

HOW CAN COMMUNITY EVENTS BENEFIT FROM TOURISM?

1. WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

In Slovenia alone, we have 24.045 voluntary associations. These associations organize different events that benefit local societies. Their key activities are:

- Preserving local traditions
- Taking care of their environment
- Keeping their communities together

These associations also face a lot of challenges. Work is done on a voluntary basis, therefore these events are (mostly) non-profit. Additionally, young people are moving out of villages and are less and less eager to help out. Traditions could get lost and discontinued. Tourism could be a solution for such events. But so far, most of these events are invisible to tourists. Why is this the case?

As events are non-profit there is almost no marketing budget. We mostly have in mind local events that happen in the rural environments (e.g. smaller villages), where people do not have the know-how of how to attract tourists. Yet people are proud of their local traditions and wish to preserve them, this is one of the main reasons why they are organizing the events in the first place.

On the other side, the demand for authentic experiences is growing. Tourists want to discover new places, meet locals, experience and learn about their culture and above all - connect with people.

The question that arises is how to connect tourists with such events?

Our proposal:

We would create an online **marketplace** for community events that happen all around Slovenia (and worldwide as well). We would reach out to local associations and enable them to post their events on the booking platform. In this case, they do not need to worry about marketing as we will market the platform itself. With that their events will get greater visibility and most importantly - events would get **"bookable online"**.

Finally, we would allow tourists to enter the backstage. They could get involved in the local communities, join their events, learn and socialize. By paying for access to events

they would contribute greatly to the future of these associations and the whole community.

2. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Our idea is immersed in all of the three pillars of sustainable development: **social, economic and environmental sustainability.**

From an economic point of view, our model produces additional income for the local community, it also provides financial stability of voluntary associations, to keep organizing these local events. We see that most young people today are not eager to join these local associations. With our idea, we see that young people could gain more motivation to join local associations and help out.

More and more people are moving out of rural areas and moving to bigger cities. There exists a great danger of losing customs and traditions, which will not be passed on to future generations. These events and new income opportunities can be a reason for people to stay in their local communities. With these events, we would create meaningful and long-term connections between tourists and the local community and encourage intergenerational cooperation.

Let's not forget ecological sustainability. Tourists would be able to participate in activities that locals are doing, which are many times focused on preserving their natural heritage. By limiting the number of tourists per event, we are also limiting our footprint on the local environment.

Our idea also solves many problems that have occurred in tourism over the past years. With it, we can steer tourism in the right direction. Because these events are located mostly in rural areas, this means tourists are being redirected away from the hotspots that were significantly overcrowded before the pandemic.

3. WHICH ARE THE PREMISES?

When discussing tourism contribution towards preserving the local environment, culture, and other elements of the destination, there are usually many bad examples pointed out through the media. The consequences of mass tourism led up to many negative assumptions which still exist when discussing this topic related to authenticity, sustainability and valorization.

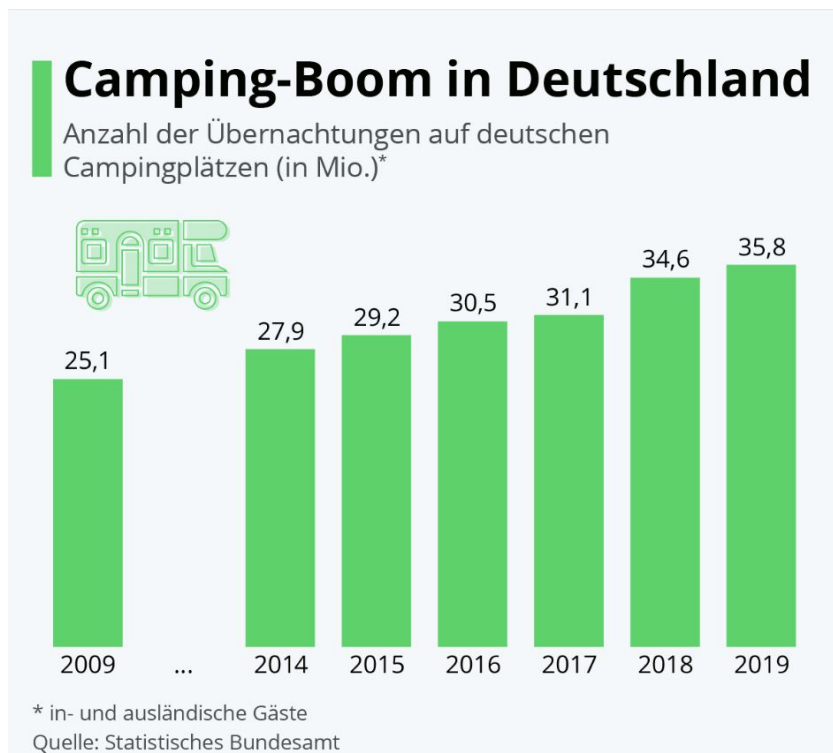
When creating and integrating a new tourism product, we need to dedicate special attention to the multilayered effects that tourism as a social activity has on the natural and social environment. We need to keep in mind the limited number of visitors that the area's infrastructure and environment can accept. And we need to create and provide an optimal atmosphere for interactions between visitors, the local community and its culture.

