

# Brand management in the practice of cross-border tourist destinations

NEVEN ŠERIĆ

*University of Split*

*Faculty of Economics Split, Croatia*

*nevseric@inet.hr*

SILVIJA VITNER MARKOVIĆ

*Karlovac University of Applied Sciences*

*Polytechnic of Karlovac*

*silvija.vitner@vuka.hr*

## Abstract

A common brand management of cross-border tourist destination provides the ability to efficiently consolidate competitive advantages to multiple destinations. A brand management for such areas is in the function of unifying the overall tourism through a recognizable tourist brand. The creation of a joint tourist brand of border areas helps to create competitiveness and a higher differentiation of the comprehensive tourist product in the global tourist market. The vision, based on the long-term aims of managing a recognizable tourist brand, helps the overall economic development of the area. To jointly manage the brand cross-border tourist destinations effectively it is necessary to achieve a synergy of tourism destinations. One possible approach is to design a specific model which brings together all the available resources of the area. This introduces a cluster concept which is a useful platform in creating an efficient marketing strategy. Such an approach encourages faster and more efficient social-economic integration. The presented research is based on the author's model developed for an efficient evaluation of tourist resources on the Croatian-Slovenian border. Research was done through the future perspective of the development of the border area of the Karlovac County (CRO) and Southeast Slovenia (SLO) with the aim of creating a recognizable cross-border tourist product. Economic contribution is efficient tourism branding of different cultural border areas. The aim of the paper is to point out the possibility of brand management for cross-border tourist destinations on the basis of common and partial elements of recognition of the area.

Key words: management, branding, cross-border, tourism, development

## 1 Introduction

The brand of a destination is a product considered in relation to its name, identity and reputation. It could be defined as a name that makes it unique among similar destinations. “Brands have become the main communicators in the global market.” (Kuhn & Alpert, 2009) A strong brand destination simplifies a tourist’s behaviour and decision-making. It even reduces the risk of making an incoherent choice. It establishes quality and creates high expectations on the part of tourists. “Strong tourist brands create strong thoughts and emotions in the tourist’s awareness.” (Morgan & Pritchard, 2001, 117) “The main premise of the brand management is creating added value for the tourist.” (Kuhn & Alpert, 2009, 58) The identity of a destination brand is the main concept of a valorisation. Tourists evaluate destinations, choose them, like or dislike them based on stereotypes. The efficient brand management of a destination is primarily influenced by the perception of the destination. Perception depends on the variety of tourist attraction of destinations. In the case of cross-border destinations, the particular values are the cultural, historical, as well as having other differences that from the tourism aspect strengthen the attractiveness of the area. “Valorisation of tourist resources in the border area through a model of cross-border cooperation contributes to the competitiveness and recognition of the brand of the tourist area.” (Butler, 2002) Cross-border cooperation can be used as a platform for brand management. This paper presents opportunities for possible cross-border cooperation between the Karlovac County (CRO) and Southeast Slovenia (SLO) through brand management. The aim is to point out the possibility of brand management in the border areas through cross-border cooperation. It is the way toward the creation of an umbrella brand of the tourist region. In this study the following hypotheses are tested:

- H1 – border areas have different relevant resources for forming recognizable brands of partial tourist products,
- H2 – border areas have sufficient resources to create a recognizable umbrella brand of the wider region.

The practical contribution is reflected in the evaluation of resources for potential branding in the border area. Scientific contribution is reflected in the creation of a methodological approach of the evaluation of the exact model for brand management. There is exploratory research, benchmark analysis, primary research, and a comparative method of data analysis. The destination brand is created as a consequence of growing competitiveness and globalisation. “Marketing strategy in brand management represents and comprises all brand assets.” (Doyle, 2002, 167) Brand management has become the principal and the most important distinguishing feature of a particular destination nowadays. The reality is fast marketing and a deluge of information. “Compared to classical brand management, brand management for the tourist destination is a process where the brand actively creates its identity with the objective of as quality as possible positioning in the global tourist market as a desirable item for tourists.” (Aaker, 1991, 46) A modern tourist chooses with emotions and the mind. “It indicates a direct connection of particular parts (brand mix of the destination) and their possible influence in the future period either as fall or increase depending on the success of the branding process.” (Aaker, 2001, 95) From one aspect in destination brand management, communication is used especially to create a differentiation. Competitiveness of the destination’s brand depends on a variety of components. The component of diversity determines available resources. Resources depend on the diversity of historical heritage and other characteristics of the cross-border areas. Effective brand management is based on the determination of available resources. The destination brand actually affects the tourist’s feelings, their emotions and requests. The image of a destination is defined as a perception, notions or a tourist’s feelings about a place. The brand is, among other things, subordinated to the destination itself. The application of the brand management for the exact destination is a complex task. It is useful to apply a custom economic model that will ultimately secure the loyalty of tourists, and recognition of the destination through the coming decades. The basic functions of the destination’s brand management are communicating, creating perception, strong relations,

