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## Article

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# Residents' Perception of Sustainable Tourism Destination Development - A Destination Governance Issue

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### ABSTRACT

Tourism destination governance is nowadays a well discussed topic in scientific literature. It considers the view of different stakeholders in tourism development. Residents belong to one of the most important stakeholders in a tourism destination as they co-create the tourism product and can significantly affect the visitors' gaze on destination. Therefore the aim of the study is to find out the interaction between residents' perception of tourism development and their involvement in destination governance issues. The economic, social and environmental impacts of tourism in two mountain destinations are analysed from the viewpoint of residents. The semi-structured interviews took place in mature mountain destinations – Val Gardena in Italy and High Tatras in Slovakia. The study concludes that the inclusion of residents in destination governance issues leads to their higher satisfaction and it addresses the need to consider more the residents' perception of sustainable tourism destination development. The novelty of the study is in the combination of destination governance approach and residents' perception of sustainable tourism destination development.

*Keywords: Destination governance, Residents, Sustainable development, Tourism impact*

## 1. Introduction

Tourism destinations have received in the last years a significant attention in tourism research. There has been a shift from focusing on tourism planning and destination management to tourism destination governance. As Pechlaner, Beritelli, Pichler, Peters & Scott (2015) emphasise the academic debate on

destination management has become increasingly absorbed with governance issues in the widest sense. Destination governance widens the perspective and better considers the diversity of interests among destination stakeholders. Destination governance consists of setting and developing rules and mechanisms for a policy, as well as business strategies, by involving all the institutions and individuals (Beritelli, Bieger & Laesser, 2007). The focus of destination governance is therefore on rules and procedures that involve the network of all stakeholders in a destination. Destination governance is a process that requires a common vision of development, appropriate organizational structures and decision-making tools, adequate processes and leaders who are able to lead

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stakeholders and motivate them to work together.

Moreover destination governance highlights the participation of residents in the process of destination development (Qian, Sasaki, Shivakoti, & Zhang, 2016). Then engagement of residents is important for solving the complex problems of tourism development and leads to more equitable allocation of benefits for long-term achievement of sustainable development goals (Lemos & Agrawal, 2006). Moreover seeking to ensure that the interests of residents are fully taken into account, so that as far as possible they can benefit from tourism development, is a crucial aspect of sustainable destination development (Tempest, 2015).

## II. Literature Review

The research of residents and their perception of tourism development in a destinations is not new. As Xu, Barbieri, Anderson, Leung & Rozier-Rich (2016) state, the studies on residents' attitudes and perceptions in tourism communities date back to the 1960s, when the main focus was to examine the perceived positive impacts derived from tourism development. In this period for example Cohen (1972) examined the impact of different types of tourist on a residents. In 1980s the focus changed towards more negative impacts of tourism (e.g. Belisle & Hoy, D., 1980). Moreover Butler (1980) published the theory of destination life cycle that dealt also with the host-guest relationship. Since 1990s the overall sustainability of tourism destination and the economic, social and environmental impacts on residents have been taken into account. Nowadays various studies (e.g. ; Lundberg, 2017; Sharma & Dyer, 2012; Sinclair-Maragh, Gursoy, & Vieregge, 2015; Woosnam, Draper, Jiang, Aleshinloye, & Erul, 2018) deal with the perception of residents towards the impacts of tourism. However, as García et al. (2015) point out the significant number studies were done in rural destinations and the lack of attention

is drawn to the destinations where tourism is the economic base for residents (island or mountain destinations).

In Europe, mountain destination thanks to their unique natural resources have played an important role in the tourism development since the middle of 18<sup>th</sup> century (Keller, 2017). In a mountain destination, tourism is an important economic activity and important source of employment, because the development of other economic activities in such area is rather limited. Therefore the analysis of residents' perception of sustainable mountain destination governance will fill the gap in the research.

### A. Residents as a part of destination stakeholder's network

Destination governance adopts a stakeholder view on tourism destination. Destination stakeholders interact with each other and thus create a destination network. These networks can be classified as policy networks that provide access to resource and co-operating networks reaching balance between competition and collaboration of stakeholders (Van der Zee & Vanneste, 2015).

A stakeholder can be defined as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation objectives” (Freeman, 1984, p. 46). When applying stakeholder's theory on examining a destination, several types of stakeholders can be found (Beritelli & Bieger, 2014; Bieger & Beritelli, 2012; Jamal & Getz, 1995; Luštický, Gunina & Oberhel, 2017; Reinhold, Laesser & Beritelli, 2015; Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005; UNWTO, 2010; Zehrer & Hallmann, 2015). They can be classified into several groups (Flagestad & Hope, 2001, p. 456) e.g. as community based stakeholders, service providers, employees, market based stakeholders, owner based stakeholders, financial stakeholders and others.

