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Which attributes are important to tourists in a mature seaside destination? A case of Opatija in Croatia

Abstract

Tourist's perception of destination attributes provides valuable managerial information for the tourism destination planning process. Destination attributes evaluation assists the management to recognize the tourist's satisfaction and thereby to direct the course of destination competitiveness. Mature seaside destinations suffer from the lack of differentiation, which is corollary of losing position in the competitive tourism market. The present study evaluates the attributes of the seaside destination Opatija from the tourist's perspective. Following this, a sample of 252 randomly chosen tourists were asked to complete a structured questionnaire. Destination attributes were evaluated using the gap analyses and Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA). The study identified four actors of Opatija attributes: *destination basic attributes*, *thematic attractions*, *culture and local gastronomy* and *accessibility*. On the basis of factor analysis and grand mean values, IPA was designed. Neither factors were identified in Quadrant I *Concentrate Here* nor in Quadrant IV *Possible Overkill*. In Quadrant II *Keep up the Work* were identified Destination basic attributes and *Culture and local gastronomy*, while in Quadrant III *Low Priority* were identified *Accessibility* and *Thematic attributes*. The results of the research highlight the necessity of differentiated strategic development of destination attributes. The article includes managerial implications of the findings and suggestions for future research in related context.

Key words: destination competitiveness; destination attributes; tourist satisfaction; attributes evaluation; Croatia

Introduction

The main factor of competitiveness is the ability to identify and valorise resources value in sustainable manner (Mazilu, 2012). Destination competitiveness has been receiving a growing attention in the past three decades due to boosting the meaning of the tourism sector worldwide (Fernando & Long, 2012). Cellini and Soci (2012) argue that competitiveness is "not a "yes-or-no" concept but a fuzzy one" and because of its missing univocal definition there is a lack of its univocal measurement. Furthermore, the same authors discuss the semantic point of view of the competitiveness and note that it has two different meanings: "struggle" and "symbiosis". Obviously, this coincides with the tourism's destination nature, where competitiveness is not possible without cooperation of its stakeholders and outer environment (Bornhorst, Ritchie & Sheehan, 2010).

Efficient destination management requires knowledge and understanding about tourist's perception of destination. It is vital for destination policy-makers to know how destination is conceived and articulated by its tourists (Pearce & Schänzel, 2015). Knowing how tourists evaluate destination attributes is critical in this regard. Indeed, Chi and Qu (2008) state that overall satisfaction is a function of attribute-level

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evaluations. Travel attributes represent a set of destination features that describe a place as a tourist destination. Attribute satisfaction has a significant positive and direct impact on overall satisfaction and attribute satisfaction is related to destination competitiveness as argued by Heung and Quf (2000).

Intense destination competitiveness in the Mediterranean challenges many traditional and mature seaside destinations to consider a possible re-evaluation of supply-related attributes. Following Chapman and Speake (2011) and Kozak and Martin (2012), Mediterranean seaside destinations have to differentiate their offer and reposition to stay competitive and gain competitive advantages relevant in the competitive tourism market. The aim of the present paper is to research tourists' perceptions of destination attributes in mature seaside destination Opatija. Using the gap analyses and Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) the paper evaluates destination attributes through the tourist's perspective. Thus, the study contributes to the body of knowledge on competitiveness of mature seaside destinations.

Literature review

Destination competitiveness represents a core area of interest in a modern tourism for researchers and practitioners. Ritchie and Crouch (2000) call it "tourism's Holy Grail" which clearly illustrates its inscrutability and extremely complex nature. Tourism competitiveness evaluation might provide a valuable asset for decision-making and prioritizing of the destination development planning (Barbosa, Oliveira & Rezende, 2010) or, to put it simply, "where and how limited resources should be directed" (Crouch, 2008). However, the competitiveness in tourism is not focused on the specific aspect of tourism product (transportation, hospitality, resources...), but on the tourism destination as a whole (Cracolici & Nijkamp, 2009); in fact - the combination of attributes recognized by tourists. Therefore, the destination is the subject of an integrated tourist experience which begins with the idea of travelling. As an outcome of its complexity, several authors understand the destination as an amalgam of different stakeholders (public, private, civil) (Mendola & Volo, 2015; Crouch, 2008). Still, some other authors have recognized tourists' perception of destination to be rather fluid and very personal (Pearce & Schänzel, 2015).

