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Tourism product as a factor of competitiveness of the Serbian economy and experiences of other countries

THEMATIC PROCEEDINGS
II

UNIVERSITY OF KRAGUJEVAC
FACULTY OF HOTEL MANAGEMENT AND TOURISM IN VRNJAČKA BANJA

EMPIRICAL MODELS AS A METHOD FOR MEASURING COMPETITIVE POSITION IN TOURISM

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Abstract

In the increasingly saturated market, the development and promotion of tourism destinations should be guided by an analytical framework relating to the concept of competitiveness. The answer to the question of how to achieve success lies in addressing tourism destination competitiveness. This paper examines the competitiveness of Serbian tourism. This analysis is primarily based on one of the most popular competitiveness indexes, The Global Competitiveness Index, developed by the World Economic Forum. This model is used to measure competitiveness, and as such is the only basis for comparison of the competitiveness of countries in tourism.
The aim of this paper is to analyze the relevant items on which they are based globally recognized conceptual models for establishing the competitive position of tourism destinations. This study presents a method of establishing competitiveness sets for international tourism destinations by using both quantitative and qualitative data collection. Methodological issues and limitations are also discussed.

Key words: *competitiveness, competitiveness Index, empirical models, competitive position, tourism destination*
JEL clasification: *L83, N17*

Introduction

Being a successful destination implies that its overall attractiveness and integrity of experiences offered to visitors should be equal or exceed those offered by other competitive destinations. In the increasingly saturated market, the development and promotion of tourism destinations should be guided by an analytical framework relating to the concept of competitiveness.

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The international environment is nowadays increasingly demanding and fast changing, so is the pressure of competition which companies and countries in the global market growing are exposed to.

The answer to the question of how to achieve success in the implementation of the development of tourism destinations lies in addressing its competitiveness. Competitiveness is the ability of destinations to successfully compete with their main rivals in the world to create wealth above the average, to maintain over time, with the least social and environmental costs. Many industries that are involved in the planning and development of the destinations require the use of a model of competitiveness that controls that relations between all the actors involved in the design and creation of added value, comply with the resource destination, at the same time maintaining the market position compared to other competitors. This paper examines the competitiveness of Serbian tourism and the analysis is primarily based on one of the most popular competitiveness index The Global Competitiveness Index, developed by the World Economic Forum. Model Travel and Tourism Competitiveness World Economic Forum is the only model which is now used in practice for measuring competitiveness, and as such it is the only basis for comparison of the competitiveness of countries in tourism.

The aim of this paper is to critically examine the importance of individual empirical model developed for the purpose of determining the comparative degree of competitiveness of tourism activities in some countries and highlight the limitations to the methodological and conceptual nature.

Competitiveness in tourism

Tourism has taken a prominent place in all spheres of economic and social progress which requires serious effort of economic and social planning. At the same time, this status brings many obligations that include the need to significantly improve the quality of information used in planning and decision-making, the establishment of political consensus on the main issues relating to economic, social and environmental well-being of destinations, and finally to develop an approach to competitiveness.

In order for the tourism sector to be profitable in the long term, its development and management should be in accordance with the new model of competitiveness (Ritchie & Crouch, 1993). Competitiveness is now widely accepted as the most important factor determining the long-term success of organizations, industries, regions and countries (Kozak & Rimmington, 1999, p. 274).

”The strategy of competitiveness is the search for a favorable competitive position in the market. It aims to establish a profitable and sustainable position in relation to the forces that determine the competitiveness of the industry“ (Porter, 1990, p. 14). Forces and factors that determine the competitiveness of the tourism industry is an area that is not sufficiently investigated (Dwyer et al., 2003, p. 63). In tourism, many authors apply the concept of competitiveness to different areas, such as economics, marketing, strategy, price, quality and customer satisfaction.

In order to determine the competitiveness of the tourism sector, we should point out two important facts (Kunst, 2009, p. 130):

- Unlike other (traditional) economic activities, "tourism product" represents the collective category (overnight stay, food and beverage services, entertainment services, recreational services, trade, etc.), or
- Tourism product is always tied to a particular destination, from which it can be concluded that the competitiveness of the tourism sector is reduced, in fact, the competitiveness broadly or narrowly construed tourism destinations.

