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IMAGE EVALUATION OF NATIONAL PARKS IN THE SPIŠ REGION

HODNOTENIE IMIDŽU NÁRODNÝCH PARKOV REGIÓNU SPIŠ

Abstract: *This study deals with tourist satisfaction in the destinations of Spiš region (High Tatras, Pieniny and Slovak Paradise). The main aim is to examine how destinations differ mutually based on individual satisfactory attributes including services and various types of facilities and other characteristics of destination. Respondents evaluated their satisfaction on 5 point scale and after that data was analyzed by correspondence analysis. We found out there are some differences between destinations, however they offer diverse type of experiences for visitors. Even when High Tatras are obviously better in many ways, this destination is considered more commercialized with higher prices, otherwise it is well known in abroad as well. Pieniny and Slovak Paradise destinations have a huge potential to provide amazing experiences too, but better infrastructure construction would help.*

Keywords: *High Tatras; Slovak Paradise; Pieniny; destination image; correspondence analysis*

JEL classification: C10, M30, L83, Z32

Introduction

Tourism is very widespread and important for many entrepreneurs. Tourism in general is recognized as one of the key development sectors in all countries, and also represents a major source of income, jobs and wealth creation. It plays a vital role in promoting the image and perception of the country at international level, and also affects domestic policy. This scale of impact and importance creates challenges to measure tourism competitiveness [1].

Maximizing the benefits and minimizing the negative impacts on tourism is possible through successful destination management [2]. Szpilko (2017) [3] claims that the development of tourism is closely linked to the functioning of destination management organizations and the products they offer. For the development of the tourism product, there is a specific need for cooperation of several subjects. A precondition for the development of the destination is to ensure cooperation between the public and private sectors, in which everyone has their own tasks to fulfill. The ultimate goal of destination management, but marketing as well, is to achieve growth and sustainability of the target country by developing its unique image, coordinating private and public tourism components, providing information for visitors, maintaining customer satisfaction, ensuring sufficient investment in attractions, etc. [4]

If the destination is the whole country, its image can be an important factor that will influence the international image of the tourist destination and its choice [5]. Destination image is frequently described as simply "impressions of a place" or "perceptions of an area" [6]. Hunt (1975) [7] defines image as "Perceptions held by potential visitors about an area." The image of tourist destinations is according to Teviana et al. (2017) [8] a reflection of the tourist attraction that consumers perceived. He says that tourist attraction comprises all elements possessed of a place that attracts visitors. These elements include landscapes for viewing, activities to follow, and experiences to remember.

According to Luštický, Musil (2019) [9] the Conceptual Model of Destination Competitiveness is the most widely used conceptual model of destination competitiveness. The model modified Porter's Competitiveness Framework to the environment of tourism destinations and

distinguishes 36 attributes of competitiveness grouped into 5 key factors: (1) supporting factors and resources, (2) core resources and attractions, (3) destination management, (4) destination policy, planning and development, (5) qualifying and amplifying determinants. It also points out the importance of the environment surrounding the destination, namely the global macro environment and the competitive microenvironment. There is a belief that stakeholders are the main development power in tourist destination and intensive cooperation with stakeholders is a crucial condition for reaching a sustainable competitive advantage [10].

The criteria for comparison are the main factors of competitiveness, which are decomposed into a two-layer hierarchical structure [9]:

1. destination resources
 - a. primary resources (nature and cultural sights)
 - b. secondary resources (tourist infrastructure, attractions, fun, and relaxation)
 - c. supporting resources (basic infrastructure, transportation, hospitality, business environment)
2. acceleration factors
 - a. price level
 - b. quality of tourist services
 - c. safety
3. demand conditions
 - a. destination's awareness
 - b. destination's image
 - c. tourist preferences
4. situational conditions
 - a. competition
 - b. macro-trends (political, economic, social, technological)

People find the feelings of satisfaction and fulfillment of needs that are currently different from the previous generation. We can also see an increase in the number of domestic guests in accommodation facilities in Slovakia [11], which represents an even higher proportion of visitors than foreign ones. Visitors prefer rather shorter holidays and longer weekends than long-term summer holidays [12]. These authors describe that the change in visitor behavior is noticeably observed, their mobility is higher, when they look for adventures and experiences and more various destinations may be visited during one vacation.

