites, holiday villages, as well as restaurants, bars, sporting facilities, etc. Their existence has a major, if not decisive, impact on the development of tourist activities;

c) **infrastructures**, i.e. the transportation system in place for accessing or reaching a tourist destination through the availability of roads, railways, airports, etc.;

d) **image**, i.e. the intangible element of the product.

a) Attractions are elements that attract travellers to a specific destination, as they make it distinct and set it apart. They are mainly associated with the natural environment and cultural heritage of a place. Attractions are:

- natural resources: rivers, lakes, forests, beaches, parks, the climate, etc. These are in fact the first element characterising a place or an area and for this reason they can be regarded as primary attractions. This category also includes landscapes which have been totally transformed by human activities; just think of certain landscapes dominated by wine production, or the terracing which is the result of the work of generations of farmers. Today, nature parks and protected areas are a proof of "quality certification" of the land and its natural resources and are more and more likely to be specifically promoted as tourist destinations.

- cultural and historical places of interest. This category includes all those tangible assets (i.e. historical heritage sites or sites which were built for a different purpose and have become places of interest for visitors due to a change of use) and intangible assets (traditions, customs, fashions, local folklore). For this reason we refer to buildings which are of interest to tourists due to their original military function (castles, fortifications, fortified villages that celebrate a powerful dynasty; cemeteries or museums of memories that serve to keep the memory of an event alive), due to their religious function (abbeys, churches, convents, parish churches, synagogues, etc.), or due to their residential and representative function (palaces and noble residences, state palaces and annexes to museums/historical archives) and finally due to their recreational function (libraries, theatres, parks and sports facilities).

- events. Events can be regarded as an attraction and therefore used to provide additional opportunities to attract people to a destination. Due to the increased demand for experiential travel, events have become an essential part of the entertainment provided by an area and a key part of its marketing strategy for tourism. There are therefore many more events now organised by tourist destinations. Events may be organised to serve the local population while attracting visitors from outside, or they may be specifically planned and organised with the sole

aim of attracting tourists. In any case, it is important that these events are unique and provide tourists with experiences that connect them with the area, the local population and its cultural heritage; in other words, an opportunity not to be missed while exploring an area to justify a visit on that particular date or at that particular time.

b) While it is true that without "attractions" there would be no tourism, since it is precisely the attractions that attract tourists and make them travel there from where they live, it is also true that an attraction that is not accessible with regard to the amount of time it takes a tourist to get there, i.e. lacking all those services that enable travellers to access the location and stay away from home, is unsuitable for tourism. Some services, such as transport and hospitality, are absolutely essential. Without them, it is impossible to gain access to the destination and spend time there.

We are therefore mainly talking about hotel, non-hotel or alternative accommodation services - accommodation which offer tourists a place to stay and rest for the night. Accommodation costs account for about a quarter of the total budget of a holiday. It is therefore essential for the success of a tourist destination that it provides sufficient accommodation, of the quality desired by visitors, of a type and standard that depends on the characteristics of the market segment or segments which the destination is targeting.

We are also referring to catering services, i.e. the services provided by restaurants, bars, cafés and all other public establishments that enable visitors to have something to eat or drink.

As with accommodation services, the quantity and quality should meet visitor requirements; however, the quality of its catering establishments can make all the difference for a destination wishing to make itself stand out from the competition.

In addition to these services, which we could regard as the basic ones, there are other services whose relevance depends on the type of tourism product provided, such as tourist information and assistance services, tourist guide services, hospitality services, entertainment services and others.

Finally, we have support services, i.e. those that serve both tourists and residents. We are talking about shops, banks, theatres, cinemas, sports facilities, and so on. These can be grouped into two broad categories: services relating to people and their basic needs, and recreational services, which are initiatives that create additional opportunities for leisure and therefore for consumption.

If the number and range of services provided by a destination is good, they can help increase the demand for tourism, both in terms of the number of arrivals and the length of time tourists spend there.

c) Attractions and services (facilities) are part of an infrastructure, so to speak (roads, local transport services, the quality of the natural environment, public safety, shops, etc.), which mainly serve the local population and only secondarily the tourist population, but which can play an important role in determining the tourist's experience of a place.

Every destination owes part of its popularity either to its accessibility or, alternately, to its lack of infrastructure and its 'isolated' location. In both cases, infrastructure is one of the elements of the tourism product and a strong point in defining an exclusive position.

The elements of the infrastructure of a tourism product, bearing in mind that they may vary over time depending on the needs of tourists and of the location, include

- healthcare: hospitals, health centres, medical services, pharmacies, doctor's surgeries, etc.;
- public utilities: electricity, gas, water, telephone and broadband services, etc.;
- mobility: roads, motorways, railways, car parks, camper van parks, local public transport, soft mobility (cycle paths), etc.;
- commerce: shops, shopping centres, markets, etc.;
- sociality: here we mean what constitutes the quality of life of the resident population, the approach to hospitality, the political climate, the local folklore, the customs and traditions of the people who live in a place, etc.;
- administration: local traffic plan, urban surveillance services, etc.;

- public safety: public protection, fire brigade, police services, etc.

d) In tourism, the image that a place has is made up of the mental representation of the opinions, feelings and impressions that the market has of a destination. The image is a representation of a place that is formed through stimuli and experiences, but can also be formed without actually visiting the place. People know 'places' even if they have not visited or experienced them directly.

The image that a destination has is a key factor in the decision-making process of choosing a trip.

Its value is recognised at the level of influencing behaviour, individual perceptions, satisfaction and choice.

The image that a destination has plays a crucial role in people's personal decisions to purchase a holiday and in their satisfaction/dissatisfaction, which is to a large extent based on the comparison between their expectation of the destination, or what they previously imagined it would be like, and their actual experience of it.

Tourism is a sector where consumer behaviour, in this case choosing a holiday, is particularly influenced by image.

