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COMPETITIVENESS OF HEALTH RESORT ENTERPRISE – LOOKING FOR METHODS OF EVALUATING CROSS-BORDER COMPETITIVENESS OF HEALTH RESORT ENTERPRISES

***Abstract:** The article deals with the problem of the extent to which it is possible to build a health resort enterprise competitiveness model useful for the needs of cross-border research. The starting point was the analysis of tourist destination competitiveness, which led to an observation that the existent models are useful on the macro level (a group of countries, a country, a smaller section of country's territory), but it cannot be used on the micro level, while a detailed research, being helpful for enterprises, does not meet the postulate of complex measurement of the determinants of their competitiveness. The research on destination competitiveness is accompanied by a discussion on the choice of a research method, while the idea of applying qualitative methods to measure enterprise competitiveness is supported. The final part of the article is the analysis of a Polish model of enterprise competitiveness (of the Toruń team) based on RBV achievements. The analysis of the model structure – the subsystems of the competitiveness potential – indicates its universality and, thus, its usefulness for adapting it for the needs of complex research both with regard to competitiveness of the Polish health resort enterprises as well as others (e.g. Slovak health resorts).*

***Keywords:** enterprise competitiveness, cross-border competitiveness, health resort enterprise, enterprise competitiveness model, tourist destination*

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Introduction

The concept of competitiveness may seem easy to understand as it is an expression of quantitative and qualitative advantages of the leading actor (enterprise, territory) over a group of its market rivals, both current and potential ones. Nevertheless, the analysis of the literature on the subject indicates the complexity of the notion of „competitiveness“, especially while attempting at defining and measuring it. The multi-dimensional and relative character of the concept is visible in the whole analysis sequence: from specifying the sources and nature of competitiveness,

through constructing its definition, determining the division criteria as well as the components and specifying the competitiveness attributes to constructing the competitiveness models. No lesser is the degree of complexity visible in the case of current understanding of the competitive advantage (advantages).

From a sector (branch) point of view, tourism is supposed to be among the most important factors of economic development in industrial and post-industrial countries in the 21st century. Thus, in those countries where the economy is based, to a large extent, on the tourist branch (sector), there must appear some competences and approaches to using the sector advantages with the aim of achieving an overall competitive advantage of a given country. Nevertheless, analogically to the situation visible in the theory of economics, the competitiveness in the tourism sector is multi-dimensional and complicated. On the macro level, the current concepts of competitiveness in tourism are based on four pillars, i.e.:

- the Ricardian theory of comparative advantage (RCA), including the so-called donations and natural conditions (exogenous advantages) and the degree of technological changes (endogenous comparative advantages);
- M. E. Porter's competitive advantages (PCA);
- Managing tourism and providing high quality of education and training with a view to increasing RCA and PCA;
- Environmental conditions, including national and global ones.

While evaluating current concepts and models of competitiveness in tourism, it must be noticed that, to a better or worse extent, they reflect the reality and are used to create development programmes. Nevertheless, they have one essential disadvantage – they refer to macro (sometimes mezzo) level of the economy, but are not useful for competitiveness analysis on the micro level – the tourist enterprise level (including health resort enterprises) independent of their spatial translocation. A hypothesis may be formed that the concept of tourist destination and the concept of destination competitiveness blur the role of tourist enterprises (companies) in the process of competing as well as building the advantages and the competitive position. Taking all the above into consideration, the article attempts at answering the question whether there are any tools and comparative analysis models of health resort enterprise competitiveness and how universal they are, i.e. how useful for empirical purposes.

