Competitiveness of the Pomurska Region as a Tourist Destination

Ivan Turčan
Mlynska 3, 05342 Krompachy, Slovakia
ivan.turcan@gmail.com

Doris Gomezelj Omerzel
University of Primorska, Faculty of Management, Slovenia
doris.gomezelj@fm-kp.si

Major differences exist between the regions of Slovenia. Despite the Pomurska region being the least developed region (according to many statistical indexes), it is an attractive tourist destination. This research deals with the competitiveness of the Pomurska region as a tourist destination. An overview of the main concepts is discussed in the first part of the paper, and the characteristics of the region are also presented. The aim of the research is to analyse the position of the Pomurska region in the minds of tourism service providers. The answer is obtained via an analysis of individual factors of competitiveness. Research hypotheses are evaluated on the basis of simple paired *t*-test between the dimensions of the competitiveness of a tourist destination, which we have computed from several variables using the method of principal components. All the three hypotheses were confirmed, i.e. the Pomurska region as a tourist destination is (1) more competitive in the field of 'natural and cultural resources' than in the field of 'created resources,' (2) more competitive in the field of 'resources' than in the field of 'management,' and (3) more competitive in the field of 'supporting resources' than in the field of 'created resources.'

Keywords: tourist destination; competitiveness; competitiveness model; Pomurska region

Introduction

Although the Pomurska region is a relatively undeveloped region (according to many statistical indexes), it is an attractive tourist destination. According to Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, 10% of all overnight stays in Slovenia in 2011 were recorded in the Pomurska region (Statistični urad Republike Slovenije, 2011). This number could increase in the future. However, for a region in which health tourism has the most prominent role, the improvement of other competitive advantage factors is necessary. This would positively contribute to the overall development of the region. To realise possible tourism projects with significant po-

tential in the Pomurska region, it is essential to employ knowledge, to have a professional approach and to include friendly local people, who (are in addition to natural resources) the greatest asset for tourism development in the region.

When reviewing the literature, we have found various research and papers about the development of the Pomurska region. However, we have not found any that deal with the competitiveness of the region as a tourist destination. Therefore, we have decided to carry out this research.

The aim of the research is to present the state of the art in the tourism sector in the Pomurska region, re-

garding other competing regions and regarding Slovenia as a tourist destination.

The main objectives are:

- to evaluate the individual factors of competitiveness in the Pomurska region according to tourist service providers,
- to determine in which areas of competitiveness the Pomurska region as a tourist destination is below average, on average or above average.

Literature Review

According to Bieger (2000), tourist destination is a geographical space, which is chosen by tourists as a target of their journey. It offers them entertainment and everything they need for living. Some other authors also define it as a geographical space. Gunn (1994) defines a tourist destination as a geographical area in which the main elements are one or more places with public services, a set of attractions and transport connections that link places and attractions. The entire development in the destination is focused on guests and in satisfying their needs. In order to pursue development, all elements must be present, and consistency and quality between them must be established. Vanhove (2005) argues that a tourist destination is a geographical area in which tourists enjoy in various types of tourist experiences. Keller (1998) states that a destination is a target selected by the tourist on the basis of tourist attractions offered by the destination. Hu and Ritchie (1993) present a somewhat different definition. According to them, a destination is a combination of tourist facilities and services, which consists of various multi-dimensional features.

The aim of a tourism policy should be to increase competitiveness through the higher quality and innovations in tourism services (Kumral & Özlem Önder, 2009). Hall (2008) points out three reasons a great deal of attention should be given to the policy. The first is to understand the creation of decisions and their influences. The second is to provide information about practical solutions to problems and to implement them in the process. The third is to understand the interests and values that are included in the policy and planning process. Governments should

be involved in tourism for social, environmental and economic reasons. Tourism has an approximately 10% share of the global economy, and it has the subsequent effects on the communities and the environment with which it is connected.

In the previous decade, there has been increasing interest in the concept of the competitive destination in the tourism literature; furthermore, a need to add a specific definition of the competitiveness of the tourist destinations to the traditional definitions of competitiveness has appeared.

