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SWOT - AHP MODEL FOR PRIORITIZATION OF STRATEGIES OF THE RESORT STARA PLANINA

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Abstract

This paper presents the results of integrated SWOT analysis and Multi-criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA) model, employed for defining the development of resort Stara Planina in Eastern Serbia and which was based on final report of previous expert study for this touristic destination. In accordance to defined SWOT factors and sub-factors six resulting strategies were generated as: SO strategies (based on the sub-factors of strengths and opportunities), WO strategy (based on the sub-factors of weaknesses and opportunities), ST strategies (based on the sub-factors of strengths and threats) and WT strategy (based on the sub-factors of weaknesses and threats). Relative importance weights of the SWOT factors and sub-factors were obtained by Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) model, as well as the ranking of identified strategies was performed by several experts. The results indicate that following sequence of strategies: $SO_1 \rightarrow SO_2 \rightarrow ST_1 \rightarrow ST_2 \rightarrow WO_1 \rightarrow WT_1$, should be realized to complete the main goals for strategic development of the touristic destination Stara Planina.

Keywords: SWOT, AHP, prioritization of strategies, touristic destination, mountain tourism

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a growing industry which accounts for 5% of the world GDP and approximately 30% of the total export (Antonakakis et al., 2015). Tourism

development Strategy of the European Union by 2020 (Lisbon Declaration) predicts the development of different regions in Europe by 2026 with adequate incentives (Sipilko, 2014).

Development of mountain tourist

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destination with year-round activities has been gaining importance in recent years, which is witnessed by a number of projects that are being implemented in South East Europe, especially in Romania and Bulgaria (Ilikula et al., 2013).

Tourist destination Stara Planina, located in Eastern Serbia on the border with Bulgaria, is an attractive area with a perspective to enter as a tourist destination on the world tourism scene among relevant tourist sites, if a professional planning and development procedure is carried out in accordance with the rules followed by the similar already renowned destinations, together with the application of the valid quality standards (Bayol et al., 2000; Ghanian et al., 2014).

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

For the selection and prioritization of the development strategy of the tourist destination Stara Planina, data was gathered from the prefeasibility study on the plan of tourism development in Stara Planina (Horvath, HTL, Zagreb, 2007) and decree of the Government of the Republic of Serbia regarding the program of mountain tourism development in the Stara Planina (Sl. Glasnik RS, 2007). From these sources, SWOT analysis of the potential of the Stara Planina was formulated and based on the SWOT factors and sub-factors possible strategies of development of this tourist destination were defined.

Prioritization of possible strategies of development of Stara Planina as a tourist destination was carried out using SWOT-AHP (Analytical Hierarchy Process), according to a procedure defined by Kurttila

and his associates (Kurttila et al., 2000).

In the academic literature the researches were conducted in order to define the strategy for the development of tourist destinations with different approaches to defining key performances on the basis of the SWOT analysis (Kajanus et al., 2004; Wicramasinghe & Takano, 2009; Ikered & Bole, 2009; Bojović & Plavša, 2011; Jeon & Kim, 2011; Sariisik et al., 2011; Zhang, 2012; Zhang, 2012; Reihanian, 2012; Bhatia, 2013; Vladi, 2014).

In applying SWOT analysis as a tool for generating and ranking optimal strategies, numerous tools for decision making have been developed recently that broaden its application and create numerous opportunities for making objective decisions. The most commonly used model of multicriteria decision making used to define prioritization of strategies is AHP (Kurttila et al., 2000; Kangas et al., 2001; Kajanus et al., 2004; Osuna & Aranda, 2007; Ho, 2008; Gorener et al., 2012).

3. SWOT ANALYSIS OF TOURIST DESTINATION STARA PLANINA AND PRIORITIZATION OF POSSIBLE STRATEGIES

SWOT analysis for the tourist destination Stara Planina was conducted using workshops with key stakeholders, market analysis, the database and expertise of the Horvath Consulting Zagreb (Horvath, HTL, Zagreb, 2007).