Competitiveness of tourism destinations

Tourism destinations are the central element of tourism. Characteristics of destinations can be classified into two groups (Laws, 1995, p. 26). First, it is its primary function, which includes the destination climate, ecology, culture and traditional architecture. Secondary function of other destinations includes dedicated elements for the development of tourism (hotels, catering, transport and entertainment). Together, these two groups contribute to the overall attractiveness of a tourism destination.

Furthermore, Laws says (1995) that the experience of other tourism destinations that are directly competitive, their perception of the quality and overall experience have a significant role on the retrial for the same destination or recommending to friends (p. 28). Implicitly or explicitly, tourists make comparisons of facilities, attractions and quality of services for various destinations. Discussing the issue of competitiveness of tourism destinations is based on the view that the experience, i.e.

experience acquired by tourists in the tourism destination of the product is fundamental in tourism (Popesku, 2008: p. 29). Consequently, competition in tourism focuses on tourism destination.

Factors determining the competitiveness of the micro and macro levels represent the logical starting point in the approach to the issue of competitiveness in tourism, regardless of the fact that it presents a specific economic tourism area which combines a number of interrelated economic activities. For this reason, the level of any tourism destination is faced with a need to provide more comprehensive tourism value chain (Yilmaz & Bititci, 2006, p. 343). It should also be noted that the tourism product is always tied to a destination.

The competitiveness of tourism destinations is the ability of a tourism destination to contribute to the economic prosperity that will enable a better quality of life and ensure high standard of living destinations (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999, p. 137). The same authors state that the competitiveness of tourism destinations can be considered as its ability to increase tourist spending to attract significantly more tourists by providing them with experiences that they meet and which are remembered and at the same time it does so in a profitable way by improving the welfare of inhabitants of destinations and storage of natural treasure for future generations (Ritchie & Crouch, 2005, p. 2).

Poon (1993) says that destinations should follow some key principles in order to be competitive and ensure the development of new and sustainable tourism - "in the first place to put the environment; set tourism as a leading sector; strengthen the distribution channels in the market; and create a dynamic private sector" (p. 24). Often, the private sector controls the operation of companies that provide tourism product and are supported by the public sector.

The research of today’s global competition reveals that changes in its components are radically changing its structure. The implication of this restructuring, imposed by those who are responsible for the management of destinations, is to do business applying the rules in accordance with the variable nature of competitiveness. Although the factors that determine the attractiveness of a destination may be relatively constant, the nature of competition requires constant review of the capabilities of destination to maintain or improve its position in a competitive market.

Competition among tourism destinations is just one manifestation of a broader phenomenon in the new economic competition (Ash & Wolfe, 2001), even in the wider phenomenon of human competition, which includes social, technological, cultural and political spheres.

Empirical models

In this paper, we will focus on the two models which are relevant in understanding the factors which directly influence the determination of the positions of the market place and which appear in the literature. These are the empirical model - Model Gooroochurn competitiveness and Sugiyarto model and the World Economic Forum.

The attempts to measure destination performance have limited success (Vengesayi, 2003). According to Kozak and Rimmington (Kozak & Rimmington, 1999), the competitiveness of the destination can be judged and evaluated quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative performance indicators of a destination can be data on arrivals and tourist spending, employment created in tourism development, while qualitative indicators assess the various aspects and features of destinations which tourists compare with those of other destinations they visited.

The lack of comparable national data that could be used to assess the competitive position of countries in the world caused WTTC in 2001 to pass the index of competitiveness of the tourism sector, similar by its nature to the one developed by the World Economic Forum's for the ranking of global competitiveness of countries (Zečević, 2011).

Several empirical models of destination competitiveness have been developed in order to facilitate international comparison of the achieved quality level, determine the competitive position of individual countries as a tourism destination and, based on that, establish conditions for maintaining adequate destination policy.