1 Competitiveness in Tourism, its Nature, Factors and Models – Chosen Problems

Studies and knowledge bases on the subject of economic determinants of tourism make it possible to formulate the following generalisations:

1. Among the researchers and theoreticians of tourism studies, there is an almost

unanimous agreement that it was M. E. Porter's works that became an impulse which caused the need for investigating the competitiveness strategies, examining the arising sources of absolute competitive needs and the methods of sustaining them as well as the nature, manifestations and results of absolute competitive advantages of the whole national economies [36], [37], [38]. As R. Grant emphasised, the strength of M.E. Porter's model consists in the fact that he integrated into one common framework both the microscopic and the macroscopic competitiveness perspectives, which did not exist prior to the publication of Porter's three works [38].

2. M. E. Porter's concept, which indirectly refers to enterprise (company) competitiveness as a competitiveness element of national industries (branches), found its resonance in tourism in the form of:
 - a) attempts at defining competitiveness in tourism and looking for factors influencing such competitiveness (competitiveness determinants);
 - b) attempts at creating a competitiveness model on the macro level.
3. The dissimilarity of the problem of competitiveness in tourism involves the fact that it has developed the notions of "tourist destination" and "tourist destination competitiveness", which are specific for the branch. "Tourist destination" is a less complicated notion as it includes, on the one hand, the destinations of tourist journeys and, on the other hand, all the things connected to a given place such as history and culture, tourist attractions, quality of tourist services as well as quality of the social and economic surrounding. "Tourist destination competitiveness" is a complex and multi-dimensional notion as it includes both competitiveness of enterprises in the tourism sector and competitiveness of tourist destination attractiveness as well as competitiveness of the economic, social and cultural surrounding. A proof for the above is the most frequently quoted definitions, the diversity and nuances of which are the outcome of differences in emphasising the dimensions of destination competitiveness [12], [23], [16], [9]. According to Ph. Kotler, J. T. Bowen and J.C. Markens, the complexity of destination competitiveness is partly the result of definitions which suggest the perception of tourist destinations as natural borders (e.g. islands), political borders or "the border market" [27].

The model of competitiveness of nations by M. E. Porter, apart from the neo-Ricardian concept of comparative advantages, had a significant and undeniable influence on the concept of creating a universal model of destination competitiveness. This has been acknowledged by both the Australian, G. I. Crouch, and the Canadian, Ritchie J. R. Brent, as well as by the Korean Chulwon Kim, and the Australian L. Dwyer – the creators of two models of destination competitiveness. Both models have been thoroughly described in the literature on the subject and function as *the Calgary Model* and *the integrated model of destination competitiveness*. A common feature of both models is the use of:

- Identified competitiveness indicators,
- Identifiable factors directly or indirectly influencing the competitiveness indicators,
- Mutual connections (interactions) between certain factors or groups of factors.

According to K. M. Malhotra, both models are evolving, which is the result of both discussions between authors and overall progress in research on competitiveness in economic sciences as well as research on competitiveness in tourism [9]; [41], [42], [10], [25], [17], [18], [28]. Simultaneously, the above mentioned models have influenced the methodology of research on tourist destination competitiveness by:

1. Adapting the internal architecture of the models (choice of competitiveness determinants) for the need of national research (macro level) or research on competitiveness of a territorial segment (mezzo level). Examples of application solutions may be the research on competitiveness of Slovenia [21] or the research conducted by an Italian-Dutch team on competitiveness of Southern Italy [6].
2. Adopting the methodological assumptions for the construction of the WEF TTCI (*World Economic Forum Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index*) in 2007 [11].
3. Using the model for the needs of building econometric models for measuring the competitiveness of countries and groups of countries, R. Craigwell's model based on Dwyer-Kim's model must be mentioned here, which was used for the analysis of the competitiveness determinants of destinations in the countries of the Caribbean Sea basin [7].
4. Intensifying the research on detailed influence factors (explaining variables) of destination competitiveness. Although, as it has already been emphasised before, the destination competitiveness models are not subject to the use on the micro level; the knowledge on the detailed determinants may become useful for an enterprise. Knowledge resources contain many examples of detailed empirical studies, the interesting ones of which (for enterprises in the tourism sector) are the findings regarding the influence of the Internet on destination competitiveness. The way the Internet changed the image of an industrial enterprise was described by M.E. Porter. [39]. The research of D. Buhalis and Zoge shows how the Internet has influenced dramatic changes in the powers of tourist organizations all over the world and how enterprises may neutralise the influence of tour operators on the choice of destinations [5].

