



Regional Brand in Slovak Tourism

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Abstract. After almost 20 years of the independent Slovak Republic existence in the midst of a turbulent changing Europe, the country perceives brands as a tool for expressing the company's given ability, its rapid recognition or creating a priori positive connotations associated with this extreme. Tourism brands are currently the result of cluster initiatives, support for the local economy at all levels of the national economy. The aim of the paper is to identify tourism brands, to evaluate awareness of the "Certified Rural Accommodation" brand and to point out the importance of a regional brand perceived as a guarantee of the tourism accommodation services quality that owes the creation and establishment of the market to regional public or private sector actors. The brand value was examined by both the customer and the provider. The basic research set of customer awareness research was 174 respondents addressed by an electronic questionnaire. Provisioning of brand value from the perspective of the provider was carried out for the actors representing the public and private sectors at regional and local level. The research results indicate that the brand awareness of the customer is below average, for various reasons; low promotion. Awareness is assessed by the provider as above average; a growing number of certified accommodation facilities. By predicting the basic economic indicator in tourism by 2020 using the correlation analysis with one dependent variable, the authors of the paper have pointed out the importance of establishing the tourism brand in the market.

Keywords: Brand value · Tourism brand · Innovation · Provider · Customer · Brand awareness

1 Introduction

The role of regional brands is to reach the visitor with a comprehensive, original, unambiguous concept of presenting products, services, associations, space, not only the region but also the state. In order to fulfill these tasks, it is necessary to coordinate the entire

labeling process from branding to brand sustainability. Not all countries are sufficiently aware of the nature, importance, seriousness and benefits of the regional brands. Our aim in the paper was to choose from a wide portfolio of brands, to choose a brand that is applied in current Slovak practice, it is unique, original, long-term established on the market, but the results indicate that awareness of this brand is low. Finding the causes of this situation is a long-term process that is conditioned by the availability of information, the scope of primary research, and the expression of the respondents' will to provide the required information. Rare sources are obtaining knowledge from a state where the position of tourism is better based on quantitative indicators. The importance of searching for these causes and even the essence of regional marking was confirmed by the quantitative results and prediction of selected economic indicator usable in tourism.

2 Tourism, Product and Services in Tourism and Current Changes

Tourism is a dynamically developing sector that has reached a mature stage of development (Goeldner and Ritchie 2014). In Slovakia it is a sector with a strong cross-sectional character, an excellent starting potential currently insufficient development (Beresecká 2012). Slovakia cannot compete with neighboring countries in the field of tourism (Krogmann et al. 2015). The problems in tourism development are insufficient utilization of potential, achieved quality of services, insufficient quality of basic and accompanying tourist infrastructure, unsatisfactory level of foreign language knowledge, insufficient quality of promotion (Meszárošová and Levický 2017).

Many entities are involved in the development of this sector - tourism service providers (businesses providing accommodation and catering services, tourism businesses (banks, insurance companies and others), service providers (professional and sectoral unions, marketing agencies, ministries, regional structures - their size, economic strength, provided services, financial resources, organizational and legal form are different but they are complementary to each other, so they cannot work without each other (Micháľková 2010). Each tourism subject uses a set of techniques, tools and measures to organize tourism through which he coordinates, plans, organizes, communicates and makes decisions within tourism with a view to its sustainable development (Kratochvíl 2007). The successful development of tourism is also the result of previous development and adaptation of local government bodies to the conditions of the country's development (Gecíková and Papcunová 2014).

There is no universal organizational structure of tourism in Slovakia, it has the character of cooperative management of the destination, it is managed through a three-level organizational structure at the national, regional and local level. Public, private, non-profit sector as well as public-private partnerships are coordinated within each level of governance. The main body of tourism is currently the Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic. Coordination of activities within the perspective type of tourism, namely rural tourism in Slovakia, is also within the competence of another Ministry, namely the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the SR. The marketing activities of the country are not managed by a separate contributory or budgetary organization established by the Ministry, but by a section within the organizational structures of the Ministry. Unified presentation of Slovakia abroad is ensured

by the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic. This role arose from the program declaration of the Slovak Government for the years 2012–2016 and from the so-called. of the Competence Act. (Beresecká 2019a, b). The need for a systematic solution for the coordination of tourism development, young, small and applicable legislation serving to promote cooperation between the various actors, was addressed by the creation of various tourism associations, clusters emerging at regional level. They are geographically concentrated actors, have broadly defined membership, are sector-specific, and are established as public-private partnerships (Duman et al. 2009), generate improved service quality, increased visibility, joint marketing activities, but also joint engagement at major local events (Novelli et al. 2006). Significant attributes of clusters include synergy and cooperation, a common approach to resources, cost reduction (Staszewska 2008; Schejbal 2012), high flexibility, division of marketing information (Saxena 2005). The success of the cluster as a form of cooperation is influenced by various factors, including willingness to cooperate, open communication (formal and informal), traditions, human and social capital, creativity, but also participation in joint projects, education and promotion. Tourism clusters are becoming an important regional development element (Balog 2015).

Due to the need to make the region more attractive but also to offer the specific experience that clients seek, the services and products in tourism clusters are appropriately combined and modified with each other (Michael 2003). These attributes are significant and necessary in view of the growing competitive space in this sector as well. International tourism competition has set new rules in the global marketplace and has been looking for new, innovative, fantasy products and tourism brands that can help create a unique product offering.

Innovation is perceived through gastronomic culture (Kontis and Skoultos 2018), product development innovations and market diversification outside the peak tourist season, (Connell et al. 2015; Cagáňová et al. 2015), changes in Internet branding (Morgan and Veloutsou 2013; Alejziak 2007), changes in the perception of satisfaction, quality, performance and various other variables that are a good predictor of customer's intended loyalty (Geng et al. 2008; Kontis and Skoultos 2018). The policy changes also affect the difference in requirements for men and women for leisure activities and prefer holiday experiences (Chen et al. 2018), which affects the composition of the current tourism product (Xu 2010; Perri 2015). He argues that product creation is influenced by the expectations of tourists, who are currently more sophisticated, are seeking for more personalized travel experience, which is often defined as leisure travel. Changes also occur in the consumer behavior of tourists, which includes certain decisions, activities, ideas, or experiences to meet consumers' needs. The decision-making process is becoming more routine, which currently refutes the opinion of Hyde and Lawson (2003), who argued that tourist decisions include planned purchases. The tourist of the future will be demanding and will also require quality accommodation services with which he is currently not very satisfied (Beresecká and Hudáková 2019).