Measuring the destination competitiveness is even more complex than the phenomenon itself because of its multidimensionality (Mendola & Volo, 2015) and possible different perspectives (demand-side, supply-side, local community, etc.). Therefore, its measurement as well as its results depend on chosen variables (elements of competitiveness or indicators), evaluation criteria (Barbosa et al., 2010) and local destination characteristics (socio-cultural, economic, political, etc.), destination life stage, methodological approach (Santos, Ferreira & Costa, 2014) and other factors.

Challenges of measuring the destination competitiveness are broadly discussed by several authors (Dwyer, Cvelbar, Edwards & Mihalic, 2012; Mendola & Volo, 2015; Santos et al., 2014; Crouch, 2008; Zhou, Maumbe, Deng & Selin, 2015; Uran Maravić, Gračan & Zadel, 2015; Uran Maravić, Bednarik & Lesjak, 2015). The most frequently mentioned seems to be the problem of mixing objective (local connections, sports facilities, prices) and subjective (service quality, hospitality of the locals, personal safety) indicators of competitiveness (Dwyer et al., 2012). Researchers note that evaluating the destination attributes represents only its relative and not absolute score. Zhou et al. (2015) emphasise that not all attributes equally contribute to destination competitiveness. Further, a problem arises when respondents are asked to rate the destination under study in comparison to competing destinations which ambitiously implies that respondents are familiar with these destinations. In addition, there is no "general destination competitiveness" despite tremendous theoretical and empirical effort (Crouch, 2008) to identify one. Therefore, destination might be competitive in some respects (in

certain attributes of competitiveness) in comparison to other destinations. Other researchers (Cracolici & Nijkamp, 2009; Mendola & Volo, 2015) point to the fact that good quantitative performance is not always followed by equivalent qualitative performance of the destination. Most studies on destination competitiveness models deal with destination competitiveness at national level, whereas they are less engaged in measuring competitiveness on regional or local level.

Perception and evaluation of destination characteristics as well as its overall destination assessment is the most valuable way of destination competitiveness and performance monitoring. It reveals elements of strength and weakness within the destination (Naidoo, Ramseook & Ladsawut, 2010) and gives to management a valuable insight into the most important destination asset(s) determining its competitiveness. If management fully understand tourist's perception regarding destination attributes and their position in the eyes of tourists, they can gain long-term competitive advantage in the tourism market (Caber, Albayrak & Matzler, 2012).

However, tourism product providers might have different perceptions of destination competitiveness from the tourist's viewpoint. Tourism providers often do not understand how destination attributes are perceived by tourists. As Naidoo et al. (2010) argue, assessing the destination attributes helps detect areas of destination strengths and weaknesses. It in turn provides profound insight of developmental strategy orientation. Indeed, destination choice is influenced by tourist's assessment of the destination (Pansiri, 2014). Tourists make decision upon destination competitive attributes (Kim, Crompton & Botha, 2000) and the choice to visit a destination depends on its competitiveness (Dwyer, Livaic & Mellor, 2003; Omerzel Gomezelj, 2006). The more favourable the perception is, the greater is the likelihood of choice (Goodrich, 1978). Tourist's evaluation of destination attributes is reflected in tourist's overall satisfaction with destination (Baker & Crompton, 2000; Kozak, 2000a; Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Alegre & Garau, 2010) which is in turn correlated with destination competitiveness through the impact on the tourist's choice (Ahmed, 1991; Naidoo et al., 2010; Caber et al., 2012).

