

Stakeholder Approach to Evaluation of Tourism Development Plans

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Abstract

Tourism development has its irreplaceable role in regional policy of almost all EU countries. The main goal of national and regional governments is to succeed in tourism market by increasing the competitiveness. The quality of strategic planning and plans can be considered as one of the most important factors of competitiveness of tourism destinations. This paper proposes a methodology for quality evaluation of tourism development plans by regional stakeholders which are crucial for tourism development. The evaluation results are used for selection of a benchmark from different Czech, Slovak and British regions by means of fuzzy TOPSIS method. The benchmark is analysed to identify transferable good practices. Subsequently, the quantification of the benchmarking gap between the benchmark and a tourism development plan of the Vysocina Region is realised. By means of the benchmarking gap analysis, the quality enhancement opportunities are identified and the good practices are used to eliminate the negative benchmarking gap.

Keywords: tourism, strategic planning, plan, benchmarking, stakeholder

Introduction

Tourism embodies one of the largest economic sectors. The World Tourism Organization (WTO; 2014) estimates that international tourist arrivals grew by 5% worldwide

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in 2013, reaching a record 1087 million arrivals.

According to the WTO (2014) the international tourist arrivals worldwide are expected to increase by 3.3% a year from 2010 to 2030 to reach 1.8 billion by 2030.

Travel and tourism sector is recognised as an important factor of regional development (Hall, 2008; Vanhove, 2011). Tourism contributes by its nature to the stability of regional and local economies. Through its positive multiplier effect, it creates business opportunities in a wide range of activities and significantly influences the development of employment in the region (Davidson & Maitland, 1997; Sharma, 2004; Cooper et al., 2008).

Tourism faces the competitive pressures that have increased significantly in recent years (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003; Kozak & Baloglu, 2011). Ritchie and Crouch (2003) propose a model that defines five steps to competitiveness within the industry. One step comprises tourism policy-making and long-term planning. Within this context, strategic planning is crucial and enables the regions to fully utilise their potential in the sector. In addition, it enables a sustainable competitive advantage and maximises tourism benefits (Evans, Campbell & Stonehouse, 2003; Edgell et al., 2008). Buhalis (2000), Hall (2008), Ritchie and Crouch (2003) also emphasise the importance of the regional stakeholders' involvement in the strategic planning process, strategy implementation and monitoring. An involvement of regional stakeholders can be considered as one of the main principles for achieving a sustainable tourism development and long-term competitive advantage (Kozak, 2004; Aas, Ladkin & Fletcher, 2005; Byrd, Cárdenas & Greenwood, 2008).

This paper focuses on a strategic planning at the regional level and the resulting strategic plans as tools of tourism policy linked to competitiveness of tourism destination. It identifies the research problem as the divergence between the goals of the Czech regional governments to increase competitiveness and the practical application of proven methods of strategic management during the elaboration process of strategic plans. The paper aims to contribute towards the quality enhancement of the Czech regional tourism development plans by means of the following tasks:

- T1: To develop a methodology that enables evaluation and comparison of strategic plans within different tourism destinations (regions).
- T2: To locate regional stakeholders those are able to objectively evaluate the quality of strategic plans.
- T3: To identify common quality characteristics of compared strategic plans and the good practices.
- T4: To transfer good practices to increase the quality of the Czech tourism destinations' strategic plans.

To address the above-mentioned, the authors propose a strategic benchmarking model.

The benchmarking method enables a quality enhancement of the analysed processes through the transfer of the best practices (Ambrosini, Johnson & Scholes, 1998). Camp (2006) describes benchmarking as an efficient technique for competitive advantage achievement in a wide range of profit and non-profit organisations. This method is equally valid in tourism wherein benchmarking has been applied (Kozak, 2004). However, benchmarking surveys usually focus on performance comparisons between particular organisations or tourism destinations. The problem of tourism planning has caused only alimited attention; although it remains a key factor to competitiveness.

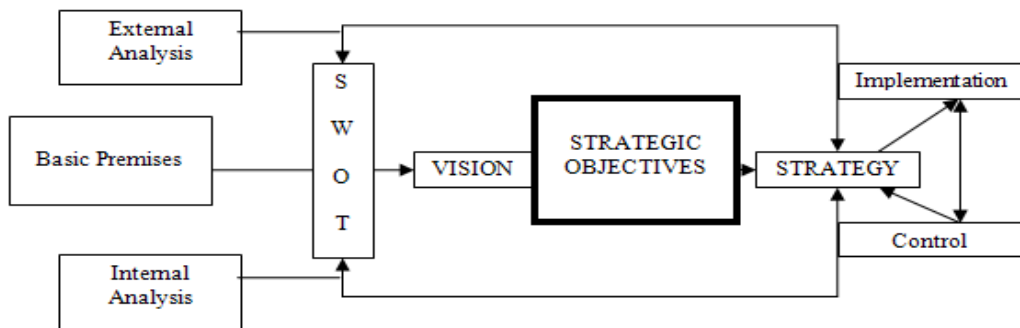
2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Strategic Planning Process

As Ritchie and Crouch (2003) note in their model of competitiveness, an attractive, efficient and highly competitive destination cannot exist only by pure coincidence. This requires a well-planned environment that supports and enables the development of tourism. The key to this environment is the factor of strategic planning. In the travel and tourism industry, it is a process that attempts to determine the appropriate course of the strategy that reflects new trends, mutable markets, and competition to provide a competitive advantage (Edgell et al., 2008). In this way, strategic planning determines the desirable direction and aligns the ownership and method to use available resources according to the conditions of the external environment and individual expectations of those involved (Johnson, Scholes & Whittington, 2008; David, 2009).

The main objective of strategic planning is to balance the quality and the quantity of the tourism supply and the corresponding demand with respects to the socio-economic development and environmental factors (Edgell et al., 2008). To be able to fulfil this task, the process of strategic planning is divided into basic phases that are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 - Strategic Planning Cycle



Source: authors

A clear definition of the planning sense, the initial conditions, and individuals involved form the initial phase of the planning cycle. A strategic analysis follows. It produces an information base to formulate a vision of tourism development and strategy for its achievement. As tourism responds strongly to various external changes, these are equally considered (Evans, Campbell & Stone house, 2003). The external strategic analysis involves the development of the tourism market, identifies main trends and demand conditions (Cooper et al., 2008). The analysis is then followed by a detailed competitive analysis. In this way, the destination determines the foremost competitors by the number of visitors, but also the services offered, and related goals, strengths and weaknesses.