Images are important because they enable us to organise information, generalise and formulate our views and expectations, thus guiding our actions, whether in terms of tourism choices or our investments in places.

When it comes to the tourist destination, how one communicates with consumers depends on the identity of the destination itself, but also from the individual messaging and positioning strategies adopted by the local players.

The image that a tourist destination has cannot be created out of nothing or based on "deception" but rather on the distinctive features that make it unique.

One of the key tools that can be used to create or enhance the image that a destination has is the brand identity of the area.

### **3. TOURISM PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT**

Tourism products exist when they align with the reasons the customer has for consuming them.

As far as demand is concerned, the tourism product represents the overall experience from the moment tourists leave their homes until they return home.

This means that in the overall perception of the customer, the product is the range of services received and, therefore, delivered by the relevant businesses.

Although there is no standard process for developing a tourism product, neither are there any rules that guarantee a safe return, the process of development necessarily starts from the needs, the purpose of the trip and the specific requirements of a particular target audience.

The response to the market consists of providing tourism products that will meet the demand (expectations and needs), particularly in relation to the specific purpose of the trip, seeking to fully satisfy customer needs with regard to the attractions and facilities of the destination, while always respecting its characteristics and identity.

The tourism product is where the requests made by demand meet the aspects organised by supply, in line with the existing (and potential) environmental and cultural aspects and characteristics of the places.

A possible approach to creating a tourism product with the characteristics described above involves the application of a methodology which, starting from the location-place, transforms it into a themed and comprehensive tourism product, which enhances the features and identity of the place and makes a specific offer distinctive and attractive compared to that provided by competitors.

It is a question of being able to offer the market holidays, accommodation and tours that will attract tourists to a destination, in response to the specific demand for tourism, representative of the area in which they are organised, and finally sustainable in terms of business and the environment.

This type of planning cannot be implemented immediately, since it requires commitment, planning and professionalism, as well as a willingness to carry out a series of operations, as described below:

- the location-place should be assessed and its attractions should be established (also taking into account the skills and expertise available);
- it is important to understand the needs of the market and to ensure they are compatible with the places of interest in the area, aiming, if the location allows it, to appeal to a wide variety of different tastes;
- These tourism products or projects have to be designed with the right players and the strategies required in order to identify our objectives and how we are going to achieve them, the time required, what the costs will be and how we will quantify the results;
- It is essential to organise a range of tourism possibilities, services and options that are sufficiently broad, themed and diverse.

Respecting the identity of the area at every stage of the development of the tourism product is of fundamental importance.

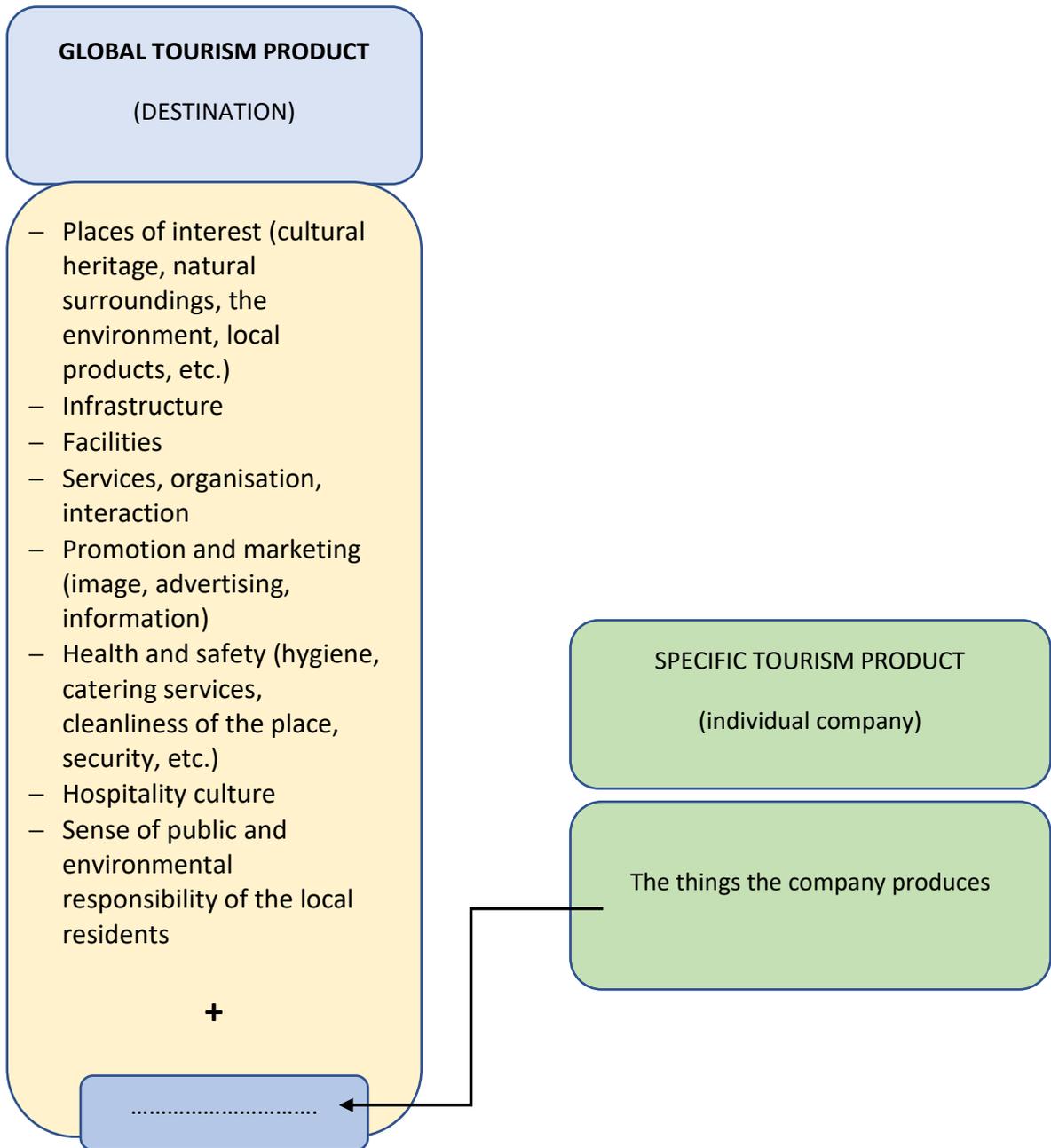
Considering the importance of the role of the area in the tourism product, as it is the main resource, it is understandable how important it is to look after it, if we do not want to jeopardise the success and longevity of the tourism product itself over time.