Mediterranean destinations face similar attributes and promotion highlighting sea and sun related products (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Buhalis, 2000) which require a profound attribute evaluation in the process of (re)positioning. In this regard, the view of tourists visiting destination is critical. Smolčić Jurdana and Soldić Frleta (2011) found that beaches as the most important destination attribute in seaside destination Opatija are assessed by tourists rather negatively and that the whole experience of destination is important when tourists evaluate seaside destination. There is an urgent need for tourism providers in mature seaside destinations to internalize the tourist's perceptions of destination attributes in order to achieve efficient positioning in the highly competitive seaside destination market.

Destination attributes are also investigated in the studies on destination competitiveness following the viewpoint of different stakeholders, such as tourism experts (Crouch, 2008), tourism managers (Omerzel Gomezelj, 2006; Bornhorst et al., 2010), local community (Yoon, 2002), tourists (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999; Kozak & Rimmington, 1999; Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Lee & King, 2006). The relevance of tourists as destination stakeholders drives to further investigation in this regard. Indeed, Pearce and Schänzel (2015) suggest to explore the tourist's perspective of destination attributes.

Having in mind the above mentioned, the study tries to answer to the following research question: What are the most important destination attributes for a mature seaside destination? A North Mediterranean destination Opatija was chosen as a case study. Using Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) we verify the gap between attributes performance and importance of destination attributes from tourist's point of view. Martilla and James (1977) argue that inconsistency between importance and performance are a sign of customer dissatisfaction, and Guadagnolo (1985) suggested that IPA is a tool to evaluate

customer satisfaction. Dwyer et al. (2012) also observe that IPA approach has a significant importance for studies on destination competitiveness.

Destination Opatija

Before proceeding with the research methodology description, we provide a brief presentation of the destination under study. Opatija is a typical seaside Mediterranean destination with 9,138 beds in accommodation sector and 1,219,538 tourist overnight stays in 2015 (CBS, 2016). The destination is rich with cultural and historic heritage and architecture, primarily attached to Austro-Hungarian Monarchy epoch, natural beauty, well-tended parks and promenades with mild Mediterranean climate. It is located in the northern part of the Adriatic Sea in the Mediterranean in the Gulf of Kvarner on the eastern coast of the Istrian Peninsula in Croatia. In terms of population size, Opatija has 11,750 inhabitants. The beginning of tourism development in Opatija is marked by building the Villa Angiolina (today's Museum of tourism) 170 years ago, accompanied by Austro-Hungarian southern railway network and it became a modern, new, bath and climatic resort in the region. Until the First World War it was a luxury tourism destination in the so-called "Austrian Riviera" in the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Opatija was an important tourism destination also after the Second World War. In the 1990s it was facing the consequences of Homeland War (1991-1995) when many refugees were hosted in Opatian hotels which operated with lower capacity at that time (Prašnikar, Brenčič-Makovec & Knežević-Cvelbar, 2006, p. 60). However, today Opatija is a mature seaside as well as a MICE destination. Despite a long tourism tradition and tourism resources allowing year-round tourism, high seasonality is present in Opatija. Indeed, 60% of yearly overnight stays are in Opatija during June and September (CBS, 2014). Nevertheless, the main problem of Opatija tourism competitiveness today "lies in the absence of strategic destination development resulting in a blurred image" (Vodeb & Nemeč Rudež, 2016, p. 218). Besides, Opatija struggles with poor collaboration among the suppliers within the destination (Prašnikar, Brenčič-Makovec & Knežević-Cvelbar, 2006, p. 251). The present research helps to determine which destination attributes are strategically important for Opatija and some managerial implications are proposed in this regard. Opatija was chosen because it is recognized as a major tourism destination in the North-Eastern Adriatic region and the most visited seaside destination in Croatia.

Method

A quantitative method was employed in this study. The research consisted of assessing tourist's perception of destination attributes with structured questionnaire. It consisted of two parts. The first part refers to socio-demographic and travel-specific characteristics of respondents. The second part consists of two sets of 22 items referring to destination attributes that were already used in the previous study of seaside destination Portorož (Zabukovec Baruca et al., 2012). The first set of 22 items (destination attributes) measured the importance and the second set measured the performance of destination attributes. A list of 22 destination attributes was provided to tourists asking them to give ratings on a five-point Likert type scale (5 = most important, 1 = least important for the first set of items and 5 = very high, 1 = very low for the second set of items). Questionnaires were distributed in English, German, Italian and Croatian language.