The success of the strategy depends, however, not only on external conditions, but on internal resources and their usage too. The analysis of the internal environment deals primarily with these facts. Furthermore, it replies to the question whether they are in harmony with the environment of a given destination and contribute to its competitiveness (Johnson, Scholes & Whittington, 2008).

A clear definition of a long-term vision and main strategic objectives follows the strategic analysis. The vision reflects the ultimate status the tourist destination seeks to obtain. The objectives elaborate the vision in greater detail. The proposed strategy represents the method to achieve the objectives. The strategy supports the development of internal resources and capabilities to assist the destination to use external opportunities and to defend against threats. It also aids to diminish significant internal weaknesses, and develop the most important strengths in accordance with the key stakeholders' interests and requests (Johnson, Scholes & Whittington, 2008).

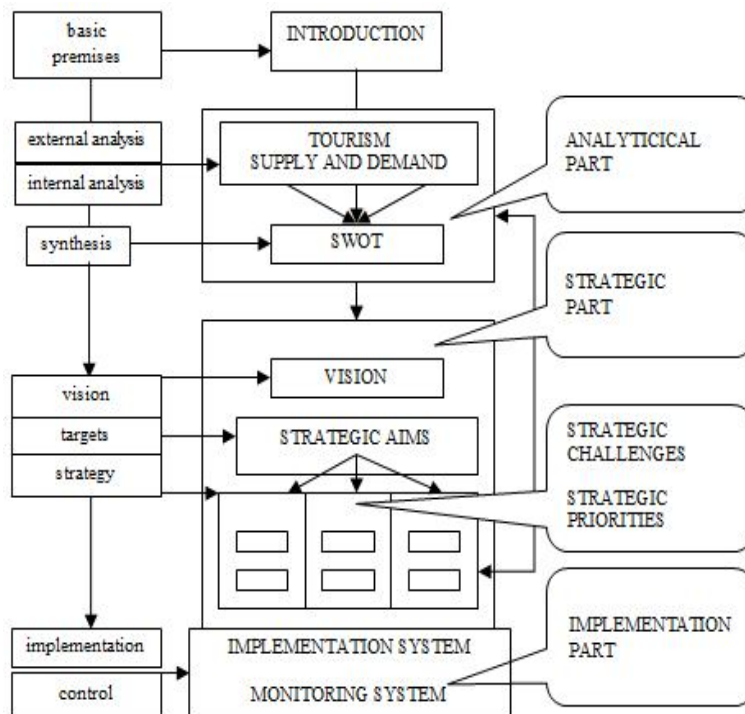
The implementation phase identifies the specific conditions for strategy gradual conversion into practice. The outcomes from the previous stages are further developed and specified into particular arrangements or actions that include a detailed time schedule, a

delimitation of resources necessary and responsibilities. The integral part of strategic planning process incorporates the specification of monitoring mechanisms based on pre-defined criteria (Johnson, Scholes & Whittington, 2008).

Tourism development plan is a synthesis of the planning cycle's results that summarises the outputs of previous phases in a clear and understandable format (Johnson, Scholes & Whittington, 2008; Hall, 2008). Typical phases of the planning cycle are: (a) determination of basic premises, (b) external strategic analysis, (c) internal strategic analysis, (d) synthesis, (e) setting development vision and targets, (f) establishing a strategy and (g) preparing the strategy implementation phase.

The following Figure illustrates the phases of the planning cycle and corresponding structure of the development plan.

Figure 2 - Structure of Tourism Development Plan



Source: authors

2.2. Benchmarking of Tourism Destination Planning

There are many definitions of benchmarking in literature. Camp (2006, p. 12) defines benchmarking as “the search for industry best practices that lead to superior performance”. A similar definition is used by Wöber (2002, p. 2), who consider benchmarking as “a systematic procedure of comparative measurement with the objective to achieve continuous improvement”. Therefore, benchmarking can be characterized as a method based on a systematic comparison of selected characteristics with the aim of finding the best transferable practices and thus reach a better competitive position.

As Kozak (2004) and Camp (2006) confirm, the concept of benchmarking and competitiveness are connected. The benchmarking method enables learning from the best in an industry, testing the external ideas and practices and implementing them into one’s own activities. In such a way this process enables a flexible reaction to changing conditions, which is important for remaining competitive (Camp, 2006).

The tourism sector began to apply benchmarking in the mid-1990s. Wöber (2001) distinguishes these areas of benchmarking focus in tourism: (a) benchmarking of profit-oriented organisations, (b) benchmarking of non-profit organisations, and (c) benchmarking of destinations. Kozak (2004, p. 41) defines the term destination benchmarking as “the continuous measurement of the performance of tourist destinations (its strengths and weaknesses) not only against itself or other destinations in the same or in a different country but also against national / international quality grading systems by assessing both primary and secondary data for the purpose of establishing priorities, setting targets and gaining improvements in order to gain competitive advantage”.

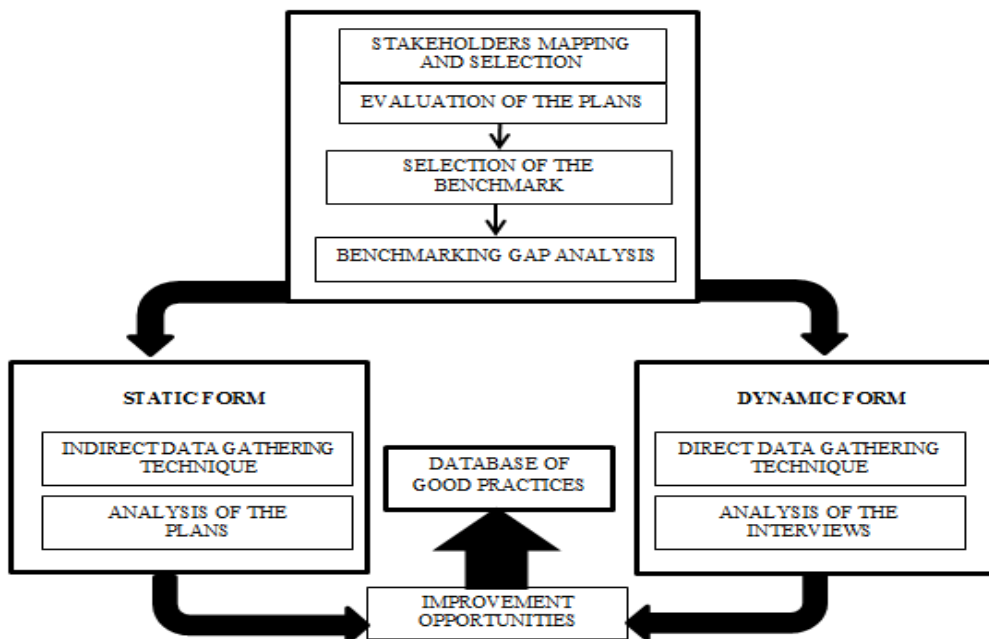
Although some examples exist that demonstrate the benchmarking application at the destination level (e.g. Alavi & Yasin, 2000; Wöber, 2002; Wöber & Fesenmaier, 2004; Kozak, 2004; Barros et al., 2011), the sphere of strategic planning has been neglected and is mentioned only at a theoretical level. However, Kozak (2004), and Kozak and Baloglu (2011) have mentioned that benchmarking is a suitable method for tourism destinations planning too.