Gooroochurn and Sugiyarto Model

This model is based on 23 indicators, which are divided into eight categories (Gooroochurn & Sugiyarto 2005, p. 27):

1. Price competitiveness,
2. Free stock,
3. Technology,

4. Infrastructure,
5. Benefits of tourism,
6. Social development,
7. The environment and
8. Human resources.

Those categories represent a methodological framework known as WTTC competitiveness monitor.

The survey included 200 countries. The methodological approach is oriented solely on publicly available and mutually comparable data previously published in the relevant publications of the World Bank, UN (United Nations) and UNDP (United Nations Development Programme).

In order to express the degree of competitiveness of tourism destinations in relation to the other, all the individual indicators of destination competitiveness are presented in the form of an index. Further, the indices are classified according to individual regions into a single index for each of the eight categories separated. Using eight aggregate indices, policy makers in each destination can easily identify their own strong and weak competitive areas and accordingly make strategic business decisions.

The methodology used in this model can be described in three steps (Kunst, 2009, p. 145):

- First, formula for the calculation of each of the 23 indicators of the destination competitiveness is defined.
- Second, undertake the calculation (statistical) of the original value of each of the 23 indicators as well as normalization of the competitiveness with respect to other countries in the sample using the following formula:

$$\textit{normalization} = \frac{\textit{real value} - \textit{minimum value}}{\textit{largest value} - \textit{minimum value}}$$

- In the third step, the arithmetic mean of the indicator is found, and aggregate index for each of the eight categories assigned.

The authors suggested the methodological approach which establishes a unique index by calculating a weighted arithmetic mean, where the weight factor for each of the eight categories is calculated using a factor analysis.

World Economic Forum competitiveness model

Published every two years, the Report provides a strategic tool for both business and governments: it allows for cross-country comparison of the drivers of T&T competitiveness, for benchmarking countries' policy progress and for making investment decisions related to business and industry development. It also offers an opportunity for the T&T industry to highlight the challenges to T&T competitiveness that require policy attention to national policymakers, and to generate multi-stakeholder dialogue on formulating appropriate policies and action (TTC Report, 2015, p. 3).

The analysis of competitiveness in the concept of the World Economic Forum, although not the first to deal with this issue, is a widely accepted concept in which economists are often invited. However, unlike the others, this concept tends to diversity and detailing, taking variables in economics, management and other disciplines, not analyzing whether they are unnecessary, relevant, interrelated (i.e. preferring to aggregate all the variables; namely, it is looking for the ones that are most relevant). This, to some extent, it is not surprising, given that the concept of competitiveness (and strategies associated with it) comes from the business literature, specifically from what is known as Porter's "diamond of competitiveness". It is believed that countries operate at relatively similar principle as well as companies - fighting for markets and resources, measuring competitiveness by observing the relative market shares, innovation and growth, competitiveness and use strategies to improve their market performance. There are few researchers who realized that such a broad set of ideas about competitiveness only makes sense for specific activities and markets, i.e. it sounds meaningful that a country is less competitive in a specific activity, and more in another, but they argued that as the economy has become more or less competitive is not properly (Manić, 2008, p. 32).

Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index - TTCI measures the success of some countries in the sector of travel and tourism, and is divided into four subindexes, which include:

1. Enabling environment,
2. T&T Policy and Enabling Conditions,
3. Infrastructure, and
4. Natural and Cultural Resources.

Within these categories monitored by several factors, there are pillars of competitiveness (14 in total) and 90 individual indicators distributed among different pillars:

- Parameters considered within the first category are business environment, safety and security, health and hygiene, human resources and ICT readiness.
- The second category includes the prioritization of travel and tourism, international openness, price competitiveness and environmental sustainability.
- The third category covers air transport infrastructure, ground and port infrastructure and tourism service infrastructure.
- The fourth category includes factors such as natural and cultural resources.

Each of these pillars is composed of a series of individual variables obtained from the annual survey of the opinions of the Director of the World Economic Forum, as well as quantitative data from various available sources, international organizations and experts (such as: IATA, IUCN, UNWTO, WTTC, UNCTAD, UNESCO).

