

OUTDOOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT AS A GENERATOR OF DESTINATION COMPETITIVENESS

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SUMMARY

Purpose

The analysis of the current situation and the possibility of development of outdoor tourism on the island of Krk with the aim of developing a tourist destination based on small and medium enterprises through the model of development concept is the main objective of the research. The purpose of this dissertation is to research the development of a tourist destination, small and medium enterprises, following the creation of a successful model that ensures the competitive advantage of the destination in accordance with the new market demands and new trends in tourism with the aim of differentiating the tourist product. Since the island of Krk has all the natural conditions for the development of outdoor tourism, it is necessary to implement a model of the concept of outdoor tourism development at all levels of destination management and all stakeholders involved in the creation of a tourist product.

For the implementation of the innovation, the existing system of destination management, the definition of objectives and operational strategies is challenged. The primary importance of defining the model of the concept of development is based on information and knowledge management in the future.

In accordance with the theme and purpose of the research, the aim of the research is to conduct a situation analysis and determine the possibilities of outdoor tourism development in the sphere of entrepreneurship on the island of Krk, set goals and proposals for innovative operational strategies and ways of managing development at all levels and innovate the tourism product by creating a model of the concept of outdoor tourism development. The model of the concept of development, the goal of this research, connects to the goals and innovation of the operational strategies as a set of dynamic activities that must be used to transform the tourist destination as a carrier of change, to be ready to achieve competitiveness in a dynamic tourism market in the function of development of small and medium enterprises.

Methodology

An empirical survey was conducted in two phases, where in the first phase the data was collected based on two focus groups with relevant stakeholders, while in the second phase it was resorted to the collection of quantitative data with three groups of respondents on the island of Krk: stakeholders, the resident population and tourists.

Collection of qualitative data through focus groups with relevant stakeholders: the Tourist Board of the island of Krk, tourist boards of municipalities and towns, entrepreneurs (renters of sports equipment, organizers of sports events, transport companies, providers of excursions and others), specialized travel agencies, restaurateurs and sponsors of tourism events. 2 focus groups were conducted with 6 to 8 participants from the aforementioned stakeholders from Primorje-Gorski Kotar County.

For the collection of quantitative data through interviews, questionnaires were prepared based on previous research and additional inputs from the theoretical background and definitions, as well as on the findings from the focus groups.

The target group for conducting the questionnaires are stakeholders in Primorje-Gorski Kotar County relevant to outdoor tourism on the island of Krk, the Tourist Board of Primorje-Gorski Kotar County and the Tourist Board of the island of Krk, tourism boards of municipalities and towns, entrepreneurs, specialized tourism agencies, restaurateurs and sponsors of tourism events. Stakeholders from Istria and other counties were also interviewed for the comparison. The comparison was made with Istria as the most developed tourist region, which, compared to the island of Krk, better manages outdoor tourism and directs the measures to increase tourism demand to similar markets.

The realized sample consists of a total of 873 respondents, of which 238 are companies (including tourist offices), 333 are respondents from the local population and 302 are outdoor tourists. Considering the practical needs and the relatively small number of relevant participants, the sample is adequate, but still the results are valid because the relevant participants are included in the sample in sufficient numbers. A pilot survey was conducted on a total of 30 participants to determine if there were any problems with understanding the questions in the questionnaire. Since the comments of the pilot participants were insignificant and the interventions to refine the questionnaire were very small, the pilot phase was not repeated. The questionnaire was posted on the website and respondents were sent a link to electronic addresses.

After the data collection phase, statistical data processing was performed. Statistical data processing included the following phases:

- Data description - description of the variables in the questionnaires using the usual statistical measures of description - percentage of responses (distribution of results) and, for quantitative variables, the arithmetic mean (average) and the measure of dispersion of responses (standard deviation).
- The test of statistical significance of the differences between the subjects on the island of Krk and the other destinations was performed using non-parametric difference tests.

To test the differences between the two groups of subjects, the Mann-Whitney U test was used, also called the Wilcoxon rank sum test. To test the differences between the same subjects on two different questions with a comparable scale, the Wilcoxon rank sum test for dependent samples was used. The Kruskal-Wallis rank test was used to test the differences between three or more groups of subjects (when the conditions for using parametric statistical tests were not met). It was used in cases when the equality of the arithmetic mean of more than two samples should be tested, where the conditions of normality and/or homogeneity of variance of the tested characteristics within the samples were not met (Ostertagova et al., 2014).

Hypothesis testing - the main hypothesis H1 is not tested directly, but is tested by operationalized auxiliary hypotheses.

Auxiliary hypotheses H1A and H1B were tested by the statistical tests described above, which tested the difference in stakeholder evaluations of outdoor tourism supply by entrepreneurs (H1A) and local communities (H1B). Auxiliary hypothesis H1C was tested through a multiple regression analysis in which preference for destination recommendation served as the criterion variable and various aspects of tourism offerings in the destination (including outdoor offerings) served as predictor variables. All statistical analyses were performed using the software IBM SPSS v24.

