

## MARIBOR – POHORJE DESTINATION COMPETITIVENESS – HUMAN RESOURCES VIEW

### TURISTIČKA DESTINACIJA MARIBOR-POHORJE KONKURENTNA S VIDIKA LJUDSKIH POTENCIJALA

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#### *Abstract*

In this paper we analysed Maribor – Pohorje tourism destination competitiveness from human resources view. In the paper we used tourism destination competitiveness model developed by Gomezelj and Mihalič (2000). The main aim of the paper is to identify the most important competitors of tourism destination Maribor – Pohorje, as also advantages and disadvantages of the actual tourism development in Maribor – Pohorje destination. Four hypotheses were tested using these statistic methods: descriptive statistical analysis, t-test and ANOVA. In accordance with hypothesis, results of our research give practical advice for future Maribor – Pohorje tourism development.

#### *Sažetak*

U radu analiziramo konkurentnost turističke destinacije Maribor – Pohorje s gledišta ljudskih resursa. U radu smo se koristili modelom za mjerenje konkurentnosti turističke destinacije koji su razvili Gomezelj i Mihalič (2000). Osnovni je cilj rada utvrditi glavne konkurente turističke destinacije Maribor – Pohorje, kao i glavne prednosti i nedostatke dosadašnjega razvoja turizma na tome odredištu. Četiri postavljene hipoteze testirali smo koristeći se slijedećim statističkim metodama: deskriptivnom statističkom analizom, t-testom i metodom ANOVA. U skladu s postavljenim hipotezama rezultati istraživanja pružaju konkretne upute za daljnji razvoj turizma na odredištu Maribor – Pohorje.

## INTRODUCTION

The contemporary tourism market is characterised by strong competitiveness among tourism destinations. Their continued success in the tourism market hinges on innovativeness and constant adjustments to meet the increasingly demanding needs of tourists. It is therefore not surprising that the issue of tourism destination competitiveness has in the recent period been the subject of interest of numerous researchers in the field of tourism.

The majority of authors dealing with the issue of tourism destination competitiveness believe that the definition of tourism destination competitiveness needs to be in line with the commonly accepted definition of competitiveness in economic literature. Most models of competitiveness are thus based on the model developed by Porter /1/,

which must be modified to accommodate the idiosyncrasies of a tourism destination.

The model of tourism destination competitiveness evolved from the simple view that the only factor important for a destination's competitiveness is its marketing positioning to highly complex models which include numerous factors (factors of attractiveness, supporting factors and resources, adoption of strategic tourism plans, efficient destination policy and management, human and financial resources for tourism development, entrepreneurial initiative at the destination, support by the local administration and regional and national organisations, vision for development of tourism, etc.). Tourism destination competitiveness is also very popular research topic in Slovenia. However, tourism destination competitiveness of some specific destinations in Slovenia is not well investigated. For that reason, the aim of the paper is to

identify the most important competitors of the destination Maribor – Pohorje and the weaknesses of actual tourism development, for which reason the participants were permitted to choose the most important competitors of Maribor tourism on their own.

## 1. TOURISM DESTINATION COMPETITIVENESS

A destination's competitiveness refers to its ability to provide a tourism experience that will lead to higher tourist satisfaction than that offered by other destinations. There are two different perspectives: a) Perspective of tourists, who see destination attractiveness as a primary factor when deciding where to travel; b) Perspective of the actual destinations, which strive to increase their competitiveness through good performance /2/. Crouch and Ritchie /3/ are the first researchers who dealt with the nature and structure of tourism destination competitiveness. Given that they endeavoured to incorporate all relevant factors of competitiveness, their conceptual model is called the *Integrated model of destination competitiveness*. According to these authors, a destination's competitiveness is based on its inherited resources, which are the basis of *comparative* advantage, and its capacity to deploy those resources, which is the basis for *competitive* advantage. The model includes five groups of factors: Core resources and attractors; Supporting factors and resources; Destination policy, planning and development; Destination management and Qualifying and amplifying determinants. *The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI)* was developed by the World Economic Forum. So far, 4 reports have been produced, for the years 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2011. It is produced in partnership with Booz & Company, Deloitte, IATA (International Air Transport Association), IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature), UNWTO (United Nations World Tourism Organization) and WTTC (World Travel and Tourism Council). The TTCI is a tool for measuring factors and policies that make it attractive to develop the travel and tourism sector in different countries /4/. The index is made up of three subindexes: the travel and tourism regulatory framework sub index (elements that are policy related and generally under the purview of the government), the travel and tourism business environment and infrastructure sub index (elements of the business environment and "hard" infrastructure) and the travel and tourism human,

cultural and natural resources sub index. Each of these subindexes is composed in turn by a number of pillars of competitiveness, of which there are 14 in all.