Descriptive statistics and IPA were used to classify destination attributes in regard to demand-side of the tourism market. IPA as an instrument helps to align destination attributes with the demand-driven characteristics. Indeed, IPA has a diagnostic power facilitating the identification of attributes

for destination competitiveness (Dwyer et al., 2012). It combines evaluations of attribute importance and performance into two-dimensional grid in order to help the interpretation and obtain practical recommendations (Oh, 2001).

Sample

The sample population for the present study was composed of tourists in Opatija. 252 usable questionnaires were collected from tourists visiting Opatija during April and May 2014. Respondents were approached in several public places in Opatija and asked to complete the questionnaire.

The profile of respondents is presented in Table 1. Half of the respondents were men and half of the respondents were women. The largest age group was 61-70 age group. Regarding their occupation, most respondents were employed or retired. The respondents mostly came from Germany and they mostly stayed at a hotel. Respondents mostly travelled with their partners. More than half of the respondents were in Opatija for the first time. The Internet was mostly cited as the respondents' main information source, followed by recommendation by friends. The main purpose to visit Opatija was rest and relaxation, following with entertainment, party and experience.

Table 1
Socio-demographic characteristics and travel-related profile of respondents

	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	125	49.6
Female	120	47.6
Missing	7	2.8
Age		
20 and below	10	4.0
21- 30	26	10.3
31- 40	29	11.5
41- 50	40	15.9
51- 60	46	18.2
61 - 70	59	23.4
71 and above	32	12.7
Missing	10	4.0
Occupation		
Employed	118	46.8
Student	13	5.3
Unemployed	11	4.4
Retired	90	35.7
Other	12	4.8
Missing	8	3.2
Country of origin		
Italy	43	17.1
Germany	75	29.8
Austria	29	11.5
Slovenia	18	7.1
Croatia	26	10.3
Other	58	23.0
Missing	3	1.2

Table 1 Continued

	Frequency	Percentage
Accommodation		
Hotel	176	69.8
Apartment	25	10.0
Private room	23	9.1
Campsite	8	3.2
Other	20	7.9
Travel company		
On my own	25	9.9
My partner	119	47.2
Family with children	32	12.7
Friends	48	19.0
Colleagues or business partners	2	0.8
Other	26	10.4
First visit to destination		
Yes	149	59.1
No	86	34.1
Missing	17	6.8
Main information source		
Own experience	36	14.3
Recommendation by friends	45	17.9
Internet	67	26.6
Guide books, brochures, books	36	14.3
Traditional media (TV, newspapers...)	6	2.4
Travel agent	47	18.7
Fair	1	0.4
Other sources	14	5.7
Purpose to visit Opatija		
Rest, relaxation	138	54.8
Entertainment, party, experience	50	19.8
Wellness and wellbeing	6	2.4
Visit relatives and friends	8	3.2
Business or education	5	2.0
Passing by	12	4.8
Healing or rehabilitation	3	1.2
Other	26	10.3
Missing	4	1.6

The collected data were analysed employing SPSS version 20. Principal Component Analysis was performed on destination importance attributes. Following Chu and Choi (2000, p. 367), grand means of factors that emerged from Principal Component Analysis were applied in the IPA. Also grand means of quality performance were calculated considering factors emerged from principal component analysis. Additionally, overall mean of importance perception and overall mean of performance perception for the entire set of items analysed were used to position axes on IPA. In fact, vertical and horizontal axes of IPA are placed on data-centred quadrant approach (Bacon, 2003) which is the most frequently used approach as argued by Eskildsen and Kristensen (2006).

Results and discussion

Destination attributes were factor analysed using Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation to find underlying common factors of importance perceived destination attributes. Missing values were excluded using pairwise deletion. Table 2 shows factor loadings, eigenvalues, explained variance and Cronbach's alpha. Items of importance perception of attributes yielded five factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0.

