

The central role of destination image in tourist competitiveness

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Abstract: Already-existing models of tourist destination competitiveness rooted in the resource-based view theory often omit competition within the sector, which was presented in the model of five competitive forces by Porter. This limits their explanatory value. It is not the aim of the paper to neglect their outcomes, which have been confirmed in numerous further publications. However, the paper aims to expand dominant views and incorporate the outcome of industrial organisation (IO). Tourist destination superiority is reflected in visitors' choices. These decisions result from the perceived value that visitors expect from consuming tourism products of particular destinations. As a result, the destination image can be indicated as the central element of the destination competitiveness-establishing process. The paper aims to propose a theoretical model of relations which leads to establishing a particular level of a destination's competitiveness. The paper is based on already published relations and rules that have been creatively incorporated into a new form of the destination competitiveness model. The model is expected to have an informative and explanatory value, which helps to understand the processes leading to establishing destination competitiveness. The model was not empirically tested as it does not offer new relations, instead, it combines relations that have been proven in contemporary literature.

Keywords: competitiveness model; destination competitiveness; decision sets; destination image; expected value

Introduction

Tourist destinations, by their very nature, spatial units, are often defined in a way that underlines their similarities to company-like entities (Pechlaner 1999, Gnoth 2004), especially their way of competing in the tourism market is highlighted in such an approach (Flagestad and Hope 2002, Żemła 2016). Consequently, most destination competitiveness models presented so far in the literature (Dwyer and Kim 2003, Heath 2003, Ritchie and Crouch 2005) were rooted in the resource-based view (RBV) (Barney 1991, Teece et al. 1997) and in Porter's (1990) concept of competitive and comparative advantage. RBV postulated that companies competing in the global environment

should rather secure a generally high level of competitiveness (competitiveness as a non-relative value) than compare this level with the competitors from their industry (competitiveness as a relative value) as it was suggested earlier on by Porter (1985) and industrial organisation economics (IO) (Cho 1998). This postulate of RBV was incorporated into cited destination competitiveness models. As a consequence, destination competitiveness was perceived as a value strictly connected with destination sustainable development (Ritchie and Crouch 2005). This reflects quite precisely the way the destinations create their competitiveness, however, in the presented paper, it is suggested that the success of particular destinations starts from their ability to attract visitors in a competitive environment more effectively than their competitors do. That is why the paper attempts to incorporate the outcome of IO into the established models.

An example of rare attempts to combine the outcome of RBV and IO in the analysis of tourism destination competitiveness is the study by Flagestad and Hope (2001) in the context of winter sports destinations in Europe. According to them, the RBV and Porter perspective (IO) may be seen as complementary streams of theory in strategic management and developing sustainable competitive advantage (Flagestad and Hope 2001). The dispute between RBV and IO approaches to the explanation of destinations' competitiveness (Sucandrawati et al. 2023) is also mirrored in differences between demand and supply-oriented models analysing tourism development and flows (Zhang and Jensen 2008).

The paper argues that destination superiority is reflected in visitors' choices (Woodside and Sherell 1977, Woodside and Lysonski 1989). These decisions result from the perceived value that visitors expect from consuming tourism products of particular destinations. A characteristic of the tourism market is a high dependence on these estimations on subjective perceptions instead of tested knowledge, as tourists usually do not have their own and current experiences regarding most of the destinations they put in their choice/consideration sets (Decrop 2006). As a result, the destination image is of pivotal importance for the destination competitiveness-establishing process (Kastenholz 2002). Understanding the process of destination image formation (Gallarza et al. 2002) is the key element of establishing destination competitiveness. In this sense we develop a theoretical model of relations which leads to establishing a particular level of a destination's competitiveness.

Literature review

Competition in the tourism market takes place primarily between destinations (Go and Govers 2000, Ritchie and Crouch 2000, Altinay and Kozak 2021), and competitiveness is crucial for a destination's success and for ensuring its prosperity (Gooroochurn and Sugiyarto 2005, Cronjé and du Plessis 2020). When deciding on their tourist trip,

tourists are primarily interested in the opportunities to spend time at the destination, and only then do they choose service providers in the previously selected destination.