Nowadays, knowledge-based changes in tourism are also perceived. Silent knowledge, which can be achieved through direct experience and procedural, based on official education and training programs in this field. (Yin and Jahanshahi 2018). The combination of knowledge, perception, creativity and accidental confluence of events continually

identifies opportunities for the emergence of new tourism products (Russell and Faulkner 2004), covering the whole complex of aspects and components of the product, including attitudes and expectations of quality (Ghadban et al. 2017).

2.1 Brand in Tourism

The brand in tourism began to write its history in the last decade of the 20th century. Recently, there is a growing interest in brands in tourism, as tour operators are increasingly aware that they can win the customer not only through the right price but above all through the hearts of visitors. Brands in tourism services depend on specific people and locations (country or location). Some locations have built up an image based on the brand category, others based on their location. Rich, dynamic, entertaining customers are attracted to places known for their many devices to meet their requirements. On the other hand, customers looking for rest, relaxation, peace and quiet, will seek spa spots and outdoor stays. Brand building is no longer just a concern for manufacturing and trading companies or tourist businesses, but they appear in different areas of life. The brand is used to refer to tangible products, services, people, regions or countries. Regional product brands are a phenomenon of the present period and interest in them is growing significantly in European countries (Gúčík et al. 2011; Seifertová et al. 2013; Ricz et al. 2011).

Attributes of a strong brand in tourism include a strong brand that is interested in product characteristics, convincingly offers one key advantage, speaks about the value system of the company (the company is focused on innovation, offers quality) is the image of customers who buy it, it can be attributed to human characteristics (young, mature, old brand, etc.). Brands that develop these five attributes, fulfill specific promises, through which they contribute to the creation of strong preferences (Gúčík et al. 2018) are considered to be successful.

In the field of tourism, the whole process of brand building and management can be perceived as a complex of brand building and brand management activities and brand building and brand management, which overlap and complement each other. The process of building and managing a territory brand should at least include the creation of a responsible working team with powers to manage and control the whole process, analyzing the current perception of the territory and determining the current position of the territory, identifying the main branding idea and analyzing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, identifying and addressing the opinion leaders of the territory, analyzing various alternatives to the idea, identifying and defining target groups, visualizing branded manuals, creating a system of marketing activities to promote the brand to customers (Vaňová et al. 2017).

In tourism, sustainability is associated with the notion of satisfaction. The empirical results of the study have been published in the scholarly literature, providing information on how important the analysis of image-satisfaction-loyalty relationships is. Image - Awareness is modified and supplemented by any new information, stimulus, own experience or experience of acquaintances, friends and family and participates in the creation of a diversified, detailed and realistic picture of the destination. Tourists tend to rely on this model of decision-making on the choice of destination leading to satisfaction. Therefore, destinations must pay due attention to the creation of a positive image through

the quality of services and products that influence the satisfaction and behavior of visitors. Tourists are willing to re-visit the destination and disseminate positive information about it. The study pointed to a relationship between loyalty and repeated visits. For these reasons, it is essential to ensure a high level of tourist satisfaction in order to develop appropriate tourist behavior, improve sustainability and target competitiveness (Geng et al. 2008). Brand awareness (Matlovičová 2015) can be measured through memories (which product brands the customer remembers), first memory (which brand was the first customer spontaneously remembered), dominance (the customer remembered the brand as the only one), identification (the customer has ever met the brand).

In tourism, the sustainability of a brand is significantly perceived through the use of a virtual communication environment, through electronic marketing. Electronic marketing is considered to be a more efficient way of communicating on the market compared to traditional means of communication. Maráková (2016) states that “the Internet can do without marketing, modern marketing without the Internet does not”. E-marketing tools include websites, online advertising, email and webcasting, mobile marketing, Internet communities (Web 2.0., Web 3.0., Wiki systems, Flickr, Blogs, Facebook, You tube, Pinterest, Twitter, TripAdvisor, etc.) and mashups.

3 Materials and Methodology

The aim of the paper is to identify tourism brands, to evaluate the awareness of the brand “Certified Rural Accommodation” and to point out the importance of a regional brand perceived as a guarantee of the quality of tourism accommodation services in which regional public and private sector actors are involved.

Primary and secondary sources were used to process the paper. Secondary sources have become the starting point for the analysis of theoretical bases and identification of tourism brands used in practice of the Slovak Republic. The source of statistical data was the database belonging to the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic and Internal Records in the Office of the Nitra Self-Governing Region.

Primary brand awareness research was carried out through quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative research was carried out when researching brand awareness by the customer. The basic research set of customer awareness research was 174 respondents addressed by an electronic questionnaire. The collection of the primary data in obtaining the customer’s view of the brand’s performance was realized by the method of inquiry, electronic communication at one-off frequency, with a monothematic focus. The questionnaire consisted of 15 questions in order to get an answer why? What is brand awareness? Provider awareness of the brand, searching for causes and relationships will be carried out by a questioning method where the target group will be the individual and the experts, using a personal way of communication, direct questioning, degree of standardization - non-standardized, one-off frequency of questions, with multi-topic/ omnibus focus. For the purposes of primary research, the authors of the paper perceive the provider dual, that is, as the primary provider of accommodation services and the holder of the Certified Rural Accommodation brand. Provisioning of brand value from the perspective of the provider was carried out for actors representing the public and private sectors at regional and local level.

Research question: Is awareness of the ‘Certified Rural Accommodation’ brand on the tourism market sufficient? resulted in the following hypotheses, which the authors of the paper will subsequently verify by the proposed procedures and methods.

H0: According to the results of field research, customer awareness of the ‘Certified Rural Accommodation’ brand is below average.

H1: Awareness of the ‘Certified Rural Accommodation’ brand is above average according to customer field research.

H2: Awareness of the ‘Certified Rural Accommodation’ brand is below average by the provider based on field research results.