Stara Planina with its surroundings has all the prerequisites to develop a necessary broader tourist destination value chain, modeled on other mountain destinations. Although these potentials are heading towards market resurgence, their real

business growth will follow only after activation of this tourist mega project. Following steps present the scope of planned activities:

Step 1. Based on the results of SWOT analysis conducted for the case of tourist destination Stara Planina, and by comparing the SWOT factors: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, as well as the sub-factors within each factor, possible strategies for the future development of Stara Planina were defined.

Based on considered objective strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, SWOT criteria were defined within each of these factors and the results are presented in the form of a SWOT matrix in Table 1.

Comparative expert analysis of SWOT factors shown in Table 1 enabled the definition of possible strategies SO₁ and SO₂ by which potentials of strengths are being used to take advantage of the opportunities which are perceived in the environment. In order to overcome internal weaknesses by using the opportunities in the environment, strategy WO₁ was defined. Strategies ST₁ and ST₂ allow the use of internal strengths to

avoid threats. Finally, strategy WT₁ allows for reducing the weaknesses in order to avoid threats.

Based on the SWOT-AHP hybrid model for prioritization of the development strategy, on the basis of the results of the SWOT factors, sub-factors, defined strategies and established goal of determining the best strategy, the AHP working model, presented on Figure 1, is used for defining mutual relations between SWOT factors and sub-factors in order to prioritize defined strategies for the development of the tourist destination Stara Planina.

Step 2. Based on the assessment of the expert team, the importance of each of the SWOT factors (criteria) in the model is determined, where their internal interdependence was not taken into consideration but only importance in relation to the set objective within the level 1 - SWOT criteria Strengths - S, Weaknesses - W, Opportunities - O and Threats - T (see Figure 1). The resulting importance of each SWOT factor is shown in Table 2, where it can be seen that the greatest significance, on