Despite the relatively high popularity of destination competitiveness among researchers of tourism-related phenomena (Altinay and Kozak 2021, Xu et al. 2021), there is a visible lack of agreement on the meaning of this concept and the appropriate methods of studying it (Cronjé and du Plessis 2020, Tleuberdinova et al. 2024). A few extended reviews (Cronjé and du Plessis 2020, Mior Shariffuddin et al. 2023, Xu and Au 2023) found out lately that there was no universal set of items, attributes or indicators to measure the competitiveness of tourism destinations. It is assumed that the concept of destination competitiveness has its sources both in research on the competitiveness of spatial systems within the broadly understood regional studies stream and in the rich literature on the competitiveness of enterprises (Dwyer et al. 2001).

The first studies concerning the methodology of analysing destination competitiveness appeared in the literature only in the 1990s (Vanhove 2007). Initially, they were based on one of two sources: comparative analysis or strategic management. The approach rooted in comparative analysis is mainly based on a comparison of individual competitiveness factors, especially those for which comparable data is available, i.e. primarily elements related to natural and anthropogenic tourist attractions, infrastructure and communication accessibility. The advantage of this approach is the possibility of a relatively objective and unambiguous comparison of the level of competitiveness of many compared tourist destinations. At the same time, the disadvantage is excessive focus on elements classified as comparative advantage factors and excessive detachment from relatively difficult-to-measure elements related to the process of creating a tourist offer and perception of the tourist destination as a uniform entity. This approach was the basis for, among others, the Tourism Competitiveness Monitor (Gooroochurn and Sugiyarto 2005) and works analysing price competitiveness (Dwyer et al. 2000, Dwyer et al. 2002, Magnion et al. 2005). Basically, this trend includes works devoted to the multi-factor analysis of the tourist attractiveness of an area (Hu and Ritchie 1992, Hong-Bumm 1998).

In some definitions and approaches (Bordas 1994, d’Hautesserre 2000, Altinay and Kozak 2021), destination competitiveness is identified with its position in the tourism market and/or its market share, and the primary task for destination managers is the implementation of an efficient competitive strategy (Poon 1993), while in others (Ritchie and Crouch 2000, Dwyer and Kim 2003), the emphasis is primarily on the fact that all entities of a given socio-economic system permanently benefit from the development of tourism, essentially equating destination competitiveness with its sustainable development (Ritchie and Crouch 2005). Ritchie and Crouch (2005) define destination competitiveness as its ability to increase tourism expenditure, to increasingly attract visitors while providing them with satisfying, memorable experiences, and to do so in a profitable way while enhancing the well-being of destination residents

and preserving the natural capital of the destination for future generations. Further studies (Dwyer 2023) within this approach also underlined residents' well-being as a required outcome of destination competitiveness. Thus, in the first approach, the market is indicated as a place to verify a destination's competitiveness level. This approach is also described as dynamic (Neto et al. 2020). In contrast, in the second, a similar role is played by the processes taking place within this destination. The approach presented by Ritchie and Crouch (2005) has so far gained more followers, and the model of competitiveness of a tourist destination built by these authors is currently by far the most frequently cited in the literature on the subject (Vanhove 2007, Cronjé and du Plessis 2020). High acceptance for the Ritchie and Crouch model and the whole approach derived from the RBV theory does not change the fact that the final effect is often very challenging in practice implications and requires the development and analysis of a huge number of factors. For example, Crouch (2011) studied the relative significance of 36 attributes of destination competitiveness, which were based on the Ritchie and Crouch (2005) model. The Dwyer and Kim (2003) model lists even more - 83 indicators. Similarly, the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI) comprises 90 individual indicators distributed among 14 different pillars (World Economic Forum 2019), while Hanafiah and Zulkifly (2019) applied 41 indicators in their studies. According to numerous studies, factors that contribute to tourism destination competitiveness include, among others, openness to international trade, technology, infrastructure, social improvement in the quality of life of society, the environment, price competitiveness, and human resources (Tleuberdinova et al. 2024). According to Roman et al. (2020), the factors influencing tourism competitiveness might be divided into two broad types (Table 1): those that establish or maintain the capacity to be competitive and those that can create a competitive advantage (Tleuberdinova et al. 2024).