The development of a local tourism product, while adapting to the visitors' requirements or to the trends in demand, must not go so far as to change the characteristics of a place if the trends in demand are completely incompatible with the potential and essence of an area. Going in the opposite direction can be dangerous and counter-productive.

Up to now we have discussed the tourism product/destination. However, there are also tourism products offered by an individual establishment at the destination who carries out this activity locally. The activity of an individual establishment reflects the characteristics of the area to which it belongs. We could say, in fact, that the specific tourism product is potentially made up of the elements of the offer of an individual establishment and the broader local tourism system of which it is part and this constitutes a large part of the specific tourism product's offer.

Table 1 - The essential elements of the tourism product

## ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF THE TOURISM PRODUCT



### 3.1 Territorial vocation and knowledge of the key resources

Putting in place a local offer for tourists requires considerable commitment in planning and organisation.

Finding out about the primary resources is the first step in assessing development potential and is essential for outlining a tourism development project in an area defined by its general characteristics: objectives, innovative strategies, implementation methods, expected results.

Therefore, the first thing to do is to assess the available resources. However, this should entail the development of a general database, which may also be used for other purposes: planning tourism and the socio-economic development of the area, but also environmental protection, maintenance, scientific research, education and training.

Assessing the local resources is essential in order to be able to select those that together will form the main elements of the local tourism offer.

Selecting the main local resources enables us to establish a fundamental aspect of the development of a system of the local tourism offer, in other words being able to exploit the cultural and environmental heritage of the area, both physically and conceptually.

Although this refers specifically to the rediscovery of the heritage of a specific area, and in specific aspects (food and wine heritage, environmental heritage, cultural heritage and their exploitation), these resources can also constitute an example that can be adapted to the research in other areas in the region,

The table below provides an overview.

Table 2. - Vocations and local resources

TOURISM RESOURCES BY CATEGORY							
Food and wine		History and culture			Sports and outdoor activities		
Elements of food and wine traditions and the promotion of local products	Traditional local food and wine events	Elements of attractions of historic, archaeological, artistic and cultural interest	Museums, art galleries, exhibitions and collections	Cultural events	Natural heritage and the environment	Sports facilities and activities	Sporting events
Local producers (commercial wine makers; delicatessens; dairies; working mills with sales outlets)	Traditional local festivals and events	Historic centres and villages	Museum collections	Festivals (literary, cinema, music, theatre, and art in general)	Nature park;	Established tracks and organised hikes	Competitive and non-competitive foot races
Farms selling direct to the public)	Wine and food festivals	Churches	Galleries	Major festivals and performances (in literature, cinema, theatre, music and the performing arts in general)	Protected area	Established cycling trails and organised rides	Sports competitions: marathons, cycling races, car races, motorbike races, running races, trials
Souvenir shops selling traditional products	Exhibitions	Historic theatres	Archaeological sites		Nature reserve	Established motocross circuits and organised motorcycle trials	Sports exhibitions, festivals and events (running and walking, cycling, motorcycling, cars, fishing, climbing, hiking, river sports, etc.)
Museums or food and wine museums	Trade fairs	Monasteries and churches	Art galleries		Enclosed areas of natural interest	Indoor climbing centres	
Local projects and initiatives (e.g.	Food and wine festivals	Archaeological sites					
		Castles					
		Manufacturing and industrial sites (related to					

**TOURISM RESOURCES BY CATEGORY**

Food and wine		History and culture			Sports and outdoor activities		
Elements of food and wine traditions and the promotion of local products	Traditional local food and wine events	Elements of attractions of historic, archaeological, artistic and cultural interest	Museums, art galleries, exhibitions and collections	Cultural events	Natural heritage and the environment	Sports facilities and activities	Sporting events
restoring and/or refurbishing historic buildings with the aim of promoting traditional local products)		industrial archaeology)  Historic heritage of an area				Sports facilities: ski lifts, rally-driving circuits, racetracks, velodromes, climbing gyms, etc.  Training and athletic clubs  Horse-riding clubs  Theme parks and amusement parks  Golf courses	Different types of sports rallies (motorbikes, cars, bicycles, etc.)  Sports and fitness retreats

### 3.2 Designing the offer for the market.

Marketing teaches us how important it is to examine the market before producing and selling.

The process of designing a tourism product has to start from the needs, the purpose of the trip and other specific requirements of a particular target group.

This means that the development strategy for tourism products and the overall tourism offer in an area will be based on the systematic analysis of trends, opportunities and threats of the market in the medium and long term and on the requirements of the demand.

The results from the process of making a selection from the resources available in an area, taking into account specific themes and availability, compared with the results of market analyses, will create the conditions for the destination to select its target customers, by identifying their basic requirements, designing products which correspond to their profiles, but also by developing the right promotional and marketing strategies.

It is absolutely essential therefore for tourism providers, whether public or private ones, to listen to the markets and to understand the requirements of the demand for tourism, as well as identifying their own potential target markets and choosing the ones they wish to focus on.

Demand segmentation makes it possible to identify similar behaviour that makes product development and communications with the markets more effective.