The idea of providing Local Community Events for tourists takes into account all the previously mentioned premises of assumption. The Community Events would be organized and provided by the locals for the sole purpose of building and enriching the community itself. Their authenticity arises from the fact that such events would not be organized or staged for the purpose of tourism, but would only be willing to accept tourists to share their knowledge and skills to preserve their traditions and culture. The idea would pursue sustainable development by limiting the number of tickets per event. The goal is to keep such one-off locally based events on a small scale and of good quality, without any additional burden on the local communities.

Focusing on our market potential and the values that the product will be encouraging in our customers, we analyzed information gathered from Statista and other sources. Because our bookable Community Events will be spread across the country, we focused on the qualities such as flexibility and mobility when searching for our target market. We found that tourists traveling with a camper or an RV would fit that profile, as they want to remain flexible while traveling and are usually choosing safer travel destinations within Central Europe.

As we can see from the figure included below, the gathered data provided us with the information that camping holidays have been trending, especially in Germany.

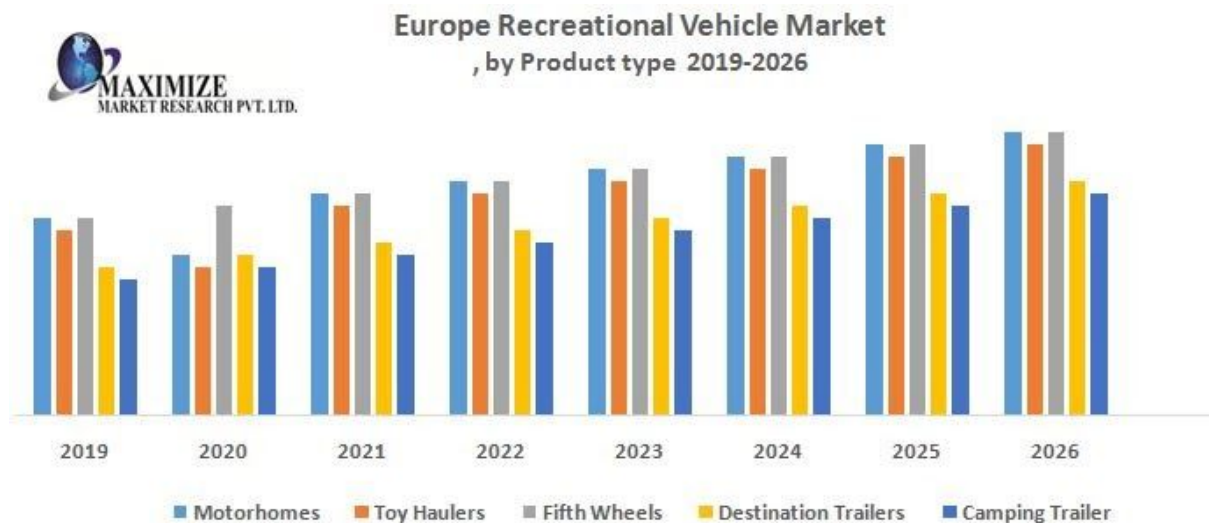
Figure 1:



Source: Statista(2021)

According to analysis and sales predictions of the European recreational market, the camping holiday trend is predicted to also be on the rise in the next couple of years. Other researches also confirm that camping holidays will be trending especially in post-covid times, as traveling with a camper provides the advantages of safe and individual living and moving.

Figure 2:



Source: Europe Recreational Vehicle Market – Industry Analysis and Forecast (2021)

The idea of Community Events wants to enrich and expand tourists’ holiday experiences in Slovenia and beyond. The other two main market segments besides camping tourists we would address are glamping enthusiasts and other boutique accommodation tourists.

4. POSSIBLE ANSWERS AND INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS

Our proposal to address the mentioned challenges is to build an online marketplace for local community events. Organizers would get the opportunity to promote these events and make them bookable online, while travelers will be able to find all local events happening nearby at one place.

On this marketplace, local community associations could upload all their special events. Because we are aware that members of these associations sometimes do not possess the required digital skills, we suggest a system with the so-called local agents – individuals, who help these local associations at every step to become visible and bookable online. The agents will be present at these events and will if needed, help to overcome the language barriers between providers and tourists.

Association representatives alone or local agents will publish the experience and it will go into the reviewing process. The online marketplace would collect somewhere between 15 - 30% commission.

Part of the money raised on the platform (through commissions) will be constantly given back to the communities (through education and workshops, non-financial awards, green tokens possibly in the future, etc.).

As an example of such a Community Event that would help to preserve local culture and enrich a tourist experience, we chose the experience of helping the locals build drywalls in the Karst Region (Slovenia). The region is very unique because it is characterized by stone, which is often used to build drywalls. Society members and residents often meet to renovate existing or build new dry stone walls (to preserve cultural heritage cultural landscape), which requires special skills. By providing tourists the knowledge and the opportunity to participate in such activities, they would make a concrete contribution to the community, while learning and socializing at the same time.

Local associations and their lifestyle | Dry walls



How to include these activities on the booking platform?

All of the activities encouraged and triggered by the local communities would take place in the form of events within weeks/months/years depending on the decision of the organizers. They will have two options:

- They will be responsible for posting the listing on the platform themselves (following the standard procedure)
- They will get the help of local agents to assist them with copywriting, uploading high-quality photos, scheduling, booking management, etc.

5. Open questions regarding these answers and solutions

There are some aspects of the idea that we would need to address. We yet have to assess the business model. So we are not sure how many community events and how many tickets to those events we should be able to sell so the business is profitable. Maybe even there are some other solutions in terms of financing eg. Municipalities financing the platform so the local associations could promote their events there.

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