In terms of methodology this model involves three steps (Kunst, 2009, p. 147):

- First, define the relevant indicators for each of the 14 selected pillars of competitiveness, and the manner of their determination,
- Then, determine the value of the quantitative and qualitative indicators, where qualitative indicators are evaluated by the Likert scale of 1 (worst possible) to 7 (best possible), while the actual value of the quantitative indicators necessary to normalize is to be comparable to the qualitative indicators. For this purpose, the following formula is used:

$$normalization = 6 \times \frac{real\ value - minimum\ value}{largest\ value - minimum\ value} + 1$$

- Finally, in the third step, the application of the mean normalized quantitative and qualitative indicators of established originally, establishes the average value of each of the 14 columns of competition, each of the 4 categories, namely total evaluation of each country. The ranking of individual tourism destination is determined by and associated with the established values of the average.

The limitations of existing models

In practice, applied empirical models determining the competitive position of tourism destinations come down to the relatively superficial and not too relevant on the world ranking table competitiveness, mainly due to reliance on a large number of indicators of socio-economic development, as well as the neglect of the tourism experience.

What is the problem TTCI index, is the fact that all the determinants of competitiveness are treated equally. However, the same determinants have different relative importance to different destinations. The essence is that the significance of the individual factors of competitiveness can be varied depending on the place of the production mix and the target market segment (Zečević, 2011).

There are almost no destinations that compete with each other in all market segments. The large, developed countries with a broad resource base and diversified structure of the attraction can offer tourism experiences suited for a large number of market segments, which is not the case with other countries. These countries need to target only those segments whose requirements can be met in accordance with the scope and nature of its resources. It is, therefore, necessary to identify those competing attributes that are critical to the individual, selected segments of the market (Crouch, 2007).

Analysis of Competitiveness Index of Travel and Tourism shows that the developed countries are ranked higher than developing ones. This is inevitable, because developed countries have better general conditions for development in general. However, if you compare the ranks to the level of development, some countries are better able to create conditions for tourism development than others. Nevertheless, the impression remains that TTCI favors developed economies and insufficiently reflects the progress achieved in developing countries (Zečević, 2011).

There is a small number of papers which connect the broader concept of the competitiveness of travel destinations from their development and evolution, as well as those which indicate the differences in the importance of some of the key variables in the competitiveness of the different stages of development (Wilde & Cox, 2008).

An alternative approach using a model of competitiveness

This begs the question whether it is possible to determine the competitiveness of a tourism destination in comparison to another tourism destination. The answer to this question could be yes, assuming that the destination determining competitiveness is approached to a fundamentally different way.

Determination of the competitiveness of a tourism destination could be implemented in two interrelated steps (Kunst, 2009, p. 151): First, it would be necessary to determine the competitiveness of integrated destination mix of experiences that then, in the second step, determine the competitiveness of individual tourism products.

The proposed approach implies that the competitiveness of a destination evaluated in relation to the perceived "ideal state" of certain factors of destination is to be pursued. However, since that time, the perception of an "ideal state" is gradually changing; it is expected that the evaluation of competitive ability of individual countries more or less approaches the ideal state, which could not be reached (Kunst, 2009, p. 152).

Analysis of the competitive position of Serbia as a tourism destination through WEF model

In this paper, we analyze the competitive position of Serbia as a tourism destination through the model of competitiveness by the World Economic Forum which calculates the index of competitiveness of tourism and travel.

Serbia as a tourism destination, according to the level of tourism development, is under its realistic possibilities. Without looking into the reasons of such a situation, it should be noted that the pace of further development depends on a number of factors, where the development of awareness and commitment to the development of tourism of key stakeholders from the private and public sectors are at the forefront when it comes to importance. In any case, the private sector should take the initiative in improving their competitiveness, innovation and improving the quality of services, and, in that respect, human resources development. The private sector needs to develop and improve their representative bodies/associations for better cooperation and coordination with each other and with companies and institutions outside the tourism sector, but also with institutions and public sector organizations (Zečević, 2005, p. 18).