It is apparent that the models and approaches to destination competitiveness underlining the effectiveness of competition with other destinations and focusing on attracting visitors and the market position are at least partially rooted in Industrial Organisation (IO) theory and Porter's (1985) model of Five Competitive Forces. According to Dwyer and Kim (2003) destination competitiveness would appear to be linked to the ability of a destination to deliver goods and services that perform better than other destinations on those aspects of the tourism experience considered to be important by tourists. The other approaches are much more developed under the influence of the Resource-Based View (RBV). These models and approaches (Table 2), especially those of Ritchie and Crouch (2005), often use Porter's (1990) theory of competitive advantage of nations and the concept of competitive and comparative advantage. According to this concept, a location (country, region, city, etc.) may build its competitiveness on comparative and/or competitive advantage (Wardana and Sukaatmadja 2020, González-Rodríguez et al. 2023). The first contains all inherited assets indepen-

dent of being purposely shaped in the short term, while the second describes how the possessed assets are used (Ribes et al. 2011).

Table 1. The basic elements and relations in destination competitiveness models

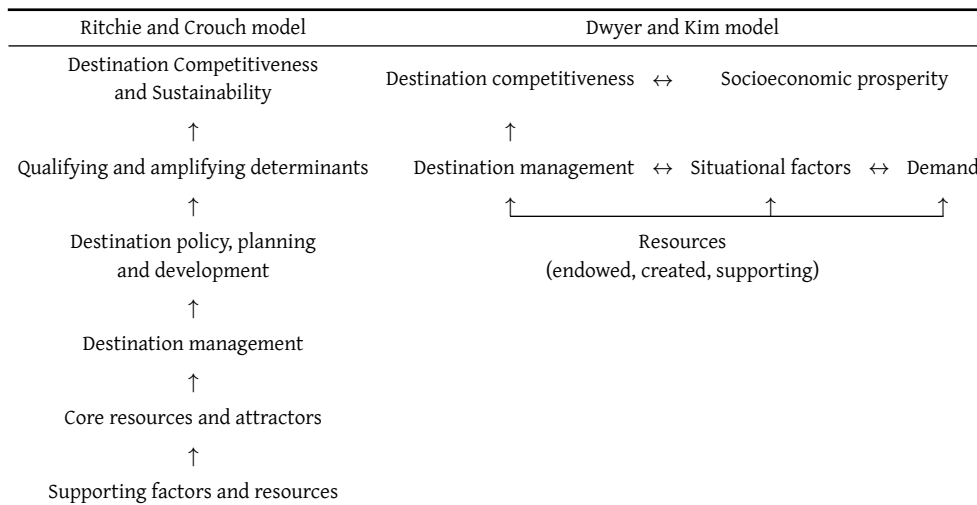


Table 2. Theories of the most cited models of tourist destination competitiveness

Theory	Main statements	Perception of competitiveness	Authors
Industrial organisation economics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Five forces of competition (the threat of new entrants, the bargaining power of suppliers, the bargaining power of buyers, the threat of substitute products or services, and rivalry among existing competitors) - Three core competitive strategies: cost leadership, differentiation, and focus. - Sources of competitive advantage are sought in the company’s environment, and above all in the closer environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Companies should compare their level of competitiveness with the competitors from their industry (competitiveness as relative value) 	Porter (1985)
Resource-based view	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A company's competitive advantage stems from its unique, valuable, rare, and inimitable resources, both tangible and intangible, rather than just its external market position. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Companies competing in the global environment should secure a generally high level of competitiveness (competitiveness as a non-relative value) 	Barney (1991), Prahalad and Hammel (1996), Teece et al. (1997)
Competitive advantage of nations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Competitive and comparative advantages as sources of competitiveness of national (regional and local) economies - Significance of clusters - Diamond of national competitive advantage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Locations need to build their competitive advantages based on a continuous improvement process taking place in economic entities located in a given national economy. - The wealth of nations is created, not inherited 	Porter (1990)