Stapenhurst (2009) and Phadtare (2011) indirectly confirm this possibility and define the term of strategic benchmarking. Stapenhurst (2009) emphasises the static framework of strategic benchmarking. He describes strategic benchmarking as a process focused on the examination of benchmarking partners’ long-term strategies and plans that establish their success in the tourism market. Phadtare (2011) emphasises the dynamic framework of strategic benchmarking within which he examines the particular steps of strategic planning cycle. Many authors agree that any form of strategic benchmarking has a significant influence on competitiveness enhancement (Zairi, 1998; Watson, 2007; Phadtare, 2011) that applies equally to the issues of tourism destinations (Kozak, 2004; Kozak & Baloglu, 2011).

3. Strategic Benchmarking Model

The authors propose a strategic benchmarking model which is based on the rules and procedures of classical benchmarking surveys and its phases are supported by proven management theory. Its main principle is derived from the model of destination benchmarking, created by Kozak (2004).

Figure 3 - Strategic Benchmarking Model



Source: authors

The model consists of the following six phases:

Phase 1: Stakeholders Mapping and Selection

The stakeholders mapping is based on information gathered from representatives of

regional-based destination management organizations. Selection of the most suitable evaluators of the plans (stakeholders) is made by the Stakeholder Index which is a sum of the values of three pre-defined stakeholders' attributes.

Phase 2: Evaluation of Tourism Development Plans

The evaluation process is a variation on multi-criteria evaluation of the variants using its own criteria. These criteria are stipulated on the basis of a literature review combined with the experiences of selected experts from the tourism sector.

Phase 3: Selection of the Benchmark

The selection is performed using the TOPSIS method (Technique for Order of Preference by Similarity to Ideal Solution) that ranks within the methods of multi-criteria decision-making. This method is modified to enable working with fuzzy data which are suitable for this form of evaluation.

Phase 4: Benchmarking Gap Analysis

This phase consists of quantification and analysis of the benchmarking gap between the benchmark and the rest of the tourism development plans.

Phase 5: Data Gathering and Analysis

The data gathering phase is realised as a combination of indirect and direct methods. This consists of the content analysis of the best strategies (benchmark) and interviews with authors of the best strategies.

Phase 6: Stipulation of the Good Practices

The analysis of benchmarking gap serves as a basis for identification of the improvement opportunities. The stipulation of the good practices responds to that opportunities and uses the data gathered from the previous phase. It results in the suggestion of the concrete improvement of the process of strategic plans' elaboration. All findings are elaborated into a format of "Cards of good practices" that in turn create an interconnected database.

More detail description of the particular phases can be found in the following chapter which is devoted to an application of the strategic benchmarking model.

4. Application of the Strategic Benchmarking Model

The benchmarking survey includes 15 regions of the Czech Republic, Slovakia and

Great Britain. The strategic benchmarking is coupled with the concept of competitive advantage. Therefore, the destinations from countries which are geographically and cultural-historically close competitors are selected (the Czech and Slovak Republics). The transfer of good practices from subjects with a better position comprises the essence of benchmarking. Therefore, the comparison is augmented by the destinations from Great Britain, which regularly ranks above the Czech and Slovak Republics in competitiveness rankings (Blanke & Chiesa, 2013). Specific destinations are chosen to correspond with the definition used by Davidson and Maitland (1997, p. 4), "administrative units, towns, villages or clearly defined rural, coastal or mountain areas". In the Czech Republic and in Slovakia these are self-governing regions (NUTS III) and in Great Britain regions (NUTS I).

4.1 Stakeholders Mapping

The research considers stakeholders such as organisations that operate in regions influenced by the tourism development plan, and participate in the strategy implementation through fulfilling of its priorities, or are affected by this strategy.

It is a modification of Freeman's definition (1984, p. 46) who defines stakeholder as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives", and definition of Presenza, Sheehan and Ritchie (2005, p. 9), who define stakeholders as "any entity that is influenced by, or that may influence, the achievement of the destination management activities". The stakeholder groups are compiled based on an approach of Buhalis (2000), Yoon (2002), Presenza, Sheehan and Ritchie (2005), and Morrison (2013) as follows: (1) local government, (2) destination management organizations, (3) development agencies, (4) tourist sector organizations, (5) universities.

The required data are obtained by the means of semi-structured interview with representatives of destination management organizations (DMOs) in 5 different regions which play a role of a testing research area. The interview uses standard five-point Likert scale to characterize all five stakeholder groups on the basis of three attributes adapted from Mitchell, Agle, Wood (1997), Bryson (2004), Sheehan (2006), Bourne, Walker (2006):

- Power - This attribute identifies such stakeholder group which is crucial for an achievement of the strategic priorities.
- Cooperativeness - The attribute identifies such stakeholder group which is non-conflict and capable to co-operate in achievement of the strategic priorities.
- Urgency - The attribute identifies such stakeholder group which is frequently involved in achievement of the strategic priorities.

The Stakeholder Index allows ranking the subject of evaluation based on a value of its attributes. In this research the Index is a sum of the values of three attributes. It enables

the researchers to sort the stakeholder groups according to their importance for strategy implementation, and thus to select the most suitable group of evaluators of the tourism development plans. The Stakeholder Index ranking is stated in the following table.

Table 1 – Stakeholder Index Ranking

Country / Region	Stakeholder Index Ranking				
	Local Government	Local DMOs	Development Agencies	Tourist Sector Organizations	Universities
Czech Republic					
-South Bohemian Region	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
-South Moravian Region	1.	3.	4.	2.	5.
- Liberec Region	1.	2.	4.	3.	5.
Slovak Republic					
- Banska Bystrica Region	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
Great Britain					
- Wales	3.	1.	4.	2.	5.

Source: own research

It is evident that the most important stakeholder groups are local government and local destination management organizations. This is why the representatives of these groups from each examined Czech, Slovak and British regions are selected as evaluators of the tourism development plans. The following table shows percentage ratio of the evaluators in total number of representatives of two most important stakeholder groups.