H3: Awareness of the ‘Certified Rural Accommodation’ tag is above average by the provider according to the results of field research.

The research question and hypotheses resulted in the compilation of the graphical logical framework within the issue shown in the Fig. 1.

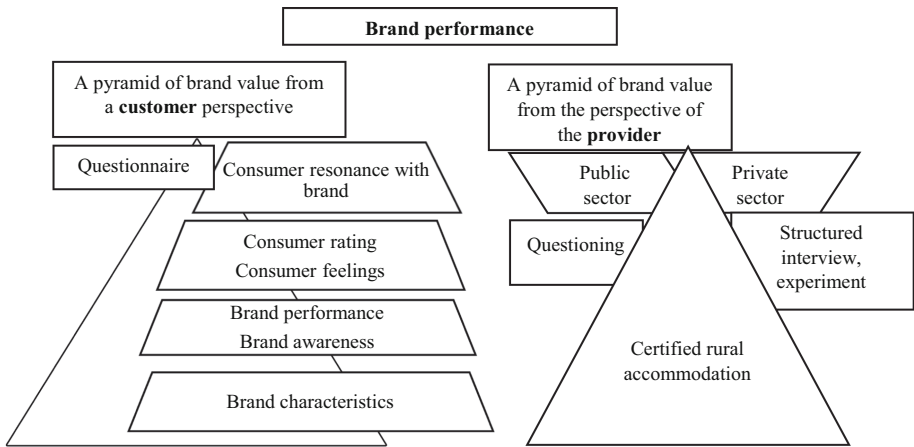


Fig. 1. Logical framework of the research question. Source: own research, (Berešková 2019a)

In order to show the importance of establishing the tourist brand, the prediction of the basic economic indicator of tourism - the number of overnight stays was used. One-variable correlation analysis method was used. The parameters of the quadratic function P1, P2, P3, the value R - correlation index and the value R2 - correlation coefficient were used to determine the suitability of the relations used. The correlation coefficient explains how much of the total variability of the endogenous variable explains the model, that is, how much of the total variability is determined by the quantified econometric model (most commonly reported in percentage). It is a measure of reconciling the empirical values the quality of the endogenous variable with the modeled values (Berešková 2019a).

A multi-criteria indirect method - point method was used to compare the level of the regions development. The 1–8 rating represents the regions order from the best to the worst results of the indicator.

4 Results and Discussion

Tourism has progressed progressively since the turn of the millennium. In the current period, the global growth again and has become one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the global market. Historically, the highest volume of visitors in recent years has been reached by tourism in Slovakia. Over the past three years, tourism performance in Slovakia has increased by approximately 45% (volume of visitors by 44%; revenue from tourist accommodation establishments by 48%), which significantly contributes to the creation of economic values, cultural and social development of the country, creation of local products or job opportunities.

Favorable developments from a global perspective and comparisons with neighboring countries are less satisfactory, as also shown in the Fig. 2.

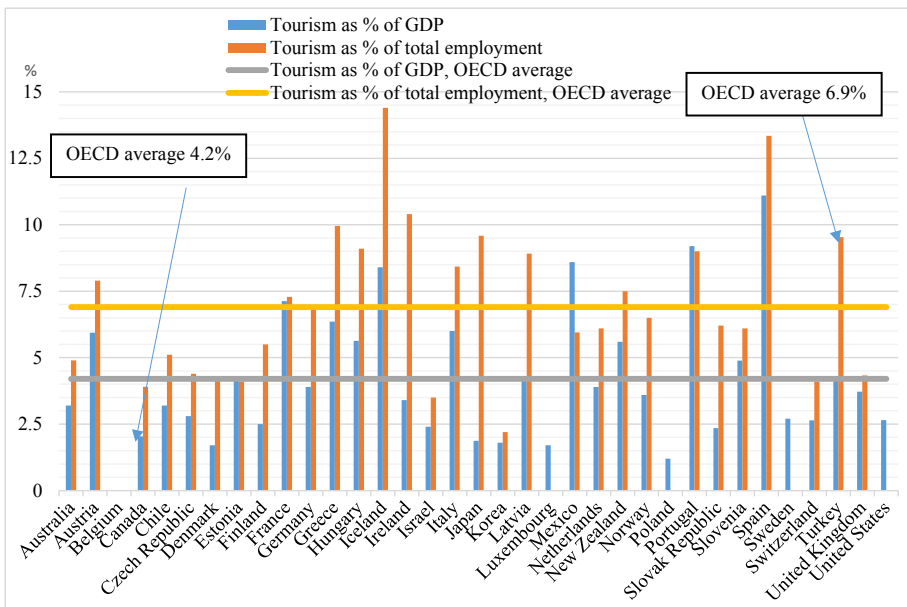


Fig. 2. OECD direct tourism contribution. Source: https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/urban-rural-and-regional-development/oecd-tourism-trends-and-policies-2018_tour-2018-en#page28

The growth rate of tourism performance in the Slovak Republic is slowing down. This is also the case with the results achieved in the Czech Republic, as shown in the Table 1.

The year-on-year development of accommodation statistics is also changing, as in 2017 the increase in foreign visitors was 6.7% (+135 thousand visitors) but the average growth rate in Europe meant an 8.4% increase in traffic. The neighboring states of the Slovak Republic also record faster year-on-year increases, which results from foreign visitors (e.g. the Czech Republic + 870 thousand foreign visitors with growth rate + 9.4%, Poland + 695 thousand visitors with growth rate 11.4%, Hungary + 348 thousand

Table 1. Selected and compared economic indicators in tourism

Country	Tourism as % of GDP	Tourism as % of total employment	Tourism as % of GDP, OECD average	Tourism as % of total employment, OECD average
Slovak Republic	2.35	6.21	4.20	6.90
Czech Republic	2.80	4.40	4.20	6.90

Source: https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/urban-rural-and-regional-development/oecd-tourism-trends-and-policies-2018_tour-2018-en#page28

visitors with growth rate + 6.6%, Austria + 1.3 million visitors with growth rate 4.8%). Such developments indicate stagnation and unfavorable state of dynamics of tourism development in the Slovak Republic in comparison with the boom on the global tourism market (Update of Marketing Strategy, 2019, In Beresecká 2019a, b).