The competitiveness of a tourism destination is reflected in its ability to increase tourist spending, attract a significant number of tourists to whom it will offer satisfying and memorable experiences, all of which is done in a profitable manner, while increasing the prosperity of the local populace and preserving natural and cultural heritage for future generations (sustainable development). The competitiveness of a tourism destination is measured according to investments, i.e. a destination is considered more competitive if tourism-related investments have a higher rate of profitability compared to other tourism destinations /5/. In researching the competitiveness of a tourism destination, opinions of experts, i.e. specialists employed in the tourism industry should be analysed, as well as those of tourists /6/. Still, examples found in literature are mostly studies based on only one of those two groups of participants. A paper by Gomezelj and Mihalič /7/ which investigates the competitiveness of Slovenia as a tourism destination was based on the opinions of participants in Slovenia's tourism sector (government institutions, tourism companies, sector of education in tourism). They believe that employees in the tourism sector are the most competent to evaluate elements of a destination and the factors which affect its competitiveness. A tourism destination is not isolated in space, but is rather located in an environment with a large number of competitors. According to Dwyer and Kim /8/, the competitive advantage of a tourism destination can be achieved if the overall attractiveness of a destination is greater than that of alternative destinations. For this reason, when examining competitiveness, it is necessary to establish a "set of competitive destinations" and then define indicators for measuring competitiveness. The most common number of destinations included in the set of competitive destinations is three to five /9/. Eraqi /10/ points out that the competitiveness of a tourism destination can be achieved through a large number of development strategies, including marketing efforts (image, quality, positioning, branding and services), efforts and strength of tourism destination management and sustainable tourism. Competitiveness is the primary objective and result of all marketing strategies. Poon /11/ mentions that a destination's competitiveness is achieved through constant innovation and per-

petual change. Flexible, segmented products and products adjusted to tourist needs are of great importance to the creation of a competitive tourism destination. Other key elements for the development of flexibility, which could in future contribute to the development of a specific destination, include management, organisation, marketing, distribution and other forms of cooperation and connection between stakeholders at a tourism destination.

According to Iordache and Cebuc /12/, the most significant elements of a tourism destination's competitiveness include:

- Factor conditions: natural and cultural resources, capital resources, infrastructure and human resources;
- Status and structure of supplies: natural status (environment conditions), material status (hotel and hospitality equipment, transportation, trade, culture, sports, shows, etc.) and non-material status – software (services, management and organisation, education, etc.);
- Market structure, distribution networks;
- Conditions in which demand occurs and supply meets it (structure of a market, travellers' experience);
- The ability of a destination to make itself known both in the national and international tourism market.

### 1.1. Resource bases as a factor of tourism destination competitiveness

According to Kušen /13/, there is a group of factors which has the greatest impact on the degree of competitiveness of a tourism destination. Those factors are called *tourism destination attractiveness factors*. These factors determine the direction and intensity of tourism development on a receptive area. In other words, factors of attractiveness include a number of various tourist attractions which are similar in nature and mutually highly homogenous. The reason for the unification of numerous different factors lies in the fact that the tourism system is an extremely complex phenomenon, composed of a large number of heterogeneous tourist attractions (natural geographical features of the area, socio-geographical features of the area, etc.). In his multifactor model of destination attractiveness, Krešić /14/ starts with the assumption that tourist attractions play a key role in motivating tourists to visit an area (destination).

In their model of tourism destination competitiveness, Ritchie and Crouch /15/ assign great

significance to attractiveness factors. They believe that tourist attractions are the primary element of a destination's attractiveness and a key motivating factor to visit a tourism destination. Many other authors /16/; /17/; /18/ wrote about the significance of factors of attractiveness as a crucial element of the existence of tourism on a given area.

Numerous attempts were made to systematise attractiveness factors into groups in order to facilitate their examination in tourism literature. Weber and Mikalič /19/ mention that factors of tourism destination attractiveness may be categorised into general factors and specific factors. General factors are mostly considered to be geographically (topographically) and climatically important tourism destinations, while specific factors of attractiveness are closely linked to a specific tourism destination. According to the UNWTO classification, a distinction can be made between: natural tourism resources, cultural and historic heritage in tourism, climatic conditions, infrastructure and tourism services and content. Ritchie and Crouch /20/ proposed a classification into seven basic groups: physiography and climate, culture and history, market ties, mix of activities, special events, entertainment, tourism superstructure. According to Kušen /21/, all attractions can be divided into potential and real attractions. Potential tourist attractions are those features of a destination with attraction potential, which have not yet been sufficiently utilised, while real tourist attractions are characterised by availability to tourists and full utilisation. Tourist attractions are also divided into natural or inherited (created by forces of nature: topographic, climatic and environmental characteristics of an area, cultural and historic heritage) and created or produced attractions (developed by people for the purposes of economic and tourism exploitation: events, entertainment, etc.).