2 The Choice of a Research Method or an Argument about the Method

D. G. Pearce is the author of two important observations. Firstly, in the period before the creation of destination competitiveness models, he demanded, for the benefit of the participants of the competition process, broad support of science in the

area of complete analysis of destination competitiveness. Secondly, the analysis of competitiveness refers to comparative studies and, thus, destination competitiveness should be evaluated in quantitative and qualitative terms. The qualitative dimensions of destination competitiveness include, according to Pearce, the attributes and factors (elements) which a tourist likes best or evaluates the highest. The comparison, therefore, comes down to comparing those features with regard to experience with other destinations [33]. The second conclusion is important as:

- Already in 1988, G. Dann's team noticed that research on tourism was dominated by quantitative methods. The dispute provoked by the article indicated the need for increasing the methodological diversity [13].
- Analogical conclusions were drawn by M. Mendenhall's team, who analysed the methods used by authors publishing articles in the years 1984 – 1990 in *International Journal of Management*. The result was surprising. In as many as 82% of the articles, the authors used quantitative methods, while only 14% of articles were based on qualitative methods and 4% of articles used both research methods [30].
- In the meantime, some voices were raised claiming that using Hard Data (*HD*) in management (especially strategic management), it is rather unlikely to grasp the *core* of such problems as e.g. the motive of partner choice, partner's qualities, control of stability and conflict in an enterprise, which may be achieved with the use of qualitative methods [32].

The analysis of literature leads to an observation that, currently, there is no explicit answer in which direction the circle of scientists will head as regards the issues of methodology in tourism and, thus:

- whether to rely exclusively on one method in the approach to tourism phenomena or to use mixed methods. This is quite important as the advocates of qualitative methods realise that such methods are not adequate to deal effectively with the dynamics of tourism [24];
- whether to look for a compromise solution – e.g. the use of a mixed method [14] or a triangulation method [15];
- Staking on whether to create a research multi-method – C. Snow and J. Thomas's postulate [1994].

Qualitative research methods, we have to solve one more dilemma: who should answer the questions, especially as regards such research tools as a standardised interview or a survey. G. Crouch, based on literary knowledge, opts for using the experts' (including tourist managers, top management of enterprises and scientists) knowledge and ascribes hardly any role in proper description to an average tourist ([8], p. 7). Other Australian researchers, Enright and Newton [8], are of a similar opinion. R. March postulates that the knowledge of doctors should be used while

evaluating destinations, which seems to be rational and justified in the case of research on health resort enterprises as destinations [March, 2004].

3 Resource Determinants of the Construction of a Health Resort Enterprise Competitiveness Model

The Resource-Based View (RBV), which arose in opposition to the so-called Position View in strategic management, has built its current position on a solid research foundation referring to:

- Ricardian economy,
- Enterprise growth,
- Distinctive competences.

The results of this research, currently combined into one whole, allowed for the creation and development of a concept which mainly aims at studying the influence of resources and abilities of an enterprise on its competitive position, taking into consideration the fact that the resources of an enterprise (company) are assigned the dominant role in the construction process of the competitiveness potential and the competitive advantage. The thing that differs among the representatives of many RBV directions is to find out which resources are the source of the advantage.