Methodology

The paper is conceptual in its nature, and relations already proven in contemporary literature are used to build a proposed model of tourism destination competitiveness. Instead of empirical confirmation, deductive reasoning is used. Deductive reasoning aims to justify the premises, from a broader understanding to a more particular one (Urano et al. 2023). In the presented paper, the final aim is to develop a new approach to understanding the tourism destination competitiveness issue by combining the dominating so far view based on industrial organisation economics and resource-based view. The central issue for the development of the proposed model was the extended literature review, collecting rationales for the model.

The rationales for the proposed model

Porter's idea of competitive and comparative advantages of an area is the starting point for the creation of the model (Table 3). To better reflect the situation in the tourism market, this terminology was adjusted, and the terms localisation and tourism offer were used. It is postulated that the comparative advantage of a destination is derived from its location in natural, social, cultural and economic space. Almost all tourist attractions playing a focal role in attracting visitors (apart from contemporarily purposely built attractions) can be put into this category (Zhang and Jensen 2007). This statement suggests that the comparative advantage of destinations should be perceived as more prominent than in the original Porter's concept. However, in the case of tourism destinations, there is one more crucial factor: their localisation regarding main markets emitting tourism traffic and transportation infrastructure (Prideaux 2000, Varela and Navaro 2015), and both are behind the destination's purposeful shaping. Based on a particular location and its features, stakeholders involved in its development (public authorities, local and international enterprises, DMOs, third-sector representatives and others) create the destination's tourism product (Buhalis 2000), which can be described as in Middleton's (1994) classical model.

A tourism destination, by its nature, differs from most commercially competitive products. The product of the tourism sector is an experience that is delivered by a destination to its visitors (Sugathan and Ranjan 2019). This experience is produced not by a single firm but by all players who affect the visitor experience, namely, tourism enterprises (such as hotels, restaurants, airlines, tour operators, etc.), other supporting industries and organizations (such as the arts, entertainment, sports, recreation, etc.) and DMOs (whether private, public, or private– public partnerships) (Ritchie and Crouch 2011). Still, tourism destinations compete in the tourism market similarly to companies (Żemła 2016). For example, according to Flagestad (2002), a destination is perceived as a collective producer in a firm-like structure coordinating complementary services according to the needs and preferences of the target market, segmented and

Table 3. Major rationales for the creation of the proposed model of tourist destination competitiveness

Rationale	Theoretical background	Consequences	References
Special approach to Porter's concept of competitive and comparative advantage in the case of tourist destinations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Competitive advantage of nations - Ritchie and Crouch's model of destination competitiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The comparative advantage of destinations should be perceived as more prominent than in the original Porter's concept. - Underlining the role of location as a base for a tourist destination's competitiveness 	Porter (1990), Ritchie and Crouch (2000)
Firm-like nature of competition between tourist destinations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A firm as a metaphor of a destination - Destination as a product 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A destination's success starts with attracting the required number of desired visitors and satisfying their needs 	Bieger (1998), Pechlaner (1999), Flagestad (2002), Zemla (2016)
The link between tourist attractiveness, destination choice, and perceived customer value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expected value theory - Tourist attractiveness concept - The choice set theory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prospective visitors chose their destinations relying on their perception of the value possible to get by visiting particular locations 	Woodside and Sherell (1977), Woodside and Lysonski (1989), Woodruff (1997), Decrop (2006), Sanchez et al. (2006), Kim and Perdue (2011)
The role of destination image in destination choices by travellers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The choice set theory - Destination image theory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prospective visitors do not create their decision setting out of the real products but rely on their limited and subjective knowledge. - Tourist destination marketers invest resources to create a favourable and desirable image. 	Woodside and Sherell (1977), Woodside and Lysonski (1989), Pike and Ryan (2004), Decrop (2006), Kim and Perdue (2011), Stylidis (2022), Yang et al. (2022)
The need to integrate the outcomes of the resource-based view, industrial organisation economics, when developing tourist destination competitiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resource-based view - Industrial organisation economics - Discussion between RBV and IO and attempts to integrate them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Building the competitiveness of a destination within the sector (IO) is insufficient, and it is necessary to manage the benefits and costs of tourism development in a way that secures the sustainable development of the destination (RBV) - Destinations should not only secure a generally high level of competitiveness (RBV), but the success of particular destinations starts with their ability to attract visitors in a competitive environment more effectively than their competitors do (IO) 	Porter (1985), Barney (1991), Teece et al. (1997), Cho (1998), Flagestad and Hope (2000)