Bartlett's test of sphericity indicated a statistically significant (0.000) correlation matrix and a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy yielded 0.797. The first factor labelled *Destination basic attributes* includes a variety of basic destination framework. Six variables were loaded on this factor which relate to natural beauty, tidiness and cleanliness, soothing atmosphere, personal safety, hospitality of the locals/staff and accommodation quality. The second factor labelled *Thematic attributes* comprises four variables, which summarize different thematic oriented attributes - wellness, gambling, health tourism and sports. The third common factor is labelled *Culture and local gastronomy* comprising the following attributes: authentic local culinary offer, restaurant offer and cultural heritage. The fourth factor labelled *Accessibility* reflects three attributes that are associated with accessibility. The fifth factor is labelled *Seaside enjoyment and events* and reflects attributes related to beaches, cultural events and nightlife entertainment. This factor has Cronbach's alpha of 0.557 and is, therefore, excluded from further analysis. Besides, three attributes – prices, general atmosphere and suitability for family holiday – did not load consistently on any factor because their loadings were below 0.5. They were therefore eliminated from further research. Thus, the four factors which are included in further research explained 51.685 % of total variance.

Table 2
Principal component analysis of importance perceived destination attributes

Factors	Factor loading	Eigen-value	Variance explained (%)	Cronbach's alpha
F1: Destination basic attributes		3.773		
Soothing atmosphere	0.705		17.149	0.779
Tidiness and cleanliness	0.702			
Personal safety	0.674			
Hospitality of the locals/staff	0.641			
Accommodation quality	0.618			
Natural beauty of the surroundings	0.611			
F2: Thematic attributes		3.051	13.866	0.813
Wellness	0.804			
Gaming possibilities	0.798			
Health tourism	0.784			
Sports and recreational facilities	0.598			
F3: Culture and local gastronomy		2.278	10.355	0.684
Authentic local culinary offer	0.715			
Restaurant offer	0.655			
Cultural heritage	0.649			
F4: Accessibility		2.269	10.315	0.659
Local connections (bus, taxi...)	0.741			
Accessibility	0.581			
Shopping facilities	0.573			
F5: Seaside enjoyment and events		1.571	7.143	0.557
Beaches	0.675			
Cultural events	0.617			
Night life and entertainment	0.571			

KMO = 0.797, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity = 1,664.437 at d.f. = 231 with a significance of p = 0.000.

Mean values and standard deviations of items included in the four factors, grand means and grand mean gaps are presented in Table 3. Grand mean is the overall mean of the factor items. It was computed for importance perception and performance perception of each factor. A gap between grand means

was calculated by subtracting importance grand mean from performance grand mean for each factor. Paired t-test is used to determine whether the gap is statistically significant.

The gap analysis shows that quality performance exceeds importance in two dimensions. *Destination basic attributes* dimension is at the top of importance perception (grand mean = 4.20) and the importance perception meets quality performance for this dimension ($p = 0.104$). *Thematic attributes* dimension is also well perceived by respondents; quality performance of thematic related attributes even exceeds the importance perceptions ($p = 0.000$). *Culture and local gastronomy* represents the strengths of destination attributes. The gap between importance perception and performance perception of this dimension is statistically not significant ($p = 0.131$). Hence, these destination attributes represent the opportunity for further destination differentiation and competitive advantage development. *Accessibility* dimension is also well perceived by respondents according to statistically significant positive gap ($p = 0.000$).