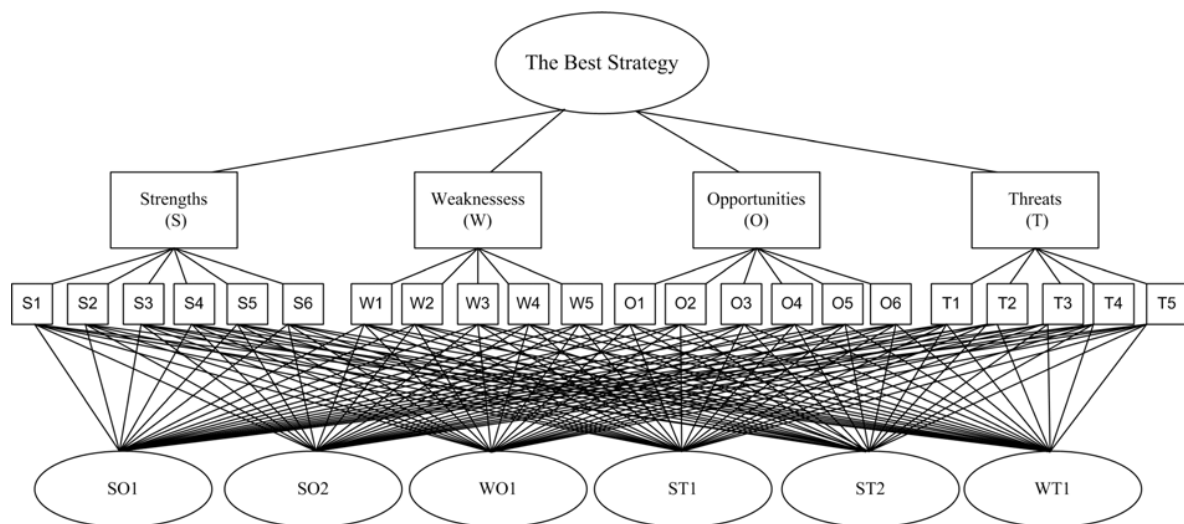


Figure 1. AHP model for the selection of the best strategy

Table 1. SWOT matrix for the tourist destination Stara Planina

	Internal factors	
	Strengths (S)	Weaknesses (W)
	S ₁ - Ecological area	W ₁ - Inadequate utilization of natural resources
	S ₂ - Climatic conditions for year-round tourism	W ₂ - The lack of innovation in the tourist offer according to international standards
	S ₃ - The proximity of the international market in which the Stara Planina is known	W ₃ - Lack of service content and a low level of local tourist spending
	S ₄ - The proximity of road connections (airports and highways)	W ₄ - Lack of quality personnel in tourism and catering industry
	S ₅ - Hospitality of the local population	W ₅ - Insufficient development of local roads
	S ₆ - The expressed interest of the local population for the development of SP	
External factors		
Opportunities (O)	SO – Strategy	WO – Strategy
O ₁ - The stabilization of the macroeconomic and political environment	SO ₁ – Developing a strategy of differentiation based on exclusive travel offers which are unattainable for competitors	WO ₁ – Creating a strategy for the development of human resources – with continuous education and training for tourism and catering industry
O ₂ - The change of the key success factors in the tourism industry		
O ₃ - Tourists increasingly visit distant destinations in shorter periods of time	SO ₂ – Creating the brand with Bulgarian partners based on a new tourist destination with unspoiled nature, using incentives from Serbia and EU funds	
O ₄ - The future of Eastern Europe as a potentially growing market for skiing and recreational tourism		
O ₅ - Tourism as a strategic orientation of Serbia		
O ₆ - The possibility of cooperation with Bulgaria through the IPA - EU funds for tourism		
Threats (T)	ST – Strategy	WT – Strategy
T ₁ - Customer expectations for high quality services	ST ₁ – Creating a strategy of market penetration and continuous quality improvement	WT ₁ – Develop a strategy of profit-oriented private firms in the area of the tourist destination Stara Planina
T ₂ - The requests for constant innovation of the tourism product and its promotion		
T ₃ - Relatively large share of the gray economy	ST ₂ – Developing strategy of strategic partnerships with the best in the year-long mountain tourism	
T ₄ - Large investments in infrastructure		
T ₅ - Countries in the region are strategically opting for development of tourism		

Table 2. Pairwise comparison of the SWOT groups

SWOT group	S	W	O	T	Importance of the SWOT factor
Strengths (S)	1	4	1/2	3	0.288
Weaknesses (W)		1	1/7	2	0.099
Opportunities (O)			1	5	0.533
Threats (T)				1	0.080

Consistency ratio relative to the goal: CR = 0.049

the basis of evaluation of the expert team, is associated to SWOT factor opportunities (53.3% significance).

From the previous Table 2, it follows that:

$$w_1 = \begin{bmatrix} S \\ W \\ O \\ T \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} 0.288 \\ 0.099 \\ 0.533 \\ 0.080 \end{bmatrix} \quad (1)$$

Table 3. Pairwise comparison of the SWOT sub-criteria – Strengths

Strengths (S)	S ₁	S ₂	S ₃	S ₄	S ₅	S ₁	Local weights
S ₁ - Ecological area	1	1/4	3	1/4	5	4	0.141
S ₂ - Climatic conditions for year-round tourism		1	5	3	7	6	0.42
S ₃ - The proximity of the international market in which the Stara Planina is known			1	1/4	5	4	0.096
S ₄ - The proximity of road connections (airports and highways)				1	6	5	0.267
S ₅ - Hospitality of the local population					1	1/2	0.032
S ₆ - The expressed interest of the local population for the development of SP						1	0.044

The consistency ratio in relation to the group Strengths: CR = 0.091

Table 4. Pairwise comparison of the SWOT sub-criteria - Weaknesses

Weaknesses (W)	W ₁	W ₂	W ₃	W ₄	W ₅	Local weights
W ₁ - Inadequate utilization of natural resources	1	1/6	1/2	1/6	1/6	0.041
W ₂ - The lack of innovation in the tourist offer according to international standards		1	5	1/4	1/3	0.168
W ₃ - Lack of service content and a low level of local tourist spending			1	1/5	1/5	0.060
W ₄ - Lack of quality personnel in tourism and catering industry				1	3	0.460
W ₅ - Insufficient development of local roads					1	0.271