marketed as one unit under one brand. Similarly, Pechlaner (1999) defines it as a process-oriented unit of competition, which must be able to provide products and offers for defined target groups and guest segments.

The management-rooted theory of destination competitiveness, focused on the firm-specific characteristics of destinations, emphasises the notion of competitive advantage to explain why some locations are more successful than others in the tourism market (Tleuberdinova et al. 2024). As a result, one can state that a destination's success starts with attracting the required number of desired visitors and satisfying their needs (Carolici et al. 2006). Consequently, destination competitiveness is rooted in consumers' market decisions, and the choice set theory (Woodside and Sherell 1977, Woodside and Lysonski 1989, Decrop 2006) is helpful for better understanding competition between destinations. In the case of the tourism market, customers make choices between products (destinations) which are totally or at least partially unknown to them (this is because the decision is made in temporal and spatial distance from the product consumption) (Pan et al. 2021). It means that the prospective visitors do not create their decision sets out of the real products but rely on their limited and subjective knowledge of them (Tapachai and Waryszak 2000, Serrano-Arcos et al. 2021). As a result, the destination image can be indicated as the central element of the destination competitiveness-establishing process (Kastenholz 2002). Therefore, tourist destination marketers invest resources to create a favourable and desirable image, encouraging potential travellers to visit or revisit their destination (Martins 2015).

According to the rich literature on the destination image, it can be analysed through its three components: cognitive, affective and conative (Pike and Ryan 2004, Styliadis 2022, Yang et al. 2022). Additionally, it is created based on different sources, which leads to highlighting the difference between organic and induced images (Wang et al. 2021, Karri and Dogra 2023). The first is out of destination control, while the other is the effect of purposefully established, mainly marketing, messages (Gartner 1989, Szubert et al. 2021). In the case of tourism destinations, the special role of organic image can be mentioned (Chon 1990, Wang et al. 2023). Destination brands, which are geographic names, are much better recognisable than corporate brands, and often, a destination attracting visitors does not start its marketing actions with a "tabula rasa". People receive their knowledge about different places around the world from their education process (Szubert and Żemła 2019), media, including social media (Kim et al. 2017, Sun et al. 2021) and other people (Jalilvand 2017). Destination image is susceptible to stereotypes (Rahayu et al. 2017, Karri and Dogra 2023). Additionally, the destination image is strongly influenced by images of a bigger territory it belongs to (such as a country or a region) and by the images of smaller units (cities, resorts) located inside (Szubert et al. 2021).

Customer expected value is influenced by destinations' images (expected benefits and costs of visiting particular places) that a particular prospective visitor possesses

(Albaladejo and Díaz-Delfa 2021). Customer choices are shaped by this perception of values (Decrop 2006) but also by his/her characteristics (social, psychological, and previous experiences) and by numerous situational factors (Lindberg et al. 2019). This relation between a destination, its location, offer and image and a visitor and his/her choices is fundamental for the destination to attract tourists and establish its position in competition with other destinations (Buhalis 2000). However, following Ritchie and Crouch (2005) and other RBV-based models, building the competitiveness of a destination within the sector is insufficient. It is necessary to manage the benefits and costs of tourism development in a way that secures the sustainable development of the destination and the competitiveness of local tourism businesses (Ritchie and Crouch 2005, Nowak and Ulfik 2018).