In fact, we could say that when the main requirements that guide the choices of target audiences have been identified and monitored over time, the design of the various elements of products and tourism products is certainly more efficient.

Whoever the provider or seller is, they must know exactly who the customer is, and no two customers are alike. It is not only about the purpose of the trip and needs to be met, but also about the different ways of choosing and purchasing tourism products or services.

The more knowledgeable and experienced the customers, the more likely it is that they will build their own package made up of individual products by using the wide range of online platforms.

Putting together, albeit at different times and through different buying channels, a set of elements that meet their travel and accommodation requirements.

If, on the other hand, they feel the product is too complicated, they are more likely to rely on the expertise of tour operators providing package holidays or tailor-made solutions that reduce their feeling that they are taking a risk or are unable to do it themselves.

### 3.3 Customer profiling.

Identifying the needs (requirements) of the target tourist is extremely important in order to determine the characteristics and the quality of the various components that will make up the tourism product on offer: it makes it possible to create a profile for each of the different categories of users that the product is aimed at.

Profiling target audiences begins with a study of the demand for tourism: based on the analysis of various sources - trends in tourism consumption, reviews, local feedback, statistics and market surveys, etc. - it produces a list of the requirements expected by a certain type of tourist.

It is important to note that, in view of the many changes in demand in recent years, the criteria used in the past for segmenting demand (geographical, socio-demographic, etc.) no longer serve the purpose of effective profiling, although they are indispensable. It is important to move on to more sophisticated levels, evaluating demand by individual niches and opting for indicators based on the reasons why people travel and consumer behaviour.

If you want to design a product for the "bicycle tourism" target audience for example, in addition to knowing the age, gender and origin of potential tourists, it is very important to identify their needs, such as the availability of safe storage in the accommodation or hotel facilities or a bicycle assistance service at every stage of the

travel itinerary. This is obviously an objective requirement that contributes largely to defining the characteristics of a tourism product.

Designing tailor-made tourism products for customers therefore means designing the various components of the products always bearing in mind their requirements, i.e. the requirements of their profile.

At this stage we can link the considerations on the composition of the tourism product with those on the profiling of potential target tourists.

In other words, we can put together all the resources available in an area - environmental and natural resources, architectural and artistic heritage, food and wine, theme-based itineraries, cultural and folklore events, which should not just be included in a list but organised in a way that describes their best use and addressed to the consumers whose needs have been carefully studied.

Table 3. - Target group profile CYCLE TOURIST (SLOW BIKER)

OBJECTIVES				ACTIVITIES	
Main activities		Secondary activities		Independent activities	Assisted activities
To enjoy a slow holiday at a relaxed pace To enjoy a holiday with their family or partner, or in small groups To visit and experience their destinations To save money		To be in contact with nature To immerse themselves in the local culture To sample traditional local products			
Opportunities	Unforeseen events	Opportunities	Unforeseen events		
Availability of a safe cycle route network: cycle lanes which are largely separated from motorised traffic, smooth, easily accessible beginning and end, of an appropriate length and uninterrupted.	Poor maintenance of the cycle network	Availability of a local tour operator to enable them explore other natural surroundings in the areas visited	Limited natural surroundings and cultural heritage	Useful information about cycle routes in the area and route maps to organise their own route when they are there	Accommodation facilities with secure indoor bike storage (bike room)
Availability of services for users of the cycle routes, such as refreshment areas, repair or inflating facilities	Inadequate signs and poor maintenance of picnic and refreshment areas	Availability of food and wine services and possible food and wine routes	Limited accommodation of adequate standards to accommodate cyclists	Availability of guides and routes so that they can enjoy the local cultural heritage	Repair / maintenance services
Bicycle rental services available	Fear of unforeseen events	Availability of a local service that enables them to learn about the local	Limited availability of professional services (licensed cycle tour	Information about establishments that produce and sell	Catering facilities in guest or hotel accommodation

OBJECTIVES				ACTIVITIES	
Main activities		Secondary activities		Independent activities	Assisted activities
To enjoy a slow holiday at a relaxed pace To enjoy a holiday with their family or partner, or in small groups To visit and experience their destinations To save money		To be in contact with nature To immerse themselves in the local culture To sample traditional local products			
Opportunities	Unforeseen events	Opportunities	Unforeseen events		
		culture, traditions and customs	guides, guided hikes, etc.) in the area	traditional local products	
Efficient public transport services	Medical problems	Possibility to rent equipment and accessories in the area	Accommodation and catering facilities with standardised services (which do not cater for special dietary requirements)	Information on local cultural heritage and cultural events	Dry-cleaning services in the accommodation facilities
A place with an eco-friendly footprint and high standards	Excessively busy night life	Alternative options in the event of bad weather		GPS routes available to cyclists	Physiotherapy and medical care
To save money	Fear of theft or damage to their belongings	Single night stays			Services offering guided tours

OBJECTIVES				ACTIVITIES	
Main activities		Secondary activities		Independent activities	Assisted activities
To enjoy a slow holiday at a relaxed pace To enjoy a holiday with their family or partner, or in small groups To visit and experience their destinations To save money		To be in contact with nature To immerse themselves in the local culture To sample traditional local products			
Opportunities	Unforeseen events	Opportunities	Unforeseen events		
Flexibility in travel and daily arrangements (e.g. mealtimes)	Unforeseen weather-related events	Service centres (bicycle repair shops)			
.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....

#### **4. HOW TO CREATE A TRAVEL EXPERIENCE**

A travel experience, in the mind of a traveller, consists of a fragment (smaller or larger) of their life lived somewhere else, which may provide them with some pleasant surprises but also some unknown factors. It will have to fulfil the same everyday needs as well as additional needs, desires and expectations, but in a different setting from their usual one.