Trends in international tourism embodied primarily in the exceptional competition and the tendency of many countries to achieve development goals through the development of tourism indicate that the abundance of natural resources must be properly assessed, especially in relation to other competitive countries (Popesku, 2008, p. 39).

Table 1: *Serbia competitiveness TTCI 2015*

	Pillars	**Rank**	**Index**
I	**Enabling environment**		
1.	Business Environment	133	3.38
2.	Safety and Security	59	5.46
3.	Health and Hygiene	38	6.04
4.	Human Resources	89	4.29
5.	ICT Readiness	56	4.45
II	**T&T Policy and Enabling Conditions**		
6.	Prioritization of T&T	113	3.83
7.	International Openness	101	2.39
8.	Price Competitiveness	78	4,56
9.	Environmental Sustainability	72	4.08
III	**Infrastructure**		
10.	Air transport infrastructure	102	2.13
11.	Ground and port infrastructure	98	2.95
12.	Tourism service infrastructure	63	4.50
IV	**Natural and Cultural Resources**		
13.	Natural Resources	135	1.90
14.	Cultural Resources&Business Travel	67	1.61

Source: *Adapted from: Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2015;* World Economic Forum, retrived from: http:// http: //www3. weforum org/docs / TT15/ WEF_ Global_ Travel& Tourism _Report _2015.pdf

The research for that report was conducted in 141 countries and data were collected as statistics from international organizations as well as the annual survey of the World Economic Studies of public opinion. The survey was conducted on a sample of 15,000 leading commercial enterprises and international organizations (Deloitte, IATA, ICCA, ILO, ITU, IUCN, UNESCO, UN Statistics Division, UNWTO, WHO, World Bank/IFC Doing Business, World Bank's World Development Indicators, World Resources Institute, World Road Statistics, WTO, WTTC, Yale-CIESIN Environmental Performance Index and Visa Analytics, ect.).

Serbia is in the final report of the World Economic Forum TTCI 2015 ranked the 95th position among 141 countries. Compared to the previous report in 2013, Serbia noted a decline in position on global competitiveness. Namely, in 2013, it had 89th position among 140 countries. Serbian tourism competitiveness index is 3.34, while the highest in the world amounts to 5.31.

The overall conclusion on the economic competitiveness of Serbia as a tourism destination can also be based on the data and conclusions listed in the survey. In this regard, the low estimated natural resources of Serbia, which places it at the 135th position in the world, is emphasized as a special problem. It is also a very low ranked in terms of business environment, prioritization of travel and tourism, aviation and transport infrastructure as well as price competitiveness. The general assessment of the basic determinants of economic competitiveness of Serbia as a tourism destination is very low.

Table 2: *Countries that are best placed globally*

Country	**Rank 2015**	**Index**	**Rank 2013**
Spain	1	5.31	4
France	2	5.24	7
Germany	3	5.22	2
United States	4	5.12	6
United Kingdom	5	5.12	5

Source: *Adapted from: Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2015;* World Economic Forum, retrived from: http:// http: //www3. weforum org/docs / TT15/ WEF_ Global_ Travel& Tourism _Report _2015.pdf

Table 2 provides an overview of the countries that are best placed after the index of tourism and travel. As seen from the Table, the same countries were the best performers in the previous report. All these countries are also the largest generators of tourism demand and supply on the international tourism market.

Table 3: *Europian Countries that are best placed globally*

Country	Rank 2015	Index	Rank 2013
Spain	1	5.31	4
France	2	5.24	6
Germany	3	5.22	2
United Kingdom	5	5.12	5
Switzerland	6	4.99	1

Source: *Adapted from: Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2015;* World Economic Forum, retrived from: http:// http: //www3. weforum org/docs / TT15/ WEF_ Global_ Travel& Tourism _Report _2015.pdf

Somewhat clearer picture is obtained when looking at the place occupied by Serbia in Europe compared to the neighboring countries as well as its direct competitors. Serbia is here (Table 4) at the bottom of the rankings at 35th place.