Table 2 – Evaluators Ratio in the Regions

Country / Region	Evaluators Ratio	
	Local Government	Local DMOs
Czech Republic		
- South Bohemian Region	25 %	27 %
- Vysocina Region	33 %	33 %
- Central Bohemian Region	18 %	22 %
- Usti nad Labem Region	25 %	25 %
- Hradec Kralove Region	33 %	31 %
- Liberec Region	40 %	40 %
- South Moravian Region	29 %	29 %
- Zlin Region	40 %	44 %
Slovak Republic		
- Banska Bystrica Region	14 %	18 %
- Zilina Region	17 %	19 %

- Trnava Region	25 %	17 %
Great Britain		
- Wales	10 %	15 %
- South West England	25 %	25 %
- South East England	13 %	14 %
- North East England	25 %	27 %

Source: own research

4.2 Evaluation of Tourism Development Plans

The basis for tourism development plans evaluation comprises of three general requirements described by Johnson, Scholes and Whittington (2008) and also by Evans, Campbell and Stonehouse (2003). It is a requirement for strategy suitability due to the strategic position of the region, acceptability to key stakeholders, and feasibility.

With respect to the specific conditions of the strategic planning in the travel and tourism sector, these requirements are elaborated within the set of criteria.

In the first step, each requirement is developed by a 1 to 3 criteria, subsequently consulted and adjusted based on the opinions of destination managers. In the second stage, the criteria are adjusted to respect specific requirements as to their completeness, absence of redundancy and minimum size. The evaluation criteria and appropriate information sources are listed in Table 3.

Table 3- Evaluation Criteria

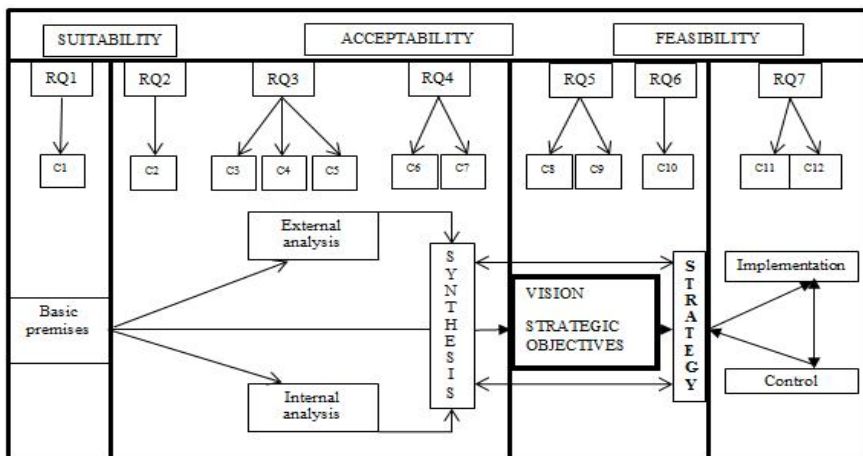
Evaluation Criteria	Information Resources
C1: The strategy clearly defines its purpose and scope	Ritchie and Crouch (2003); Cooper et al. (2008); Edgell et al. (2008)
C2: The strategy takes into account the impact of external factors	Edgell et al. (2008); Hall (2008); Cooper et al. (2008); Dess, Lumpkin and Eisner (2008); Johnson, Scholes and Whittington (2008)
C3: The strategy deals with the internal sources of destination	Hall (2008); Ritchie and Crouch (2003); Cooper et al. (2008); Evans, Campbell and Stonehouse (2003)
C4: The strategy deals with tourism demand at destination	Evans, Campbell and Stonehouse (2003); Hall (2008); Dwyer and Kim (2003); Ritchie and Crouch (2003)
C5: The strategy defines the most important regional stakeholders	Evans, Campbell and Stonehouse (2003); Kozak and Baloglu (2011); Edgell et al. (2008)

C6: The strategy analyses the situation at other destinations	Evans, Campbell and Stonehouse (2003); Kozak and Baloglu (2011); Ritchie and Crouch (2003); Buhalis (2000)
C7: The strategy examines the results of particular analyses for the stipulation of the competitive advantage	Dwyer and Kim (2003); Johnson, Scholes and Whittington (2008); Grant (2008); Ritchie and Crouch (2003)
C8: The strategy contains a development vision	Grant (2008); Dwyer and Kim (2003); David (2009); Ritchie and Crouch (2003)
C9: The strategy sets development targets	Dess, Lumpkin and Eisner (2008); Cooper et al. (2008); Grant (2008)
C10: The strategy proposes measures to achieve the vision and targets	Evans, Campbell and Stonehouse (2003); Johnson, Scholes and Whittington (2008); Kozak and Baloglu (2011)
C11: The strategy defines the process of its implementation	Ritchie and Crouch (2003); Edgell et al. (2008); Grant (2008); Kozak and Baloglu (2011)
C12: The strategy defines a control system of its implementation	Ritchie and Crouch (2003); Johnson, Scholes and Whittington (2008); Kozak and Baloglu (2011)

Source: authors

This process leads to a hierarchical structure of three general requirements, seven main requirements (RQ1 – RQ7), and twelve criteria (C1 – C12), which comprise the entire planning process. This structure is described in the following figure.

Figure 4- Structure of the Evaluation Criteria



Source: authors

The evaluation procedure uses on an on-line application. The criteria defined in the previous benchmarking phase are used; with each refined into three key characteristics. These characteristics provide a better understanding of the criteria and reduce the factor of subjectivity. In this way, the respondents evaluate the levels of fulfilment of the 36 key characteristics that typify 12 criteria associated with the planning cycle. Participants access the application through a unique URL link. This ensures that only invited stakeholders from a given destination comment and evaluate the particular development plan.

The survey deploys triangular fuzzy numbers that represent the verbal expression of a criteria's importance and the level of fulfilment. These fuzzy variables are adequate to model real-life circumstances. The considered fuzzy approaches are consistent with previous research conducted by Gupta, Sagar and Kishore (2003), and Wang and Chang (2007).