The fact that the resource-based approach led to the establishment of the resource-based view in strategic management was the result of many theoretical trends and concepts, the most important of which, in a brief outline, include:

- a) the economic justification of enterprise competences by E.T. Penrose [34], [35];
- b) the notion of „enterprise routine“ [31];
- c) the works of J. B. Barney on the problems of market balance and distinguishing the elements of enterprise resources (4 capitals of an enterprise) [1], [2] [3];
- d) the concept of Core Competences of the Corporation (CCC) by C. K. Prahalad and G. Hamel used for achieving competitive advantages [40] and, in addition [*Competitiveness... 2002*];
- e) the concept of company distinctive capabilities by J. Kay;
- f) the concept of Time-Based Competition by G. Stalk and other related concepts,
- g) the concept of Capability-Based Competition developed by G. Stalk and J. Shuman;
- h) the concept of a Learning Organization initiated by P. Seng;
- i) the concept of Knowledge-Based Management.

Summing up, the role of the resource-based view, as regards arriving at an enterprise competitiveness model, may be characterised in the following way:

- In the resource-based approach, an enterprise is treated as a bundle of unique resources,
- On the stage of the resource-based model of enterprise strategy and achieving the competitive advantage, two processes are exposed in the literature on the subject:
 - a) ascribing key importance to non-material resources in the process of building the competitive advantage within the resource structure;
 - b) emergence of a new type of capital, the intellectual capital, which, in the near future, will become the factor determining the achievement of the perspective competitive advantage.
- The economic reflection of enterprise's competitiveness, which has been proven by J. B. Barney, is its results in business activity [Barney, 1997, pp. 31-37].

4 A Health Resort Enterprise Evaluation Model

In the literature on the subject (both Polish and foreign), there are many descriptions of enterprise (company) resources and the features ascribed to resources and competences. A common denominator for the majority of solutions is the establishment of a cause–result relationship between enterprise resources and its competitiveness. Based on such premises, the Toruń research team headed by M. J. Stankiewicz, undertaking the task of determining the competitive position of an enterprise in the industrial sector, adopted the following assumptions:

- A. It is possible to construct an enterprise competitiveness model useful for empirical purposes.
- B. The traditional division of enterprise resources is of little use for research purposes and, thus, there is a need for decomposing the resources into elements useful with regard to qualitative research [44], [4].

Ad. A. The enterprise competitiveness model by M. J. Stankiewicz consists of the following elements (subsystems):

1. *Competitiveness potential*
2. *Competitive advantage*
3. *Competition instruments*
4. *Competitive position* ([44] p. 89).

Each subsystem was defined and the competitive potential was equated with enterprise resources (material and non-material ones) which are necessary for its functioning in market competition. The last element of the model, the competitive position, is understood as the result achieved by an enterprise in competing in a given sector and is compared to the results achieved by its competitors.

Ad. B. As a result of adopting the assumption that the competitive potential (1st element of the model) is a set of resources, it may be considered a set of elementary components of the competitive potential – *cpc (competitive potential components)*, which are grouped respectively. The grouped subsystems of the competitive potential were called *functional and resource-based spheres* ([44], pp. 118–124). Initially, 11 functional and resource-based spheres were distinguished and 91 elementary components were assigned to them. Then, as a result of experience, the number of spheres was reduced to 9, but the number of *cpc* increased to 122.

The above described model is characteristic of universality, i.e. it is possible to use its internal architecture (spheres and *cpc*) for the needs of empirical research on competitiveness of enterprises in other areas of the economy than the industrial sector. With a view to using the model of competitiveness for research in the health resort tourism sector, talks were held in the form of a panel, with managing staff and managers of health resort enterprises in the West Pomerania region, which resulted in the acceptance of the idea and the adoption of the assumption, taking into consideration the specifics of the companies in the sector. The topic of these talk was distinguishing 10 functional and resource-based spheres as well as assigning 62 competitive potential components to them. The reduction in the number of *cpc*, unlike in the case of M. J. Stankiewicz, was dictated by the methodological and research possibilities as well as by the rule known from Vilfredo Pareto, according to which 20% of factors cause 80% of changes.