Competitiveness has become a focal point for tourism policy. With increasing competition and tourist activity, tourism policy is focusing on improving competitiveness through the safekeeping of assets, control and growth of quality and efficiency in the industry (Vanhove, 2005). Competitiveness has a direct impact on the success of tourist destinations in the international market (Armenski, Gomezelj Omerzel, Djurdjev, Đeri, & Dragin, 2011). For a tourist destination to be competitive, it is essential to ensure the sustainable development of tourism from both economic and ecological as well as cultural, social and political perspectives (Dwyer & Kim, 2003). Ritchie and Croutch (2003) argue that a tourist destination becomes competitive by using its ability to increase tourist consumption to attract more visitors and provide them an unforgettable experience, by increasing the well-being of locals, and by preserving natural resources for future generations. In the literature, we can find several definitions of destination competitiveness. Ritchie and Crouch (2003) have developed a model that distinguishes the comparative advantage from the competitive advantage. This model is an attempt to include all relevant factors that may define the competitiveness of tourist destinations. Hassan (2000) defines the competitiveness of a tourist destination as the ability of the destination to create and increase the added value of existing products with continuous maintenance of all its resources and by maintaining the market position with regard to competitors. Dwyer, Forsyth and Rao (2000) argue that the competitiveness of a tourist destination is a common concept, which involves differences in prices combined with exchange rate fluctuations, the productivity of various components of

the tourism industry and other factors that determine the attractiveness of a destination. Pearce (1997) describes the competitiveness of a destination with techniques that can be used to analyse and compare the different features of destinations that are competitive. Thereby, the comparison and evaluation of relevant tourist elements contribute to a better understanding of competitive advantages, which us conductive to the development of tourism policy. Poon (1993) believes that it is extremely beneficial to follow the 'new' type of tourism in order to achieve competitiveness. This kind of tourism is extremely flexible, durable and, unlike mass tourism, it is focused on the individual. If a destination wants to be competitive, the environment should be given top priority. Tourism has to become a leading economic sector. Distribution channels on the market must be strengthened, and a dynamic private sector must be created.

Competitive advantage as a management concept is frequently discussed in current literature. The reasons for this increased interest are the rapid changes that enterprises and destinations are facing, the complexity of the business environment, the impact of globalisation, changing customer needs, increased competition, the rapid development of information and communication technologies and open global markets (Kahreh, Ahmadi, & Hashemi, 2011). Managers must control the general situation of the industry or destination, and they need to compare its performance with demand on the market. They must examine their own organisations in comparison with others in order to determine key functions for achieving success (Spulber, 2009). A competitive advantage exists when an enterprise or destination offers a product or service that is perceived by the target markets as better in quantity and/or quality than the products or services of their competitors (Dess, Lumpkin, & Taylor, 2005). Porter sees a competitive advantage as a strategic objective. He believes that it is strongly linked to the performance of enterprises (Kahreh et al., 2011).

Spulber (2009) argues that there are generally three sources of competitive advantage. The first is the cost-effectiveness that provides more efficient use of resources; the second is product differentiation, which increases the benefit of consumers; the third is inno-

vation in transactions that create new combinations of demand and supply. According to Lesáková (2011), the competitive advantages arise from the choice of the markets, from the extraordinary authority of enterprises or destinations, and from the way enterprises or destinations are using resources that provide them better reviews and reputations compared to other competitors.

Comparative advantages of the destination emerge from natural resources. These are extremely powerful comparative advantages, because they are the reason visitors leave the destination with a positive experience. It can be argued that such advantages are, for example, climate, landscape and nature. It must be remembered that both comparative and competitive advantages do not last forever. Due to various changes and impacts on the environment, such advantages can be generated, but also lost. Hunt indicates this risk, stating that comparative advantages are lost due to weakness or poor use of internal factors in the form of failed investments of enterprises, the resulting uncertainty, and doubts or failure to adapt (Vodeb, 2010).

Models of Destination Competitiveness
Several authors have devoted themselves to the development of various models related to the competitiveness of tourism destinations. However, an optimal model does not exist. Each of them differs depending on how many and what kind of variables were used in their creation. Gooroochurn and Sugiyarto (2004) have created a valuation model of competitiveness, which includes eight factors: price, openness of the economy, technological development, structure, social development, human development in tourism, the environment, and human resources. Enright and Newton (2004) have developed a quantitative model for measuring competitiveness. It is based on the identification of the main competitors, attractions and enterprises that have influence on competitiveness of destinations. Go and Govers (1999) have measured competitiveness by factors that are particularly salient for congress and convention tourism. They have divided them into seven groups: quality of hotels, quality of services, accessibility of destination, diversity of

supply, the image of destination, climate, and the environment and attractiveness of the destination. Johns and Mattsson (2005) have established the competitiveness of destinations in accordance with the quantitative performance, based on the numbers of tourist arrivals and revenues. They also recognise the necessity to evaluate the qualitative aspect. Kozak and Remmington (1999) represent the view of tourist destination competitiveness that is based on two main factors. These are the primary (climate, environment, culture, heritage) and special factors of the tourism sector (hotels, transport and others). In a model that used fishing tourism as an example, Melián-Gonzáles and García-Falcón (2003) describe destination resources as a combination of natural and cultural resources. Hassan (2000) focuses on the environment and factors of sustainable tourism, dividing them into the following groups: comparative advantages (factors of micro and macro environment), the orientation of demand (destination flexibility by changing demand), the structure of the tourism sector (organisation of tourism) and care of the environment.