Results

The classical model of the production process of tourism services (Figure 1), as presented by Smith (1994), was taken as a starting point for constructing the proposed model. This model presents how a tourism product is created and helps to understand the steps in establishing an attractive offer of a destination. This attractive offer stands for a most important reason why tourists choose to visit the destination, which is the necessary condition, still not a sufficient one, of a destination's competitiveness.

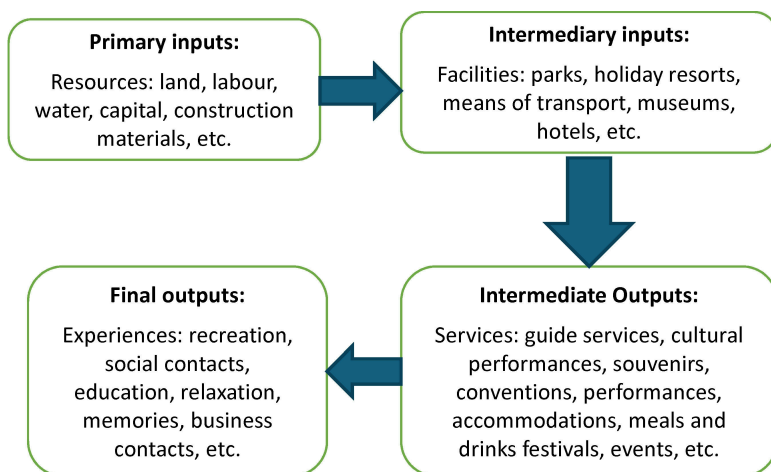


Figure 1. Smith (1994)'s model of the tourism production process. Source: own evaluation based on Smith (1994)

Smith (1994) distinguishes three stages of this process. Primary inputs to the system – resources such as land, labour, water, capital, construction materials, etc., must be transformed into intermediate inputs, which are all tourist facilities, such as parks, holiday resorts, means of transport, museums, hotels, etc. Only from them do we obtain

intermediate outputs, i.e. accommodation, catering, guide services, festival and museum services. The most important postulate of the cited model, however, is to indicate the need for further planned transformation of these elements, so that they become the final outputs of the production process - i.e. the consumer's experiences, which can be defined as recreation, education, business contacts, memories, adventure, etc. The first stage leads to the achievement of a specific service potential by a given entity, which reflects the tourism product being ready to be offered to visitors. The condition for starting the proper phase of service production is the emergence of a consumer. In contrast to other services, in tourism, the only external factor in the production of services is almost always the participation of the service recipient. Analysing the production of services in a tourist destination, it can be seen that this participation is also much broader than in most other service markets. The task of the first phase of the production of the tourist product is to create a broad offer consisting of many substitute and complementary elements, the acceptance of which by the consumers is reflected in their choices, i.e. the decisions to visit a specific destination. However, the fundamental task of the consumer in the process of product production is not only to devote his/her time and effort to the consumption of the offered services, but above all to choose from among the services and forms of spending time offered on site, those that best suit his/her preferences and possibilities. The tourist not only chooses which elements of the offer proposed to him by the service providers he will use, but also decides when and how. In addition, his/her final experience related to undertaking a tourist trip depends to a large extent on his/her attitude, behaviour and emotional involvement, which in Smith (1994)'s model is identified with the tourist product, which reflects the last, third stage of Smith (1994)'s tourist product production process.

The Smith (1994)'s model of tourism production can be also useful in understanding how the competitiveness of a destination is being established. Particular phases of the production process illustrate how the destination and its product gain their ability to attract tourists and build their value proposal. The basis for creating a high expected value by the tourist destination is therefore resources that are shaped by the natural and historic conditions. They are related primarily to particular location. They constitute the primary inputs to the production process. It can be assumed that these conditions are the result of the location of the tourist destination in a specific place in geographical, social and economic space. Location is to considered also in relation to individual tourist traffic emission markets, other tourist areas and traditional communication routes. All these features of a location are permanent and independent of the current activities of entities managing tourism. We also note that, unlike corporate markets, in the case of competition between destinations, from the very beginning, there will be privileged areas and those whose location makes it difficult to build a competitive tourist offer.