Tourist consumption in fact differs from the consumption of other types of leisure activities: it lasts longer but happens less frequently; it usually requires a substantial financial commitment; it does not allow the tourist to check in advance whether the product is suitable for his or her needs; and it requires the tourist to physically leave their usual residence and then return to it.

Designing and organising a travel and accommodation experience for a potential tourist (or group of tourists) in one's own country requires professional skills and expertise.

In order to organise a tourism trip, it is important to put yourself in the shoes of the tourist and empathise with them, trying to share their ideas, tastes, desires and needs.

Ultimately it is like managing and planning a part of their life somewhere else.

Being able to create a travel and/or accommodation experience might be a useful skill for many tour operators or those working in any of the associated sectors.

Being able to recommend a well-organised travel itinerary to guests requesting one, can place the accommodation provider or tourist information office or food and wine producer in a better position in the market.

And those working in tourism marketing and communication should also be able to provide detailed information about the area (having previously visited it themselves and then prepared their own advice in the form of suggestions intended for specific groups of tourists).

The field of application of this kind of activity may apply to all tour operators, in a more or less direct way. This should be the case not only for companies or services promoting the area, or those working in tourism, but also for the managers of hotel

and catering establishments, sporting facilities, local manufacturers, and food and wine producers.

#### 4.1 The travel itinerary.

The most important part of a tourism product (or package holiday) around which the whole organisation of the travel experience revolves (whether it is cultural, gastronomic or sporting), particularly if it is not intended as a permanent stay, but as a visit, is the **itinerary**.

Knowing how to create travel itineraries is one of the key aspects of the cultural tourism service; it can be decisive in whether the project will prove successful both for the company concerned and for the area concerned (destination or geographical area).

The travel itinerary, in addition to being a journey between various places of interest, whether for leisure or cultural purposes, is also an economic and cultural receptacle.

It will ensure, using the local transport system, that all the different places in the area can be easily accessed and enjoyed, in a range of different ways, which will vary according to what the user is able to do and/or according to their preferences.

A system of well-organised travel itineraries offers a number of advantages:

- tourists will have the opportunity to explore and appreciate the natural surroundings and cultural sites along routes that have been tried and tested by those who know the area;
- it will stimulate the interest of visitors, make their stay enjoyable and worthwhile by providing them with advice about the places to see and the things to do in the area;
- it may encourage the visitor to spend longer in the area, enhancing their experience of the area;
- it promotes a cultural exchange between customers and residents (hotel and catering operators as well as local residents).

A system of itineraries, therefore, can raise the profile of a tourist destination and its operators, add value and give it a competitive advantage, improving the quality of available guest accommodation as well as facilities for local residents.

Tour operators or anyone who is interested in organising tourist trips and accommodation for those wishing to explore new places or just to relax will need to approach the planning of tourism activities in a meticulous, professional way so that the range of opportunities in a particular area can become a pleasant and exciting experience for potential tourists.

Since the travel itinerary is the most important part of the whole visitor experience, consisting of a system of closely-knit elements, planning a travel itinerary involves taking into account numerous variables.

The best way to create a travel itinerary (whether it is based on cultural, food- and wine-related or sporting activities) is first to conduct some preliminary analysis and research, which are essential in order to effectively carry out the following operational phase.

#### 4.2 Knowledge of the reference area.

The travel itinerary is a route enabling the tourist to explore a new area, regardless of size.

It is certainly not enough to simply draw a series of segments, lines or curves on a map or chart. In order to obtain good results, it is important to study the various elements of the area chosen.

Researching the area, in order to gain an understanding of its tourism potential and risks, a phase that we could regard as the analysis phase (i.e. the initial practical aspects of the project), can be divided into different development phases:

- bibliographical or desk-based study: this is the preliminary phase in order to acquire important information before travelling and to get an idea of the amount of time required for the trip. However, it may be necessary at a later stage also to find out more about any relevant topics or aspects, if the need arises.

- In-situ inspections and checks. Those who plan reliable travel itineraries do not only work from their desks; tour operators should know the itinerary in every detail, including any negative points. Travel itineraries have to be carefully studied, prepared and properly tested before they are made public and marketed. All parts of the route should be checked, if possible even at different times, in different weather conditions and situations, without underestimating the risks to which potential tourists could then be exposed to during their stay. It should also be noted that a travel itinerary can be designed in more or less detail and to various levels of complexity, depending on the characteristics of the routes and the type of potential users they are designed for.
- Critical assessment, monitoring and updating: researching the area again at regular intervals is highly recommended, because it gives the opportunity to check and update the project according to changes in the conditions of use of the establishments or of the services provided.

This is the process of assessing and recording the main facilities that provide a good starting point for reflecting on the tourism resources that could be used in potential wine- and food-related, culture- and sport-themed travel itineraries.

In addition to these, there are other useful tools for gaining an understanding of the area such as:

- geographic and topographic maps, themed maps, specialised maps (dealing with geology, botany, flora, meteorology, etc.), GPS and other tools (GIS - Geographic Information System, satellite surveys, etc.);
- scientific, popular and tourist publications and textbooks (about nature, art, history, traditions, cuisine, crafts, etc.);
- tools for recording and storing images (cameras, video cameras, scanners, etc.)

#### 4.3 Types of itineraries.

Organising a cultural, sporting or food- and wine-related travel itinerary involves a number of different activities, depending on whether the project is initiated by a public tourist board, tour operator or other private operator.

In the first case, the objectives of an institutional nature and for the systemic enhancement of the whole area in question are the most important ones; in the second case it is important to consider the profit targets of the company, including its links with local operators (with regard to its relationships with suppliers and/or partners) and the choices related to the product and market.

We can therefore make a distinction between:

- Promotional travel itineraries: planned by public bodies to advertise the attractions of the area and attract tourists, which may involve small or large areas
- Commercial travel itineraries: planned by tour operators with the aim of creating new tourism products for the market in order to attract tourists. These often cover different areas and enable the organisation of trips to those areas suitable for hosting tourists

Ideally, a travel itinerary should be designed in consultation with both the public and the private sectors, by sharing aims, objectives and strategies.