The most comprehensive model is undoubtedly Crouch and Ritchie's model, which was first presented in 1993 at the Congress of the International Association of Scientific Experts in Tourism (Association Internationale d'Experts Scientifiques du Tourisme). The model consists of five main groups (resources of attraction, supporting factors, tourist destinations policy, management, and restrictive or expansion factors) that affect the competitiveness of tourist destinations (Ritchie % Crouch, 2003). In their model, De Keyser and Vanhove (1994) have included macroeconomic factors, supply factors, demand factors, factors of tourism policy and transport factors. Among the main factors, Heath (2003) has ranked key attractions and their management, health and safety aspects of tourist destinations, infrastructure, supporting services (accommodation and transport facilities, distribution channels, etc.), key factors of perceived experience, partnerships and alliances and communication between them, research, measuring and monitoring of performance. He also added the political, legal, financial and organisational frameworks of the tourist destination, and the investment climate.

In our research, we will use the so-called integrated model of competitiveness of tourist destination (Dwyer & Kim, 2003). It includes resources (natural, cultural, created, supporting), management (government, economy), environment and demand.

Presentation of the Pomurska Region

The Pomurska region is the most north-eastern region of Slovenia, consisting of three main natural geographical units: Goričko, Lendavske Gorice and Murska Ravan, which is divided in two parts by the Mura River. The region borders with Austria on the northwest, with Hungary on northeast and east, with Croatia on south and with the Podravska region on southwest. The region consists of four units (Murska Sobota, Lendava, Ljutomer and Gornja Radgona) and has twenty seven municipalities. It is characterised by a typical continental climate with warm summers and cold winters.

The competitiveness of the region is weakened by a low level of education and a low interest in education. There are no institutions of higher education or research activities. In the development program, the Regional Development Agency Mura has therefore set the objectives such as increasing the quality of education, long-life learning and the development of higher education infrastructure and functioning of higher education institutions (Regionalna razvojna agencija Mura, 2007).

The economy of the Pomurska region is in a difficult situation. The performance of local companies has decreased in recent years; manufacturing used to be essential, but due to the current economic crisis, many companies and enterprises have found themselves in financial and economic difficulties.

The quality of soil, mineral and thermal waters for health and spa services and for hydropower utilisation are natural resources of enormous importance for the Pomurska region. Tourism is one of the key opportunities for the region, contributing not only to economic but also to social development. Health and spa tourism is highly developed in the region, especially in Moravske Toplice, Radenci, Lendava and Banovci. These resorts account for 22% of all overnight stays in Slovenian health resorts and spas (Vodeb, 2007).

Cooperation and interlinking with thermal resorts and spas in Austria, Croatia and Hungary would contribute to further development.

It is necessary to include cultural heritage and natural values in the offer of tourism services. Many countries have adopted a strategy for integrating new economic alternatives and achieving greater diversity of activities in order to prevent massive migration from rural areas to larger cities (Iorio & Corsale, 2010). One alternative is rural tourism, which has an enormous potential for development, especially along wine routes, where wine culture and fruit growing are popular. Tourist farms are the main suppliers, and tourism is only a secondary activity. According to Belec (1996), border areas are distinctive because of their natural, geographical, historical, administrative and political characteristics, population structure, cross-border traffic flows, etc. Laws (1995) argues that the power of the destination to create new forms of tourism and entertain new tourists depends on the economic and social diversity and on attractions that can be offered. Border areas are attractive mainly because of their natural and cultural features that are different than that of the home countries of visiting tourists. The Pomurska region possesses a sizeable potential to develop cross-border services and products, which could contribute to the competitiveness of the region (Služba Vlade Republike Slovenije za lokalno samoupravo in regionalno politiko, 2010). Due to increased competition, new tourist products must be developed. Local enterprises should be included, which would also help to create a new job opportunities. Besides the geothermal and other renewable sources of energy and competitive agriculture, tourism is highlighted as significant competitive advantage of the region.