and a higher destination value. Tourist destinations attempt to construct character and uniqueness. In such a way, they create and enter into a mutual relationship. That relationship is particularly related to the tourist's attempts to construct their own image through a particular image. Tourists and the destination brand realize a certain interdependent relationship. Effective model for the brand management in tourism requires interaction with the elements of the brand's mix, along with the interaction and the creation of relations with tourists. The exact model for brand management needs to evaluate all differentiations of the destination's resources. Such a model places the brand management *inside* the destination. "It is a crucial link that connects the destination and a guest through added value." (Hankison, 2004, 116) In the case of cross-border areas the interaction and cooperation in the brand management is an absolute prerequisite for the development of future tourism. Regardless of the expected quality of the cross-border area, each destination has to get the same tourist standard. Because of these reasons it is an absolute necessity to use a certain model for brand management. The model is essentially the platform that directly transfers exact information concerning the tourist demand to the branded cross-border area. Summing up the activities for the development of the brand management model, it is important to collect and analyse tourist perception. It is important to develop tactics in congruence with the tourist demand. Brand management represents a supporting platform and a starting point for the adequate positioning of the cross-border tourist area on the global tourist market. "The effectiveness of brand management suggests the use of a project method in order to upgrade brand communication." (Hankison, 2004, 112) In the case of cross-border area, a project method could be the programme of the reorganization of the tactics of brand management. Important changes should be based on the destination's tourist market profitability analysis. The final modification is the actual concrete re-branding of guest perception. Brand management encompasses different activities that lead to the revival of the branded destination:

- Formation of the new marketing structure of the destination;

- Identification of strategic brand activities of the destination;
- Formulation of a new image of the destination;
- Assurance of resources and conditions to implement the new promotional mix.

## 2 Methods and access

Defining the starting point of the creating process for the destination brand management includes the determination of the appropriate model. Specifics of the border areas of two or more neighbouring countries determine the terms of the model. Depending on a particular case it is appropriate to define an exact strategy for the brand management of border areas, despite the unbalanced level of tourism development. An unbalanced level of the achieved tourism development of border areas determines the characteristics of the selected model. "Frontier regions are often blessed with few natural resources and may suffer the problems of relative or absolute inaccessibility, a small or even nomadic population. Many frontier regions are characterized by limited infrastructure such as transportation, accommodation and other services." (Butler, 2002, 4, 15) These areas often offer a rich cultural and historical heritage and preserved landscape. It is the base for the development of specialized tourist products. Border areas are special because of their natural-geographic features, historical-administrative-political characteristics, demographic structure, economy orientation and level of economic development, land-property relations, cross-border employment, and cross-border traffic. All of these specifics are recommended to include in a custom model brand. Tourism in these areas is often developed with different intensity in different strategic context. "The myth of the frontier has been a powerful one, and is still to be seen clearly today in advertisements relating to specific forms of tourism such as ecotourism and adventure travel." (Butler, 2002, 6) Brand management has to be compatible with the environment, resources, and the population and used for long term success. "It is of equal importance to maintain attributes of a region that make it different from other tourist regions in order