Tourism in Slovakia grows year by year [11] and by our research we wanted to examine how satisfied the tourists are in chosen destinations. We selected Pieniny National Park, Slovak Paradise National Park and High Tatras National Park as our destinations, all from Spiš region and with close mutual distance. Otherwise all parks offer different experiences and are distinguished by various type of nature.

This kind of research has not been examining before, that is why we see our purpose here. It is important to know what features drive visitors to come and even more what insufficiencies exist there in the destinations. The main aim was to detect similarities and differences of image perceiving between chosen destinations and to find out which destination lags based on evaluated attributes. We used correspondence analysis to explore that. The interpretations are about to visually convince about the results as well.

Materials and Methods

Our materials were responses from questionnaires asked to tourist destination's visitors. We demanded to response from relevant visitors who objectively can assess their satisfactory with

individual attributes at visited destination. At main part of questionnaire was needed to express their satisfaction by 5-point Likert satisfactory scale (from very dissatisfied (1) to very satisfied (5)). Questionnaires were asked by us at all three destinations and so 331 respondents participated (99 respondents at Pieniny National Park, 111 at Slovak Paradise, 121 at High Tatras). Most of them were Slovaks (149 respondents), then Poles (71 respondents), Czechs (61 respondents) and of course 32 Hungarians as well. We may say the V4 countries mostly took place at our research. Otherwise there are respondents from 11 different countries together involved.

We placed 17 attributes to evaluate and asked some opened questions too. Following Table 1 shows picked attributes. Later we demonstrate on the map by using indicated attribute tags.

Tab. 1: List of image attributes asked by questionnaire

| Attribute tag | Image attribute |
|---------------|--|
| atr 1 | accommodation services |
| atr 2 | food services |
| atr 3 | transportation facilities |
| atr 4 | shopping facilities |
| atr 5 | cultural – entertaining facilities |
| atr 6 | overview at destination |
| atr 7 | used potential at destination |
| atr 8 | traditions and customs visibility |
| atr 9 | destination promotion |
| atr 10 | cleanliness |
| atr 11 | trails and routes marking |
| atr 12 | accessibility |
| atr 13 | unique atmosphere at destination |
| atr 14 | reasonable prices |
| atr 15 | performed expectations from the locality |
| atr 16 | willingness and friendliness (overall behaving towards visitors) |
| atr 17 | overall satisfaction with trip/vacation |

Source: inspired by Mao, Zhang, Bao (2005) and own attributes added too

Research in Spiš region was inspired by Mao, Zhang, Bao [13], who have examined image of other tourist destinations in China. We have undertaken their research method's attributes that were suitable to examine at our chosen destinations. According to mentioned research we applied correspondence analysis subsequently as well. Our data were analyzed and got outputs that may be interpreted by demonstrating on the map.

We tested our data by chi-squared test. There is an assumption [14] about the expected frequencies, when these values should not be lower than 5, or they can be in a maximum of 20% of the inner cells. If this is that case, chi-square may be used. Based on it, we will assess whether there is an association between the level of satisfaction and the destinations, and thus whether to continue interpreting the results of the correspondence analysis is statistically significant.

Results and discussion

All the data from chosen destinations were analyzed. We have processed multidimensional correspondence analysis with all the mentioned attributes. As we stated before, there was chi-squared test implicated and the value is 3.62411 with p-value 1.000. We intended to keep usual designation of p-value 0.05. Based on that, rows and columns, all the attributes and so the points of destinations emplacement do not relate together. In that case the results of multidimensional analysis are not statistically significant for any other interpretation.