Table 4 -Linguistic Variables

Importance Weight of the Criterion		Rating of the Criterion	
Linguistic Variable	Triangular Fuzzy Number	Linguistic Variable	Triangular Fuzzy Number
Very low	(0; 0,1; 0,3)	Very poor	(0; 1; 3)
Low	(0,1; 0,3; 0,5)	Poor	(1; 3; 5)
Medium	(0,3; 0,5; 0,7)	Fair	(3; 5; 7)
High	(0,5; 0,7; 0,9)	Good	(5; 7; 9)
Very high	(0,7; 0,9; 1)	Very Good	(7; 9; 10)

Source: adapted from Gupta, Sagar and Kishore (2003), Wang and Chang (2007)

The resulting data are derived from an arithmetic mean of the values completed by the individual evaluators. The formula (1) expresses the importance of the criterion, where l means total number of evaluators, \tilde{v}_j^l expresses the fuzzy weight of j -th criterion given by l -th evaluator. At the first step of the computation of a criterion value, it is necessary to recognise an average level of the fulfilment of the key characteristics. This is specified by formula (2), where m is the number of key characteristics and \tilde{x}_j^m expresses fulfilment degree of the m -th key characteristics of j -th criterion. The resulting criterion value is then computed using formula (3), where n means number of evaluators from a given region.

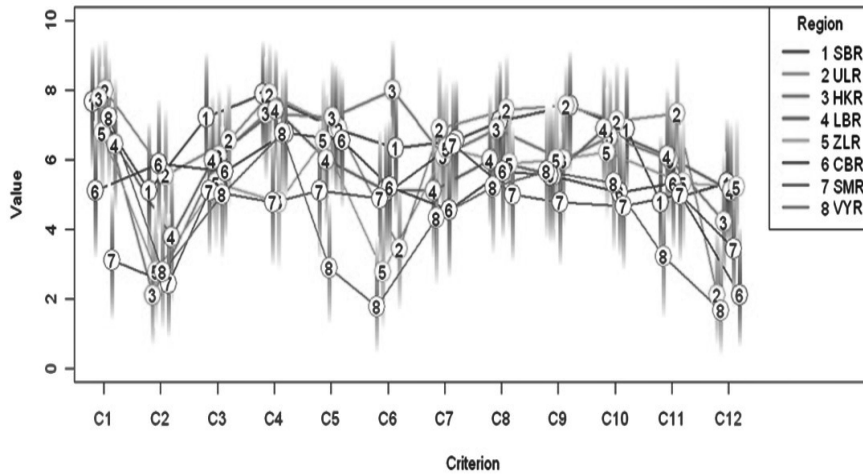
$$\tilde{v}_j = \frac{1}{l} (\tilde{v}_j^1 + \tilde{v}_j^2 + \dots + \tilde{v}_j^l) \quad (1)$$

$$\bar{x}_j = \frac{1}{m} (\tilde{x}_j^1 + \tilde{x}_j^2 + \dots + \tilde{x}_j^m) \quad (2)$$

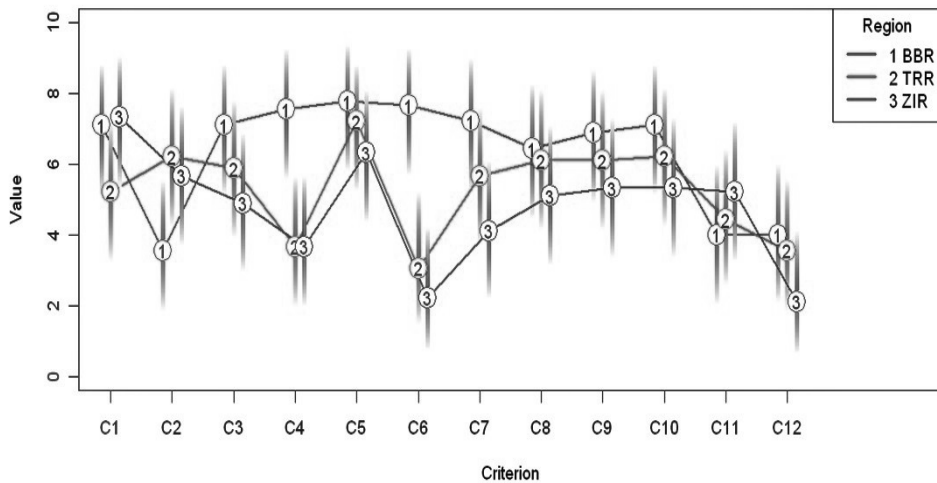
$$\tilde{x}_j = \frac{1}{n} (\bar{x}_j^1 + \bar{x}_j^2 + \dots + \bar{x}_j^n) \quad (3)$$

The following three graphs represent the overall results of the evaluation of strategies in the form of triangular fuzzy numbers. The values of the criteria use formulae (1) – (3).

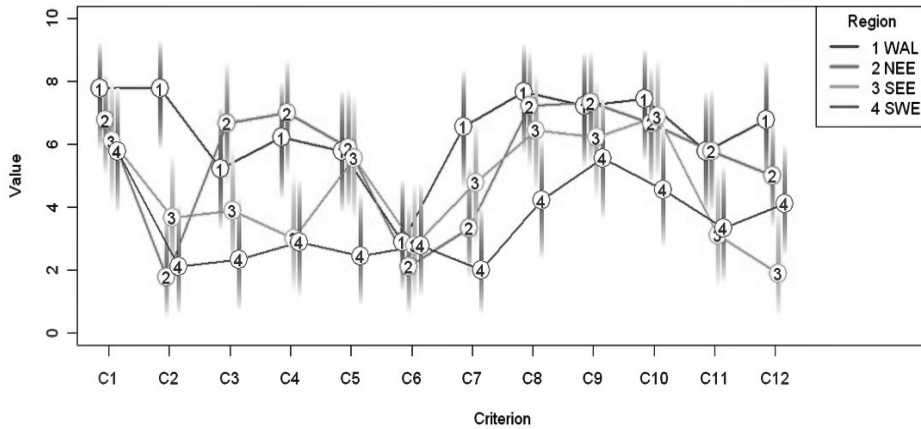
Graph 1 – 3 - Evaluation Results



Legend: 1 SBR (South Bohemia Region), 2 ULR (Ustinad Labem Region), 3 HKR (Hradec Kralove Region), 4 LBR (Liberec Region), 5 ZLR (Zlin Region), 6 CBR (Central Bohemia Region), 7 SMR (South Moravia Region), 8 VYR (Vysocina Region)



Legend: 1BBR (Banska Bystrica Region), 2 TRR (Trencin Region), 3 ZIR (Zilina Region)



Legend: 1 WAL (Wales), 2 NEE (North East England), 3 SEE (South East England), 4 SWE (South West England)

Source: own research

4.3 Selection of the Benchmark

The selection of the benchmark is advanced as a solution to the multi-criteria decision-making problem based on the TOPSIS method which is frequently used. It permits variants ordering according to their distance from ideal and basal variant (Opricovic & Tzeng, 2004). Although the application of multi-criteria decision-making methods is not very frequent in benchmarking surveys, the reasons for selecting this approach and the TOPSIS method are: (a) its relative simplicity, (b) the suitability with regard to the proposed evaluation method, (c) the frequent utilisation in combination with fuzzy data, and (d) comparable predicative ability in comparison with other multi-criteria methods.

