

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ABOUT TOURISM DESTINATION COMPETITIVENESS

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Abstract: *Identifying the factors that determine the degree of competitiveness of a tourist destination implies a sustained effort on the part of the researchers considering the complexity of tourist phenomenon. The competitiveness of a tourist destination is given by the following features: natural and anthropic resources, specific and general infrastructure, the offer of tourist services, tourist destination management, adopted marketing policies, care towards the environment, the cooperation between authorities and private sector, marketing conditions. The main purpose of this paper is to provide a theoretical perspective regarding tourist competitiveness in the sense of presenting the different approaches of the concept in the last three decades as well as illustrating patterns of tourist competitiveness.*

Keywords: *tourism destination competitiveness; determinants of destination competitiveness; factors; competitiveness model.*

JEL Classification: *M1; Z300; Z310; Z320; Z33; Z38; M31.*

1. Introduction

Tourist destination competitiveness represents a thoroughly examined area among the interested parties (national and international public institutions as well as offerers of tourist services). Establishing and harnessing the competitive benefits of each tourist destination represents the main factor which ensures the development of the tourist sector in a certain region, area.

The interest for identifying the competitive benefits in all fields of activity is pointed out in the current conditions of the market economy, and within the tourism industry this aspect is due mainly to the change of tourist purchase behaviour (access to information, introducing in the international tourist circuit tourist destinations not easily accessible in the past, the fragmentation of annual leave, the desire to live new and unique experiences, the high level of population mobility in the area). Competitiveness represents the ability of an entity to cope with competition; therefore analyzing the competitiveness of a tourist destination can be done only by comparing it to one or more tourist destinations which aim at the same segment of tourists.

Porter (1990) states that "A nation's competitiveness depends on the capacity of its industry to innovate and upgrade". and "Differences in national values, culture, economic structure, institutions and histories all contribute to competitive success" (Porter, 1990, p.73). The statements formulated previously help outlining the major factors of economic competitiveness. It is obvious that a competitive tourist destination sums up a series of elements that lead to the success of tourist activities as follows: the existence of natural and anthropic resources, general and specific infrastructure, the level of accessibility of the tourist area/region, the skilled workforce, the price-quality ratio, the safety level, the care for the environment, tourist destination management, marketing policies, the marketing of tourist services that meet the needs of the tourists, the attitude of the locals, national government policies, sustainable partnerships between the state institutions and not least the orientation towards the needs of the tourist.

2. Methodology of the research

This paper has the following objectives: offering a theoretical perspective regarding the concept of tourist competitiveness, presenting frequently used patterns of tourist competitiveness in expert studies in the last three decades, identifying new areas of research in the field of tourist competitiveness.

The time frame of the research March – April 2020.

The stages covered by this research are the following: studying published literature selecting the relevant works to the examined topic, centralizing the most important approaches regarding the possible areas of research in the field of tourist competitiveness, issuing of conclusions.

3. Tourism destination competitiveness

In the attempt to define the concept of tourist competitiveness, the authors of specialized literature works have formulated over the years a series of approaches to the concept which shows the heterogeneous nature of this determinant of tourist demand. Goffi (2013) formulates that "Competitiveness has been associated in the tourism literature as a critical factor for the success of tourist destinations". (Goffi, 2013,p.122) This point of view indicates the growing interest of researchers in associating competitiveness with the success of tourist activities in a certain region, area.

Buhalis (2000) defines competitiveness as "Destination's ability to create and integrate value-added products that sustain its resources while maintaining market position relative to competitors". (Buhalis, 2000, p. 240). According to the definition given previously tourist destination competitiveness represents its ability to face competition by means of reasonable use of the resources. This point of view reinforces the idea formulated by Ritchie and Crouch (2003) according to which "Competitiveness without sustainability is illusory" (Ritchie and Crouch, 2003, p. 9). The sustainability of tourist destination has been stated as an essential condition for the performance of a tourist destination since the 1970s. This is due to the fact that

once the tourist circulation has intensified it is quite obvious the need to preserve the environment and use natural resources rationally.

Dwyer & Kim (2003) define the concept of competitiveness as being "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" (Dwyer & Kim, 2003, p. 375). Unlike the definitions mentioned before here the tourist experience is formulated as a determinant of the tourist competitiveness.