Otherwise we focused on each attribute separately and we can bring out the results which have statistically relevant meaning. We use two dimensions that are enough to explain the outcomes regarding high rate of inertia. Some of the attributes we demonstrate on the map as well.

Services and facilities

For the very first attribute (accommodation services) we offer tables mainly including final coordinates for destination points and inertia, according to which we clarify the results. Then mass describing relative proportion of frequencies is included and the quality column which contains information concerning the quality of representation of the respective row point in the coordinate system defined by the respective numbers of dimensions. Table 2 is composed from row information and Table 3 from column information.

Tab. 2: Row Coordinates and Contributions to Inertia of attribute 1 (accommodation services)

| Destination | Coordin. Dim. 1 ¹ | Coordin. Dim. 2 ² | Mass | Quality | Relative Inertia | Inertia Dim. 1 ³ | Inertia Dim. 2 ⁴ |
|-----------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------|----------|---------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Pieniny | 0.141 | -0.195 | 0.275 | 1.000000 | 0.089 | 0.033 | 0.692 |
| Slovak Paradise | -0.540 | 0.042 | 0.346 | 1.000000 | 0.566 | 0.615 | 0.040 |
| High Tatras | 0.390 | 0.104 | 0.379 | 1.000000 | 0.345 | 0.352 | 0.269 |

¹ Coord. Dim. 1 = coordinates of dimension 1; ² Coord. Dim. 2 = coordinates of dimension 2; ³ Inertia Dim. 1 = inertia of dimension 1; ⁴ Inertia Dim. 2 = inertia of dimension 2

Source: output from Statistica software

Tab. 3: Column Coordinates and Contributions to Inertia of attribute 1 (accommodation services)

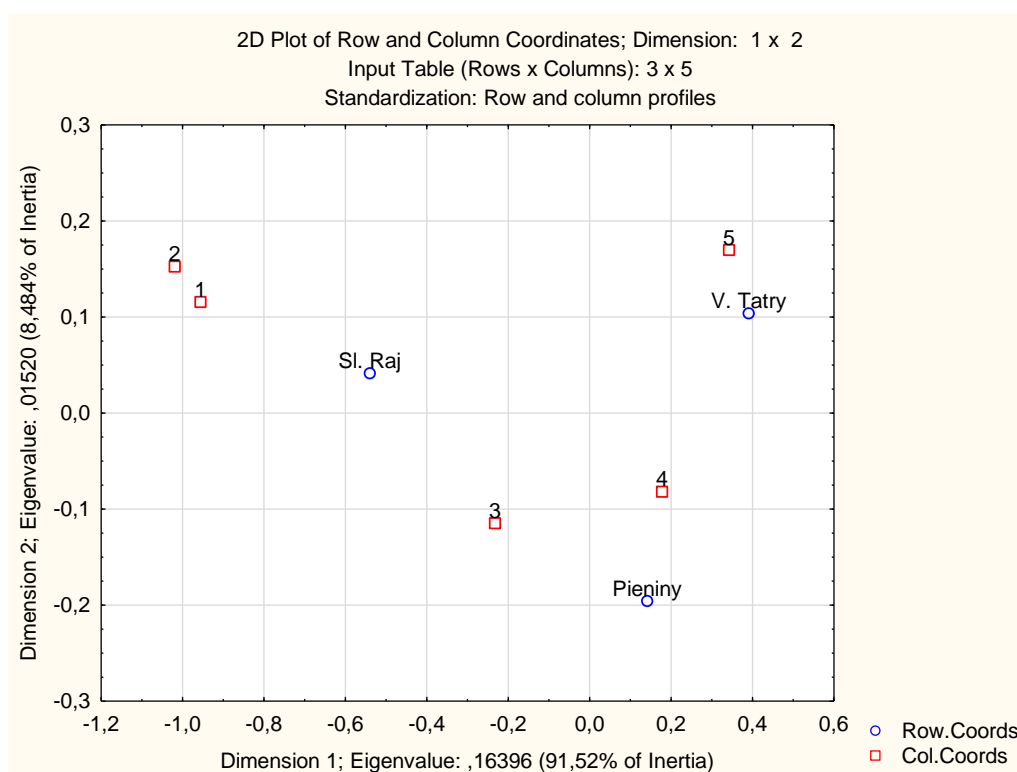
| Satisfaction point | Coordin. Dim. 1 | Coordin. Dim. 2 | Mass | Quality | Relative Inertia | Inertia Dim. 1 | Inertia Dim. 2 |
|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|----------|----------|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1 | -0.95635 | 0.115626 | 0.050336 | 1.000000 | 0.260720 | 0.280786 | 0.044272 |
| 2 | -1.01923 | 0.152791 | 0.060403 | 1.000000 | 0.358108 | 0.382707 | 0.092768 |
| 3 | -0.23255 | -0.114810 | 0.221477 | 1.000000 | 0.083147 | 0.073050 | 0.192055 |
| 4 | 0.17781 | -0.081860 | 0.409396 | 1.000000 | 0.087553 | 0.078940 | 0.180459 |
| 5 | 0.34217 | 0.169857 | 0.258389 | 1.000000 | 0.210472 | 0.184517 | 0.044272 |