The key to change and development of tourism is orientation to attractive forms of tourism, development, expansion and innovation of unique offer. In tourism, it is necessary to create an offer that corresponds to the expectations of sophisticated tourists of the present time who are looking for authentic, interactive and quality travel experiences. Focusing on the quality and level of provided services in tourism is an important tool of competition in a competitive environment and gains a stronger influence in the choice of destination or products.







Nowadays, visitors or potential tourists have a greater choice of products, destinations, but paradoxically, less and less time to choose the right product or service, so the brand becomes the focus of interest in the business environment. The following table provides an analysis of established brands in the Slovak Republic tourism.

The inclusion of the regional level marks shown in the Table 2 is carried out from the point of view of the grouping of local actors into a particular partnership, mainly Local Action Groups, which take on a regional character.

The role of the unified presentation of Slovakia abroad resulted from the legislative document. of the Competence Act. The country's "Good idea Slovakia" brand with symbolic significance works on two levels. The direction out of the country in building the social world, thus fulfilling social symbolism and inwardly serves to build its own identity. The initiator is the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic.

In 2014, the National Program for the Support of Agricultural Products and Foodstuffs was established, as well as brands serving to support domestic food production in a growing competitive environment after Slovakia's accession to the EU - "Quality Label SK". Products with above-standard quality parameters were marked with the "SK GOLD Quality Mark" mark (<http://www.znackakvality.sk/?pl=17>). These brands are initiated by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic.

Table 2. Tourism brands in the Slovak Republic

Level	Brands	Graphic representation of the brand
National level	destination / country marker	
	national products / quality label SK	
	enterprises / organization	
Regional level	regional products	
	clusters	
	tourism enterprises	

Source:http://www.ezat.sk/znaky_kvality/kriteria; [http://www.ubytovanienvidieku.sk/;](http://www.ubytovanienvidieku.sk/)
<https://www.visitorava.sk/><https://www.kupeledudince.sk/ospolocnosti/organizacia-cr-dudince;>
<http://www.systemkvalitycr.sk/sk/onas.html;> <http://www.karsticum.sk/Page/ZnackaRegionalnehoProduktu;>
[http://www.klasterliptov.sk/;](http://www.klasterliptov.sk/)[https://ochutnaj.praveslovenske.sk/znacka-kvality-sk/;](https://ochutnaj.praveslovenske.sk/znacka-kvality-sk/) [https://www.cedronnitrava.sk/;](https://www.cedronnitrava.sk/)
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<http://www.malohont.sk/clanok.php?id=278;> [http://vydra.sk/2019/06/13/regionalny-produkt-horehronie/;](http://vydra.sk/2019/06/13/regionalny-produkt-horehronie/)
[https://regiongron.sk/udelenie-znacky-regionalny-produkt-pohronie/;](https://regiongron.sk/udelenie-znacky-regionalny-produkt-pohronie/) [https://www.bystricoviny.sk/prclanky/190158/;](https://www.bystricoviny.sk/prclanky/190158/)
<https://www.trnava-vuc.sk/klaster-cestovneho-ruchu-zapadne-slovensko;>
[http://www.klasterliptov.sk/;](http://www.klasterliptov.sk/)[https://www.visitorava.sk/o-nas/;](https://www.visitorava.sk/o-nas/)
<https://www.kupeledudince.sk/o-spolocnosti/organizacia-cr-dudince;> <http://uksk.sk/stranka-2/stranka22/>

In Slovakia, an innovative and voluntary tool “Slovak Quality System for Tourism Services” has been created for organizations active in tourism, which is able to systematically help to improve the quality of services, gain expertise and increase their competitiveness. The system is based on simple principles of quality management, based on knowing the needs of the customer and continuously improving the quality of services provided. The entire system was created under the license of the proven German Service Qualität Deutschland system, which was taken over by several countries and became the basis for the Slovak Quality System for Tourism. Currently, 18 entities hold this brand. The implementer and coordinator of the quality system is the Ministry of Transport and Construction of the Slovak Republic (<https://www.mindop.sk/ministerstvo-1/cestovny-ruch-7/slovensky-system-kvality-sluzieb-v-cestovnom-ruchu/startuje-slovensky-system-kvality-sluzieb-v-cestovnom-ruchu>).

The system of regional labeling of products and services in Slovakia has not yet been officially represented at national level. The regional branding system is open to any

region with clearly defined borders. Existing regional labels in Slovakia are mainly initiated by Local Action Groups or Public Private Partnerships operating on the LEADER principles. The National Network of Slovak Local Action Groups (NSS MAS) thus covers the national level of coordination and promotion of regional labeling in Slovakia. In each regional labeling region, there is a local regional coordinator who carries out regional labeling activities and communicates with local producers and service providers. The actors of the regional labeling agreed on a uniform design of the logotype of the local products and services labeling in Slovakia and the minimum principles for the certification of the regional product or service were adopted, which will be respected in each acceding region. In addition, each region will take into account its specificities and uniqueness in its principles. There are several important regional brands in the Slovak Republic. The regional product quality label e.g. Ponitrie received products: cow's and goat's milk, mousse, mead, oil paintings, liquid chilli pepper extract, pumpkin seeds, accommodation and catering services. The regional product brand Hont presents the regional product under the slogan: "The best of traditional rural products". The area is unique in preserving traditions and crafts: lace making, pottery and blacksmithing. Or the goal of the creation of the "Regional Product Nitrava" brand was to strengthen local business, develop the local economy in the area of production and services, support local markets, restoring wine houses, reviving old vineyards other. The importance of the regional brand lies not only in the presentation of products and services of regional entrepreneurs, but also creates space for closer cooperation, gaining new contacts and mutual experience.