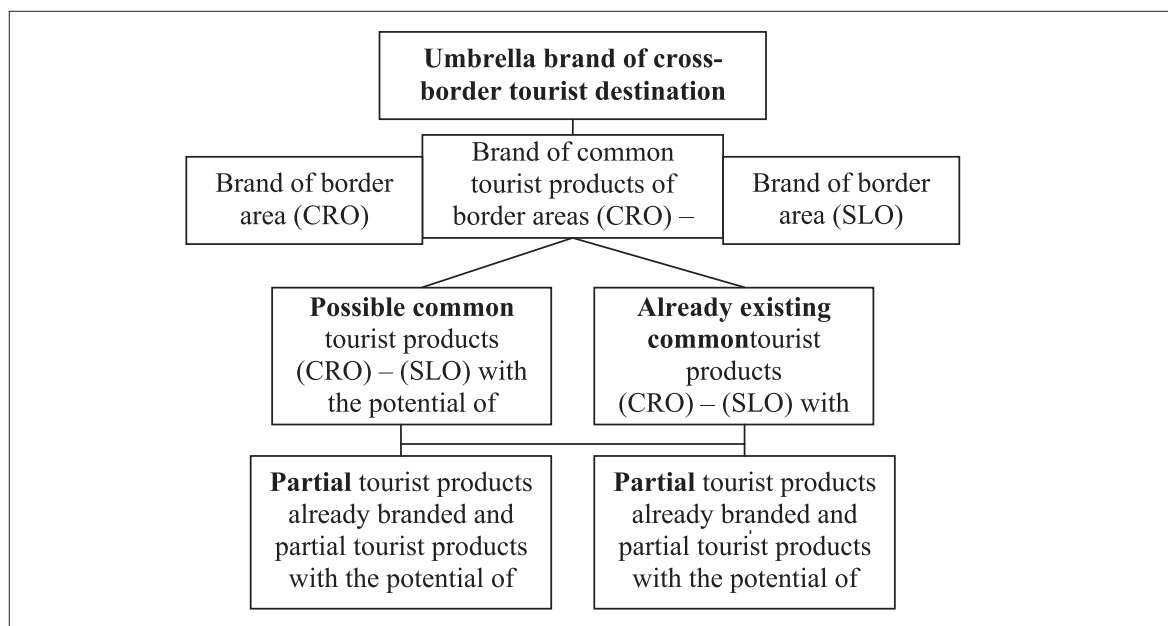
to maintain its competitiveness and appeal.” (Butler, 2002, 5) That is why it should simultaneously evaluate all tourist resources, coordinate and program the tourist infrastructure, coordinate the policy of free time, and form a common model for brand management of the cross-border area. The recognition of tourist’s offer of border areas can be improved by partial components of recognition and specificity. Cross-border cooperation in border areas enables a higher tourist and economic competitiveness of all entities that act in border areas, taking into account the development opportunities arising from the joint cross-border action. Opportunities are recognized in the development of tourism in border areas, among other things. The cross-border cooperation of neighboring countries encourages the development of tourism of the whole region through various national and international projects. Cross-border tourism cooperation between neighboring countries is recognized in a common evaluation of attractions and harmonization of the infrastructure. Valuation of tourism opportunities can be achieved by the formation of common tourist products and common promotion. There are three main phases of the development of the cross-border cooperation in practice toward author experience. The first stage includes preliminary activities to create a framework and conditions for effective participation. The second stage represents the transition toward development-oriented marketing (strategic) goals. The third stage leads to the formation of the common structures of cross-border cooperation by linking the existing stake holders at the regional level into the local level working groups and councils. In practice there are two basic forms of cooperation:

1. Coordinated benchmarking;
2. Making special agreements.

The European Union has developed two institutional frameworks of cross-border cooperation in tourism – *Interreg* and the concept of the Euro region. European Union programs in tourism, in the context of cross-border cooperation of Croatia and Slovenia, are within the PHARE CBC instrument for EU financial assistance. Different forms of horizontal, vertical and diagonal business integrations are emphasized in

the context of cooperation between business entities in the tourism industry. Various business integrations allow businesses within the tourism industry to cross borders and expand their tourist markets. Partners in tourism from different countries empower their competitive advantage in the international tourist market through business integrations. Various business integrations in tourism could be the potential development approach between the Republics of Croatia and Slovenia through cross-border cooperation. Sub regions can be set and a series of networks and contacts between the settlements along the border on both sides can be established. Partnership between the governing bodies of the same level is useful in the effective management of tourism resources in border areas. These partnerships contribute to sustainable evaluation and harmonization of the economic, social and environmental standards. State borders affect tourism in many ways, primarily in terms of throughput. The conditions that determine the state borders throughput depend on the relationships between the countries. If there is a tourist zone that exists adjacent to the boundary on only one side, some people will be attracted to visit the other side as well. That presents opportunities for tourism development to spill over onto the non-tourist side of the border. If there is a tourist zone that extends across or meets at the borders, there may be communication and cooperation between the two sides so that the entire natural or cultural attraction system operates as one entity. In the European Union there is an obvious effort to encourage the merging of smaller tourist destinations that are adjacent to larger destinations, to create new tourism products. Such projects are interesting for investors and they contribute to the economic development and population of those areas. The reality of border areas is an unbalanced economic development and an uneven population. The integration of tourism activities encourages the approval of funding common projects. Figure 1 shows the author’s working model suitable for branding cross-border tourist destinations. For higher differentiation and recognition of the tourist destination, the model contains acronyms of countries whose border areas have been the subjects of this research.