Table 4: *Comparison of the competitive position of Serbia with neighboring countries at European level*

	Country	Regional rank	Global rank	Index
1.	Italy	6	8	4.98
2.	Greece	18	31	4.36
3.	Croatia	19	33	4.30
4.	Slovenia	23	39	4.17
5.	Hungary	25	41	4.14
6.	Bulgaria	28	49	4.05
7.	Romania	32	66	3.78
8.	Montenegro	33	67	3.75
9.	Macedonia	34	82	3.50
10.	**Serbia**	**35**	**95**	**3.34**
11.	Albania	36	106	3.22

Source: *Adapted from: Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2015; World Economic Forum, retrived from: http:// http: //www3. weforum org/docs / TT15/ WEF_ Global_ Travel& Tourism _Report _2015.pdf*

This review clearly shows that Serbia, at the 35th place, is significantly behind those countries. In the ranking by TTCI 2015, the only worse ranked country was Albania, which is second to last at 36 place. The best placed countries in the region were Italy and Greece, and there are now and the former Republic of Yugoslavia, Croatia and Slovenia. The countries that are better placed than Serbia are Hungary, Montenegro, Bulgaria, Romania and Macedonia.

It can be said that not only do all countries take the same race, but that each country participates in the race defined by its own unique position in tourism and has its own tourism development goals. Some destinations are never direct competitors, due to the fact that there are various types of products or simply due to the fact that for a destination there is a problem of access - long distance, complicated transport, high costs, while the other is easily accessible.

Conclusion

Destinations are fighting each other to get into the group that tourists generally consider as the goal of their journey. The variety of tourism destinations makes it difficult to place them all into the same group and they are meaningfully ranked according to certain criteria ranging form the best/most competitive to the weakest/least competitive. Competitiveness and the resulting success can be compared only within the same competitive zone. When the destinations are compared, it is necessary to determine which destinations are the key competitors.

In the context of the preceding facts, it would be necessary to determine who are Serbia's competitors. If competitiveness analysis is valid, then the indices of competitiveness can help to establish standards for comparisons between countries. This ranking helps policy makers to formulate and evaluate national results in terms of competition, which further helps companies to improve competitiveness as opposed to others. This is also helpful for investors to allocate resources among the countries and researchers to discuss economic issues in a comparable way (Manić, 2008,. 26). In this sense, it would be desirable that the concept of competitiveness benefits of benchmarking, and not some kind of a priori norms, because many aspects of performance are better evaluated when the rapper is an obvious example from practice, not theory.

Competitiveness in tourism is of particular importance to those countries that are committed to the highest possible market share. Manager of tourism must identify and explore the competitive advantages and to analyze the competitive position of the destination. The degree in which that country can benefit from tourism largely depends on the competitive position in the international tourism market.

A significant benefit of the tourism competitiveness index is the possibility of analyzing the position of Serbia as a tourism destination in the international market. Without this and other information, it would not be clear in which way to give priority to the process of improving the competitiveness of Serbia in the international tourism market.

Ever more crucial factor of the competitiveness of tourism destinations would become how much diversity, or how much intensity of individual tourism experience and the very experience can offer compared to other destinations.

The reasons for this should be sought in the fact that in terms of diversity demand requires the rapid development of the growing number of the so-called new market niches, i.e. maximum individualized approach to a potential buyer of the tourism experience. It can be expected that the decisions of potential consumers on the choice of destinations are linked to identified items of destination competitiveness.

In general, it can be concluded that in modern conditions the competitiveness of a tourism destination has to be less and less linked to the achieved level of its socio-economic, political and regulatory development. More focus should be given to the attractiveness of its experiential mix, where the emphasis should be placed on the attractiveness of each tourist experience.

Due to the large number of indicators which are potentially relevant for determining the competitiveness of the integrated destination experiential mix, the inability to precisely define the relative importance of individual indicators, as well as the fact that the contribution to each destination competitiveness is different from case to case (from a land to a land), we conclude that is not possible to more accurately determine the competition of some tourism destinations; it could be assessed only with more or less accuracy.

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