The delays in the development in the transport, environmental and business infrastructure are the main weaknesses that hinder accelerated development of the Pomurska region.

Toward the Research Hypotheses

In our study, six dimensions of tourism destination competitiveness were included: (1) natural and cultural resources, (2) created resources, (3) supporting resources, (4) management, (5) environment, and (6)

demand. While still not entirely complete, they describe and measure the most salient dimensions of tourism destination competitiveness. Based on the literature review, the above discussion and mostly on the research on competitiveness of Slovenia as a tourism destination (Gomezelj & Mihalič, 2008), the following hypotheses are proposed.

HYPOTHESIS 1 *The Pomurska region as a tourist destination is more competitive in the field of 'natural and cultural resources' than in the field of 'constructed resources.'*

HYPOTHESIS 2 *The Pomurska region as a tourist destination is more competitive in the field of 'resources' than in the field of 'management.'*

HYPOTHESES 3 *The Pomurska region as a tourist destination is more competitive in the field of 'supporting resources' than in the field of 'constructed resources.'*

Research Methodology

The methodology is discussed in terms of data collection process, sample description and data analysis. Based on the aim of the research and the developed hypotheses, the conceptual tourism destination competitiveness model was empirically verified on the sample of tourism enterprises in the Pomurska region.

Data Collection

For gathering data, we have used a questionnaire distributed personally at the beginning of 2012 to tourism experts and practitioners in the Pomurska region. The register of tourism enterprises (629) was obtained from the online database of the Agency of the Republic of Slovenia for Public Legal Records and Related Services. The register included hotels and other accommodation facilities, tourist farms, apartments and private rooms, restaurants, cafes, patisseries, bars, travel agencies, museums and galleries. Therefore, the research sample was composed of stakeholders on the supply side of the tourism industry.

We have adopted the questionnaire from Gomezelj and Mihalič (2008, pp. 294–307). At the beginning, the questionnaire covered some socio-demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, level of education, oc-

cupation and amount time of working in the tourism industry.

The respondents answered questions by using five-point Likert scale. Based on the integrated model, 65 questions about the competitiveness of the Pomurska region as a tourist destination were divided into six sets: natural and cultural resources (9 questions), created resources (22 questions), supporting resources (8 questions), management (15 questions), environment (8 questions) and demand (3 questions).

From a total of 250 questionnaires, 173 were returned, which represents a 69.2% response rate. Nineteen of them were not completed entirely; therefore,154 questionnaires were included in the analysis.

Sample Description

The competitiveness of destinations is most often evaluated from the tourist's point of view. However, the target group of our research represent tourism service providers. Of the total number of respondents, 92 were woman (59.74%) and 62 were men (40.26%). The average age of women was 34.44 years and of men 35.27 years. There were five people younger than 20 years of age, which is 3.25% of all respondents. In the age group of 20 to 30 years, there were 52 respondents or 33.77%. The largest group of respondents, 56 or 36.36%, was 31 to 40 years of age. Twenty eight respondents (18.18%) were from 41 to 50. In the group from 51 to 60 years of age, there were 11 respondents (7.14%), and two (1.30%) were over 61 years of age.

Eighty-two respondents (53.25%), i.e. a majority, had finished high school. One (0.65%) had completed only primary school, while 31 (20.13%) had finished higher vocational school. Higher education had been achieved by 37 (24.03%) of respondents, and three (1.95%) had obtained a master's degree.

The largest group of respondents, 86 (55.84%) worked in the hospitality sector. Six (3.90%) were employed in travel agencies. A total of 31 (20.13%) worked in the accommodation sector, 20 (12.99%) in services connected with tourism, and 11 (7.14%) on tourist farms. Six of 11 tourist farms were also offering accommodation.

Of all respondents, most had worked in the tourism industry for more than one and less than ten years,

Table 1　Natural and Cultural Resources

Factor	(1)	(2)
Folk tradition	3.96	0.90
Natural environment	3.95	0.83
Suitability of the climate for tourism	3.73	0.88
Fauna in flora	3.71	0.86
Tidiness and cleanliness of the environment	3.64	0.83
Cultural heritage	3.45	0.83
Art and architectural sights	3.35	0.88
Historical position and importance	3.33	0.85
National parks	2.93	1.04

Notes　Column headings are as follows: (1) arithmetic mean, (2) standard deviation.

represented by 88 respondents (57.14%). Three (1.95%) respondents had been employed in tourism less than one year, while 42 (27.27%) had worked in tourism more than 11 but less than 20 years. Sixteen (10.39%) respondents had worked more than 21 but less than 30 years, and five had worked in the industry for 31 years or more.