Source: output from Statistica software

The first dimension extracts 91.52% of the total inertia, while the second dimension extracts only 8.48% of the total inertia. The sum of the inertia of both dimensions is 100% (total inertia). Given that they cover more than 90% of the inertia, a two-dimensional solution is appropriate for interpretation. However, it follows from the above that dimension 1 has a higher informative value.

According to tables above and its inertia we describe accommodation services attribute based on Slovak Paradise and High Tatras destinations and satisfaction points 2, 1 and 5. Visitors at High Tatras are generally satisfied with the accommodation services and it is not necessary to remedy these services. On the contrary the situation about housing services in the Slovak Paradise is rather dissatisfied. It is visible on the correspondence map very clearly (Figure 1).

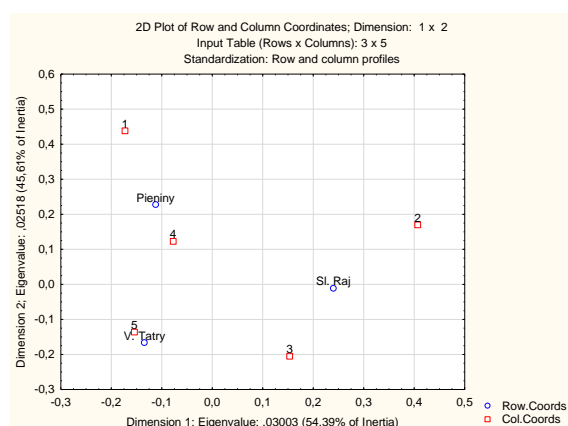
Fig. 1: Attribute 1 (accommodation services) demonstrated on the map



Source: output from Statistica software

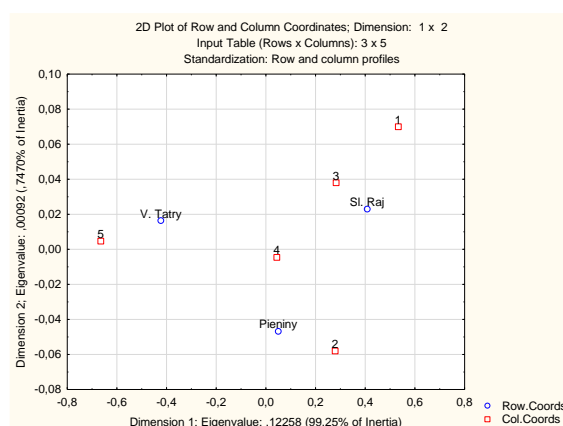
Other services and facilities we explain by the most interesting and significant findings such as the food services that acknowledge the High Tatras destination again. Chi-squared test proved value 17.8879 with p-value 0.021, which confirms significance. Figure 2 demonstrate that. At third attribute with transport facilities at destinations is chi-squared value 40.1399 with p-value 0.000. The High Tatras destination has its greatest contribution to the analysis and also highly associates with the satisfaction numbered 5 as "very satisfied." It is also necessary to mention the location of the Slovak Paradise had mostly neutral attitude and on the contrary, Pieniny destination is analyzed in a more negative light, depending on the evaluation of other destinations. It is generally true that this national park is located in a very disadvantaged position within the settlement of larger cities. However, if it would attract more attention to this very unique and often undiscovered place and more possibilities of public transport would offer towns of Kežmarok and Poprad for an affordable price, then even this small national park could experience fame compared to the best. Figure 3 below demonstrate this attribute.