Fig. 1: Working model of branding cross-border tourist destination.



Source: authors' research 2010/2011.

The model is based on three platforms:

- Brand management of the border area for each country;
- Brand management of common tourist products for border areas;
- Brand management of partial tourist products for each border area separately.

In addition to the existing, and already positioned partial tourist products of the border areas of each country, the model assumes the implementation of new common tourist products of border areas. These partial tourist products contribute to the tourist image of border area.

### 3 Research: cross-border tourism cooperation Karlovac county (CRO) and Southeast Slovenia (SLO)

Research was done for the border area of the Karlovac County and Southeast Slovenia. The research includes:

- Analysis of tourist potentials and the achieved level of tourist development in border areas on both sides of the national borders;
- Partial tourist products for each border area separately;
- Proposals for common tourist products as well as determining the image of the tourist product of the observed cross-border areas (which is the foundation of creating the competitive brand).

Partial tourist products are analyzed in order to define the basic elements for forming possible common products of border areas. Common tourist products, among others, are the basic elements for creating the competitive umbrella brand of a cross-border tourist destination. An analysis of tourist resources has been carried out for research purposes, and an evaluation of the tourism development level has been made for both border areas. Below are the results of the analysis. The tourist traffic of Karlovac County is studied through actual tourist arrivals and overnight stays of foreign and domestic tourists, the structure of tourist traffic according to the countries of origin and the average length of stay. The border area of Karlovac County,

studied in this research, includes the municipality of Kamanje, the municipality of Žakanje, the town of Ozalj and the municipalities of Ribnik, Netretić and Bosiljevo. In Karlovac County the hydrographic network presents a special tourism resource. A network of rivers, rivulets and streams has created attractive, unique scenery. The Kupa/Kolpa River is the longest, its flow running entirely through the territory of Croatia, but a significant part of it forms the natural border with the neighboring country of Slovenia, which forms a platform for the development of common specialized tourist products (kayak tours, rafting, etc.). A section of the Kupa/Kolpa, downstream from Kamanje towards Ozalj, is suitable for rafting at a length of approximately 10 km. On this route there are several unique travertine barriers and a number of rapids. After the first few kilometers the route leads to the Vrlovka cave, often a transit destination for holiday-makers. The diversity of the scenery is also usable for tourist development as one of the special features of the country. Many kinds of scenery typical of continental Croatia are represented in a relatively small area. The hills around the town of Ozalj are rich in the idyllic scenery of the Kupa/Kolpa canyon. The area just off the banks of the Kupa/Kolpa, attractive and used for wine growing at the far north of the county, is the area of Vivodina. It is attractive for tourism because of the wine road of Vivodina. In the border area of the county there are currently small areas along the Kupa/Kolpa which are under environmental protection. The prominent scenery of Ozalj – the area around the town, is partly protected by the canyon of the Kupa/Kolpa near the old castle of Ozalj. It is a protected landscape, an area of natural and cultural values with great landscape value, biodiversity and cultural and historical values. Among other environmentally protected areas in the

border area of the Karlovac County, the Vrlovka cave near the town of Ozalj is prominent as a geomorphologic natural monument. Natural and anthropogenesis tourist resources operating together can additionally enrich the tourist offer of the border area of the Karlovac County. Old medieval castles situated in the municipalities and the towns of the border area of the Karlovac County include Ozalj, Ribnik, Bosiljevo and Novigrad on Dobra. In the process of evaluating old castles, their general condition presents the greatest of problems. They are neglected, dilapidated and plain looking. Furthermore, the promotion of old castles is not enough so they remain completely unknown to tourists. Most roads near the old castles don't have road signs and therefore don't mark the way to them. At the same time there is no clear and specifically designed tourist offer relating exclusively to the old towns of the Karlovac County. Their importance for tourism is currently insignificant. A small folklore village by the name of Trg, near Ozalj, represents one of the most important sources for studying material and immaterial culture of the Pokupje area. In the past it served as the outskirts of the fortified town of Ozalj. The centre of the village has been preserved. They keep the customs and culture of the people of Ozalj inside their walls. Items of clothing, footwear, dishes, furniture, handicraft, utensils, tools, carts and carriages have been preserved. Nowadays the folklore village is an excursion site visited by a small number of visitors. Another motif to choose a tourist destination could also be local gastronomy. Habits and customs of the inhabitants of a certain region related to food mostly depend on the abundance of plant and animal species. The culinary culture of the Karlovac County in general, as well as the border area itself, is rich in the basic features of various culinary zones with the