Data Analysis
Natural and Cultural Resources

The natural and cultural resources group contained nine factors of competitiveness. The highest rating in the group was achieved by the factor 'folk traditions,' with an average rating of 3.96. This is followed by 'natural environment' (3.95), 'climate suitability for tourism' (3.73), and 'fauna and flora' (3.71). These factors represent the basis of the primary tourist resources. In combination with folk traditions, they are essential of creating a secondary tourist supply and high quality tourist products. The only factor ranked below average was 'national parks' with an average of 2.93. The standard deviation is relatively high (1.04), which indicates that the respondents were not particularly unified in their answers.

Created Resources

In the created resources group, the highest ranking was measured by the factors 'health tourism' (4.21) and 'rural tourism' (4.05). These results were expected,

as spas and health resorts are immensely popular in the Pomurska region not only among locals, but also among foreign visitors. They also significantly contribute to the overall number of overnight stays in Slovenia. The region, which has so many thermal sources, could be extremely attractive for investors seeking to build more similar health facilities. Massive potential remains in the already well-developed rural tourism. Both rural and health tourism depend very much on the aforementioned natural resources, which were all ranked above average. This represents a positive sign for their further development. The factor with the lowest average was 'winter activities offer' (2.06), which is not surprising considering the low-lying terrain of the region. Low scores were attained by the factors 'adrenaline activities offer' (2.29), 'casinos' (2.25) and 'nightlife' (2.29). Unlike the winter activities offered, tourists can most directly influence them or encourage their development.

However, we believe that any new investments in this field would be unnecessary. It is essential to maintain already existing facilities. We suggest that in the case of created resources it is necessary to focus on health and spa tourism, rural tourism, and the development of outdoor activities and recreational opportunities. These are the factors with the strongest tradition and have the best potential for the further development and promotion of tourism in the region. Speaking of factors that achieved below-average ratings, we see opportunity in more frequent organisation of festivals and special events, which could be combined, for instance, with cuisine; this already has a strong position in the region. Together with local residents, they could create attractive tourist attractions. In order to develop tourism in the region, it is necessary to improve the efficiency and quality of local transport.

Supporting Factors

The highest ranked factor in this group was 'hospitality of the locals' with an average score of 4.20. The lowest average ranking was measured by the factor 'animation' (2.70), which is the result of a deficit of certain tourism products. It could be improved with the organisation of festivals and special events, as stated

Table 2   Created Resources

Factor	(1)	(2)
Health tourism	4.21	0.86
Rural tourism	4.05	0.86
Cuisine	4.01	0.91
Opportunities for recreation	3.70	0.83
Quality and variety of accommodation facilities	3.58	0.79
Offer of restaurants, bars, cafes, etc	3.51	0.94
Outdoor activities offer	3.48	0.92
Water activities offer	3.34	1.12
Availability of natural attractions	3.34	0.78
Sport activities	3.31	0.83
Shopping opportunities	3.14	0.84
Access to tourist information	3.10	0.73
Festivals, special events	2.97	0.90
Support of the locals by organizing special events	2.97	0.89
Entertainment (theaters, cinemas, etc.)	2.86	0.77
Efficiency and quality of local transport	2,60	0,90
Access to the airports	2.47	0.94
Entertainment and theme parks	2.40	0.84
Adrenaline activities offer	2.29	1.03
Nightlife	2.29	0.93
Casinos	2.25	0.93
Winter activities offer	2.06	0.99

Notes   Column headings are as follows: (1) arithmetic mean, (2) standard deviation.

in the previous section. The factor 'accessibility of the Pomurska region as a destination (transport connections)' was ranked slightly above average, but we should not be satisfied with that result. It is necessary to establish new transport links, particularly take advantage of the main railroad with international connections. Other factors in the group have achieved above-average ratings.

Management

The only factor that was ranked with an average of 3.05 was 'level of development of social tourism.' All 14 other factors have achieved below-average ratings.

Table 3   Supporting Factors

Factor	(1)	(2)
Hospitality of the local residents	4.20	0.85
Communication and trust between the tourists and the local population	3.40	0.77
Access to the telecommunications network	3.34	0.83
Quality of tourist services	3.24	0.83
Access to health care	3.23	0.79
Availability of financial institutions (banks, exchange offices, etc.)	3.08	0.82
Accessibility of Pomurska region as a destination (transport connections)	3.02	0.80
Animation	2.70	0.75

Notes   Column headings are as follows: (1) arithmetic mean, (2) standard deviation.