Although the attractiveness of an area is frequently the decisive factor in tourist decision-making, it is certain that not all attractions were specifically designed to be valued through tourism. Tourist attractions are most commonly classified in the following ways:

- External (archaeological sites, zoos, safaris...) and internal attractions (castles, palaces...);
- Natural and man-made attractions;
- Primary and secondary attractions /22/.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

In order to conduct a survey research which measures the competitiveness of the tourism destination Maribor – Pohorje, we used the questionnaire from the paper by Gomezelj and Mihalič /23/, which was based on the model of tourism destination competitiveness by Dwyer and Kim /24/. A total of 85 indicators of competitiveness were used in the paper, divided into six groups:

- 1) Inherited resources (natural and cultural),
- 2) Created resources (e.g. tourism infrastructure, events, etc.),
- 3) Supporting resources (quality, destination accessibility, infrastructure, etc.),
- 4) Destination management,
- 5) Demand conditions (Perceptions, preferences and awareness) and
- 6) Situational conditions/Environment (location, safety, political stability, etc.).

This model aims to include all important elements of tourism destination competitiveness which are mentioned in common economic literature, along with elements specific to the competitiveness of an actual tourism destination. The first three groups of determinants include various characteristics of the destination which make it attractive to tourists (preserved nature, climate, tradition, gastronomy, accommodation capacities, resorts, theme parks, events, nightlife, hospitality, destination accessibility, quality of services, etc.). Destination management includes factors which increase the attractiveness of inherited and created resources and enhance the quality of supporting resources, while monitoring the conditions in the environment. This component incorporates the activities of destination management organisations, marketing organisations, the destination's policy, planning and development, development of human resources and management of the environment. Demand conditions are made up of three elements of tourist demand: awareness, perception and preferences. Factors of the environment, such as the position of the destination, political stability, conduciveness to investment, micro- and macro-environment, safety, price competitiveness, may either have a positive or negative impact on the competitiveness of a tourism destination /25/.

### 2.1. Survey

The research was conducted between April and July 2015. The participants in the research were human resources at the tourism destination, i.e. all stakeholders involved in tourism development: tourism employees in Maribor, employees at faculties and research institutes in the field of tourism, representatives of the local government, and the students of master and doctoral studies of tourism at the University of Maribor. Tourists did not participate in the research, as the author whose original model was used believes that they are unable to properly assess the factors relating to the management of a tourism destination. The questionnaire was created as a Google Document form and distributed via email to the most important stakeholders in Maribor tourism, post-graduate students of the Faculty of Economics and Business and the Faculty of Tourism of the University of Maribor, and eminent lecturers and experts in the areas of tourism and hospitality. A total of 57 valid responses were received. The data were collected and processed in the software package SPSS. The participants were asked to mark each of the 85 indicators of competitiveness on a five-point Likert scale comparing the tourism destination Maribor – Pohorje with the previously established group of competitive tourism destinations. Mark 1 represents the opinion that the assessed factor at destination Maribor – Pohorje is far below the level of competitor destinations, while mark 5 represents the opinion that the assessed factor at destination Maribor – Pohorje is far above the level of competitor destinations.

### 2.2. Hypothesis

In order to realise the main aim of our research, we decided to test these hypothesis:

H1: The biggest competitor of the tourism destination Maribor – Pohorje is Ljubljana.

H2: The greatest weakness of Maribor – Pohorje destination is the actual management of the tourism destination, while the greatest strength are inherited resources.

H3: There are statistically significant differences in the average marks for different destination competitiveness dimensions depending on the participants' gender.

H4: There are statistically significant differences in the average marks for different destination competitiveness dimensions depend-

ing on the function participants perform in tourism development.

### 3. SAMPLE

The survey comprises a total of seven questions. The first five questions refer to socio-demographic characteristics of participants, while the remaining two questions relate to establishing the biggest competitors and measuring the competitiveness of the tourism destination Maribor – Pohorje. Table 1 shows the gender structure of the sample. Two thirds of the sample are female, once again confirming the fact that tourism is a predominantly female field.