Poon (1993) puts forward four directions of ensuring the competitiveness of a tourist destination "put the environment first"; "make tourism a lead sector"; "strengthen the distribution channels in the marketplace"; "build a dynamic private sector" (Poon, 1993, p. 24).

Another definition given by Enright & Newton (2004) points out the necessity of an accumulation of factors (tourist services, support services) which influences the competitiveness of a tourist destination.

Cvelbar & al. (2015) offers a different approach to tourist competitiveness "we define destination competitiveness as the total tourism contribution to GDP per tourism employee" (Cvelbar & al., 2015, p. 2). The emphasis is laid on the economic side of the tourist activity which leads to population prosperity and welfare. Similarly, Cvelbar & al. (2015) highlights the fact that "In developing countries, the most important driver of destination competitiveness, alongside destination management, is tourism infrastructure" (Cvelbar & al., 2015, p. 7).

Cracolici & al. (2008) states that "In the light of the competitive behaviour in the tourism market, regions have to maximize their market share given the resources available".(Cracolici & al., 2008, p.327).

This point of view resumes the approach formulated by Buhalis (2008) stressing the efficient harnessing of resources. Mihalic̃ (2013) considers that "Tourism destination supply encompasses a multidimensional concept that includes not only tourism economic goods, such as overnight stays and entertainment, but also environmental attractors that serve as a resource base for tourism development and, in many cases, are a primary attraction for potential tourism demand" (Mihalic̃, 2013, p. 615). This approach points out the importance of tourist resources either natural or anthropic as an essential condition for practicing tourist activities.

The different approaches presented above draw attention to some relevant aspects for the

success of tourist activities: the capacity/ability to manage a tourist destination by means of the efficient use of its resources thus leading to the economic prosperity of an area, of a region or even of a country. The definitions taken from the literature point the need of asking the following questions: What are the main factors of tourist competitiveness? Are there any unanimous accepted indicators in measuring tourist competitiveness? Does the sustainability of a tourist destination ensure its competitiveness as well? In order for a tourist destination to be competitive is there also the need for it to be attractive for the tourists? Does the ability of a tourist destination to attract more tourists ensures competitiveness in a medium term or in a long term?

4. Competitiveness models

Scientific works referring to the study of a tourist destination's competitiveness operate with a series of patterns that indicate a vast list of features/elements regarding the estimation of the competitive degree.

Porter (1990) formulates a set of four competitiveness features: "factor conditions", "demand condition", "related and supporting industries", "firm strategy, structure and rivalry" (Porter, 1990, p. 78). Likewise, Crouch & Ritchie (1990) elaborate another pattern of tourist competitiveness which includes four determinants respectively nineteen features: "qualifying determinants": "location", "dependencies", "safety", "cost"; "destination management": "resource stewardship", "marketing", "organization", "information", "service"; "core resources & attractors": "physiography", "culture & history", "market ties", "mix of activities", "special events", "superstructure"; "supporting factors": "infrastructure", "accessibility", "facilitating resources", "enterprise" (Crouch & Ritchie, 1990, p. 147).

Dwyer & Kim (2003) have developed the following indicators of tourist competitiveness: "endowed resources" ("natural", "culture"/"heritage"), "created resources" ("tourism infrastructure", "range of activities", "shopping", "entertainment", "special events"/"festivals"), "supporting factors" ("general infrastructure", "quality of service", "accessibility of destination", "hospitality", "market ties"), "destination management" ("destination management organization", "destination marketing management", "destination policy" and "planning development", "human resource development", "environmental management"), "situational conditions" ("competitive (micro) environment", "destination location", "global (macro) environment", "price competitiveness", "safety/security"), "demand factors", "market performance indicators" ("visitor statistics (numbers)", "visitor statistics" (expenditure), "contribution of tourism to economy", "indicators of economic prosperity", "tourism investment", "price competitiveness indices" and "government support for tourism") (Dwyer & Kim, 2003, pp. 400 – 405).

Hassan (2000) formulates four determinants of tourist competitiveness: "comparative advantage", "demand orientation", "industry structure", "environmental commitment" (Hassan, 2000, p. 242).

The variables/ features stated by the authors of the various scientific works in order to estimate the competitiveness of a tourist destination have been exploited by means of some questionnaires /surveys (Loureiro & Ferreira, 2014; Mihalic, 2013; Goffi, 2013; Zehrer & al., 2016; Chen & al., 2011; Goffi & Cucculelli, 2012; Kozak & Rimmington, 1999; Cracolici & Nijkamp, 2008; Chen & al., 2014).