Table 4   Management

Factor	(1)	(2)
Level of development of social tourism	3.05	0.84
Correspondency of tourism development with the needs and requirments of the tourists	2.99	0.77
Effectiveness of tourism enterprises	2.97	0.72
Support of locals in tourism development	2.97	0.80
Awareness of the private sector on importance of sustainable tourism development	2.94	0.79
Development and promotion of new tourism products	2.91	0.80
Correspondency of tourism development with the needs and requirements of capital	2.90	0.78
Correspondency of tourism development with the needs and requirements of society	2.86	0.76
Correspondency of tourism development with the needs and requirements of the local residents	2.84	0.75
Educational structure of employees in tourism enterprises	2.79	0.83
Efficiency and ability of managers in tourism.	2.78	0.83
The level of cooperation between enterprises.	2.71	0.82
Quality of research in tourism.	2.68	0.77
Awareness of the public sector on importance of sustainable tourism development	2.65	0.75
Investments by foreign companies in tourism.	2.47	0.86

Notes   Column headings are as follows: (1) arithmetic mean, (2) standard deviation.

In general, factors from the management group were the worst rated of all those included in the questionnaire. The factor 'investments of foreign enterprises in tourism' was given the lowest average rating (2.47). Better ratings were given to the factors 'quality of research in the field of tourism' (2.68) and 'awareness of the public sector on the importance of sustainable tourism development' (2.65). the answers of the respondents were fairly unified.

The below-average rating of the factor 'level of co-operation between enterprises' (2.71) is not satisfying. This factor is crucial, especially with regards to small providers of tourism products and services, which is also emphasised in the SWOT analysis carried out by the Regional Development Agency. They consider this factor to be a significant opportunity for regional development. Service and product providers could offer a more varied range of tourism services, and they would be more competitive and benefit from common advertising, which would mean direct reductions of costs. In the case of more effective linkage between enterprises, the factor 'development and promotion of tourism products' (2.91) could have certainly achieved a better rating; thus, it was ranked as the seventh most competitive in the group. The below-average rating of 'education' (2.79) has confirmed what we have reported about in the chapter about education structure

of the Pomurska region in the theoretical part of the thesis. The majority of employees in the tourism sector have completed the middle level of education; the lack of skilled labour and not the departure of highly educated staff represent a massive threat. The low level of education is associated with the below-average rating of the factor 'efficiency and ability of managers in tourism' (2.78), which directly affects the factor 'effectiveness of tourism enterprises.'

Environment

The environment group includes economic, social, cultural, demographic, political, legal, technological factors and the other factors of the wider environ-

Table 5   Environment

Factor	(1)	(2)
Safety of tourists.	3.86	0.90
Political stability.	3.21	0.99
Price and quality of accommodation facilities ratio.	3.08	0.77
Price and quality of tourist services ratio.	3.04	0.74
Using of information technologies in tourism enterprises.	3.00	0.55
Electronic marketing in tourism enterprises.	2.99	0.77
Cooperation between the public and private sectors.	2.74	0.76
Interest of investors to invest in tourism enterprises.	2.48	0.83

Notes   Column headings are as follows: (1) arithmetic mean, (2) standard deviation.

ment. The 'interest of investors to invest in tourism enterprises' factor was ranked with the lowest score of 2.48, which is another threat to the Pomurska region. This is the result of the weak effectiveness of the policy and non-simulating climate for investment in existing facilities or for the creation of new ones. The fragmentation of enterprises and of the offer of tourism services is the reason the factor 'cooperation between public and private sector' was evaluated as being below average (2.74). The only opportunity for improvement is through the common goals of regional development. The 'safety of the tourists' factor was ranked with an average of 3.86, which is the highest rank in the environment group. Standard deviance was 0.90, which means that respondents' answers varied considerably. The average of the competing regions was achieved in the factor 'using of information technologies in tourism enterprises' for which answers were mostly concentrated around the average. The factors of 'price and quality of accommodation ratio' (3.08) and 'price and quality of tourist services ratio' (3.04) were both ranked a little above average and the answers were fairly unified.

Demand

Respondents have given 'image of the Pomurska region as a tourist destination' the highest rating (3.29).