Table 1: Gender structure of participants

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	19	33.3
Female	38	66.7
Total	57	100.0

Source: Authors, according to the analysis of results in the SPSS package

Table 2 shows the educational structure of the sample. The majority of participants have finished college of vocational studies or faculty, while as little as 8.8% of participants have finished only secondary education.

Table 2: Educational structure of participants

Level of education	Frequency	Percentage
Secondary education	5	8.8
Vocational studies	23	40.4
Faculty	21	36.8
Magister degree/Doctorate	8	14.0
Total	57	100.0

Source: Authors, according to the analysis of results in the SPSS package

Table 3 shows the structure of the sample according to the function the participant performs in the tourism sector of the destination Maribor – Pohorje. The majority of participants, close to 50% of the sample, is made up of employees in the industry (employees at tourism and hospitality companies, managers of tourist agencies and hospitality facilities), followed by postgraduate students of tourism and economics, who make up close to a third of the sample. The smallest number of employees work at the local tourism organization Maribor – Pohorje (only 3.5% of the sample).

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Table 3: Structure of the sample according to the function in the development of tourism at the destination

Function	Frequency	Percentage
Local government representative	5	8.8
Tourist agency manager	6	10.5
Hospitality industry manager	8	14.0
Scientist in the field of tourism/economics	4	7.0
Employee of a tourism/hospitality company	14	24.6
Employee of the local tourism organisation	2	3.5
Postgraduate student of tourism/economics	18	31.6
Total	57	100.0

Source: Authors, according to the analysis of results in the SPSS package

Table 4 shows the data which refer to the age of participants in the sample. The average age of

participants in the sample is approximately 32 years. The youngest participant is 22 years old, while the oldest is 60.

Table 4: Age of participants				
	Number of participants	Minimum	Maximum	Arithmetic mean
Age	57	22	60	31.75

Source: Authors, according to the analysis of results in the SPSS package

Table 5 shows the data which relate to the duration of work experience and studies of participants in relation to tourism. Participants worked

in tourism for an average of 10 years, with this period varying between 1 and 40 years.

Table 5: How long have you been engaged in tourism?				
	Number of participants	Minimum	Maximum	Arithmetic mean
Age	57	1	40	9.70

Source: Authors, according to the analysis of results in the SPSS package

#### 4. RESULTS

##### 4.1. Results of the descriptive statistical analysis

Table 6 shows the results of answers to the question: *In your opinion, which are the biggest competitors of the tourism destination Maribor – Pohorje?* Participants were asked to specify three biggest competitor destinations and rank them from the biggest competitor (Competitor 1) to the third biggest competitor (Competitor 3). As the table shows, most participants see Ljubljana as the big-

gest competitor of the tourism destination Maribor – Pohorje. It is interesting that 19.3% of participants consider Ljubljana to be the second biggest competitor, while it occurs as the third biggest competitor only twice, where it was classified under Other. The biggest competitors after Ljubljana include Zagreb and Graz, followed by Vienna and Budapest. Participants mentioned other destinations as well: Ptuj, Bled, the Slovene Riviera. Interestingly, although Klagenfurt was presented as a competitor destination in the previous chapter, none of the participants mentioned it.

Table 6: Distribution of responses to the question: In your opinion, which are the biggest competitors of the tourism destination Maribor – Pohorje?

Competitor 1	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
<b>Ljubljana</b>	40	70.2
<b>Zagreb</b>	9	15.8
<b>Graz</b>	6	10.5
<b>Other</b>	2	3.5
<b>Total</b>	57	100.0
COMPETITOR 2	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
<b>Zagreb</b>	34	59.6
<b>Graz</b>	11	19.3
<b>Ljubljana</b>	11	19.3
<b>Other</b>	1	1.8
<b>Total</b>	57	100.0
COMPETITOR 3	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
<b>Graz</b>	29	50.9
<b>Vienna</b>	9	15.8
<b>Budapest</b>	8	14.0
<b>Other</b>	11	19.3
<b>Total</b>	57	100.0

Source: Authors, according to the analysis of results in the SPSS package

The final question in the questionnaire referred to the assessment of competitiveness of the tourism destination Maribor – Pohorje in comparison to the previously established competitors. As mentioned above, the model used in the research was taken from the paper by Gomezelj and Mihalič (2008). Since the above model is classified into six factors (dimensions of competitiveness), the results of the descriptive statistical analysis will first be shown individually, by each dimension.