Fig. 2: Attribute 2 (food services)



Source: output from Statistica software

Fig. 3: Attribute 3 (transportation facilities)

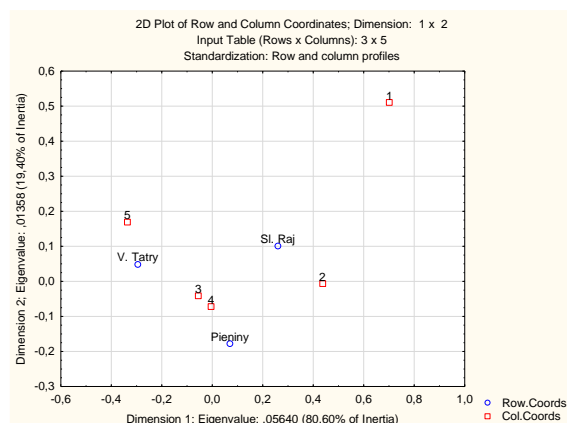


Source: output from Statistica software

The fourth attribute (shopping facilities) has got a value of chi-squared 22.6472 and p-value 0.0038. This attribute is shown on the correspondence map Figure 4. According to the tables with the contribution of inertia, we evaluate the High Tatras destination positively with the level of satisfaction "very satisfied", which corresponds to it the most. Satisfaction point 2 "rather dissatisfied" is also important and mostly relates to Slovak Paradise destination. Pieniny National Park could be interpreted from second dimension with specific satisfaction point as "rather satisfied" in relation to the other destinations. Considering own experiences at destinations we agree the analysis is very objective regarding many opportunities to buy whatever in High Tatras, you can stop for delicious cup of coffee or to buy souvenirs with wide range offer at all busy places or even at highly located cottages in the mountains. Pieniny destination offers good facilities too and there are several places to rent a bike or to take a beer. On the other hand, we must confirm the shopping facilities in Slovak Paradise are on the low level. Anyway, if there are services, then just at starting point when hiking, not during your way through.

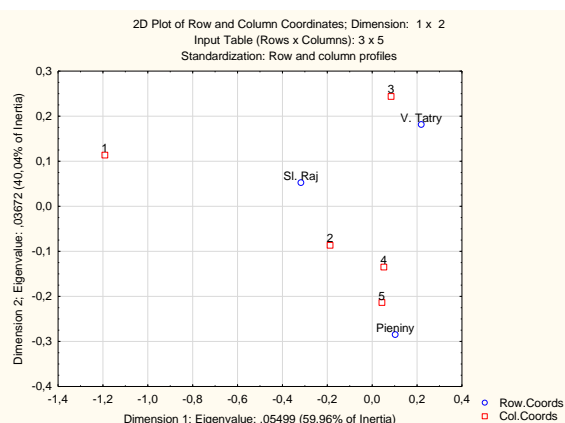
Dimension 1 has an explaining value with inertia of 59.96% for fifth attribute (cultural – entertaining facilities). According to the map (Figure 5), the most influential destination Slovak Paradise has the satisfaction rate "rather dissatisfied" closest to it in relation to other destinations. Furthermore, the High Tatras are relatively important for second dimension, which in this case corresponds to the "neutral attitude" mostly, which did not tell us that much, if we would want to bring some recommendations. In terms of the highest level of satisfaction, Pieniny seems to us to be the best destination, but according to the inertia tables they do not have a high informative value. Pieniny is more significant in the evaluation of the second dimension, which has a minority share in total inertia of 40.04%.