Table 6   Demand

Factor	(1)	(2)
Image of the Pomurska region as a tourist destination.	3.29	0.93
Recognition of Pomurska region tourist offer in Slovenia.	3.23	0.85
Recognition of Pomurska region in Slovenia.	3.16	0.89

Notes   Column headings are as follows: (1) arithmetic mean, (2) standard deviation.

Table 7   Total Variance Explained in the new Variables

New variable	(1)	(2)	(3)
Natural and cultural resources	0.866	48.28%	0.582 to 0.806
Created resources	0.788	23.88%	0.383 to 0.625
Supporting resources	0.752	37.45%	0.492 to 0.753
Management	0.879	42.94%	0.499 to 0.811
Environment	0.669	38.67%	0.340 to 0.780
Demand	0.706	73.16%	0.821 to 0.876

Notes   Column headings are as follows: (1) kmo, (2) share of total variance explained (in the new variables, obtained by principal component analysis), (3) factor loadings.

In the second place, they classified 'recognition of the Pomurska region's tourist offer in Slovenia' (3.23), and in the third 'recognition of Pomurska region in Slovenia' (3.16). All factors have achieved above-average ratings, which is particularly encouraging for the further marketing activities of providers in tourism and the competent authorities. However, a relatively high standard deviation indicates that the thoughts of respondents were not unified.

Findings

In order to test the hypotheses by using principal component analysis, we have set six new variables. Table 7 shows the share of variability of all variables we have covered.

We have tested hypotheses by using a paired-samples t-test. The aim was to test the null hypothesis that the arithmetic mean of one variable is equal to the arithmetic mean of the other variable.

Hypothesis 1 *The Pomurska region as a tourist destination is more competitive in the field of*

Table 8   T-Test Results for Hypothesis 1

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
0.476	0.567	0.0457	0.386	0.566	121	0.414	153	0.000

Notes   Column headings are as follows: (1) mean, (2) standard deviation, (3) standard error mean, (4) upper 95% confidence interval of the difference, (5) lower 95% confidence interval of the difference, (6) *t*, (7) *df*, (8) significance (2-tailed).

'natural and cultural resources' than in the field of 'created resources.'

We define the null hypothesis (HO) and the alternative hypothesis (HA).

HO *The arithmetic mean of the variable 'natural and cultural resources' is equal to the arithmetic mean of variable 'created resources.'*

HA *The arithmetic mean of the variable 'natural and cultural resources' is higher than the arithmetic mean of variable 'created resources.'*

By using a paired-samples *t*-test (Table 8), we have ascertained that the average value of the difference between two variables is 0.48 and the standard deviation has a value of 0.57. The lower confidence limit with 95% confidence is 0.39; the upper limit is 0.57. The value of the two-tailed statistical significance is 0.000.

Therefore, we can confirm hypothesis H1, i.e. that the Pomurska region as a tourist destination is more competitive in the field of 'natural and cultural resources' than in the field of 'created resources.'

HYPOTHESIS 2 *The Pomurska region as a tourist destination is more competitive in the field of 'resources' than in the field of 'management.'*

We define the null hypothesis (HO) and the alternative hypothesis (HA).

HO *The arithmetic mean of the variable 'resources' is equal to the arithmetic mean of variable 'management.'*

HA *The arithmetic mean of the variable 'resources' is higher than the arithmetic mean of variable 'management.'*

A paired-samples *t*-test of the variables 'resources' and 'management' showed that the average value of

Table 9   T-Test Results for Hypothesis 2

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
0.355	0.454	0.0366	0.283	0.428	9.714	153	0.000

Notes   Column headings are as follows: (1) mean, (2) standard deviation, (3) standard error mean, (4) upper 95% confidence interval of the difference, (5) lower 95% confidence interval of the difference, (6) *t*, (7) *df*, (8) significance (2-tailed).

Table 10   T-Test Results for Hypothesis 3

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
0.189	0.427	0.034	0.122	0.258	5.515	153	0.000

Notes   Column headings are as follows: (1) mean, (2) standard deviation, (3) standard error mean, (4) upper 95% confidence interval of the difference, (5) lower 95% confidence interval of the difference, (6) *t*, (7) *df*, (8) significance (2-tailed).

difference between the two is 0.36 with a standard deviation of 0.45. As in the first case, level of confidence is 95%, and the level of two-tailed statistical significance is 0.000.

We confirm Hypothesis H2 that the Pomurska region as a tourist destination is more competitive in the field of 'resources' than in the field of 'management.'