Nevertheless, the location and its features itself does not determine the value expected by the potential tourists. Equally important is the effective use of a given location. Creation of a competitive tourist offer depends on both the intentional and unintentional actions of all entities shaping the tourist destination product, as well as on the fixed features of the location. These actions concern both the real sphere related to the broadly understood development of tourism space, including tourism investments, planning and policy, as well as the information sphere, related to, among others, the flow of information between entities co-creating the destination product and the promotion of the destination among potential investors. The large number of entities participating in the process of shaping the destination product and the complex relationships between them, as well as a number of other features of the destination product, mean that in most cases there is no single entity that would fully control, steer and bear responsibility for shaping the destination offer.

In order to create the high value expected by potential visitors, it is also necessary to appropriately disseminate information about the offer. This should be aimed at establishing a favourable image of the destination and its tourist product. The destination choice depends primarily on the destination-specific package of benefits, the provision of which is expected by a visitor in connection with the stay in the destination. This perception is rooted in the destination's image. It should be remembered that the image depends on both the fixed elements of the location, the actual tourist offer and purposeful and accidental actions aimed at shaping it. It also depends on a number of uncontrollable and difficult to predict events, including decisions by celebrities, artists, journalists and other media workers, which make information about a given area appear in the media or in art independently of the promotional policy conducted in the destination. The image of a specific destination is also influenced by the image of larger tourist areas in which it is located, which, in a sense, is also a result of its location. As a response, destination managers and marketers put special attention on destination branding (Szondi 2007, Vesalon and Crețan 2019) and studying negative stereotypes that may negatively influence the destination image (Szubert and Zemla 2019, Szubert et al. 2021, Gajić et al. 2023).

The value expected by the consumer is primarily the effect of the first phase of production of tourist services in Smith (1994)'s model. Therefore, offering an expected value higher than that of competitors may have its source in three basic elements. Firstly, it may be a higher level of primary inputs than in the case of competitors. Secondly, it may be a higher level of perfection of the process of their transformation into secondary inputs, allowing for the creation of a better tourist offer. Finally, remembering that expected value is a specific idea of what a tourist can expect in a given destination, and a potential visitor makes a comparison not based on real facts, but on his incomplete knowledge and ideas about them, the source of a higher assessment of

expected value may be the development of a desired image of the destinations’ product in the eyes of visitors.

The model of destination competitiveness

Based on the above argument, it is possible to build a model showing the basic relationships leading to the competitiveness of a tourist destination (Figure 2). The expected value, and indirectly the competitiveness of a tourist destination, is influenced by three main factors: location, destination’s offer and the destination image whereby the location indirectly influences the expected value through its impact on the tourist offer and on the image, which is also dependent on the offer. Based on these three elements, a tourist choosing a destination will assess the expected customer value offered by individual tourist destinations. However, different people will make different decisions in different situations based on assessing the value offered by a tourist destination. This will be influenced by both situational factors and the characteristics of the buyer himself/herself, such as financial, time and informational limitations, as well as psychophysical, political or legal factors. Situational factors may include the current mood, interactions with people from the surroundings, current weather, and information provided by the media at a given moment. These factors can cause a shift in the hierarchy of importance of individual selection criteria, and also affect the particular focus on the consequences of the latest information obtained by the potential tourist making the choice.