Table 3
Mean values, standard deviations, grand means and grand mean gaps

Factors	Importance perception		Performance perception		Grand mean gap	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Gap	t-value (p)
F1: Destination basic attributes	4.20		4.16		-0.05	1.634 (0.104)
Soothing atmosphere	4.02	1.12	3.87	0.98		
Tidiness and cleanliness	4.26	0.86	4.19	0.86		
Personal safety	4.30	0.94	4.36	0.89		
Hospitality of the locals/staff	4.24	0.92	4.21	0.85		
Accommodation quality	4.06	0.97	4.05	0.93		
Natural beauty of the surroundings	4.31	0.91	4.25	0.90		
F2: Thematic attributes	2.81		3.46		0.65	-6.984 (0.000)
Wellness	2.90	1.35	3.61	1.06		
Gaming possibilities	2.33	1.73	3.27	1.14		
Health tourism	3.03	1.27	3.64	1.01		
Sports and recreational facilities	2.99	1.20	3.30	0.89		
F3: Culture and local gastronomy	3.91		4.01		0.10	-1.518 (0.131)
Authentic local culinary offer	3.83	1.06	3.93	0.88		
Restaurant offer	3.92	0.95	4.01	0.96		
Cultural heritage	3.99	0.95	4.08	0.85		
F4: Accessibility	3.47		3.69		0.23	-3.721 (0.000)
Local connections (bus, taxi...)	3.37	1.16	3.59	1.07		
Accessibility	3.84	1.10	3.97	0.98		
Shopping facilities	3.19	1.14	3.52	1.03		

Overall mean value of all importance perception items (3.66) and overall mean value of all quality performance perception items (3.87) were used to position axes of IPA. The grand mean values of importance perception and quality performance perception of each factor were plotted in IPA (Figure 1). It has to be noticed that all four dimensions of attributes were plotted in IPA regardless of the gap statistical significance.

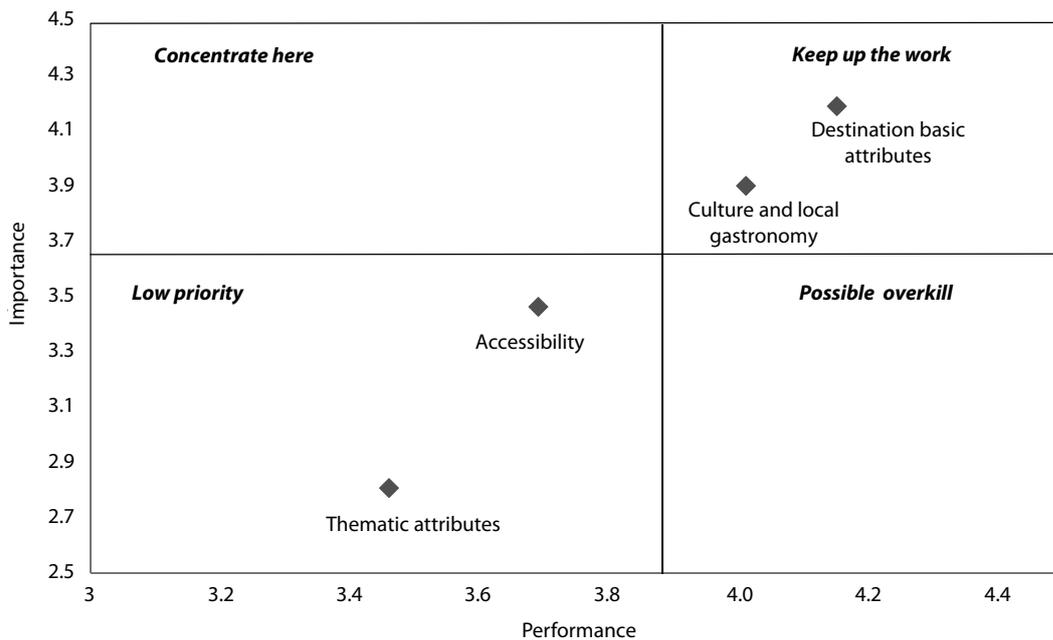
Two factors of destination attributes whose importance and performance is above overall mean value were identified in *Keep up the work* quadrant. It captures the attributes that tourists perceive as important to their purchase decision and on which they think destination performs well (Oh, 2001). They are represented by *Destination basic attributes* and *Culture and local gastronomy offer*. Destination policy makers and tourism providers in Opatija should continue to develop and maintain quality of

these attributes and destination positioning should focus on them. In line with this, culture related attributes and local gastronomy have a huge potential to build destination differentiation on local specifics. This is in accordance with the findings of a previous study among tourism representatives in Opatija (Vodeb & Nemeč Rudež, 2016) which confirms culture and local gastronomy as a competitive advantage of Opatija. Similar to our findings, Zabukovec Baruca et al. (2012) identified that safety and tidiness are important for tourists to a nearby and very similar seaside destination Portorož while night life and entertainment are of low importance for its tourists. Likewise, Blažević et al. (2012) confirm in their study that tourists in Opatija are most satisfied with natural beauty, hospitality of people and tidiness of destination.