**Table 1:** *Tourist traffic in Karlovac County in the years 2008 and 2009.*

Year	Tourist arrivals			Tourist overnight stays			Average number of overnight stays
	Total	Domestic	Foreign	Total	Domestic	Foreign	
2008	164 883	31 520	133 363	278 808	78 673	200 135	1,7
2009	161 277	25 336	135 941	269 419	61 381	208 038	1,7

*Source: author's research, according to the data from the Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2009 and 2010 yearbooks (Croatian Bureau of Statistic, 2009, 2010).*

**Table 2:** Tourist traffic in the border areas of Karlovac County in the year 2009.

Municipality	Tourist arrivals			Tourist overnight stays			Average number of overnight stays
	Total	Domestic	Foreign	Total	Domestic	Foreign	
Ozalj	468	305	163	1169	865	304	2,5
Bosiljevo	256	59	197	291	61	230	1,1
Kamanje	-*	-	-	-	-	-	-
Netretić	-*	-	-	-	-	-	-
Žakanje	71	2	69	156	6	150	2,2
Ribnik	134	17	117	184	19	165	1,4
Total	929	383	546	1800	951	849	1,9

\* no data

Source: authors' research, according to the data from the Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2009 and 2010 reports (Croatian Bureau of Statistic, 2009, 2010).

dominance of the culinary zone of Gorski Kotar and Lika. Caterers have also included assorted specialties of the international cuisine into their offer. Wines from autochthonous varieties of grapes typical of this climate are served.

According to data, tourists stay for a relatively short period of time in Karlovac County. In the total achieved tourist traffic there is a dominant share of foreign tourists. In the year 2008 and 2009, Karlovac County was mostly visited by tourists from Germany, Italy, France, the Netherlands, and Poland. In the year 2009, Karlovac County disposed of 424 beds in hotel accommodation, 384 beds in tourist resorts and 294 beds in camps. (Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Croatia, 2009 categorization) Hotel accommodation is represented mostly in cities, namely Karlovac and Ogulin. Camps are located along the rivers of Mrežnica and Korana.

Tourist traffic achieved in the borderline municipalities and towns by comparison with the overall achieved tourist traffic of the county in the year 2009 is less than 1%. The greatest tourist traffic was recorded in the town of Ozalj. One motel can be found close to the town of Ozalj. Other accommodation facilities of the studied border area consist mostly of private accommodation. The tourist offer of the border area of Karlovac County is currently underdeveloped, without a strategic framework and without a vision for future tourism development. The city government of Karlovac is preparing a Tourism Development Strategy 2011 -

2020. This strategic document for tourism development of the town of Karlovac and surroundings during the period of 2011 – 2020 should make the difference and initiate the development of tourism. Planning will be done by the beginning of 2012. The city government of Ozalj should do the same. Southeastern Slovenia borders with the Republic of Croatia (Karlovac County) on the river Kupa/Kolpa. Southeastern Slovenia consists of 20 municipalities. The studied border area of Southeastern Slovenia and Karlovac County is the area of Bela Krajina which consists of the municipalities of Črnomelj, Metlika and Semič. The Park Krajina called Kolpa is a protected area of the Kupa/Kolpa River in the territory of Southeastern Slovenia. There are 16 natural monuments and 41 cultural monuments under protection along the river itself and in its immediate vicinity. The Kupa/Kolpa has 39 autochthonous fish species. The border flow of the Kupa/Kolpa is suitable for sports and recreational water activities. Among natural heritage sites are some interesting karsts caves such as Malikovec, Lebica, Bečka, Vidovec, and Zdenc. In the border area there is the Bela Krajina wine road which includes the vineyards of all three borderline municipalities. Along with the wine tasting of the assorted varieties of grapes from Bela Krajina, the Slovenes also offer holiday-makers the original sweet bread of Bela Krajina. There are some cultural institutions in Metlika, Črnomelj and Semič such as the Museum of Bela Krajina in Metlika, the Museum collection of Semič, the Museum collection of Črnomelj, the Kambič gallery, and numerous sacral buildings.