The dimension *Inherited resources of tourism destination* includes a total of nine questions which relate to natural and man-made tourism destina-

tion resources (Table 7). Research results indicate that the greatest advantages of the tourism destination Maribor – Pohorje in terms of inherited resources are: Attractiveness of climate for tourism, Cleanliness, and Unspoiled nature. The greatest weaknesses of the destination with regard to inherited resources are National parks and Artistic and architectural features. In terms of other aspects of competitiveness with respect to inherited resources, this destination is on a par with its competitors.

Table 7: Assessment of participants with regard to inherited resources of the tourism destination

Inherited resources of tourism destination	Number of participants	Minimum	Maximum	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation
Cleanliness	57	3.00	5.00	3.9123	.50993
Attractiveness of climate for tourism	57	3.00	5.00	4.1053	.58810
Unspoiled nature	57	3.00	5.00	3.7895	.49051
Flora and fauna	57	2.00	4.00	3.1754	.46762
Traditional arts	57	2.00	5.00	3.0351	.73107
Artistic and architectural features	57	2.00	5.00	2.9123	.63473
Historic sites	57	2.00	4.00	3.1404	.69278
Heritage	57	2.00	5.00	3.1053	.72418
National parks	57	1.00	3.00	1.7193	.75010
Total valid responses	57				

Source: Authors, according to the analysis of results in the SPSS package

The dimension *Created resources of tourism destination* includes a total of 24 questions. Participant assessment is shown in Table 8. As the primary advantages of the tourism destination Maribor – Pohorje in comparison to its competitors, participants emphasised: Winter-based activities, Recreation facilities, and Nature-based activities, which is in line with the previously presented resources of the destination in terms of the development of sports and recreational tourism. The greatest weaknesses of the tourism destination pointed out by the participants are: Airport efficiency/quality

(previously mentioned in the chapter on geographical position in terms of tourism), Community support for special events, Amusement/Theme parks, and Diversity of shopping experience. Examination of the competitors chosen by the participants makes it clear that such responses were expected. Competitor destinations feature much better equipped shopping centres, busier airports, more events, and therefore more opportunities for entertainment and leisure.

Table 8: Assessment of participants with regard to created resources of the tourism destination

Created resources of tourism destination	Number of participants	Minimum	Maximum	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation
Water-based activities	57	2.00	4.00	3.2982	.49875
Winter-based activities	57	3.00	5.00	4.7719	.46359
Nature-based activities	57	3.00	5.00	4.3860	.55916
Recreation facilities	57	3.00	5.00	4.4035	.56251
Sport facilities	57	2.00	5.00	3.7368	.74466
Adventure activities	57	2.00	5.00	3.6667	.76376

Table 8: Assessment of participants with regard to created resources of the tourism destination

Food service facilities	57	2.00	4.00	2.6140	.64792
Variety of cuisine	57	2.00	5.00	3.1754	.53861
Visitor accessibility to natural areas	57	3.00	4.00	3.2982	.46155
Congress tourism	57	1.00	4.00	2.0877	.71416
Rural tourism	57	3.00	5.00	4.0526	.58006
Health resorts, spa	57	2.00	5.00	3.8421	.56028
Accommodation (variety/quality)	57	2.00	4.00	3.0351	.56584
Airport efficiency/quality	57	1.00	3.00	1.2105	.45264
Tourist guidance and information	57	2.00	5.00	2.9474	.58006
Special events/festivals	57	1.00	4.00	2.2105	.72548
Entertainment (e.g. theatre, galleries, cinemas)	57	2.00	4.00	3.0877	.54382
Casino	57	2.00	3.00	2.5439	.50250
Community support for special events	57	1.00	3.00	1.6316	.61620
Nightlife	57	1.00	3.00	2.1228	.65657
Local tourism transportation efficiency/quality	57	2.00	4.00	3.3860	.59023
Diversity of shopping experience	57	1.00	3.00	1.9825	.64063
Amusement/Theme parks	57	1.00	3.00	1.8246	.63027
Health/medical facilities to serve tourists	57	3.00	4.00	3.2281	.42332
Total valid responses	57				

Source: Authors, according to the analysis of results in the SPSS package

Table 9 shows participant responses which relate to the dimension of competitiveness *Supporting resources*. The table offers conclusions that, according to assessments of participants, there are no particular advantages or weaknesses of the tourism destination Maribor – Pohorje in comparison to its competitors. Participant responses hover around mark 3, meaning that the tourism destination Maribor – Pohorje is as competitive as other destinations in terms of Supporting resources.