#### 4.4 Who is the itinerary for?

Whoever intends to plan and develop a travel itinerary must make sure they research the market.

Any considerations will involve:

- the segmentation and selection of the target audience(s).
- understanding and monitoring of the tourism supply situation with particular focus on case studies and real or potential competitors (projects and operators in the same sector);
- assessments of the positioning of one's own offer.

It is important to continually research, update, and make comparisons with outside sources and other geographical entities (reading specialised publications, attending conferences and trade fairs, visiting interesting areas directly, etc.) as it facilitates all the activities which are part of the difficult decision-making process concerning the development, management, modification or adjustment, and compliance with quality standards of each project.

#### 4.5 Planning and management.

After completion of the initial research phase and having checked the accuracy of the required analysis and research, a more operational phase begins, in which careful consideration will be given to the human resources involved (their skills and expertise), the financial resources available and the technological resources that will be required, in order to establish the scope of the activities needed in order for the objectives to be achieved.

As mentioned above, planning a travel itinerary is based on the organisation of interdependent variables and elements.

One of the key success factors is to define and maintain a consistent approach at every stage of the project.

Being able to put together and organise the elements defines the level of efficiency and effectiveness of the project in relation to the demands of potential consumers.

It is a question of planning the experience of enjoying the attractions in an area with the aim of ensuring the best possible conditions for tourists.

It is the planning of the user experience that transforms an asset into a tourist attraction.

In the language of the 'experience economy', planning the experience consists of choosing a theme, writing a script, assigning roles and dressing the set; and all this cannot be left until the last minute but must be carefully planned.

Developing a travel itinerary means to create a scenario with key reference points to ensure a successful experience.

The project, from this point of view, can be considered as a story, different each time, possibly constructed by adapting it to the client, who becomes the protagonist.

A fundamental element for the identity and uniqueness of the suggested use of an area through a travel itinerary is the choice of theme, which is necessary to eliminate the risk of the tourism product being generic and unimaginative.

Never losing sight of the theme when planning the travel itinerary means making the route attractive and recognisable, particularly if it is consistent with the local, cultural and creative context of which in which it is based.

It is important that the theme is adapted not only to the expectations of the target group, but also to the expertise and perception of those who design it and manage it, taking into account the technical aspects of the travel itinerary.

In addition to professional and technical expertise in the industry, the key skills of a good tour operator (in the cultural, food and wine or sports sectors) who is involved in the planning of a travel itinerary, include the ability to identify compatible themes that will become the leitmotif (the recurring theme) of the trip, narrative skills (for a timely, compelling and engaging commentary on the various stages that make up the travel itinerary) and, above all, the ability to approach the subject of tourism in an interdisciplinary way.

Say, for example, that someone has to organise a religious travel itinerary in their local area, you can easily imagine that providing products all based around the same theme (i.e. consisting of almost entirely of visits to religious sites) would be repetitive and could easily become boring for the tourist.

In order to break this monotony, it would be useful to offer events accompanied by cultural experts, for example, who would highlight the food and wine traditions in the areas where religious sites are located and the relationship between "religious life" and food and wine traditions, enhancing the travel itinerary by adding visits to craft fairs, artisan food and wine producers and/or participating in cultural events, which would make the travel itinerary into a richer experience.

It is of paramount importance that the theme and interdisciplinary approach of the tourism product is completely compatible with the destination, its resources and its products.

#### 4.5.1 New technologies for tracking travel itineraries.

One of the key issues for improving historic, artistic and cultural travel itineraries to be enjoyed either on foot or by bicycle is having adequate tracking in order to enable tourists to move with the right equipment and ensure the safety of both walkers and cyclists.

A travel itinerary must be tracked with a georeferenced track using GPS. The technologies available on the market today enable us to have the technological means, at low cost, to record a georeferenced track which contains a series of data such as length, altitude, time, speed, etc..

More specialised map navigators or even a simple smartphone (equipped with GPS) can record a route and its data using special Apps. Obviously, the better the navigator, the more detailed the track will be, as more satellites are connected to it.

GPS records the location through geographical coordinates (area, latitude, longitude, altitude, time and other data) and records them through the connection it establishes with satellites circling the earth. The more satellites are connected to the device, the more accurate the reading.

The track is a succession of co-ordinates, connected together in a line, automatically recorded by the device when we go on a hike. While recording a route, GPS trackers record our location at variable time intervals (approx. every ten seconds).

The points, called track points, are then joined together to form, to a fair approximation, the route we have travelled, known as the track.

While the navigator is recording the track it is useful to document the whole route with photos, videos and notes and it is important that the photos are georeferenced. A georeferenced photo certifies that the reproduced place is real and gives value to the whole travel itinerary.

Even more interesting would be a compact video camera that would enable you to record the route and capture all its features. Videos are valuable tools when writing a description of the route.

In the absence of a video, it is useful to record any observations and features of the route using a voice recorder or notepad.

Finally, it is useful to make a note of the type of vegetation found along the route (Mediterranean, pine and beech forests, etc.), whether there are natural springs, tumuli, stone ramparts, fencing, water courses, signposts, and give a description of the landscape.

This information along with the track, waypoints and georeferenced images, is essential for providing a description of the travel itinerary and enabling visitors to enjoy it.

#### 4.5.2 Length of route and stages.

A travel itinerary may last from a few hours (in which case we refer to it as an excursion) up to several days (in which case we refer to it as a trip).

The length of the route and of the individual stages is therefore intrinsically linked to the duration of the stay and the season in which it takes place, the characteristics of the area which it goes through, how busy it is and the activities that are on offer and, above all, the means of transport used (also in relation to the quality of the roads).

If it is a walking route, it is important to clarify the level of difficulty.

