

SLOVENIAN SPORT TOURISM DESTINATIONS AND THEIR COMPETITIVENESS

Maja URAN MARAVIČ¹, Jakob BEDNARIK², Miha LESJAK¹

¹University of Primorska, Faculty of Tourism Studies Turistica, Obala 11a, 6320 Portorož, Slovenia

²Faculty of Sport, University of Ljubljana, Gortanova 22, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia

Corresponding author:

Maja URAN MARAVIČ

University of Primorska, Faculty of Tourism Studies Turistica, Portorož, Slovenia

e-mail: maja.uran@fts.upr.si

ABSTRACT

This paper assesses the competitiveness of Slovenian sport tourism destinations and compares it with other domestic destinations and those abroad. The methodology is based on different destination competitiveness models. An integrated instrument of the sport destination competitiveness was developed and tested for validity of content and used to assess the competitiveness. There are eight main hypotheses tested. The research results confirm the main hypothesis – that Slovenian tourism managers believe Slovenian destinations are more competitive at home than abroad. The contribution of the research lies in the fact that it has applied the generic instrument for measuring destination competitiveness on sport tourism destinations and, for the first time, their competitiveness is measured in Slovenia.

Keywords: *tourism, destination competitiveness, sport tourism, Slovenia.*

KONKURENČNOST SLOVENSКИH ŠPORTNOTURISTIČNIH DESTINACIJ

IZVLEČEK

Destinacije s športnoturistično ponudbo v Sloveniji morajo nenehno izboljševati svojo konkurenčnost. Ta članek govori o analizi konkurenčnosti slovenskih destinacij s športnoturistično ponudbo ter jih primerja z drugimi destinacijami v Sloveniji in v tu-

jini. Metodologija je zasnovana na podobnih raziskavah destinacijske konkurenčnosti doma in v tujini. Za namen raziskave je bil razvit integriran inštrument za merjenje konkurenčnosti športnoturistične destinacije, ki je bil obenem tudi testiran za vsebinsko veljavnost. Testiranih je bilo osem hipotez. Glavna hipoteza je potrjena, in sicer da so po mnenju turističnih managerjev slovenske destinacije bolj konkurenčne doma kot v tujini. Glavni prispevek te raziskave je v razvoju inštrumenta za merjenje konkurenčnosti športnoturističnih destinacij in v dejstvu, da je takšna raziskava prvič opravljena tudi v Sloveniji.

Ključne besede: turizem, konkurenčnost destinacij, športni turizem, Slovenija

INTRODUCTION

Global tourism supply is infinite, with destinations facing tough operating conditions nowadays. Successful strategic planning and development of tourist destinations require appropriate tools to best assess the operational situation. Such tools help to identify the situation better and, at the same time, they can be used to design easier and clearer measures for improvement. In addition, they also contribute to the coordination of various tourism destination stakeholders. One of the most well known tools to assess such situations is the model of destination competitiveness.

Tourist destinations (e.g. cities, regions or sites) are no longer seen as a set of distinct natural, cultural, artistic or environmental resources, but as an overall appealing product available in a certain location: a complex and integrated portfolio of services offered by a destination that supplies a holiday experience which meets the needs of the tourist. The tourist destination can thus produce a compound package of tourist services based on its indigenous supply potential (Cracolici & Nijkamp, 2008).

Numerous definitions of destination competitiveness were proposed in literature but there seems to be no generally accepted statement of the term. Researchers have proposed different definitions of destination competitiveness from various approaches. Crouch and Ritchie (1999) examined the definition in terms of the economic prosperity of destination residents, which is consistent with the view raised by World Economic Forum. This approach is specifically applicable to the international-level destinations. It is considered reasonable to examine destination competitiveness with the focus on economic prosperity, since the nations (destinations) compete in the international tourism market to foster the economic well-being of their residents, as well as the opportunity to promote the country as a place to live in, trade with, invest in, do business with, play sport against, etc. (Dwyer & Kim, 2003). Studies by Crouch and Ritchie (1999), and Dwyer and Kim (2003) represent the main works on tourism competitiveness, not only in the construction of conceptual models and in the understanding of competitive factors, but also in the search of certain measuring systems that can compare tourism destinations (Parra-Lopez & Oreja-Rodriguez, 2014). There

is no method available that can be used to integrate “hard” and “soft” factors into a single index (Dwyer & Kim, 2003).