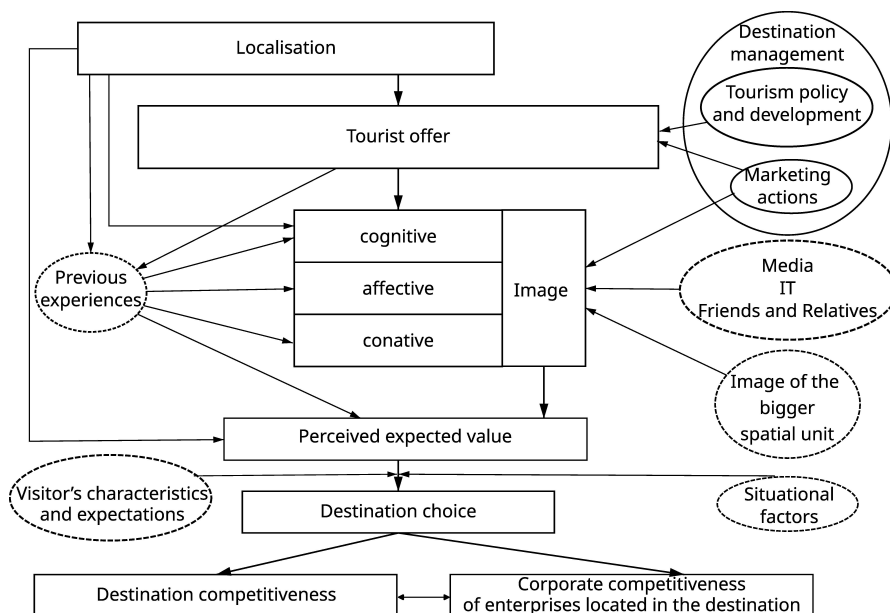


Figure 2. The proposed model of tourist destination competitiveness

Discussions

The presented model of destination competitiveness offers a new approach to the issue as it combines approaches typical for the industrial organisation economics (Porter 1985) and for the resource-based view (Hamel and Prahalad 1994). It is based on works published so far, and enriches these works by the simultaneous use of concepts often perceived as contrary (Flagestad and Hope 2001). That was possible by underlining consumers' point of view and making the destination image the central issue of the model. Even though such an approach had not been offered by the literature, all relations building the model were already studied and proven. That is the reason why the model can be presented as a theoretical construct without detailed empirical justification. The approach to destination competitiveness presented in the model is expected to be useful for a better understanding of the phenomenon for both practitioners and theoreticians of destination management.

Practitioners, especially destination policymakers, may benefit from the model by developing long-term strategies and improving destination performance (Baggio et al. 2010), acknowledging the role of localisation, offer, and image in the creation of visitors' expected value (Pandža Bajš 2015). Especially, the role of destination image is to be underlined as prospective visitors do not build their expectations on the real offer but on their perception of it (Gallarza et al. 2002, Kastenholz 2002). For scientists, the model is the next step towards a more comprehensive understanding of relations conditioning the long-term success of a destination (Bain 2009, Lewis-Cameron and Brown-Williams 2022).

Conclusions

Similar to any other publication, the presented paper is influenced by several limitations, which indicate the direction of future studies. Destination competitiveness is an extremely complex issue, and any model presenting it must rely on significant simplifications. This is also the case with the presented model. It is focused on its core, constituted by the relation of localisation, offer, destination image, expected value, and competitiveness, but the factors influencing these elements are only mentioned and need to be further developed, especially as most of them are also studied in detail in the literature.

The presented model also does not repeat the content of the most prominent previous destination competitiveness models, such as the Ritchie and Crouch (2000, 2005) and Dwyer and Kim (2003) ones, which focus on the relation between the competitiveness and sustainable development of a destination. Offering a high expected value to prospective visitors is a prerequisite condition of destination competitiveness. However, it should never be perceived as the only or sufficient condition. The

destination's sustainable development must also be secured. A clear illustration of the relation between localisation, offer, image, expected value, and destination sustainability, strongly underlined by Ritchie and Crouch (2000, 2005), is the most desired outcome of prospective studies. The question of transferring the market success into the long-term sustainability of a destination is the key. However, the difficulty of this task results not only from the complexity of the term "destination competitiveness", but also from the fact that destination sustainability itself is differently understood (Hunter 1997, Jørgensen 2024) and difficult to operationalise (Butler 2005, McCool et al. 2013).

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