A model decomposition of a health resort enterprise into functional and resource-based spheres as well as competitive potential components is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Functional and resource-based spheres of a health resort enterprise

Sphere	Competitiveness Potential Components (cpc)
Information sphere	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Knowledge about competitors, 2. Prognoses of competitors' behaviour. 3. Knowledge about current market situation. 4. Prognoses of market development. 5. Knowledge about patients' needs. 6. Prognoses of patients' needs development.
Innovation sphere	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enterprise's own units dealing with medical (balneological) technology development. 2. Cooperation with scientific centres and/or specialised institutions (Agency for Health Technology Assessment).

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Computer support of health care development processes.
Production (service) sphere	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Quality of the equipment and apparatus. 2. Modernity of therapeutic and spa technologies. 3. Possibilities for undertaking new services. 4. Service management systems in use. 5. Quality of medical staff. 6. Staff's medical culture. 7. Computer support of therapeutic technologies.
Quality management sphere	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Involvement of top management in programmes assuring the quality of services offered. 2. Involvement of all employees in observing the rules of high quality of work. 3. Use of quality assurance systems (ISO). 4. Possession of service quality certificates. 5. Use of a complex quality management system (TQM).
Distribution sphere	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Possible influence on distribution channels. 2. Methods of connection with service receivers. 3. Possibility of using diversified forms of service distribution.
Marketing sphere	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rank assigned by the company to marketing activity. 2. Financial resources for marketing activity. 3. Quality of personnel in the marketing sphere. 4. The use of specialist marketing advisory services.
Economic and financial sphere	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enterprise financial results. 2. Structure of assets. 3. Total cost level. 4. Labour cost level. 5. Planning, analysis, control and cost settlement systems in use. 6. Enterprise financial potential. 7. Easy access to external (EU) sources of financing. 8. Management accounting (controlling) instruments in use.

	9. Use of specialist financial advisory services,
Organization and management sphere	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enterprise organization form. 2. Enterprise size. 3. Possession of company strategic plans. 4. Flexibility of decision procedures. 5. Methods of preparing and making decisions (simulation, benchmarking, operations research) in use. 6. Quality of managing staff. 7. Degree of activity formalization. 8. Implementation of IT solutions in management. 9. Motivation and pro-innovative activity support policy. 10. Work climate. 11. The use of consulting services.
Employment sphere	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Educational level of company employees. 2. Employees' inclination to innovations and changes. 3. Employees' belief in management's competences. 4. Employees' belief in success. 5. Employees' inclination to learning (raising qualifications). 6. Human Resources policy in use. 7. Training systems in use.
"Invisible resources" sphere	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Organizational culture existing in the company. 2. Company image (reputation). 3. Unique capabilities. 4. Capability of creating a lobby supporting the company. 5. Connections to decision centres in the surrounding (National Health Fund, etc.). 6. Experience and contacts from the past. 7. Convenient location and unique natural therapy resources.

Source: self-prepared elaboration based on literature studies and talks held with top management and managers of health resort enterprises.

The data obtained during the research may be subject to statistical processing with the use of correlation analysis methods. Moreover, consultations with experts have been planned (Delphi session) to determine the final list of the key competitive potential components of health resort enterprises.

Conclusion

There arises a question whether the above presented health resort competitiveness evaluation model is useful for including the areas outside the borders of Poland – comparative research on cross-border competitiveness. From such point of view, the first health resort enterprises to be included in the empirical research could be those in Poland and Slovakia. The efforts of Slovak health resorts to attract Polish patients have already become a fact. Both countries are characterised by their membership in the European Union, which results in the unification of legal solutions, similar degree of affluence of their citizens and analogous demographic issues.

The analysis of the knowledge on health resort enterprises in Slovakia [19] confirms the existence of similar relations between a health resort enterprise and its external surrounding, which is a guarantee for research on the inside of a health resort enterprise as well as for finding out to what extent the results of empirical research in Poland and Slovakia coincide with conclusions based on studies on the literature of the subject.

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