On the other hand, destination competitiveness models cannot be directly applicable to the destination that primarily offers sport tourism. In order to compete in the growing sport tourism market, it is crucial for destinations to develop a profound understanding of how competitive they are. To assess competitiveness of such destination it needs to be explored what sport tourism supply encompasses.

Currently, there are a number of authors (e.g. Hinch, Higham, Hall, Weed, Gibson in Uran Maravič et al., 2014), who have dealt with the definition of sports tourism. Slak Valek (2008) concluded in her doctoral thesis that the most suitable definition for marketing sports tourism in the Slovenian context is that sports tourism is a journey that stimulates the individuals to temporarily depart from their usual environment with a motive to actively participate in sports, watching sports or visiting sports and tourist attractions.

Sports tourism refers as well to the direct and indirect tourism benefits related to a consumer who travels to watch and / or to participate in sports-related activities or events. Expenditure in the tourism industry generally is considered an invisible export, as it involves the transfer of money from overseas consumers for a domestic-based service. Sports tourism is considered a niche market, but one which has received greater attention from policy-makers in recent years. It has been facilitated by, among other things, technological change, changing social attitudes and circumstances, and increasing regional accessibility due to the rise of low-cost air travel. In order to assess competitiveness of sports tourism destination, one has to add to general destination competitiveness models a section where sports tourism supply is assessed. The sports tourism supply is composed of different sports that are supplied in the destination. It has to be pointed out that Mike Weed (2009) in his meta-analysis of the progress in sports tourism research found just one research where destination competitiveness had been assessed. Most of the research examines the benefits of the sports tourism or characteristics of sport tourists. This also suggests that sports tourism supply is in its developing stage, where not all the methods known in tourism planning processes are deployed.

METHODOLOGY

Following and adopting the model developed by Omerzel Gomezelj & Mihalic (2008), a survey was conducted to determine the competitiveness of destinations, comparing them to other Slovenian destinations and to foreign destinations. As suggested by Omerzel Gomezelj & Mihalic (2008), a set of indicators of destination competitiveness was chosen. Special emphasis was given to sports supply. Most indicators of macro environment were omitted.

The survey was administered from July to September 2014. The respondents were managers at local and regional tourism organisations in Slovenia. The whole instrument consisted of 60 items. In total, 38 fully completed questionnaires were returned, 20 for

comparison with domestic destinations and 18 for comparison with foreign destinations. The respondents amount to 83 % of all overnight stays in Slovenia, so we can say that the sample is sufficiently representative.

The respondents were asked to rate a series of statements (on a 5-point Likert scale, for each of the 60 competitiveness indicators). The ratings ranged from one (well below average) to five (well above average). For clearer assessment of respondents' assessments to the indicators, the results are grouped into the seven categories. For each of these groupings, tables were produced, where mean and standard deviations for each group are displayed together. The SPSS standard package for personal computers was used for this purpose. At this stage, items were tested for normality. We did not test for other assumptions since we used a standard scale.

Based on the research questions for this study, seven hypotheses were proposed to determine the differences between destination competitiveness, at home or abroad. One hypothesis was added to address the question of whether destinations were more competitive in terms of sport or non-sport (tourism) supply. The hypotheses are as followed:

H1: Destinations are more competitive at home than abroad in the field of transport.

H2: Destinations are more competitive at home than abroad in the field of hospitality.

H3: Destinations are more competitive at home than abroad in the field of primary supply.

H4: Destinations are more competitive at home than abroad in the field of secondary supply.

H5: Destinations are more competitive at home than abroad in the field of sport supply.

H6: Destinations are more competitive at home than abroad in the field of tourist services.

H7: Destinations are more competitive at home than abroad in the field of destination image.