Fig. 4: Attribute 4 (shopping facilities)



Source: output from Statistica software

Fig. 5: Attribute 5 (cultural – entertaining)



Source: output from Statistica software

Other features

Other attributes were analyzed in same way, however we will mention the most important and interesting findings here.

Attributes number 7 (used potential at destination), 10 (cleanliness), 11 (trails and routes marking), 12 (accessibility), 13 (unique atmosphere at destination) were tested and p-value was proved as higher than our 0.05 limit or condition about expected frequencies was not accomplished. These attributes will not be interpreted.

The sixth attribute analysis about overview at destination in Slovak paradise recommends to entrepreneurs or the management of the national park to improve the clarity and the general information for people, which would obviously help to the destination's image. Pieniny is more represented in dimension 2 and in relation to the other two destinations it is most associated with the answer "rather satisfied." We also perceive the destination as more recognizable compared to the Slovak Paradise, we consider it as a more open and it is easier for visitors who are located at some resort which is more or less the starting point for all activities. On the contrary, there are several specific places in Slovak Paradise, such as Podlesok, Píla, Spišské Tomášovce, Čingov, or the villages of Mlynky and Dedinky, while from the entire mentioned are a possible hikes and trails marking are not very helpfully made. The High Tatras corresponds with the best answer number 5 mostly, but according to the inertia table, this answer does not have a strong influence on the interpretation. In any case, the High Tatras are considered to be probably the best known and there are many websites, forums, brochures and various tables that indicate interesting places and if we consider the clarity, it is in very good condition, comprehensive even for foreign visitors.

The attribute numbered as eight (traditions and customs visibility) has got following evaluation. According to the output of the resulting correspondence map, we can observe a high share of total inertia for dimension 1 to have an influential informative value (91.71%). The relative contribution to the inertia is specific for Pieniny (0.642) mainly, while it corresponds a lot to the highest relative inertia column for the answer "very satisfied." Compared to such an exceptional destination as the High Tatras, we review from the map an undeniable competitive advantage of Pieniny in terms of traditions and customs that the visitor can see at the destination. According to the analysis, the High Tatras are perceived rather negatively and we assess it in terms of an open question, where the respondents replied to us about this attribute. By this we explain the Tatras region is often described in superlatives, but in this case the respondents perceive exaggerated commercialization, construction that is not connected with tradition and customs are only marginally visible.

The ninth attribute is about destination promotion and we interpret the issue of promotion as rather neutral for the Slovak Paradise. Respondents do not perceive promotion in any special way, nor significantly known in relation to other destinations. Promotion in High Tatras is associated with great satisfaction. The High Tatras are promoted very precisely not only at home but abroad as well. The Slovak Paradise National Park management should rather think about how to improve the destination's image and attract more international tourists, although we must admit it is quite challenging, especially when the Tatras national park is about 50 kilometers away and metaphorically "steals glory" to other destinations.

For attribute number fourteen we may interpret, that reasonable prices at High Tatras correspond most to "very dissatisfied and neutral attitude," and "rather dissatisfied," which is statistically significant in the analysis. This statement could be expected, as the High Tatras generally rank among the most visited places in the country. Tatras resorts are visited by numerous foreign tourists as well, and that is why prices may be not set according to other reasonable prices in the region. Of course, it is true that prices are often exorbitant for people if they compare them with the average wage. Developers who need to ensure a return on investment for cable cars, hotels and attractions also play an important role. The second destination worth mentioning is Pieniny, which is most suitable for answer 4 as "rather satisfied," but the second dimension with inertia of 28.57% is more important for interpretation. The answer "very satisfied" corresponds the most for Slovak Paradise destination (in relation to other destinations) and is more important at dimension 2. In general, prices in Slovak Paradise and Pieniny are set relatively well and do not affect the image of the destination negatively.