Factors marked the highest were Hospitality of residents towards tourists and Communication and trust between tourists and residents; the supporting resource which was assessed as the least competitive was Animation, which can be linked to the fact that in the recent period, there have been few entertainment and thematic events organised in Maribor in comparison to prominent competitor destinations.

Table 9: Assessment of participants with regard to supporting resources

Supporting resources	Number of participants	Minimum	Maximum	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation
Financial institutions and currency exchange facilities	57	1.00	4.00	2.8772	.56915
Animation	57	1.00	3.00	2.0702	.49496
Quality of tourism services	57	2.00	4.00	3.1228	.53686
Telecommunication system for tourists	57	1.00	4.00	2.7018	.53335
Accessibility of destination	57	2.00	4.00	2.9649	.49875
Communication and trust between tourists and residents	57	3.00	5.00	3.5789	.53276
Efficiency of customs/immigration officials	57	2.00	4.00	2.9649	.42109
Attitudes of customs/immigration officials	57	2.00	5.00	3.1228	.59971
Hospitality of residents towards tourists	57	3.00	4.00	3.5789	.49812
Destination link with major origin markets	57	2.00	4.00	3.0702	.56251
Visa requirements as impediment to visitation	57	1.00	4.00	2.9298	.41660
Security/safety of visitors	57	3.00	4.00	3.2807	.45334



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Communication and trust between tourists and residents	57	3.00	5.00	3.5789	.53276
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Security/safety of visitors	57	3.00	4.00	3.2807	.45334
Total valid responses	57				

Source: Authors, according to the analysis of results in the SPSS package

The dimension *Situational conditions* consists of a total of 11 questions. Participant responses are shown in Table 10. Participants believe that the majority of situational conditions at the tourism destination Maribor – Pohorje are at the same level of competitiveness as at the listed competitors (participant responses ranged between 2.2807 and 3.2281). The sole factor underlined as the greatest advantage of the destination in relation to

competitors is Value for money in destination tourism experiences, while the only particularly non-competitive situational condition is Private sector recognition of importance of sustainable tourism development. Excessive orientation exclusively toward economic efficiency of tourism is a general characteristic of the private sector in tourism.

Table 10: Assessment of participants with regard to situational conditions

Situational conditions	Number of participants	Minimum	Maximum	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation
Political stability	57	3.00	5.00	3.2281	.50063
Value for money in destination tourism experiences	57	3.00	5.00	4.2456	.50993
Value for money in accommodation	57	2.00	4.00	3.0877	.63473
Manager capabilities	57	2.00	4.00	2.7719	.53511
Existence of tourism programs for visitors	57	2.00	3.00	2.5965	.49496
Public sector recognition of importance of sustainable tourism development	57	1.00	3.00	2.2807	.61975
Private sector recognition of importance of sustainable tourism development	57	1.00	3.00	1.7368	.55183
Value for money in shopping items	57	2.00	3.00	2.5263	.50375
Use of e-commerce	57	2.00	3.00	2.5439	.50250
Use of IT by firms	57	2.00	4.00	2.9474	.58006
Cooperation between public and private sector	57	2.00	3.00	2.5263	.50375

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Value for money in accommodation	57	2.00	4.00	3.0877	.63473
Manager capabilities	57	2.00	4.00	2.7719	.53511
Existence of tourism programs for visitors	57	2.00	3.00	2.5965	.49496
Public sector recognition of importance of sustainable tourism development	57	1.00	3.00	2.2807	.61975
Private sector recognition of importance of sustainable tourism development	57	1.00	3.00	1.7368	.55183
Value for money in shopping items	57	2.00	3.00	2.5263	.50375
Use of e-commerce	57	2.00	3.00	2.5439	.50250
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Total valid responses	57				

Source: Authors, according to the analysis of results in the SPSS package

Destination management is the fifth and largest dimension in the model of tourism destination competitiveness used in this research. It contains a total of 25 questions. Participant responses can be found in Table 11. It can easily be established that the marks related to destination management are extremely low, since none of the factors has the

average mark of 3.5 or higher. The least competitive aspects of destination management assessed by the participants were destination policies in social tourism, extent of foreign investment and investment environment, and entrepreneurial qualities of local tourism businesses (average marks below 2).