**Table 3:** Tourist traffic in Southeastern Slovenia (Bela Krajina) in the years 2008 and 2009.

Year	Tourist arrivals			Tourist overnight stays			Average number of overnight stays
	Total	Domestic	Foreign	Total	Domestic	Foreign	
2008	98 621	45 289	53 332	365 396	214 093	151 303	3,7
2009	104 303	54 278	50 025	381 427	233 990	147 437	3,7

Source: Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Slovenia, 2009, 2010.

Cultural events fostering the cultural and historical heritage of the local people are also held. Visitors have found interest in folk heritage and events such as “The oldest folklore festival in Slovenia”, “Semiška Wedding”, “The Spring Vine Event”.

Tourists stay longer in Southeastern Slovenia than in Karlovac County. In Karlovac County tourists are, in most cases, in transit and there is a lack of appropriate tourist facilities. In the total achieved tourist traffic of Southeastern Slovenia there was an equal share of domestic and foreign tourists in the years 2008 and 2009. Among foreign tourists, Southeastern Slovenia was mostly visited by Italians, Germans, Austrians, Croats and the French. In the year 2009 Southeastern Slovenia disposed of 2,254 beds in hotel accommodation and 1,252 beds in camps. (Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Slovenia) The camps are located along the Kupa/Kolpa River. In the border area of Southeastern Slovenia and Karlovac County there are 8 campgrounds. In the borderline municipalities of Metlika, Črnomelj and Semič the largest number of beds is in camps. In all three studied borderline municipalities there are a total of 890 beds, of which 530 beds and 60% are in camps.

The tourist traffic achieved in border areas seen in comparison with the overall tourist traffic of Southeastern Slovenia in the year 2009 makes out a share of approximately 9% of tourist arrivals and 6% of tourist overnight stays. In the overall achieved tourist traffic of border areas there is a predominant share of domestic tourists. The greatest tourist traffic is recorded in the municipality of Metlika. Metlika is also important because of intensive cross-border cooperation with the Republic of Croatia because of daily migrations and contact among the inhabitants of the border areas. As part of the EDEN project (European Destinations of Excellence) the Kupa/Kolpa River has been chosen by the European Commission, in accordance with the guidelines of European tourism policy, as the 2010 destination of excellence. Rural tourism, tourism with the theme of gastronomy and wine roads, sports and recreational tourism on the Kupa/Kolpa, camping tourism and sightseeing tourism are all developed in that area.

**Table 4:** Tourist traffic in borderline municipalities of Southeastern Slovenia (Bela Krajina) in the year 2009.

Municipality	Tourist arrivals			Tourist overnight stays			Average number of overnight stays
	Total	Domestic	Foreign	Total	Domestic	Foreign	
Črnomelj	3527	2896	631	9064	7710	1354	2,6
Metlika	4872	3981	891	11 663	9991	1672	2,4
Semič	1146	1119	27	3102	3001	101	2,7
Total	9545	7996	1549	23 829	20 702	3127	2,5

Source: Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Slovenia, 2009, 2010.



#### 4 Discussion: potential tourist brands of the cross - border area of Karlovac country and Southeastern Slovenia

The border areas of Karlovac County and Southeastern Slovenia is rich in landscape, historical, cultural and traditional resources which can be used for designing an attractive and diverse range of specialized tourist offerings. Benchmarking is possible way to improve partial experience of the Slovenian side into a new qualitative level in the cross-border territory of the Republic of Croatia. In addition, in potential new tourist projects in the territory of the Republic of Croatia it is possible to offer participation to Slovene partners as well, especial in a segment which assumes a more complex tourist infrastructure. Each region has prerequisites for the development of its own original tourist product. In a synergetic global promotion an additional tourist value is provided for the whole area and the cost of marketing management of partial projects is reduced by common market performance. Traditional cultural heritage (customs, folk costumes, folk dances, folk songs, old farmhouses, traditional crafts, etc.) forms an especially attractive base for the development of original tourist products of the border areas. The border area of Southeastern Slovenia puts forward several distinctive original products such as the Bela Krajina Easter egg, the Bela Krajina sweet bread, the Bela Krajina folk costumes, and the Bela Krajina folklore as well as some protected wines of Bela Krajina such as Metliška Črnina and Belokranjec. The trademark of the border area of Bela Krajina has been taken from the traditional embroidery of Bela Krajina. Products from wine, honey, cheese, bread and various souvenirs forming an integral part of the tourist offer of the studied area are represented in the border area of Southeastern Slovenia (Bela Krajina). The border area of Southeastern Slovenia is positioned in the tourist market as a distinctive, environmentally preserved and attractive rural area rich in original natural, and cultural and historic heritage. In the border area of Karlovac County natural as well as cultural and historic heritage is currently insufficiently or not at all