The fifteenth attribute focused on performed expectations from the locality describes Slovak Paradise with rather negative answers in terms of satisfaction and in relation to other destinations. Since it is a matter of meeting expectations, it can be very demanding and especially subjectively satisfying the needs of each visitor. We see the huge potential that the destination offers, the national park has a beautiful natural heritage and amazing forests suitable for tourism. Even according to this analysis, we see the potential is not fully exploited and respondents' expectations are not fully met. In comparison with Pieniny, which have their significance within the inertia of dimension 1, we observe a higher progress within the expectations fulfillment and experiences that the respondents achieved during their stay. Maybe it is caused by the attractions that are offered in Pieniny, which are attractive and remarkable in the country (rafting on the wooden floats).

The explanation of sixteenth attribute is characteristic for Pieniny destination, where the analysis has shown certain results about willingness and friendliness of the people towards visitors. Respondents were "very satisfied" with the behavioral atmosphere and we suppose not just Slovaks were taken in account when evaluating, but Poles as well. Results for two other destinations are not that straightly evaluated.

By the last seventeenth attribute (overall satisfaction with trip/vacation) we found chi-squared value as 40.4411 with p-value 0.00 which designates us high significance. We suppose the overall satisfaction with a trip spent in a tourist destination depends on the presentation of destination's image. Generally the High Tatras destination is the best perceived destination although many visitors associate it as an expensive or commercial. Other two destinations were not clearly proved for just one exact satisfaction point at this analysis.

Summary

Reason for the relevance of the analysis is the value of data and correspondence maps that show relationships to other destinations. We can easily compare the competitive advantage at least on the basis of attribute visualization in destinations.

In general we may state based on our analysis, the High Tatras destination has an appropriate offer of services. There are cozy accommodations enough, food and shopping services occur at busy places, frequent transport connections are ensured and each visitor find easily suitable standard of services for himself. On the other hand this destination will lose specific atmosphere more and more during the time when developers construct still something new. Prices will grow probably and traditions will be seen at organized festivals only. However, image of this destination is perceived rather in positive way.

Pieniny national park stands out with attributes related with friendliness, traditions and all that obvious. We think this destination is more authentic, because residents are those services providers largely. From our analysis we perceive private transport missing here. Public buses are not that often and by this idea much more tourists would come, mainly those self travelling. Image of Slovak Paradise national park is perceived rather in negative way according to our analysis evaluation. There are several entrepreneurs offering services at starting points or touristic centers, but quality is not always sufficient. We see another problem in organizational managing when planning events, promotion. Better shopping opportunities for visitors and ensuring understandable orientation should be offered for visitors. From our analysis we found out the expectations are not met many times. Otherwise, the nature of this park is awesomely special and differs from High Tatras or Pieniny. Hiking here is more about gorges crossing, passing amazing waterfalls and reefs. This destination has potential to be explored by passionate tourists much more as it is now. That we may achieve by useful services providing and thoughtful planning as well.

We recommend to use the potential of two unnoticed (towards to High Tatras) destinations. It is important to start with the purposeful promotion, which should be in charge of the management of national parks or municipality. It is not only about advertising intending to just sell services quickly, but about informing about the possibilities, activities, edification to spend time in nature with family, educating children about fauna and flora around us. It is necessary to give people the added value they can gain by exploring the places around them. We also think that it is necessary to create positive associations with destinations, because visitors can often be discouraged of the accessibility or infrastructure at these sites.

In addition by improving promotion, it is necessary to be aware of the potential in that location. We want to appeal that the potential of the destinations is very high (especially natural potential, which was admired by almost 50% of respondents who expressed nature as a "top phenomenon" they experienced in the destinations). Though no doubts there is a reason to visit the destination! Future research may be oriented more on satisfaction analyzed by demographical factors, to focus deeply on satisfaction with exact attractions or to study types of tourist's expenditures at the destination.

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