The study of these papers shows that there are not any unanimously accepted and applied indicators in estimating the degree of competitiveness of a tourist destination, hence the residing the necessity of a thorough study of this matter. This would imply formulating, selecting and validating the same performance indicators for all analyzed tourist destinations.

The difficulty of establishing such indicators is also given by the fact that the appreciation of some qualities /features stick to the tourist's choice. Thus a series of

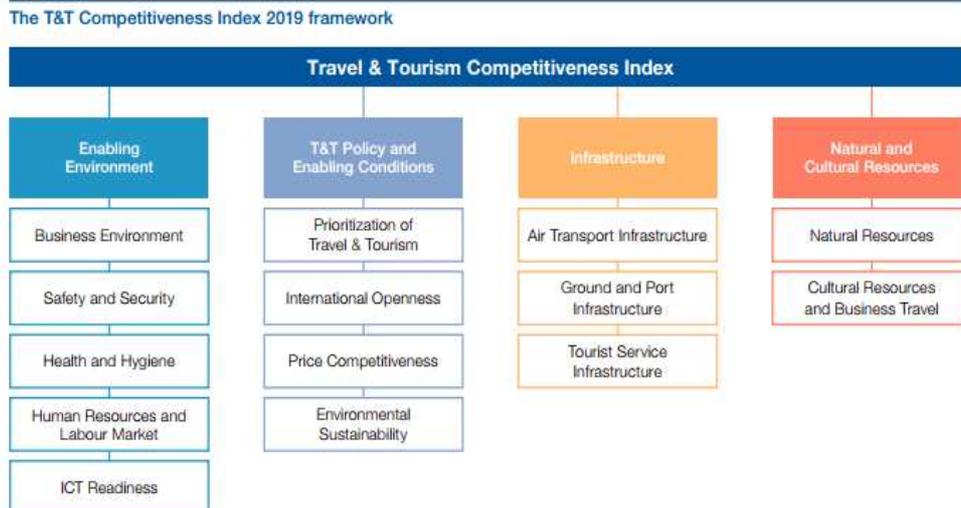
errors can emerge caused by: the previous experiences of the tourist, the tourist's current mood, the opinion of the close ones, the involvement/ superficiality of the tourist in appreciating some attributes, allotted time, assumptions.

Figure 1: Tourism destination competitiveness models

Autor	Determinants of destination competitiveness
Crouch & Ritchie, 1990	"qualifying determinants" "destination management" "core resources & attractors" "supporting factors"
Porter, 1993	"factor conditions" "demand condition" "related and supporting industries" "firm strategy, structure and rivalry"
Hassan, 2000	"comparative advantage" "demand orientation" "industry structure" "environmental commitment"
Dwyer & Kim, 2003	"endowed resources" "created resources" "supporting factors" "destination management" "situational conditions" "demand factors" "market performance indicators"

Source: Porter, 1990, p. 78; Crouch & Ritchie, 1990, p. 147; Hassan, 2000, p. 242; Dwyer & Kim, 2003, pp. 400 – 405;

Figure 2: Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index



Source: World Economic Forum, The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2019 Travel and Tourism at a Tipping Point, 2019. http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_TTCR_2019.pdf, [11 Apr 2020].

By examining the indicators of tourist competitiveness presented above, one can notice that there are not any significant differences in assessing the attributes of a tourist destination within three decades. Starting with the 1990s to the present day certain elements prevail: natural and cultural resources, infrastructure, and destination management. From here we can deduce that it is quite difficult to establish other indicators in order to quantify the attractiveness degree of a tourist destination on one hand, and on the other hand the essential needs of tourists have remained the same. However, a more detailed analysis of tourist purchase behavior would help to elaborate some indicators regarding tourist expectations and experiences related to spare time spending in a certain tourist destination.

5. Limitations and Further Research

The limits of this research derive from the fact that the review of the specialized literature is not an exhaustive one, the current paper displaying only a part of the approaches formulated in the last three decades and represents only an attempt to illustrate the possible differences, changes in approaching the concept of tourist competitiveness. In the future the conducting of some studies regarding the importance of the performance attributes in choosing a tourist destination on categories of tourists (for instance age, status, profession, income) would be appropriate.

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