Two factors were identified in *Low priority* quadrant. Following Oh (2011), it captures attributes that are important to tourists but on which the destination does not perform well. Importance and performance of *Accessibility* and *Thematic attributes* are perceived in this quadrant. It can be derived that Opatija faces attributes imbalances.

None of the factors were identified in *Concentrate here* and *Possible overkill* quadrant. So, none of the factors has a higher importance and lower quality performance perception or *vice versa*.

Figure 1
Importance-performance matrix of destination Opatija attributes



Conclusions

The present study highlights destination attributes of mature seaside destination in regard to their importance and performance perception from the tourist's viewpoint. Surprisingly, basic destination attributes that represent the intangible part of destination were identified as the most important attributes of the mature seaside destination and attributes related to thematic attributes are considered much less important to tourists. It opens an important question on how mature seaside destination should position in a highly competitive seaside destination market. The research highlights the necessity of differentiated strategic development of destination attributes in mature seaside destinations.

Statistically significant positive gaps between performance and importance show that destination attributes meet tourist's quality performance expectations. Notably, based on the study findings, it seems that management should maintain the quality performance of destination attributes labelled *Accessibility* and *Thematic attributes*.

From the managerial and tourism policy standpoint, it is recommended to focus on destination attributes that are recognized by tourists as important *Destination basic attributes* and *Culture and local gastronomy*. Objective indicators of destination competitiveness (local connections, accessibility and sports facilities) were low estimated by tourists, whereas subjective indicators of destination competitiveness (safety, hospitality and cultural richness) were high estimated. Destination vicinity of source markets and destination accessibility are recognised by the market supply-side as the most important competitive advantage to Opatija (Vodeb & Nemeč Rudež, 2016) showing the gap between the market supply-side and demand-side which has to be further investigated. Likewise, Smolčić Jurdana and Soldić Frleta (2011) found that the beach, which is the most important destination attribute from the supply-side view, is assessed by tourists rather critically.

Indeed, the study helps to better understand the opportunities of tourism management and development of Opatija and provides a guidance to develop positioning strategy and destination marketing mix. *Destination basic attributes* calls for complementary dimension of tourism supply with a more thematic content and *Culture and local gastronomy* seems to represent the most appropriate one following the present IPA. Thus, in line with destination resources, tourism suppliers should develop innovative tourism products related to culture and local gastronomy.

Although dimensions *Accessibility* and *Thematic attributes* are located in *Low priority* quadrant, they shouldn't be ignored because they might represent important complementary offer for tourists and destination enrichment. Further research can extend to complementarity analysis of attributes giving an insight into the level of complementarity of different destination attributes. Coordinated positioning efforts could reposition a mature destination into destination that efficiently targets its regional and global market.

The study findings cannot be generalized to other destinations, but it certainly contributes to the knowledge and comprehension of complex and holistic nature of tourism destination competitiveness.

Limitations and suggestions for further studies

Obviously we cannot generalize these results and conclusions due to the specific sample of tourists participating in our study. It was a snapshot of the spring-season tourists to Opatija. Further research can extend to include visitors in other seasons in order to compare attributes sought by tourists to Opatija in different seasons. As already mentioned, importance and relevance of the relations between the demand-side and the supply-side attributes have to be studied.

Furthermore, investigation of relationship among the attributes would be welcome to upgrade this area of research. In fact, Laesser and Beritelli (2013) and Santos et al. (2014) argue that understanding the interrelationship among the attributes of destination competitiveness might shed some light to this area.

The research was time and resource limited which prevented us to include a larger sample in the study. Nevertheless, it represents an important step in understanding the relevance of mature seaside destination attributes.

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