Cluster organizations in tourism are an important type of clusters in Slovakia. Most cluster organizations were established as associations of legal entities. The only exception is the Balnea Cluster Dudince Tourism Association, which is a civic association (<http://www.siea.sk/klastre-cestovneho-ruchu/c-323/klastre-cestovneho-ruchu>). All clusters operate in specific tourist attractive microregions. Even three, Klaster Orava, Klaster Liptov and Klaster Turiec, operate within one self-governing region of Žilina. Similarly to technology cluster organizations, cluster organizations operating in the field of tourism were spontaneously created mainly from the activities of companies, cities and self-governing regions, without the support of the national government. The strongly competitive environment forced businesses to find appropriate models to face intense trans-regional but also transnational competition. Cluster organizations are focused on the promotion and development of "traditional" tourism, except for the Balneo Cluster Dudince focused on health tourism. The main activity of these cluster organizations is targeted marketing in Slovakia as well as in Central European countries (especially Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland, Austria), strengthening of partnership among cluster members and building of new cross-border partnerships. The clusters carried out development projects, various support events, building a common infrastructure (tourist information offices, prerequisites for discount cards), information and promotional activities. Like technology-oriented cluster organizations, tourism cluster organizations have the potential for further growth (Balog 2015; Cagáňová et al. 2015). Supporting the development of clusters in the Slovak Republic is partially addressed by legislation only in the case of tourism through Act No. 91/2010 Coll. on the promotion of tourism. The

Act does not explicitly mention “clusters” as actors, but defined types of associations (<https://www.siea.sk/klastre-na-slovensku/>).

The European - Slovak Association of Agritourism and Tourism as one of the first professional associations in Slovakia acceded to the award of the Quality Label for the tourism and agrotourism facility marked with the logo “Slovakia - Rural Holidays”. The role of this brand is to ensure and guarantee the quality of services provided in rural tourism and agrotourism facilities, their prestige in competition with other facilities in the industry (http://www.ezat.sk/znaky_kvality/kriteria). Once the criteria have been met, the tourist accommodation facilities, regardless of their territorial competence within the Slovak Republic, may be the holder of this brand.

Quality label Certified accommodation in rural areas can be obtained by accommodation facilities located in one of the eight regions of the Slovak Republic, namely in the Nitra region, which also meets the minimum requirements for the award of the mark.

4.1 Certified Rural Accommodation

The system of accommodation facilities certification in the countryside was successfully established in 2013 in the Nitra region of Slovakia. The region is a predominantly rural, slowly growing region of the SR, with adequate activity and position, average degree of readiness for innovation, on average competitive outside the centers of EU development activities and with the possibility of cross-border cooperation with the Republic of Hungary. In terms of socio-economic level, the Nitra Region shows average to below-average values, while the natural, positional, economic and cultural potential of the region is higher than the level of its utilization. The natural conditions in the Nitra region as well as the character of the economy gave it a rural character. The reason for introducing the quality label in rural areas “Certified accommodation in rural areas” into practice was the long-term unfavorable position of the region in the tourism sector (Beresecká 2012), which is also evident from data in the Table 5. Development of basic economic indicators in tourism. The efforts of public sector representatives at regional level were to reverse this situation. One of the solutions was the creation of the brand perceived as a guarantee of the quality of services provided by accommodation facilities located in the countryside.

The main objective of the Rural Accommodation Certification project was and is to improve the quality of the services provided in the countryside, to guarantee and present the quality of the services to the outside, to take into account the perception of service quality by guests, to facilitate customer decision making and control. The partial objectives of creating and establishing certification are shown in the Fig. 3.

The condition for awarding the mark was fulfillment of the minimum number of points of the accommodation facility broken down according to their classification into a certain category, which are given in the Table 3.

Reviews include the following areas: location and appearance of the accommodation, availability of the accommodation, basic facilities of the accommodation, staff, information, security at the accommodation, feedback between the service provider and the guest, additional equipment of the accommodation, additional services of the accommodation. The system also uses four different forms of additional designation of

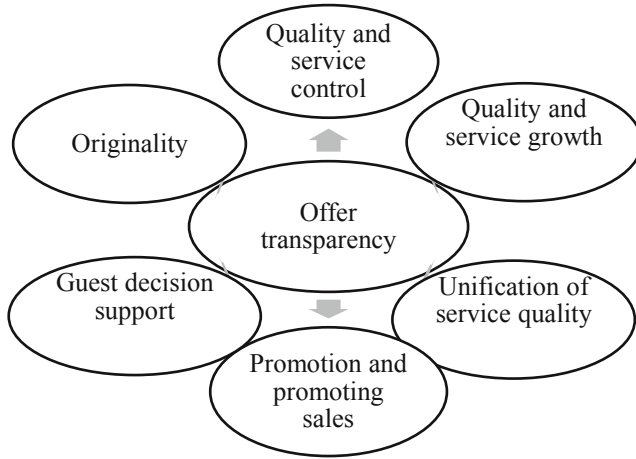


Fig. 3. Objectives for certification of rural accommodation. Source: Jarábková et al. (2013)

Table 3. Classification of requirements for the award of certified rural accommodation

Group of accommodation facilities	Certification criteria		
	Compulsory	Optional	Collectively
Hotel facilities: hotel, garni hotel, mountain hotel, congress hotel, wellness hotel, spa hotel, boutique hotel, apartment hotel, motel, hotel, guest house	48 points	Min. 37 points	Min. 85 points Max. 163 points
Parahotel accommodation facilities: apartment house, hostel, cottage settlement, camping, privacy hostel (room, facility, holiday apartment)	47 points	Min. 37 points	Min. 84 points Max. 162 points

Source: own elaboration

accommodation: certified rural accommodation ‘tourism’, certified rural accommodation ‘water stay’, certified rural accommodation ‘culture and education’, ‘multi-purpose’ certified rural accommodation. Certified accommodation has the possibility to apply for inclusion in one of the groups of certified accommodation facilities, which express the narrower focus of the accommodation services on a specific target group of guests, whose requirements the accommodation can satisfy best. Assignment to the appropriate group will allow the visitor to easily navigate thematically through the accommodation search.

The first results of brand building and management in the Nitra region for specific accommodation establishments that went through the certification process appeared in 2013. This year, 13 accommodation establishments were certified. In 2014 there were 7, the year 2016 was a breakthrough, because it achieved the lowest number of certifications, namely 3, 2017 recorded a record increase in certifications in the number

of 14 accommodation facilities. The spatial distribution of certified accommodation facilities is shown in Fig. 4.