touristically valorized. The analyzed area currently has in its tourist offer local wines along the Vivodina wine road which can be potential tourist brands of the border area and the entire area of Karlovac County as well. There is also the small folklore village by the name of Trg near Ozalj which represents one of the most important sources for the study of material and immaterial culture of Pokupje, and can form a quality base in creating souvenirs as well as in creating an identity of rural areas of the bordering region in the tourism market. Old castles in the border area such as Ribnik, Ozalj, Bosiljevo and Novigrad on Dobra should become part of unique tourist facilities of this part of Karlovac County. Old castles could be integrated into tourism offerings by forming a historic theme route which will present the old castles to visitors through common historical moments.

An inventory of the resource base of the studied border areas reveals a possibility of combining a part or the entire heritage element into a common, integral, tourist product. A prerequisite to an efficient commercialization of such a product is the thematic development of a range of partial, specialized products which should be sensibly coordinated into the ITP of the destination. It is appropriate to base the creation of such products on the resource features of the area (the Kupa/Kolpa River, caves, natural architecture, etc.), historical and cultural heritage (castles, forts, old towns), as well as traditional heritage (original architecture of settlements, gourmet products). The Kupa/Kolpa River, wine growing, and the production, and distribution of honey make key points for forming distinctive products of both regions. The Kupa/Kolpa can be appropriately evaluated through the prism of a unique landscape resource along which and on which it will be possible to develop different sports and recreational facilities for day trips, as well as residential packages for camping tourism during summer season for tourists coming to Southeastern Slovenia and Karlovac County. The ecologically preserved environment of the Kupa/Kolpa is an ideal area to design specific catering offer based on the offer of eco-camps as accommodation facilities. The caves of Vrlovka, Vidovec, Zdenc and Bečka can be managed as theme tourist products of the border

areas. Furthermore, other valuable tourist resources are the old towns, castles and forts which can also form a theme route connecting Slovenia and Croatia. Rural households in this area are involved in the production and distribution of honey and wine growing. Wine and honey products are made exclusively by organic production and make interesting eco-products typical of the studied area. The management of cross-border tourist brands assumes an image created on basic tourist resources. Relevant information about the area is a prerequisite for the creation of a competitive image. Image is also a reflection of the character of an area, namely its identity, at different levels of public view. Since image is formed on the basis of distinctive identity and the way it communicates to all levels of the public, for an efficient image management it is important to understand the notion of the identity of a tourist destination, as well as its origins. Image is an expression of other people's view of a destination, whereas identity offers an explanation of how the local people perceive a destination.

## 5 Conclusion

Effective brand management is the assumption of long-term competitive positioning of the destination in an increasingly demanding global tourism market. Joint branding multiple destinations on cross - border areas is a complex task. Often the standards in the context of

tourism development are not identical. On the other hand, differences in terms of cultural and historical development of these areas are the prerequisites to create a competitive brand. Brand management for border areas is a complex and creative process of the research and evaluation of the existing destination image and segmentation of the target emissive tourist markets. The activities undertaken in this context are the target action through communication with the chosen market segments. The activities of the brand management of the border areas, which are aimed at positioning the relevant competitive advantages, may be in order to support an existing image (if the relevant tourism demand is determined), or to create a new image (or enhanced image), and adjust marketing communications to other competitive advantages of the destination. From this conducted research it can be concluded that is always necessary to create a new tourist image of a cross-border area through the activities of brand management. This marketing approach of creating a new tourist image and the brand managing of border areas sets the criteria for sustainable tourism development based on the premise of the competitiveness and diversity range of specialized tourist products in the border areas. In this way, the observed image of the destination is a consequence, and the identity is evaluated based on the all different resources and values of the cross-border area.