Table 11 Assessment of participants with regard to destination management

Destination management	Number of participants	Minimum	Maximum	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation
Entrepreneurial qualities of local tourism businesses	57	1.00	3.00	1.9825	.55069
Access to venture capital	57	1.00	3.00	2.1754	.50437
Investment environment	57	1.00	3.00	1.7895	.52566
Efficiency of tourism / hospitality firms	57	2.00	4.00	3.2807	.52625
Existence of adequate tourism education programs	57	2.00	4.00	3.1754	.57080
Tourism / hospitality training responsive to visitor needs	57	2.00	4.00	2.8421	.62076
Destination vision reflecting tourist values	57	2.00	4.00	3.2456	.57572
Destination vision reflecting resident values	57	2.00	4.00	3.1404	.51543
Destination vision reflecting stakeholder values	57	2.00	4.00	2.8421	.49242
Destination vision reflecting community values	57	2.00	3.00	2.6842	.46896
Developing and promoting new tourism products	57	3.00	4.00	3.4386	.50063
Destination has clear policies in social tourism (e.g. disabled, aged)	57	1.00	3.00	1.6140	.52625
Quality of research input to tourism policy, planning, development	57	2.00	4.00	2.7368	.51846
Tourism development integrated with overall industry development	57	2.00	4.00	3.0702	.49496
Government cooperation in development of tourism policy	57	1.00	4.00	2.2632	.74466
Resident support for tourism development	57	1.00	4.00	2.6842	.53977
Public sector commitment to tourism / hospitality education	57	1.00	4.00	2.8596	.58060

Private sector commitment to tourism / hospitality education	57	1.00	4.00	2.6667	.54554
Educational structure of employees in tourism	57	2.00	32.00	3.2632	3.92122
Development of effective destination branding	57	2.00	4.00	3.3860	.64792
Extent of foreign investment in destination tourism industry	57	1.00	3.00	1.7193	.61975
Level of cooperation between firms	57	2.00	4.00	2.9825	.66792
Appreciation of service quality importance	57	2.00	4.00	2.5789	.62528
Quality in performing services	57	2.00	4.00	3.0000	.68139
Local tourist organisation reputation	57	2.00	4.00	2.9825	.61212
Total valid responses	57				

Source: Authors, according to the analysis of results in the SPSS package

The final dimension of competitiveness in the used model is Demand conditions. This dimension incorporates only four questions to which participants responded. These can be found in Table 12. Based on the results in Table 12, it can be concluded that, compared to its competitors, the tourism destination Maribor – Pohorje does not deviate considerably in terms of demand condi-

tions. The greatest advantage assessed by the participants was the overall destination image, while international awareness of the destination and of its tourism products is below average in terms of competitiveness. Additional work could be done to improve these areas through adequate marketing campaigns to target foreign markets.

Table 12: Assessment of participants with regard to demand conditions

Demand conditions	Number of participants	Minimum	Maximum	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation
Overall destination image	57	3.00	5.00	3.6491	.61212
International awareness of destination products	57	2.00	4.00	2.7368	.64160
Fit between destination products and tourist preferences	57	2.00	5.00	3.1754	.80451
International awareness of destination	57	1.00	4.00	2.2632	.74466
Total valid responses	57				

Source: Authors, according to the analysis of results in the SPSS package

Table 13 shows the average values of competitiveness of each of the above presented dimensions of competitiveness. We may conclude that, viewed by dimension, the tourism destination Maribor – Pohorje does not differ considerably from its competitors. The destination's competi-

tiveness in terms of inherited resources, created resources and supporting resources is somewhat above average. According to the participants' assessment, the destination's greatest weakness is the actual management of the tourism destination.

Table 13: Average marks of participants by dimension of competitiveness

Dimensions of competitiveness	Number of participants	Minimum	Maximum	Arithmetic mean	Standard deviation
Inherited resources	57	2.67	3.78	3.2105	.21790
Created resources	57	2.79	3.29	3.0227	.11026
Supporting resources	57	2.67	3.33	3.0219	.14132
Situational conditions	57	2.45	3.09	2.7719	.15663
Destination management	57	2.48	3.84	2.7361	.18744
Demand conditions	57	2.00	3.75	2.9561	.35077
Total valid responses	57				

Source: Authors, according to the analysis of results in the SPSS package

#### 4.2. T-test and ANOVA results

In order to determine statistically significant differences between groups of participants in terms of average marks for these dimensions of competitiveness, we conducted an independent samples t-test and a single factor analysis of variance (ANOVA). The results of these two analyses can be found below, but only those which proved to be statistically significant.

The t-test was conducted in order to establish

whether there are statistically significant differences in the average marks for different competitiveness dimensions depending on the participants' gender. The only statistically significant differences were found with respect to the dimension Supporting resources at the level of significance  $p < 0.05$ , whereby male participants gave higher marks in the dimension Supporting resources (Table 14). The t-test by gender showed no statistical significance for other dimensions of competitiveness.