The first step of the TOPSIS method application is the construction of a fuzzy criteria matrix shown in formula (4) and its normalisation according to the expression (5),

where $i = 1, 2, \dots, m; j = 1, 2, \dots, n; \tilde{x}_{ij} = (a_{ij}, b_{ij}, c_{ij}); \tilde{r}_{ij} = \left(\frac{a_{ij}}{c_j^+}, \frac{b_{ij}}{c_j^+}, \frac{c_{ij}}{c_j^+}\right); c_j^+ = \max c_{ij}$.

$$\tilde{Y} = \begin{bmatrix} \tilde{x}_{11} & \cdots & \tilde{x}_{1n} \\ \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ \tilde{x}_{m1} & \cdots & \tilde{x}_{mn} \end{bmatrix} \quad (4)$$

$$\tilde{R} = [\tilde{r}_{ij}]_{m \times n} \quad (5)$$

The following step is the creation of a weighted fuzzy criteria matrix \tilde{W} that considers the different criteria weight. The matrix is created by multiplying the criteria values from normalised matrix \tilde{R} by their weights \tilde{v}_j . For single elements it applies $\tilde{w}_{ij} = \tilde{r}_{ij} \times \tilde{v}_j$.

Elements of the weighted fuzzy criteria matrix are positive triangular fuzzy numbers with values from the interval $(0, 10)$. The ideal variant has the form $A^+ = (\tilde{w}_1^+, \tilde{w}_2^+, \dots, \tilde{w}_n^+)$ and basal variant $A^- = (\tilde{w}_1^-, \tilde{w}_2^-, \dots, \tilde{w}_n^-)$, where $\tilde{w}_j^+ = (10, 10, 10)$ and $\tilde{w}_j^- = (0, 0, 0)$; $j = 1, 2, \dots, n$. The distance of evaluated variants from ideal and basal variants are calculated according to the formulae (6) and (7), where $d(\tilde{w}_a, \tilde{w}_b)$ indicates distance of two fuzzy numbers \tilde{A} and \tilde{B} , calculated by vertex method according to formula (8) and where $i = 1, 2, \dots, m$; $j = 1, 2, \dots, n$.

$$d_i^+ = \sum_{j=1}^n d(\tilde{w}_{ij}, \tilde{w}_j^+) \quad (6)$$

$$d_i^- = \sum_{j=1}^n d(\tilde{w}_{ij}, \tilde{w}_j^-) \quad (7)$$

$$d(\tilde{A}, \tilde{B}) = \sqrt{\frac{1}{3}[(a_1 - b_1)^2 + (a_2 - b_2)^2 + (a_3 - b_3)^2]} \quad (8)$$

Finally, the closeness coefficient from basal variant according to formula (9) is calculated, where $i = 1, 2, \dots, m$ and a ranking of evaluated variants is assembled.

$$\tilde{c}_i = \frac{d_i^-}{d_i^+ + d_i^-} \quad (9)$$

Based on the results of the on-line evaluation, the following four-member benchmark is determined: (1) The tourism development plan of the South Bohemia Region, (2) The tourism development plan of Wales, (3) The tourism development plan of the Ustinad Labem Region and (4) The tourism development plan of the Banska Bystrica Region. The reasons for the composition of four-member benchmark are (a) a sufficient robustness with regard to the identification of good practice, and (b) a relatively small range with regard to the comparability. Table 5 contains the closeness coefficient values.

Table 5 - Closeness Coefficient (TOPSIS method)

Country / Region (abbr.)	d+	d-	Closeness Coefficient
Czech Republic			
- South Bohemian Region (SBR)	1,874	0,514	0,514
- Usti nad Labem Region (ULR)	1,949	0,500	0,500
- Hradec Kralove Region (HKR)	1,973	0,488	0,488
- Liberec Region (LBR)	2,034	0,469	0,469
- Zlin Region (ZLR)	2,132	0,446	0,446
- Central Bohemian Region (CBR)	2,156	0,433	0,433
- South Moravian Region (SMR)	2,301	0,393	0,393

- Vysocina Region (VYR)	2,373	0,384	0,384
Slovak Republic			
- Banska Bystrica Region (BBR)	1,944	0,497	0,497
- Trnava Region (TRR)	2,147	0,439	0,439
- Zilina Region (ZIR)	2,266	0,408	0,408
Great Britain			
- Wales (WAL)	1,916	0,505	0,505
- North East England (NEE)	2,124	0,456	0,456
- South East England (SEE)	2,329	0,395	0,395
- South West England (SWE)	2,535	0,332	0,332

Source: own research

4.4 Benchmarking Gap Analysis

A benchmarking gap is generally described as the difference between the actual performance and the performance of the chosen benchmarking partner (Kozak, 2004; Camp, 2006). In this research it is the difference between evaluation of one selected (compared) development plan and evaluation of four-member benchmark. On the basis of the benchmarking gap analysis, it is possible to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the compared plan and derive from them the opportunities for quality enhancement.

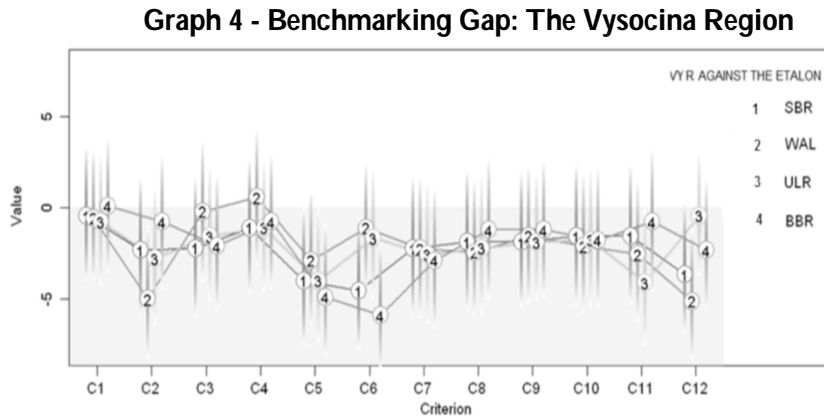
Let \tilde{x}_{ij}^{comp} represent the criterion value derived from the evaluation of compared plan and \tilde{x}_{ij}^{bench} represent the criterion value derived from evaluation of the benchmark. If \tilde{x}_{ij}^{comp} is less than \tilde{x}_{ij}^{bench} , the negative benchmarking gap occurs. By analogy, if \tilde{x}_{ij}^{comp} is greater than \tilde{x}_{ij}^{bench} , the positive benchmarking gap occurs. In the case of equality of the criteria values, the neutral benchmarking gap occurs.