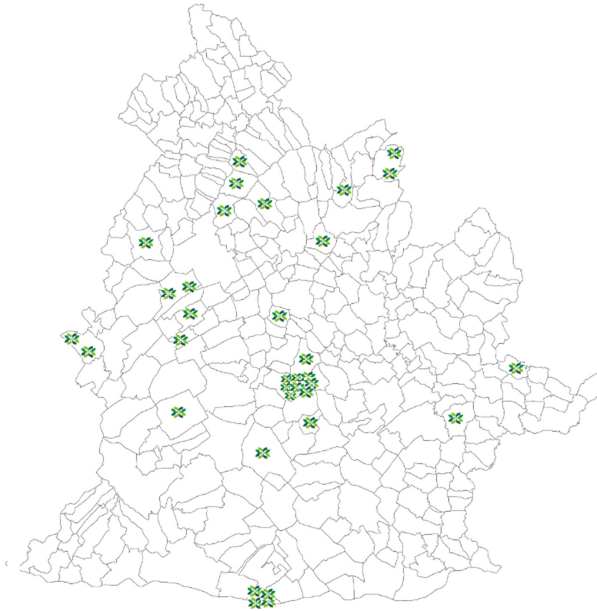


Fig. 4. Location of certified accommodation facilities of the Nitra Region. Source: own elaboration, (Beresecká 2019a)

Significant interest in the brand showed accommodation facilities allocated in the villages Štúrovo and Podhájska.

4.2 Assessment of Brand Awareness Certified Rural Accommodation

Brand awareness was assessed in two ways by customers and providers.

The basic research set of customer awareness research was 174 respondents addressed by an electronic questionnaire. From the results of quantitative research in the form of inquiries, it was found that women in a percentage of 77.6%, coming from abroad, living in the city, were predominantly involved in research on the brand awareness of Certified Accommodation in Rural Areas. They were from Slovakia, they lived mostly, 68.67% in municipalities. Respondents under the age of 25 (78.7%) with university education showed interest in the research; they are students who report income ranging from EUR 1001–1500, living mostly in a family of four (42.5%).

The Certified Rural Accommodation logo consists of two parts - a graphic element, which is based on the motif of a flower of brown-green color and the text, Certified Rural Accommodation. The following table shows the results of the primary research on brand value from a customer perspective (Table 4).

The first result of primary research is a statistical portrait of the socio-demographic profile of respondents who completed a questionnaire in order to ascertain the level of

Table 4. Brand value from the customer's perspective

	Indicator	Absolute expression	in %
Brand awareness	Do you know this brand?		
	Yes	17	9.8
	No	157	90.2
	Do you think the brand of certified accommodation is sufficiently promoted?		
	Yes	6	3.4
	No	168	96.6
Brand performance	How do you like the look of this brand?		
	1. I don't like it at all	3	1.7
	2. I don't like it anymore	23	13.2
	3. I like or dislike it	65	37.4
	4. It's pretty	67	38.5
	5 It is very pretty	16	9.2
	If so, were you satisfied with the services of certified accommodation?		
	1. I was not at all satisfied	29	16.7
	2. Rather dissatisfied	10	5.7
	3. Satisfied and dissatisfied	96	55.2
	4. Satisfied	21	12.1
5. Very satisfied	18	10.3	
Consumer feelings	What do you think first when you see this brand?		
	Nature	143	82.2
	Pleasure	2	1.1
	Peace	16	9.2
	Family	1	0.6
	Trust	7	4
	Quality	5	2.9
	What do you like on the brand?		
	Colour	66	37.9
	Shape	45	25.9
	Font	25	14.4
	Overall, I like it	31	17.8
It affects me emotionally	7	4	
Consumer rating	If you have the possibility to choose an accommodation facility, would you choose a certified accommodation facility?		
	Yes	138	79.3
	No	36	20.7
	What does the brand mean to you?		
	Quality	55	31.6
	Professionalism	24	13.8

(continued)

Table 4. (continued)

	Traditions	39	22.4
	Trust	33	19
	History	11	6.3
	Future	12	6.9
Brand use	Have you used the services of certified rural accommodation?		
	Yes	39	22.4
	No	135	77.6

Source: own research, own elaboration

awareness of the Certified Rural Accommodation brand. 9.8% of the respondents said they knew the brand, 96.6% said the brand was under-promoted, but 38.5% said it was pretty. Respondents who used the services of certified accommodation facilities could not express their satisfaction with the services provided. 55.2% said they were both satisfied and dissatisfied with the services. The brand evokes nature in the respondents and they like it in color. 79.3% stated that they would prefer certified facilities when deciding and choosing between certified and non-certified accommodation.

The identification of the brand's value from the provider's perspective was carried out by actors representing the public and private sectors at regional and local level (guarantor and holders of Certified Rural Accommodation).

The primary public sector researcher was the guarantor of the certification system, which had the right to grant, use and withdraw the aforementioned brand, namely the Tourism Department of the Nitra Self-Governing Region. The results indicate that public sector representatives are above average satisfied with the certification system. Their satisfaction is enhanced by the knowledge and the fact that the Nitra Self-Governing Region is the "first and only region", which in 2013 already tried to introduce a system that guarantees the quality of services. At present, the uniqueness and originality of this system persists. The representatives are satisfied that they have been able to create a subsidy system that in practice can guarantee the sustainability of the established brand. They perceive the value of the brand through the expressed interest in certification and the increase in the number of certified accommodation facilities.

The primary research of private sector representatives was focused on identifying attitudes towards the certification system, identifying weaknesses and strengths that would lead to a positive change in the entire certification process. The answers to the questions are:

Why did you get certified, what does such marking mean to you?

The answer to this question was unequivocal for all respondents. A strong motive was financial support, repeated with a uniform amount of EUR 1,000. "*This was strong ..., ... main ..., ... important ..., ... at the beginning the only reason not to try ...*"

What do you like about the certification system?

The respondents welcomed such activity, it was the first and is still the first in the region

in the Slovak Republic. They are satisfied that “... *some office ...*” has shown interest and wants to help them, it is not only “... *declared, but also real help ...*”. They also welcome the possibility of meetings organized by the certifying authority, seeing that the number of certified establishments is increasing, so even the first concerns “... *whether we did well*” are falling.