H8: Destinations are more competitive in non-sports than sports supply.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the item groupings. We analysed mean comparison data for domestic destinations with the mean comparison data for foreign destinations for each grouping. For that purpose, eight new variables were introduced. The new variables were computed through SPSS procedures as the total mean of individual groupings. That was followed by an independent T-test to check the hypothesis (Table 2).

The **Transport** grouping consisted of five items, measuring competitiveness in terms of destination accessibility with different modes of transportation. The items were: accessibility by air, road accessibility, railway accessibility, transport from airport to destination and price competitiveness of air travel. The mean value in Transport

grouping is 3.39 and is higher when comparing their own destinations to other domestic destinations. The T-test proved that the difference was statistically significant. **We can confirm H1.**

The **Hospitality** grouping consisted of five items: hotel accommodation, other accommodation facilities, price of accommodation services, food and drink and the price of food service. The mean value of all the items in the **Hospitality** grouping was higher in terms of being more competitive at home (the mean value is 3.45) than abroad (the mean value is 2.90) and the difference was statistically significant. **We can confirm H2.**

Table 1: Descriptive statistics.

	DESTINATION	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
TRANSPORT	SLOVENIAN	20	3.3900	.72104	.16123
	FOREIGN	18	2.7333	.67213	.15842
HOSPITALITY	SLOVENIAN	20	3.4500	.65172	.14573
	FOREIGN	18	2.9000	.67650	.15945
PRIMARY SUPPLY	SLOVENIAN	20	4.0000	.51866	.11598
	FOREIGN	18	3.6111	.79418	.18719
SECONDARY SUPPLY	SLOVENIAN	20	2.9150	.65556	.14659
	FOREIGN	18	2.4889	.73155	.17243
SPORT SUPPLY	SLOVENIAN	20	2.8519	.65251	.14591
	FOREIGN	18	2.4274	.63513	.14970
SUPPORT SERVICES	SLOVENIAN	20	3.4286	.65219	.14583
	FOREIGN	18	3.0635	.81142	.19125
IMAGE	SLOVENIAN	20	3.1250	1.13410	.25359
	FOREIGN	18	2.3472	.92410	.21781
NON-SPORT SUPPLY	SLOVENIAN	20	3.3848	.53313	.11921
	FOREIGN	18	2.8573	.59545	.14035
COMPETITIVENESS TOTAL	SLOVENIAN	20	3.3086	.52818	.11811
	FOREIGN	18	2.7959	.57495	.13552

Source: Own calculations.

The **Primary Tourism Supply** grouping consisted of three items: natural attractions, cultural attractions and fees for visits to natural and cultural attractions. The mean values for all the items in the **Primary Tourism Supply** grouping were higher (the mean value being 4). The T-test showed that the difference was not statistically signi-

ficant. It is interesting that in other studies there is an emerging trend in high value for the primary tourist supply (natural and cultural attractions), but it is also clear that these resources are not optimally exploited. **We cannot confirm H3.**

The **Secondary Tourism Supply** grouping consisted of 10 items: shopping, festivals, MICE, theatre, cultural events, museums and galleries, casinos, nightlife, amusement parks and fees for visit of the attractions. The mean value for all the items in the **Secondary Tourism Supply** grouping was higher for the destination when compared with other domestic destinations than if it was compared with destinations abroad. The T-test showed that the difference was not statistically significant. **We cannot confirm H4.**

Table 2: Independent T-test.

Group	T-test for Equality of Means						
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Differ- ence	Std. Er- ror Dif- ference	95% Confidence Interval of the Dif- ference	
						Lower	Upper
TRANSPORT	2.894	36	.006	.65667	.22690	.19650	1.11683
HOSPITALITY	2.551	36	.015	.55000	.21558	.11279	.98721
PRIMARY SUPPLY	1.805	36	.079	.38889	.21546	-.04809	.82587
SECONDARY SUPPLY	1.894	36	.066	.42611	.22498	-.03018	.88240
SPORT SUPPLY	2.028	36	.050	.42457	.20935	-.00001	.84915
SUPPORT SER- VICES	1.536	36	.133	.36508	.23773	-.11705	.84721
IMAGE	2.301	36	.027	.77778	.33796	.09236	1.46320
NON-SPORT SUPPLY	2.881	36	.007	.52742	.18305	.15618	.89867
COMPETITIVE- NESS TOTAL	2.865	36	.007	.51273	.17894	.14982	.87563

Source: Own calculations.