The quantification of the benchmarking gap is realised by the formula (10) where \tilde{A} represents the evaluation results of compared plan and \tilde{B} represents the evaluation results of the benchmark. The input data consist of aggregated results of the benchmark evaluation and the evaluation results of compared plan in the form of triangular fuzzy numbers.

$$\tilde{A} - \tilde{B} = (a_1, a_2, a_3) - (b_1, b_2, b_3) = (a_1 - b_1, a_2 - b_2, a_3 - b_3) \quad (10)$$

The following graph illustrates the quantification of the benchmarking gap of the Vysocina Region against the benchmark. This region was selected as an example for the realisation of the benchmarking gap analysis with the aim to identify the opportunities for

quality enhancement and corresponding good practices. The fuzzy values in the grey area represent a negative benchmarking gap while the values above this area, a positive gap.



Source: own research

4.5 Data Gathering and Analysis

By means of the benchmarking gap analysis, it is possible to identify the weaknesses of the compared plan and plot their importance in comparison with the benchmark. It is possible to determine the quality enhancement opportunities that increase focus within the development plan updating process. Once completed, the good practices from the benchmark are used to improve the weaknesses and eliminate the negative benchmarking gap.

For the fulfilment of this task, it is necessary to realise the data gathering survey focuses on the content analysis of the plans incorporated into the benchmark (static form of planning), and methods of their elaboration (dynamic form of planning). The research team opted for a combination of indirect and direct data gathering techniques. From the perspective of the benchmarking model, such an approach enables the completion of quantitative data with results from the qualitative survey.

The analysis of the content and structure of the benchmark is selected as the method of indirect data gathering. Although this process enables the identification of good practices from the static form of planning, it is not sufficient. Consequently, information from the semi-structured interviews with destination managers involved in the process of the plans elaboration is included. The aim of the interviews is to discover the managerial methods used during the strategic planning process.

Table 6 summarises the main quality improvement opportunities from the *Strategy of Tourism Development in the Vysocina Region* based on the benchmarking gap analysis and

consequent indirect data gathering survey.

Table 6 - Opportunities for Quality Enhancement: The Vysocina Region

Planning cycle	Evaluation Criteria	Opportunities for Quality Enhancement
Basic Premises	C1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main goal of the strategy is not sufficiently explained • Procedure of the strategy elaboration is described in vague terms
External Analysis	C2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External factors influencing tourism demand are not examined
Internal Analysis	C3 C4 C5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intangible resources of the destination are not examined • Quality of internal sources is not examined • Internal sources are not examined with a view to their uniqueness • Relationships between regional actors are not described
Synthesis and Competitive Advantage	C6 C7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitive advantage of the destination is not identified • Competitive position of the destination is not set • SWOT analysis is too generalised
Long-term Goals	C8 C9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision is too wide and it does not indicate the required future state • System of strategic aims is too complicated without connection to development vision • Procedure for strategic aims fulfilment is not clearly described
Strategy	C10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy is too wide without clear connection to the vision and strategic aims • Enhancement of destination's competitiveness is not accentuated
Implementation and Control of the Strategy	C11 C12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form of strategy implementation is not clearly described • Monitoring system of strategy realisation is not set • Responsibility for strategy realisation and monitoring is not assigned

Source: own research

4.6 Stipulation of the Good Practices

Now the good practices from the benchmark are used to purge the negative benchmarking gap. The individual "Cards of good practice" are created for this purpose in the form of the following tables. The cards contain good practices of both the static and dynamic forms of the planning aggregated according to main phases of the planning cycle. The good practices of the static form proceed from the structure and content of the benchmark while the dynamic form reflects managerial methods of its elaboration.

The source of primary good practice is the plan from the benchmark against which the strategy of the Vysocina Region embodies a significant negative benchmarking gap. The sources of secondary good practice are the remaining members of the benchmark. These practices are usable relative to the scale of the benchmarking gap. The cards also include information on application of the managerial methods in the form of a simplified three-shade semaphore method where the shade indicates level of simplicity and usefulness of the method.

Table 7 – 13 Good Practices Cards

Basic Premises		
Good Practice: Static Form of Planning		
C1: The strategy has a clearly defined purpose and scope	Source of Good Practice	
	Primary	Secondary
Explanation of the main reason and form of strategy elaboration	ULR	
Description of the procedure of strategy elaboration		
Explanation of the link between strategy and economic development intentions		WAL
Setting of the main idea of the strategy		SBR
Good Practice: Dynamic Form of Planning	Application	
	Simplicity	Usefulness
Work Breakdown Structure	medium	high
Round table	medium	medium
Panel discussion	high	low

Source: own research

External Analysis		
Good Practice: Static Form of Planning		
C2: The strategy takes into account external factors impact	Source of Good Practice	
	Primary	Secondary
Analysis of the most important macro factors influencing tourism demand	WAL	
Identification and analysis of the main tourism trends		

Judgement of analysed factor's impact on tourism development		
Analysis of economic situation of inhabitants and unemployment rate		ULR
Analysis of legislative framework and its impact on tourism		SBR
Good Practice: Dynamic Form of Planning	Application	
	Simplicity	Usefulness
PEST analysis	low	medium
Analysis of demand trends and demand development	medium	medium
Scenario method	low	low
Working groups	medium	high
Brainstorming	high	low

Source: own research

Internal Analysis		
Good Practice: Static Form of Planning		
C3: The strategy deals with the internal sources of destination	Source of Good Practice	
	Primary	Secondary
Identification of intangible resources of the destination	SBR	
Examination of a progress of tourist infrastructure's quantity and quality		
Judgement of the uniqueness of destination's supply		
Setting the key forms of tourism and linked tourism activities		BBR
C4: The strategy deals with tourism demand at destination	Source of Good Practice	
	Primary	Secondary
Setting the key segments of travellers and identification of their profile	SBR	
Identification of the most important tourist targets (attractions)		
Survey of satisfaction of the key travellers segments		ULR
C5: The strategy defines the most important regional stakeholders	Source of Good Practice	
	Primary	Secondary
Identification of organisations notably influencing tourism development	BBR	
Definition of the mission of regional stakeholders in tourism		
Identification of co-operation possibilities with regional stakeholders		ULR
Good Practice: Dynamic Form of Planning	Application	