The consistency ratio in relation to the group Weaknesses: CR=0.093

Table 5. Pairwise comparison of the SWOT sub-criteria - Opportunities

Opportunities (O)	O ₁	O ₂	O ₃	O ₄	O ₅	O ₆	Local weights
O ₁ - The stabilization of the macroeconomic and political environment	1	5	3	6	1/3	4	0.254
O ₂ - The change of the key success factors in the tourism industry		1	1/4	3	1/6	1/3	0.052
O ₃ - Tourists increasingly visit distant destinations in shorter periods of time			1	5	1/4	3	0.150
O ₄ - The future of Eastern Europe as a potentially growing market for skiing and recreational tourism				1	1/7	1/4	0.031
O ₅ - Tourism as a strategic orientation of Serbia					1	5	0.426
O ₆ - The possibility of cooperation with Bulgaria through the IPA - EU funds for tourism						1	0.087

The degree of consistency in relation to the group Opportunities: CR = 0.075

Table 6. Pairwise comparison of the SWOT sub-criteria - Threats

Threats (T)	T ₁	T ₂	T ₃	T ₄	T ₅	Local weights
T ₁ - Customer expectations for high quality services	1	4	5	6	3	0.470
T ₂ - The requests for constant innovation of the tourism product and its promotion		1	3	4	1/3	0.143
T ₃ - Relatively large share of the gray economy			1	3	1/4	0.080
T ₄ - Large investments in infrastructure				1	1/5	0.045
T ₅ - Countries in the region are strategically opting for development of tourism					1	0.262

The degree of consistency in relation to the group Threats: CR = 0.07

Table 7. The importance of the criteria and sub-criteria of the SWOT analysis

SWOT groups - criteria	Importance of the SWOT criterion	SWOT sub-criteria	Local importance of SWOT sub-criterion	The overall importance of SWOT sub-criterion
Strengths - S	0.288	S ₁ - Ecological area		
		S ₂ - Climatic conditions for year-round tourism	0.141	0.041
		S ₃ - The proximity of the international market in which the Stara Planina is known	0.420	0.121
		S ₄ - The proximity of road connections (airports and highways)	0.096	0.028
		S ₅ - Hospitality of the local population	0.267	0.077
		S ₆ - The expressed interest of the local population for the development of SP	0.032	0.009
Weaknesses - W	0.099	W ₁ - Inadequate utilization of natural resources	0.044	0.013
		W ₂ - The lack of innovation in the tourist offer according to international standards	0.041	0.004
		W ₃ - Lack of service content and a low level of local tourist spending	0.168	0.017
		W ₄ - Lack of quality personnel in tourism and catering industry	0.060	0.006
		W ₅ - Insufficient development of local roads	0.460	0.046
Opportunities - O	0.533	O ₁ - The stabilization of the macroeconomic and political environment	0.271	0.027
		O ₂ - The change of the key success factors in the tourism industry		
		O ₃ - Tourists increasingly visit distant destinations in shorter periods of time	0.254	0.135
		O ₄ - The future of Eastern Europe as a potentially growing market for skiing and recreational tourism	0.052	0.028
		O ₅ - Tourism as a strategic orientation of Serbia	0.150	0.080
		O ₆ - The possibility of cooperation with Bulgaria through the IPA - EU funds for tourism	0.031	0.017
Threats - T	0.08	T ₁ - Customer expectations for high quality services	0.426	0.227
		T ₂ - The requests for constant innovation of the tourism product and its promotion	0.087	0.046
		T ₃ - Relatively large share of the gray economy	0.470	0.038
		T ₄ - Large investments in infrastructure	0.143	0.011
		T ₅ - Countries in the region are strategically opting for development of tourism	0.080	0.006

Step 3. In this step, local importance of SWOT sub-criteria was determined by the expert team, while the scores of comparative pairs of SWOT sub-criteria, defined in Table 1, are given in tables 3-6.

Step 4. Through mutual multiplying of obtained weight factors from Step 2 and Step 3, global importance of SWOT sub-criteria is calculated, as presented in Table 7.