Respondents were asked to assess how well sports tourism products are represented in their destination. The **Sport Tourism Supply** grouping consisted of 26 items: sport sites, sport events, supply of active holidays, ski slopes, cross-country skiing, hiking, cycling, golf, tennis, climbing sites, cave activities, sailing, rafting, kayak, canoeing,

fishing, swimming sites, adrenaline activities, sport animation programs, professional sports preparation programs, sport camps, team building programs, medical sports tourism, sport museums, sport shops, sport equipment rentals, sport agencies and charges for sport activities. On average, respondents believe that the **Sport Tourism Supply** in their destinations is more competitive at home than abroad. The T-test proved that the difference was statistically significant. **We can confirm H5.**

The **Support Tourist Services** grouping consisted of seven items: information in the Tourist Information Centre (TIC), information on sport tourism products in the TIC, tourist information on the web and in printed media, sport tourism product information on the web and printed media, organised visits to tourist attractions, tourist animation and tourist information in travel agencies in the tourists' home towns. The mean value for all items in the **Support Tourist Services** grouping was higher for domestic destinations (the mean value being 3.42) than for foreign destinations (the mean value measured 3.06). The T-test proved that the difference was not statistically significant. **We cannot confirm H6.**

The **Destination Image** grouping consisted of items related to perceptions of the destination's image. These items were images of the tourist destination, images of the destination's tourist products, global visibility of tourist products and global visibility of the destination's sport tourist products. The mean value of all items in the **Destination Image** grouping was higher for the destination when compared with other domestic destinations than for foreign destinations. The T-test proved that the difference was statistically significant. **We can confirm H7.**

An extra variable was added. This variable consisted of all non-sports items. We wanted to know whether the destinations were more competitive for sports supply versus other tourism supply. The results indicated a higher mean value for non-sports supply – or in other words – the respondents believe that they are more competitive in tourism supply than in sports tourism supply. **We can confirm H8.**

DISCUSSION

The mean value for all 60 items was higher where the destination was compared with other domestic destinations than if it was compared with foreign destinations. The T-test proved that the difference was statistically significant. We can confirm the general hypothesis that destinations are more competitive at home than abroad as assessed by the respective group of respondents.

One of the major goals of this research was to develop and test the instrument for sports destination competitiveness for its validity, especially for content validity. Through in-depth discussion with tourism managers it was pointed out that some of the items were more difficult to assess objectively than others. That confirms the major weakness of these kinds of models and their measurement instruments, as noticed by many authors (Dwyer, Knezevic Cvelbar, Edwards, & Mihalic, 2012; Omerzel Gomezelj, 2006). Looking at Armenski, Gomezelj, Djurdjev, Čurčić, & Dragin (2012) and

Mulec and Wise (2013) works, natural (inherited) resources are among the most competitive. This has been confirmed with the findings in this research as well.

The practical implications of the study are relevant to tourism stakeholders and planners. Tourism is run under the pressure of tourists, managers, economists, capitalists and the local community and these rarely share common ideas and expectations. The destination competitiveness analysis does not only analyse the current situation but it gives, above all, a common ground or a list of the weaknesses that need to be annulled in order to better compete on the international tourism market. If the research sample is representative enough, the stakeholders have problems disputing the results and the actions that need to be taken.

We also see many opportunities for further research, especially in the context of further testing the instrument for its reliability and validity.

CONCLUSION

The link between sports and tourism in tourist-developed countries is growing stronger, which is also reflected in the tourist product design. This is not just a temporary trend in modern tourism development. In this respect, Slovenia is lagging behind the competing countries, as it has not yet prepared a strategy for how to best develop and market itself as a sports tourism destination.

Sports tourism products would definitely help to position Slovenia better on the international tourist market. The results of this study will help to identify and overcome the key obstacles in the development of tourism and sports supply.

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