In this regard, the levels of difficulty are classified as follows:

- easy: ideal for everyone;
- medium: requires a minimum of effort, but does not pose any particular difficulties;
- difficult: intended for people who are used to walking along demanding routes (such as steps, mountain paths, steep descents, etc.);

- very difficult: only for experienced walkers.

#### 4.5.3 Type of route.

This refers above all to the characteristics of the road surface, the width and type of route (dirt tracks, paved roads, footpaths, motorways, etc.), the average traffic and the gradients and bends, as well as a precise assessment of the accessibility of resources (signs and signage, parking areas, suitable entrances, spaces for manoeuvring, alternative routes, etc.) in relation to the vehicle used.

#### 4.5.4 Means of transport.

Having obtained information about the area, based on its morphology (topography and hydrography) the quality of the roads and the public services available, it is possible to choose which means of transport is best suited for travelling along the route.

There is a wide range of choices, depending basically on the needs of the target group and the travel itinerary planned.

Train, coach (large or small), car (also off-road), camper van, bicycle (racing, road, mountain bike, e-bike, etc.), on horseback, on foot, etc.

It is easy to see why the type of transport connections available must be carefully considered, the distances covered between stages or on each day, the total duration of the route, the time of year, the objectives and level of difficulty of the route, the target group, not to mention the choice of road and road surface.

With regard to the distance to be covered at each stage, it is important to consider not only the maximum but also the minimum distance to be covered in a day for the itinerary to be enjoyable and not too easy for those who participate.

#### 4.5.5 Breaks.

When all the appropriate calculations regarding the number, duration, importance, feasibility, value, interest, type and thematic relevance of the stops have been taken into account, the outcome will be pleasant and enjoyable.

In the case of guided tours, it is also important to assess the need for toilet or leisure breaks as well as to include some time in the schedule when visitors are free to do what they like.

The success of a travel itinerary depends very much on the correct estimate of the length of each stop, in relation to the activities planned throughout the route.

Generally speaking, the duration of a visit to a museum, or to a typical food producer should not exceed an average of 60 to 90 minutes (on the other hand, this is related to the importance one decides to attach to such stops).

#### 4.5.6 Length of stay and time required.

These variables should mainly be structured according to the length of the itinerary, the number and frequency of stops, the means of transport used, the theme of the itinerary, the availability and opening times of facilities and services, always bearing in mind the expectations of the traveller.

#### 4.5.7 Points of interest and tour operators.

As already mentioned above with regard to planning the experience of visiting the local places of interest, it is a question of assessing and verifying the number of places to be visited in the area (places of historic, cultural and environmental interest, panoramic viewpoints, but also farms, wine cellars, handicraft manufacturers, etc.), tour operators, potential suppliers, partners, consultants, etc. (accommodation, restaurants, service provider and tourist agencies, guides, leisure, wellness, sport, etc.) useful for deciding on the breaks and stages during the trip.

The person planning the travel itinerary must acquire as much information as possible and personally inspect every single element.

You should not underestimate the importance of making a careful selection, which should be based mainly on their quality and significance in relation to the itinerary, their location, their environmental characteristics and thematic relevance, compliance with standards required by the market and their overall quality.

#### 4.5.8 Route outline.

Factors that most influence the outline of an itinerary are the geographic-tourist context and the thematic aspects of the trip.

When planning a route, some important variables need to be carefully considered:

- the geomorphological and cultural characteristics of the area to be visited;
- the importance, density and location of the places;
- the thematic objectives of the trip;
- the availability and distribution of tourist facilities (accommodation and catering facilities, other tourism service providers);
- other technical characteristics of the route (length of stay, means of transport, characteristics of rest points, length of stages, etc.).

In relation to itinerary planning, the following types of route are identified

- Linear itinerary: ideal for representing routes to explore new regions or extensive areas (historic transit routes, river courses, etc.) or to connect places and main stages of journeys such as the Grand Tours, where the emphasis is on crossing distant lands (for example, ideal for a journey by bicycle, perhaps partly along the banks of a river, looking for agricultural and food products in the lands visited or along a pilgrimage route such as St. Olav's Way, St. James's Way or the Via Francigena to be followed on foot)
- The circuit or daisy route: a good choice if there is an important or main attraction in the area to be visited (e.g. in terms of places of cultural interest) which has a strong symbolic, cultural or thematic value. Around this focal point it is possible to build a number of excursions to other resorts and destinations in the vicinity that will improve the tourist's understanding of the place and the theme. The decision to build a radial route can also be related to the increased availability of accommodation and catering facilities located in the main location. In fact, in this type of itinerary, staying at the same hotel during a stay may provide better value for money (the accommodation manager might be happy to offer a discount for longer stays), better levels of service such as

loading and unloading luggage or easier relationships with the service providers (e.g. tour guides, or bicycle hire) depending on the town chosen.

- Circuit itinerary: perfect for areas where there are a number of important tourist resorts, connected with each other by theme and with a wide-ranging offer both in terms of the attractions and in terms of the number and quality of facilities, which will justify separate trips. In this case, the travel itinerary normally begins and ends in the same location, which may be useful for various reasons (e.g. for convenience in terms of organising and managing arrivals and departures because of a nearby railway station or key motorway junction, or because it is ideally the right place for the route to begin and end).
- Itinerary with opportunities to branch out: suitable for areas where there is more than one place of interest which acts as an attraction in terms of theme and/or tourism and/or logistics and distribution. In this case, there are routes that link more than one location, each deserving a longer stop and from where one can embark on other excursions and visit nearby attractions. An itinerary with opportunities to branch out could be ideal, for example, for exploring a large valley which leads to smaller side valleys.

It is important to note that the same area can be visited based on different types of travel itineraries depending on the chosen theme, which is strategically important to the route.