	Simplicity	Usefulness
Analysis of tourism infrastructure and conditions for the development	high	high
Evaluation of destination offerings	low	medium
Quantitative analysis of destination performance	medium	medium
Analysis of tourist behaviour and satisfaction	low	high
Stakeholders audit	medium	medium
Synthesis and Competitive Advantage		
Good Practice: Static Form of Planning		
C6: The strategy analyses the situation at other destinations	Source of Good Practice	
	Primary	Secondary
Identification of main competitors at the European and national level	BBR	
Comparison of tourism supply with competitors according to key forms of tourism		
Identification of sources of competitive advantage		
Setting the competitive position		
Analysis of co-operation opportunities with main competitors		SBR
C7: The strategy examines the results of particular analyses for stipulation of the competitive advantage	Source of Good Practice	
	Primary	Secondary
Overall SWOT analysis structured under the forms of tourism	BBR	
Analysis of the main development problems		
Analysis of the causes of main development problems		ULR
Good Practice: Dynamic Form of Planning	Application	
	Simplicity	Usefulness
Assessment of the competitors profile	medium	high
Estimation of relative competitive strength	low	medium
SWOT analysis	medium	high
Working groups	medium	high

Source: own research

Long-term Goals		
Good Practice: Static Form of Planning		
C8: The strategy contains development vision	Source of Good Practice	
	Primary	Secondary
Reflection of current state discovered by previous analysis	WAL	

Reasoning of the main idea of the vision		SBR
C9: The strategy has set development targets	Source of Good Practice	
	Primary	Secondary
Setting the strategic tasks in consequence with development vision	SBR	
Setting a clear procedure for fulfilment of the strategic tasks		
Reasoning of the strategic targets		BBR
Proposal of the set of monitoring indicators		BBR
Good Practice: Dynamic Form of Planning	Application	
	Simplicity	Usefulness
Round table with representatives of working groups	medium	medium
Brainstorming combined with techniques suitable for evaluation of the ideas	medium	high

Source: own research

Strategy Formulation		
Good Practice: Static Form of Planning		
C10: The strategy proposes measures to achieve the vision and targets	Source of Good Practice	
	Primary	Secondary
Formulation of logical system of strategic challenges developing the targets	WAL	
Emphasis on development of the sources of competitive advantage		
Setting the concrete strategic priorities within each strategic challenge		
Good Practice: Dynamic Form of Planning	Application	
	Simplicity	Usefulness
Logical framework matrix	low	high
Working groups	medium	medium

Source: own research

Implementation and Control of the Strategy		
Good Practice: Static Form of Planning		
C11: The strategy defines the process of its implementation	Source of Good Practice	
	Primary	Secondary

Description of the form of strategy implementation	ULR	
Setting the obligatory procedure for realisation of concrete projects		
C12: The strategy defines a control system of its implementation	Source of Good Practice	
	Primary	Secondary
Setting the strategy monitoring process	WAL	
Assignment of the responsibility for monitoring of the strategy		
Setting the anticipated outcomes and indicators for control of their achievement		
Good Practice: Dynamic Form of Planning	Application	
	Simplicity	Usefulness
Logical framework matrix	low	high
Responsibility matrix	medium	high

Source: own research

4.6.1 Recommendations

As a final step of the analysis it is possible to formulate these brief recommendations for the transfer of the good practices to practice:

1. Consistently address all phases of the planning cycle. The planning cycle consists of a logically consistent system whose individual components are closely linked. It is necessary to ensure the coherence of the individual parts of the strategic documents and afford equal attention to each.

2. Do not underestimate the importance of introductory information. The basic premise of the planning cycle is its outset, which affects subsequently its direction. It is necessary to contemplate the purpose of strategic planning, the expected effects on regional stakeholders, and to describe the main phases of the elaboration process of the strategy.

3. Reduce and consolidate the analysis. The analytical section should not be a static description of the conditions for tourism development. It should contain only a brief definition. At the core, the confirmed analysis of the external and internal environment can best express the current state and provide predictions for future development. A synthesis of the analyses results is essential. It enables the revelation of key resources that hold a decisive influence on the development of tourism.

4. Do not neglect the existence of global factors. Tourism is sensitive to various factors. Strategic analysis identifies the most important factors, analyses trends, and enables a valid assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the internal resources based on the state of the destination macro-environment.

5. Elaborate an analysis of internal resources. This section must be extended to the analysis of human and intangible resources. An element of the competitiveness of the destination's resources is introduced into the analyses. There is also the necessity to analyse the eligibility of a usage of the resources with respect to the external conditions of the destination.

6. Develop a preparation of the strategy implementation. The final stage of the planning cycle cannot be ignored. It should be given the same attention as previous stages. There is a need to establish the necessary resources for strategy implementation, any limitations, and in particular the responsibility of individuals or organisations for the implementation process.

7. Define a control system of the strategy implementation. A clear and workable system for the monitoring of the strategy implementation process is significant to the implementation phase. Such a system must contain all the necessary steps to continuously monitor the success of the implementation of the strategy including measurable indicators and time schedule.

5. Conclusion

This paper focuses on the issue of tourism development planning at the level of tourism destinations. It emphasises the necessity of strategic planning and regional stakeholders' involvement in the strategic process to achieve sustainable competitive advantage of tourism destinations. The benchmarking method is used as a proven tool for the quality enhancement with a strong link to the concept of competitiveness. The paper concentrates on strategic benchmarking that is not described and applied in the travel and tourism sector in a complex form. It aims to contribute to the quality enhancement of selected development plan by the utilisation of a strategic benchmarking survey in various tourism destinations.

The research proposes a comprehensive methodology of strategic benchmarking centred on strategic plans of tourism destinations. This methodology is applied to the conditions of 15 regions in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Great Britain. It was possible to locate the key regional stakeholders capable to evaluate the quality of their "domestic" strategic plans. The evaluation results are used for comparison of their quality and to determine common strengths and weaknesses. The stakeholder approach to benchmarking enables the examination not only the static form of planning but also its dynamic form.

The resulting good practices from destinations involved in the benchmark were transferred into Cards of good practices used by the destination management of the Vysocina Region. Consequently, in doing so, removes the negative benchmarking gap in the strategy

updating phase.

Nevertheless, the benchmarking survey centred entirely on the planning process. It did not concentrate on the implementation of the strategy to practice and real impacts of tourism policy. This set of problem will be a matter of interest of more extensive research focused on evaluation of the effects of tourism policy for destination stakeholders on a regional or micro-regional level. Despite this, the research creates substantial conditions for the improvement of the planning process quality and the fulfilment of the main aim of modern regional policy: the development of the regions thanks to the increase of their competitiveness.

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