HYPOTHESIS 3 *The Pomurska region as a tourist destination is more competitive in the field of 'supporting resources' than in the field of 'created resources.'*

We define the null hypothesis (HO) and the alternative hypothesis (HA).

HO *The arithmetic mean of the variable 'supporting resources' is equal to the arithmetic mean of variable 'created resources.'*

HA *The arithmetic mean of the variable 'supporting resources' is higher than the arithmetic mean of variable 'created resources.'*

The results of *t*-test between variables 'supporting resources' and 'created resources' indicate that the average value of the difference between the two variables is 0.190 with a standard deviation of 0.43. The level of confidence is 95%, and the two-tailed statistical significance is 0.000.

We confirm Hypothesis H3 that Pomurska region as a tourist destination is more competitive in the field of 'supporting resources' than in the field of 'created resources.'

Research Limitation and Implications

No competitiveness research had been conducted in the Pomurska region prior to this paper; consequently, these research results will be useful for private and government entities responsible for the development of tourism.

However, the study has the following limitations: (1) regarding the questionnaire: factors were computed on the basis of data collected with a questionnaire that used perceptual measures, which are subjective in nature; (2) time of research: the acquired data represent evaluations on a certain date (cross-sectional study design), which means that our study lacks a longitudinal component; (3) sample: only the stakeholders from the supply side were included in our research. Despite these limitations, this study makes significant contributions and implications.

For the future, we suggest research surveying more groups of respondents. It would be useful to include visitors, and local residents, who have experience in the destination.

Conclusion

This research has indicated what the potential for the development of the Pomurska region is, and what the region's advantages and disadvantages are. We have analysed the competitiveness of the region as a tourist destination by using data obtained from questionnaires. 'Health tourism' was ranked with the highest value among all factors. Irrespective of the sector in which respondents were employed or how long they had been working in the tourism industry, every one of them was aware of the strong position of the spas and health resorts in the region and of the potential for their further development. Rural tourism is the second strongest asset of the region. In combination with the other factors from the created resources group, especially with factors 'outdoor activities' and 'recreational opportunities,' tourist products for a wide segment of visitors could be established. 'Cuisine' was also evalu-

ated with a high average rating. Together with health tourism, it contributes significantly to the recognition of the Pomurska region's range of tourism products in Slovenia and to the recognition of the Pomurska region as a whole. All factors from the natural and cultural resources group, except one ('national parks'), have been ranked above average. This indicates that people are aware of the natural and cultural wealth of the region, which creates high-quality primary tourist services. It is necessary to protect nature and to use it in the most appropriate and efficient ways for tourism purposes. In the supporting resources group, 'hospitality of the local residents' has been rated as the best factor. We can also confirm this from our own experience in personal contact with respondents during the questionnaire distribution. Tourism is created by people, and it is their hospitality and kindness that can often turn an ordinary vacation into something unique and unforgettable. The second-best rated factor is the 'communication and trust between tourists and local residents.' These two factors have an enormous influence on the overall quality of provided services. Visitors will return to the destination only when they feel comfortable and absolutely safe. It is clear that economic recessions, financial crises, terrorist attacks or wars cause a significant decrease of tourism activity, and they can paralyse it for several years. 'Safety of tourists' and 'political stability' are the two most highly rated factors in the environment group. All stated factors are strengths of the region and contribute considerably to its competitiveness.

For more effective tourism development and increased competitiveness of the region, it is beneficial to highlight the factors that have been rated below-average. We have already mentioned that it is necessary to take care of the attractiveness of the primary tourism products and to increase the efficiency of supporting resources. It is a matter of concern that except for the 'level of social tourism development' factor, all other factors from the management group have achieved below-average rankings. In general, they were rated the worst of all the factors obtained in the questionnaire. The lowest ranking was given to the 'investments of foreign enterprises in tourism' factor. This result was not a surprise, because in the

whole of Slovenia there are exceedingly few foreign investors who would be interested in investing in tourism. Moreover, the Pomurska region is also in a weak position regarding investments in the other sectors of the economy. More research and analyses in tourism are essential, and particular attention should be given to education and training of employees. A tourism enterprise can only be effective if people who work there are effective. Research has shown that the level of cooperation between enterprises is low. The factor of 'cooperation of private and public sector' was also ranked below-average. It is necessary for all interested parties to come together and work together. Cooperation is the only way they can increase their own competitiveness and, with more varied and wider range of tourist products, they can contribute to the competitiveness of the region. The image of the Pomurska region would be strengthened, and it would be eventually recognised as a tourist destination.

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