What do you dislike about the certification system?

The respondents commented on the complexity of certification, the disproportionate number of criteria they must meet to be certified. They currently have a problem with submitting projects, they have to submit them electronically and many of them do not have IT skills. They would welcome more training and targeted, e.g. how to work with the booking system, how to train people to achieve satisfaction and repeat attendance in their establishments. What benefits can bringing together, working together? At present, devices are perceived only through a competitive perspective.

They would welcome “... *a body to help them organize organized events to guarantee their attendance*”. On the other hand, in an area with the highest percentage of accommodation facilities as well as certified accommodation facilities, other types of accommodation facilities, which are not regulated by the Decree, would also welcome. It would also help them e.g. administration and updating of the website of the municipality, which would answer a number of questions asked by the visitors of the tourism concerning the events that are currently planned to be realized in the municipality. They expect assistance from the municipality in the professional processing of promotional materials, as they perceive their efforts for certification and its acquisition as a “*thing*” that is also presented by the municipality.

What would you change in the entire certification process?

Clearly web page. Because “... *first look at the page is about Podhájka*”. The page is missing contact information, “... *people are asking us if it really works, why are there no names to take care of it*”, “do they really look at those criteria?”

The results of primary research suggest that brand value from the perspective of providers is perceived very positively, through uniqueness, originality, leadership through the creation of a quality assurance system, or a strong financial incentive factor, whether by public or private sector actors.

Results for the research question: **Is awareness of the brand of Certified rural accommodation in the tourism market sufficient?** confirm the hypotheses:

H0: Brand awareness Certified rural accommodation is below average according to customer field research, which means that brand value is low, below average because of low promotion, brand performance, but gives rise to feelings that are key to rural tourism development.

H2: Brand awareness Certified rural accommodation is above average according to the provider's field research results. The public sector representative perceives the brand's value through an increased number of certified accommodation facilities, and the private sector perceives it through subsidies. (Beresecká 2019a).

The importance of establishing the brand Certified accommodation in the countryside

On the basis of the results of qualitative research, there is a space for deeper knowledge that can be obtained by quantitative research. From the results of quantitative research, we sought the answer to the question: Is it necessary and worthwhile in the conditions of the Slovak Republic to make efforts to create and manage a brand that in some way guarantees the quality of tourism services for accommodation providers in small capacity accommodation? The results processed from secondary sources are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Development of basic economic indicators in tourism

Indicator	Year	Territorial unit									
		SR	BA	TT	TN	NR	ZA	BB	PO	KE	Nitra order
Number of beds in accommodation facilities	2013	197	28	15	14	17	40	21	34	26	6
		747	143	942	397	440	440	115	131	139	
	2016	192	27	15	15	16	40	21	32	23	6
		218	920	795	259	190	057	518	291	188	
2017	194	28	15	15	18	39	21	32	21	6	
	274	456	534	534	106	250	587	009	893		
2018	201	28	17	15	18	43	22	32	21	6	
	451	785	704	774	784	084	984	750	586		
Number of accommodation facilities	2013	3485	233	276	246	307	882	494	701	346	7
		3 489	241	267	287	303	907	508	671	305	
	2016	3 495	234	270	279	353	892	516	662	289	4
		4 007	275	295	326	388	1 063	588	728	344	
2017	4 048	1 073	263	238	238	819	400	700	314	7	
	505	854	709	336	440	016	251	248	651		
2016	5 023	1 386	318	322	298	975	520	854	347	8	
	629	283	524	020	829	536	895	528	014		
2017	5 375	1 447	366	371	324	1	569	894	366	8	
	475	811	717	591	652	035 225	164	173	142		
2018	5 596	1 460	365	370	335	1	627	932	386	8	
	407	130	027	034	670	119 677	660	121	088		
Number of overnights	2013	11 486	2 184	1 076	972	612	2	1 335	2 256	649	8
		571	586	726	493	661	397 984	415	759	947	
	2016	14 138	3 000	1 203	1 274	828	2	1 614	2 713	726	7
		420	449	899	486	062	777 136	400	587	401	
2017	14 936	3 103	1 351	1 374	977	2	1 680	2 790	762	7	
	766	541	121	363	268	896 764	911	308	490		
2018	15 515	3 082	1 352	1 454	970	3	1 825	2 901	830	7	
	083	284	397	952	827	097 483	981	080	079		

Note: SR – Slovak Republic, BA – Bratislava region, TT – Trnava region, TN – Trenčín region, NR – Nitra region, ZI – Žilina region, BB – Banská Bystrica region, PO – Prešov region, KE – Košice region¹

Source: ŠÚ SR, own elaboration

Based on the analysis of the selected economic indicators development in tourism, it can be stated that the order of Nitra region location, where the brand is established, has been fixed since 2013, i.e. since the brand was established to 2018. The number of accommodation establishments has changed positively, with a shift from 7 to 4. The state of disinterest in the region continues to remain, compared to 2013, the region fell to the last 8th place out of 8 regions. However, the tourists visiting the region will stay in the region for a longer period, as evidenced by a change in the number of overnight stays from eighth to seventh.

This deeper knowledge based on quantitative results has led us to know the near future, the prediction of economic indicators. For this purpose the indicator - number of overnight stays was chosen. The results are shown in the Fig. 5 and the Table 6.

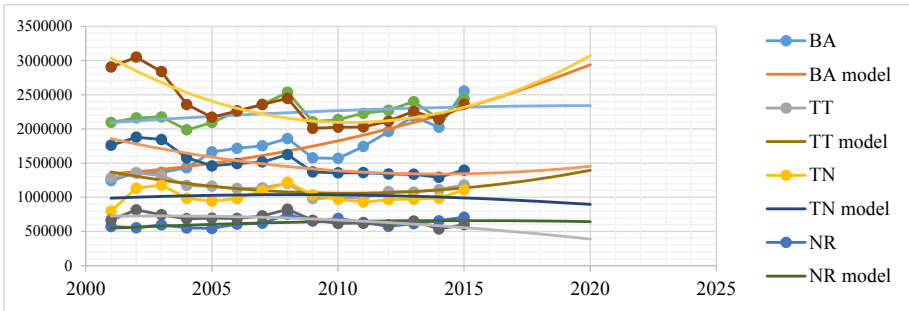


Fig. 5. Forecast of the number of overnight stays in regions of the SR. Source: own elaboration