Findings

By analyzing the obtained results of quantitative research, the main hypothesis H1 was accepted: The model of the concept of entrepreneurship development and strategic management of the development of outdoor offers, based on the synergy and innovation of the actors, has a positive effect on the competitiveness of tourism. The auxiliary hypothesis H1A, which refers to the synergy of all stakeholders of outdoor tourism, is fully accepted, and the hypotheses H1B and H1C, which refer to the impact of outdoor tourism on the local population and the recommendation rate of outdoor tourists, are partially accepted. The willingness to recommend is influenced by satisfaction with outdoor events, but not by other aspects of outdoor tourism offerings. The qualitative research also noted the positive impact of synergy between stakeholders on competitiveness, especially in terms of connecting offers, for the development of which hoteliers and local government and self-government are considered by focus group participants to have the greatest merit, which was refuted in the quantitative research.

Situational analysis of outdoor tourism presented through descriptions and evaluations of elements of the offer, SWOT analysis, benchmarking analysis and PESTLE analysis, positions the island of Krk as a highly potential destination for the development of outdoor tourism. The development of the outdoor offer with an emphasis on international outdoor events, along with geomorphological characteristics of the space suitable for outdoor activities, good image of the destination, traffic connections, positive attitude of the local population towards tourists and ecological development of the destination, are the advantages that enable the island of Krk to create the basis for achieving a better competitive advantage. The political, economic, socio-cultural and technological environment in which the island of Krk is located, has the greatest impact on the economic perspective of development in which the entire economy is faced with high price increases and inflationary risks.

The main competitor of the island of Krk is Istria, which leads in the offer and promotion of outdoor tourism. Given the larger area of the destination, Istria automatically generates a larger number of contents in the quantitative indicators of the accommodation offer. Emphasis is placed on the qualitative indicators of the level of development of outdoor tourism, from which it can be concluded that Istria leads compared to the island of Krk, especially in the marketing of outdoor products such as Istra-bike, Istra-trail, Istra-climbing and Istra-kajak.

The results of the conducted research show that outdoor tourism operators on the island of Krk focus their entrepreneurial activities mainly on building relationships with guests and improving the quality and content of services, as well as on developing their own brand. They invest the least in training their employees and hiring qualified workers. The system of tourist boards and restaurateurs is rated statistically significantly ($p < 0.05$) better in terms of developing the offer and promotion than other actors. Tourist boards are also perceived as the actors that make

the greatest possible contribution to the promotion of outdoor tourism. On the island of Krk, 60% of respondents confirmed the expansion of the outdoor offer in the last two years, with the proactivity, i.e. the introduction of a new offer before the demand, being relatively the worst evaluated. There is no statistically significant difference between hoteliers and entrepreneurs when considering the aspect of offer development and promotion.

Activities that contribute to the creation of a competitive advantage are largely achieved in Istria, while for the island of Krk it was confirmed that the competitive advantage is achieved less through the diversification of the offer compared to other actors. In entrepreneurship on the island of Krk, there is a lower level of synergy between the actors than in Istria. On the island of Krk, private sector entrepreneurs with the highest number of sports equipment renters, hoteliers and restaurateurs are perceived as the actors that play the greatest role in the competitiveness of outdoor tourism, in contrast to tourist boards and local authorities, whose role is considered to be lower.

Residents believe that not all stakeholders invest enough effort in developing the offer and promoting outdoor tourism. In this regard, he perceives the restaurateurs as the best evaluated actors in the development of the offer, followed by tourist boards and hoteliers, and positions the local government and self-government in last place. In terms of promotion, the system of tourist boards ranks first. Most residents believe that outdoor tourism can have a positive impact on employability, and see a negative attitude towards the development of outdoor tourism in the possible devastation of resources and the creation of traffic problems.

Originality of the research

The doctoral dissertation in conceptual, methodological and application terms makes a scientific contribution. The conceptual scientific contribution of the research consists in a systematic review of the literature, in which a systematization of the dimensions of outdoor tourism was made in order to distinguish it from other specific forms of tourism, more specifically from nature tourism, leisure tourism, ecotourism and adventure tourism. The systematization of the analysis of the existing knowledge on the model of development conception in tourism with the application to outdoor tourism represents a new way to conceptualize the development of a specific form of tourism in the destination, which is also a conceptual scientific contribution. This is followed by previous research on the concept of creating a competitive advantage of the destination through the innovation of the tourist offer, the promotion and management of development, and the criteria for monitoring the success of outdoor tourism management.

The methodological and empirical part of the research makes a scientific contribution through the application of different methods of statistical analysis and the adaptation of measurement scales to measure competitiveness, entrepreneurial initiatives and management of outdoor tourism development. The methodological contribution is reflected in the identification of the relationship between the stakeholders' offer and the competitiveness of the destination and the determination of the dimensions of outdoor tourism. The linking of cognitive facts from the qualitative and quantitative part of the research, testing statistically significant differences between groups of respondents, represents an empirical contribution, especially for forms of tourism that are only in the first stage of development in the destination and for which there is no historical data necessary for setting development goals.

The contribution of application is reflected in the proposal to manage the development of outdoor tourism in the destination using research and development, supply, promotion, finance and human resources as a comprehensive tool to achieve development goals. The application level of development management contributes to the fact that the same research approach can be applied to other destinations.

Keywords

Concept of Development, Outdoor Tourism, Tourism Competitiveness, Tourism Entrepreneurship, Tourist Offer Innovation, Sustainable Development Management

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