

e-Tourism: The Role of ICT in Tourism Industry

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Abstract

The accelerating and synergistic interaction between technology and tourism in recent times has brought fundamental changes in the industry and our perceptions of its nature [1]. Adoption of new technologies has reshaped the entire process of tourism service development, management and marketing, as well as entire tourism industry as a whole. Due to the increasing impact on efficiency and effectiveness of tourism organizations, ICTs may be perceived as an integral part of the contemporary tourism business.

In the Smart e-Tourism project [2] being implemented within the framework of Karelia ENPI CBC Programme, ICT enabled opportunities and possibilities for the tourism industry in the Republic of Karelia, Russia and Oulu region, Finland have been studied. For instance, to better cognize how different organizations use ICT to interact with consumers, including tourists, an online questionnaire was developed. The study took place during February and March, 2013 and responses were gathered from both regions. In all, more than 300 responses were collected.

The project has the potential to create unique opportunities to further enhance e-Tourism solutions for the Republic of Karelia and Oulu region. This could be achieved through implementing state-of-the-art technologies. For example, 3-D Internet and Smart Spaces have the potential to create exceptional opportunities to improve ubiquitous applications for the betterment of the travelers.

Digital services and mobile applications that are being developed in the project will assist tourists in finding offers that meet their needs and individual preferences. Also previously mentioned survey ensures the need for mobile application development as, for instance, less than 2% of respondents from Russian Karelia currently use mobile applications for information about their products or services dissemination.

The following subsections emphasize aspects considered for e-Tourism solution development within the project.

Pre-travel phase

- ICT provide a wide range of tools to facilitate travel-related information search, for instance virtual (3D) representation of the destination may encourage tourist to search information about particular destination and visit it in the real life.
- Information about the region available during the trip planning should enable tourist to create personalized travel plan, for instance as a proactive proposal based on tourist profile and preferences. Recommendations from virtual communities and social networks may positively affect travel decision making.

Travel phase

- Real-time information about the destination should be available during the trip, for instance information about events and places of interest, advices and practical recommendations. For instance, mobile applications may enable tourists to find products or services that match their needs.
- Besides, regional electronic guide system that provides travelers with road direction signs and electronic information notes should be released to enhance travel experience.

Post-travel phase

- ICT provides tourists variety of solutions to share their travel experience with others, for instance using virtual communities and social media. Tourist travel experience may affect other potential tourist travel decision making.

Regional tourism will become more attractive as a consequence of e-Tourism solutions that are being developed. Even though there are evident gaps in the infrastructure, e-Tourism solutions show encouraging outcomes. It is worth noting that e-Tourism has an immediate effect on the regional competition through provision of cost effective and personalized services.

Index Terms: e-Tourism, ENPI, Karelia, Travel planning, Personalized services.

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