Table 6. Number of overnights

p1	6.86E+1 0	1.21E+1 0	1.45E+1 0	- 4086939 608	- 2367710 352	- 2507877 360	1.25E+1 0	4.29E+1 0	- 4.563E+ 09
p2	- 6827470 3.5	- 1216097 8.22	- 1445638 7.55	4071424. 094	2351038. 781	2484095. 891	- 1239726 9.13	- 4272426 2.3	4557703 .79
p3	16994.64 273	3045.194 431	3595.535 122	- 1013.734 184	- 583.4587 765	- 614.5611 267	3077.838 329	10625.71 254	- 1137.90 08
R	0.427682 541	0.892283 243	0.847945 957	0.160351 939	0.600825 946	0.480102 9	0.898199 957	0.889895 889	0.72323 782
R ²	0.182912 356	0.796169 386	0.719012 346	0.025712 744	0.360991 817	0.230498 794	0.806763 163	0.791914 693	0.52307 294

Source: own elaboration (Beresecká, 2019a)

The following table shows the quantitative representation of the graphically represented predictions in absolute and percentage terms (Table 7).

The results show that not every region in the Slovak Republic tends to grow the selected indicator. The forecast for the number of overnight stays shows that the greatest percentage change will occur in 2020 in the Bratislava, Nitra and Žilina regions. The

Table 7. Forecast of the overnight stays number in absolute and percentage terms in regions of the SR

Area	Year 2001	Year 2015	Change 2015/2001 in %	Year 2020	Change 2020/2001 in %
SR model	11968042	11628986	-2.83	13122385	9.65
BA model	1345869	2305185	71.28	2937092	118.23
TT model	1371156	1137097	-17.07	1395081	1.74
TN model	987318	991064	0.04	896097	-9.24
NR model	548724	707945	29.01	642794	17.14
ZA model	2095152	2319410	10.70	2341118	11.74
BB model	1857498	1344112	-27.64	1453155	-21.76
PO model	3037034	2317424	-23.69	3069863	1.08
KE model	725345	555866	-23.37	387237	-4661

Source: own elaboration

worst forecast in the monitored economic indicator will be in the Košice, Banská Bystrica and Trenčín regions.

Based on the forecast, the unfavorable position of the Nitra region should change significantly, but the results will not reach the value of the indicator achieved in 2015.

Given the extent of this contribution, it is not possible to address a number of indicators that could initiate tourism development. Neither the one-member econometric model expresses several factors influencing the increasing trend. Ide, e.g. on the district's GDP, subsidies for tourism, investment development, the share of expenditures of citizens on services. It creates space for further empirical research and searching for possible causes of poor development of the country, not only in the field of tourism.

5 Discussion

Creation and use of the brands in the Slovak Republic can be characterized as a heterogeneous, uncoordinated activity caused by multi-species, multiple brands that do not have central management at national level by the public or private sector. In the Czech Republic, with which the Slovak Republic formed a common Czechoslovak state by the end of 1992, the situation is different from this point of view. The creation of regional brands in the Czech Republic was stimulated by the Natura 2000 project "People for Nature, Nature for People", funded by the European Commission, which was implemented in 2004–2006. The regional product labeling was one of the main parts of this project aimed at raising public awareness of the pan-European network of Natura 2000 protected areas. Since 2005, the rules and criteria for product labeling have been set, including the name and appearance of the brand itself and Group or Regional Development Agency. Already in the first year the first certificates were awarded to products in the Krkonoše, Beskydy and Šumava. Since 2006, the branding system has been called "Home Products". Private sector actors have shown significant interest in regional brands not only in terms of

abundance but also in the scope of tourism services. Based on the demand for regional labeling, the Ministry of the Environment in 2007 created certification rules for the labeling of accommodation and catering services. In 2008, the European Flower Eco-label was awarded. This year is also significant in the Czech Republic the establishment of the Association of Regional Brands. The association logo is shown in the Fig. 6.



Fig. 6. The association logo. Source: <http://www.regionalni-znacky.cz/arz/cs/o-nas/>

The Association is the national coordinator of the regional labeling system, it is an association of regions with its own brand. Its activities are governed by the statutes and internal rules. The Association ensures that all brands maintain a high standard and provide space for the joint development of regional brands.

The main objective of regional labeling is to raise the profile of regions and highlight interesting products that are being created in this area. Since 2004, 27 regions have been involved in the regional branding system. In each region there is a regional coordinator who manages the brand. The product brand is awarded by an independent certification committee (independent in each region), subject to compliance with the prescribed rules. In connection with the labeling of products, in some regions the labeling is also used to support selected accommodation and catering facilities. In addition to certified products and services, experiences are also marked and certified.

The regional branding system in the Czech Republic is open to any region with clearly defined borders. The initiator of a new brand must be a local organization or institution that will act as a regional coordinator. The territorial scope of this system signs is shown in Fig. 7.

In addition to this system, there are other brands operating in the Czech Republic that are not members of the association, e.g. the brand “Tradition of the White Carpathians”, “Regional Product Bohemian Paradise”, but the marking is based on similar principles.



Fig. 7. Territorial scope of regional brands in the Czech Republic. Source: <http://www.regionalni-znacky.cz/arz/cs/o-nas/>

6 Conclusion

The paper points out some critical problems, which include the underestimated role of the state in tourism. Although the tourism industry in the global context is a sector with high development dynamics, Slovakia has not seen this trend in recent years. Based on the results of theoretical and empirical knowledge, it can be concluded that the brand process in Slovakia is not institutionalized, not coordinated by the national coordinator. Branding is initiated by regional activities, while marketing activities are fragmented, undersized, professionally unprofessionally managed. There is little awareness of the unique, original, long-term established ‘Certified Rural Accommodation’ brand operating in the territory of one of the eight regions used by the accommodation providers. The solution to the change in the position of tourism in the territory of the Slovak Republic would be to create a public sector body at the national level, especially for the tourism sector, which the country currently lacks. This would ensure a coordinated and integrated development of the sector, including the implementation of communication strategies.

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