#### 4.6 An example of tourist travel schedule

Planning a travel itinerary for a target audience can be summarised in a travel schedule that will be one of the tourism products of the area/destination proposed to tourists.

The table below shows an example of this, referring, for the sake of argument, to the cycle tourism sector:

Product	Bike and taste
Product line	CYCLETOURISM
Tourist profile	Cycle tourist SLOW BIKER
Resources required and related services	<p>PRIMARY RESOURCES</p> <p>Cycle route ..... (km. 50)</p> <p>SECONDARY RESOURCES</p> <p>..... Food Museum</p> <p>Nature reserve</p> <p>..... Castle</p> <p>SUPPORT SERVICES</p> <p>Public authorities (for maintaining the signs and the cycle lanes)</p> <p>Medical and Sports Centre (medical and physiotherapy services for sportsmen and women)</p> <p>Cycles ..... bicycle repair shop</p>
Tourist services	<p>Hotels .....</p> <p>Agriturismo .....</p> <p>Inn .....</p> <p>Restaurant .....</p> <p>Bike tour sport tourism guides and bike hire services</p>
Infrastructure	<p>Railway station</p> <p>Bus station</p> <p>Car park .....</p> <p>Car park .....</p> <p>Camper parking area .....</p>

	.....
Image	Immersion in nature Safe cycling .....

#### 4.7 Range of local tourist offer.

The number of "tourism products" constitutes the range of facilities and services available in the area and represents the range of products of a local area (a destination) which expresses the choices it offers, i.e. the set of product lines available in the destination itself and targeted at specific groups.

A possible example is given in the table below, from which one can see the formalisation, in terms of breadth and depth, of what a destination can offer to different target groups.

Table 5. - Range of local tourist offer

	WIDTH		
	PRODUCT LINES		
	History and culture	Sport and nature	Food and wine and relaxation
DEPTH	Religious and cultural itineraries	Accommodation and activities in nature reserves and protected areas	Agriturismo packages
	Themed visits and tours to explore the area	Outdoor centres and services and nature-based sporting activities	Holiday packages in charming period houses
	Theatrical and musical performances and the performing arts in general	Adventure parks	Tasting experiences in cellars and delicatessens
	Specialised and experiential visits to monuments, historic centres and museums	Travel itineraries using the network of trekking, hiking, horse riding, mountain bike and cycle routes	Tasting of traditional local products - traditional local recipes Wine and food festivals Staying in picturesque villages

Visits and tours to explore the cultural landscape Local folklore and traditions Historic re-enactments possibly in historic locations Accommodation in period houses and fine hotels Exploring art destinations .....	Local folklore and traditions Hiking and/or nature guides Routes including ethnographic and/or nature museums Agriturismo packages	Visits and tours to explore farmland Visits and tours to sample local products .....
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The range of products in a destination captures the reality of a moment in time.

It shows how an area, with its constituent elements identified, organised and managed in synergy by both public and private operators in the various sectors, can become a tourism product.

However, the area/destination is not a closed, self-contained system, defined once and for all and not subject to change.

On the contrary, the system interacts with the outside world: the tourism product, coinciding with all or only some of the elements of the area, depending on the complexity or range of offers available in an area, or even on new experiences for tourists that become available, can change its content over time.

**5. HOW TO PROMOTE THE TOURISM PRODUCT**

Once the products and markets have been identified it is possible to promote them using the most appropriate marketing tools. It is a question of creating a number of different marketing tools to reach the target audience.

When planning the use of individual marketing tools, you should never lose sight of your target group, so that you avoid using standard tools, which are more expensive and less effective.

In recent years, the use of online marketing has increased to meet special demand which enables us to reach a wider market cheaply at same time.

In addition, when it comes to activity holidays, such as walking and/or cycling holidays, it is also very important to use direct channels as they enable consumers to join similar networks and/or interest groups (e.g. associations, clubs, etc.) that bring enthusiasts together.

Finally, it is important to identify the various tools available depending on whether one is addressing nearby markets, the domestic market or the international market, adopting the channel best suited to the size of the target market.

Marketing tools have been grouped into the following types:

- Promotional materials and photos: these include printed materials (brochures, guides, route planners, maps, etc.) for the presentation and exploitation of the offer and for giving recommendations. These materials can be both informative tools, e.g. route planners describing routes, but also and above all marketing tools.
- Off-line communications: this generally includes media campaigns, press offices, etc., where each selection depends on the traveller's budget. For example, an advertisement in a specialist magazine costs much less than one in a national newspaper and, above all, makes it easier to reach the target audience. There are now many specialist magazines offering walking tours and nature trails.
- Another effective way of promoting the area and a tourism product is to set up "educational tours", i.e. an invitation to try out the tourism product and services, addressed to trade journalists for the publication of advertising material or to tour operators to establish business relations.

- Online communications: this heading includes all the activities that can be carried out on the web, starting with the website as an informative shop window designed with the right focus on the target audience, and where possible commercial in the event that it allows people to book and purchase directly the businesses and services it advertises. There are many communication channels on the Internet which enable you to advertise your own content: purchase of banners, pay by clicking on search engines, web content, positioning, etc. and an increased visibility on social networks, which represent an important tool for creating and maintaining a community and creating direct relationships with your target audience.
- Among indirect promotional channels, it can also be very useful to consider collaboration with travel bloggers and other online influencers. A fairly common practice is to offer the experience for free in exchange for advertising on the blogger/influencer's channels.

But it is also essential to set yourself up so that you can market your own products, and the main operators you should be dealing with today for specialised tourism products are certainly the Online Travel Agencies (OTAs).

OTAs are by far the best indirect distribution channel for tours, experiences and activities.

Identifying the best OTA to invest in will depend on the type of customer you are targeting and who you are hoping to reach through a particular platform.

Some of the best-known OTAs are given as examples: Musement, Airbnb Experiences, ToursByLocals, Viator, Veltraetc.

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