The resulting normalized results indicate the dominant influence of the following sub-criteria: S_2 - Climatic conditions for year-round tourism (0.420), O_5 - Tourism as a strategic orientation of Serbia, as positive sub-criteria and W_4 - Lack of quality personnel in tourism and catering industry (0.460) and T_1 - Customer expectations for high quality services (0.470) as a negative sub-criteria. It is obvious that the strength of the positive sub-criteria is greater than the strength of the negative impact of the sub-criteria which is of crucial importance for the choice of the best strategy in the considered case.

Hence it follows that:

$$W_2 = W_{SWOTsub-criteria(global)} = \begin{bmatrix} 0.041 \\ 0.121 \\ 0.028 \\ 0.077 \\ 0.009 \\ 0.013 \\ 0.004 \\ 0.017 \\ 0.006 \\ 0.046 \\ 0.027 \\ 0.135 \\ 0.028 \\ 0.080 \\ 0.017 \\ 0.227 \\ 0.046 \\ 0.038 \\ 0.011 \\ 0.006 \\ 0.004 \\ 0.021 \end{bmatrix} \quad (2)$$

Step 5. In this step, by using expert assessment, the importance weights were determined for each alternative strategy ($SO_1, SO_2, WO_1, ST_1, ST_2, WT_1$) relative to the defined SWOT sub-criteria, which resulted in the matrix W_3 , presented in Table 8.

Step 6. Finally, the overall priority of the considered strategies was calculated as:

$$W_{alternatives} = \begin{bmatrix} SO1 \\ SO2 \\ WO1 \\ ST1 \\ ST2 \\ WT1 \end{bmatrix} = W_3 \times W_{SWOTsub-criteria(global)} = \begin{bmatrix} 0.277 \\ 0.247 \\ 0.102 \\ 0.156 \\ 0.124 \\ 0.094 \end{bmatrix} \quad (3)$$

4. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The results indicate that based on the SWOT-AHP hybrid model, prioritization of the strategies for the development of the tourist destination Stara Planina was defined in the following descending order:

$$SO_1 \rightarrow SO_2 \rightarrow ST_1 \rightarrow ST_2 \rightarrow WO_1 \rightarrow WT_1$$

In order for Stara Planina to become a prestigious tourist destination it is necessary to implement the strategy of differentiation (SO_1) by relying on strengths and the opportunities, which should provide an exclusive offer distinguished by its quality from other tourist centers in the region, in order to attract tourists and earn their loyalty for a return visit. Maintaining a supply to the highest quality standards during a longer period will create conditions for the emergence of the brand together with partners from Bulgaria, using EU funds and government incentives (SO_2).

Table 8. Matrix W_3 - the importance of the weights determined for each alternative strategy

$$W_3 = \begin{bmatrix} 0.382 & 0.382 & 0.082 & 0.382 & 0.250 & 0.056 & 0.382 & 0.043 & 0.250 & 0.250 & 0.064 & 0.064 & 0.159 & 0.382 & 0.064 & 0.382 & 0.250 & 0.382 & 0.382 & 0.064 & 0.056 & 0.064 \\ 0.250 & 0.250 & 0.380 & 0.250 & 0.160 & 0.052 & 0.250 & 0.160 & 0.042 & 0.160 & 0.043 & 0.382 & 0.101 & 0.160 & 0.382 & 0.250 & 0.382 & 0.250 & 0.250 & 0.043 & 0.039 & 0.043 \\ 0.043 & 0.043 & 0.043 & 0.043 & 0.043 & 0.102 & 0.043 & 0.101 & 0.373 & 0.382 & 0.382 & 0.043 & 0.384 & 0.043 & 0.101 & 0.064 & 0.043 & 0.160 & 0.160 & 0.382 & 0.375 & 0.382 \\ 0.101 & 0.064 & 0.084 & 0.160 & 0.101 & 0.380 & 0.160 & 0.382 & 0.119 & 0.101 & 0.160 & 0.250 & 0.045 & 0.250 & 0.043 & 0.160 & 0.160 & 0.064 & 0.064 & 0.101 & 0.246 & 0.160 \\ 0.160 & 0.160 & 0.250 & 0.101 & 0.382 & 0.250 & 0.101 & 0.250 & 0.105 & 0.064 & 0.250 & 0.160 & 0.062 & 0.101 & 0.250 & 0.043 & 0.101 & 0.101 & 0.101 & 0.160 & 0.156 & 0.250 \\ 0.064 & 0.101 & 0.161 & 0.064 & 0.064 & 0.160 & 0.064 & 0.064 & 0.112 & 0.043 & 0.101 & 0.101 & 0.250 & 0.064 & 0.160 & 0.101 & 0.064 & 0.043 & 0.043 & 0.250 & 0.127 & 0.101 \end{bmatrix}$$