Table 14: T-test results by gender for the dimension of competitiveness Supporting resources

Competitiveness dimension	Arithmetic mean		t – value
	Male (n=19)	Female (n=38)	
Supporting resources	3.0921	2.9868	3.099*

\*statistically significant at the level  $p < 0.05$

Source: Authors, according to the analysis of results in the SPSS package

In order to determine statistically significant differences in average marks between more than two groups of participants, we used the single factor analysis of variance – ANOVA. According to the level of education, ANOVA showed no statistical significance. However, significant statistical differences were established with respect to the function participants perform in tourism development (Table 15). Differences were established for the dimension Situational conditions, so that, compared to postgraduate students of economics and tourism, considerably higher marks to items

which refer to situational conditions were given by hospitality sector managers, employees in tourism and hospitality companies, and employees in the local tourism organisation. The reason for such assessment lies in the fact that participants who are constantly in touch with the tourism practice of Maribor can have a much more realistic view of tourism development than students, who still have insufficient practical experience. ANOVA showed no statistical significance for other dimensions of competitiveness.

Table 15: Results of ANOVA test by gender for competitiveness dimension Supporting resources

Dimension of competitiveness	Function performed by participants in the tourism sector of the destination							F value	LSD post-hoc test
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
Situational conditions	2.7636	2.7576	2.8750	2.7273	2.8247	2.9091	2.6869	2.341*	3>7, 5>7, 6>7

\*statistically significant at the level  $p < 0.05$ ; 1 – local government representative; 2 – tourist agency manager; 3 – hospitality industry manager; 4 – scientist in the field of tourism/economics; 5 – employee of a tourism or hospitality company; 6 – employee of the local tourism organisation; 7 – postgraduate student of tourism/economics.

Source: Authors, according to the analysis of results in the SPSS package

#### 5. DISCUSSION AND FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The competitiveness of tourism destinations is a term present in literature since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, from which time a large number of models was developed. All those models strive to measure the competitiveness of a tourism destination as accurately as possible. However, in creating competitiveness models, it is necessary to take

into account all idiosyncrasies of a specific destination. The conducted survey research was aimed at measuring the current competitiveness of the tourism destination Maribor – Pohorje and determining the greatest competitors of Maribor tourism. It was established that these competitors are actually three destinations in its vicinity: Ljubljana, Zagreb and Graz. These destinations are rich in tourism resources of a far higher quality, and are labelled as a destination brand in the percep-

tion of potential tourists. Furthermore, the actual management and organisation of tourism at these destinations is at a much higher level. Our research hypothesis H<sub>1</sub>: "The biggest competitor of the tourism destination Maribor – Pohorje is Ljubljana" according to our research results can be accepted. According to the research results, the striking competitive advantages of the tourism destination Maribor – Pohorje are: Cleanliness, Attractiveness of climate for tourism, Unspoiled nature, Winter-based activities, Nature-based activities, Recreation facilities, and Value for money in destination tourism experiences. These results are in line with the defined tourism development strategy. The greatest disadvantages of the destination Maribor – Pohorje are: Airport efficiency/quality, Extent of foreign investment, Community support for special events, Private sector recognition of importance of sustainable tourism development. These are specific areas which the management of the destination must address in order to increase its competitiveness. The survey research also showed that all Maribor tourism stakeholders assess the competitiveness of the destination as average. Still, resource bases of the tourism destination were assessed as significantly higher than the dimensions relating to management and demand conditions. Here, we can conclude that our research hypothesis H<sub>2</sub> can be accepted. These are actually the areas which the destination must work on, in order for the defined strategy to be implemented entirely, rather than partially. The final section of the research establishes statistically significant differences in average marks between various participant groups. Male participants assessed the competitiveness of the dimension Supporting resources more positively, while students gave significantly lower marks to the dimension Situational conditions compared to the employees in the local tourism organisation and hospitality industry managers and employees. Here, we can conclude that our research hypotheses H<sub>3</sub> and H<sub>4</sub> cannot be accepted, because there are not statistically significant differences for all destination competitiveness dimensions (H<sub>3</sub>) and between all sample groups (H<sub>4</sub>). The proposed research represents a good starting point for further research which will deal with the competitiveness of urban tourism destinations. Research results have both empirical and practical significance, as they can help tourism destination managers to get a simple overview of the greatest advantages and disadvantages of Maribor tourism. Only in this manner, by catering to tourist

needs and demands, can the tourism destination Maribor – Pohorje become a competitive destination brand in the global tourism market.

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