With the implementation of mentioned strategies, the conditions will be created for the application of market penetration strategies (ST_1) which implies increase in capacity with already achieved level of quality and with trained staff, which then creates prerequisites for the development of the strategy of strategic partnerships with the best in the industry (ST_2). For the development of the of the abovementioned strategies (ST_1) and (ST_2) it is necessary to use EU funds and state subsidies, given that the private sector shows a restraint due to frequent changes in decisions regarding the development of this tourist destination. It is also necessary to simultaneously develop the strategy for the development of human resources consisted of the personal educated for the needs of tourism industry (WO_1) due to the observed sub-factor W_4 - Lack of quality personnel in tourism and catering industry necessary for the development of the mountain destination, which possess the highest value in the sub-factor weaknesses (0.460). Arrival of foreign partners and major players in the tourism sector creates the sense of security in the private sector and primarily in the local population, which would lead to the development of the strategy of profit-oriented private firms (WT_1).

5. CONCLUSION

The achieved results of development of the tourist destination Stara Planina show that initial investments yielded the expected results, which can be confirmed by the significant interest of tourists for a year-round stay on this mountain. However, the planned development was stopped a few years ago due to cessation of any investment even in the maintenance of local roads leading to this destination. Furthermore, the initial enthusiasm of the local population towards investing in the development of this area has also disappeared. Achieved results so far are far from the real potentials of Stara Planina, which indicates that the current development of this tourist destination was not performed according to the requirements in pre-investment study (Horvath, HTL, Zagreb, 2007).

In order to achieve the objectives defined in the pre-investment study (Horvath, HTL, Zagreb, 2007) as well as in the Government's decree on establishing a program for development of mountain tourism in the area of Stara Planina (Sl. Glasnik RS, 2007), the further development of this tourist destination is possible by implementing the highest standards and experiences gained in developing similar destinations.

SWOT-АНР МОДЕЛ ЗА ПРИОРИТИЗАЦИЈУ СТРАТЕГИЈА РАЗВОЈА ТУРИСТИЧКЕ ДЕСТИНАЦИЈЕ СТАРА ПЛАНИНА

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Извод

У раду је дефинисана “SWOT” анализа за развој туристичке дестинације Стара планина у Источној Србији, на основу експертске прединвестиционе студије развоја ове туристичке дестинације. На основу дефинисаних “SWOT” критеријума и подкритеријума у оквиру дефинисаних критеријума одређене су могуће стратегије на основу “SWOT” критеријума и то: “SO” стратегије (на основу односа снага и шанси); “WO” стратегије (на основу слабости и шансе); “ST” стратегије (на основу снага и претњи) и “WT” стратегије (на основу слабости и претњи). Експертском оценом односа “SWOT” критеријума и подкритеријума коришћењем “АНР (Analytical Hierarchy Process)” методологије, извршена је приоритизација дефинисаних стратегија, при чему је добијен следећи редослед приоритета стратегија: “SO1 → SO2 → ST1 → ST2 → WO1 → WT1”, и чијом реализацијом се остварују циљеви развоја туристичке дестинације Стара планина у Источној Србији.

Кључне речи: SWOT, АНР, Приоритизација стратегија, туристичка дестинација, планински туризам

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