As Gursoy, Chi, & Dyer (2010) emphasise residents are important destination stakeholders as they play a vital role in providing quality experiences for tourists and maintaining sustainable destination development.

They are the general members of the public, including business owners, service providers, and workers / employees who service tourists' needs and wants (Sharma & Dyer, 2012). Residents, as supply-side stakeholders, are important in strengthening the destination competitiveness (Abreu Novais, Ruhanen, & Arcodia, 2018) and their support and recognition is pivotal to the long term success of the destination (Line & Wang, 2017). Local residents are therefore key stakeholders in the process of achieving sustainable development of tourism (Lundberg, 2017).

## B. Residents' perception of sustainable destination development

Sustainable tourism development can be defined as "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities" (UNEP & UNWTO, 2005). Therefore a sustainable tourism development consists of three pillars - economic, social and environmental. From a sustainable development perspective, it is important to research residents' perception of tourism impacts as they are the ones who are exposed to the many effects of tourism development (Sinclair-Maragh et al., 2015). More precise information on residents' perception of tourism development would legitimize the planning process and facilitate the community-based approach to sustainable development (Jamal & Getz, 1995). It is therefore important that tourism planners understand how residents perceive tourism development in order to determine what they need to do to gain local support for strategic tourism related initiatives (Harrill, 2004).

There are several studies that dealt with the economic impacts of tourism from the perspective of residents (e.g. García et al., 2015; Bestard & Nadal, 2007; Gursoy et al., 2010) reaching the consensus that residents' view on economic impacts is mainly positive. Tourism in a destination is creating new employment possibilities, raise the living standards and is stimulus for infrastructural investments.

However, there are also negative economic impacts, such as seasonality or the rising prices of goods and services, as well as the costs for living (inflation) in a destination.

From the social point of view tourism influence habits, customs, quality of live and values of residents. Positive social impacts include rising the self-esteem of residents, protection of local traditions and rise of social glue (Wu & Kim, 2017), as well as raising the awareness of region and higher offer of infrastructural facilities. The higher criminality and privacy invasion are perceived as negative social impacts (Almeida García et al., 2015; Andereck & Vogt, 2000; Milman & Pizam, 1988; Tosun, 2002).

It can be also affirmed, that the residents' perception of sustainable tourism development can be influenced by environmental impact perception (Mazhenova, Choi, & Chung, 2016). On the one hand tourism is seen as a mechanism for reducing environmental pollution (Sinclair-Maragh et al., 2015) and thus the protector of natural resources. On the other hand, the development of tourism negatively affect the environment, leading to extensive construction, noise, water and air pollution, parking problems and congestions (Bestard & Nadal, 2007; Liu, Sheldon, & Var, 1987; Lundberg, 2017).

Nowadays the research of residents' perception of tourism development deals with identifying, measuring and comparing the variables (attributes or factors) that may influence the manner in which tourism and its impacts are perceived (Sharpley, 2014). These variables may include demographic characteristics (age, gender and education), type of tourism, length of residents' stay in the destination or distance from the main touristic attraction. Moreover, the destination life cycle, first proposed by Doxey (1975) as "irridex" model, later described by Butler (1980) in his tourism area life cycle model and more developed by Buhalis (2000), was also considered as an important variable. However there is a lack of attention of today's research on the relationship between the involvement of residents in destination governance issues and residents' perception of its economic, social and environmental impacts.

### III. Methods

The aim of the paper is to find out the interaction between the residents' perception of tourism development and their involvement in destination governance issues. The research sample consists of residents in two mature mountain tourism destinations. The destinations were chosen in order to be in the same stage of destination life cycle with the offer of similar type of tourism, however with different approaches to involvement of residents in destination governance issues.

Val Gardena represents the destination in the South Tirol, Italy. Destinations in the South Tirol are considered to be mature with the elements of rejuvenation (Pechlaner, Hemptrei, & Kofink, 2009). Following the reform in 2007 the local tourism organizations collaborate intensively with all relevant tourism stakeholders, including residents. Together 111 residents took part in the semi-structured interview. The respondents were chosen randomly during the local events in 2017.

The High Tatras are located in the Carpathians, Slovakia. Similarly to Val Gardena, the destination is mature and since 2009 the rejuvenation stage has been entered (Maráková, Holúbeková, Makovník, & Gajdošík, 2017). The reform in 2010, following the Tourism Support Act no. 91/2010 Coll., resulted in the establishment of new destination management organizations in Slovakia. However, these organizations are finding their way to properly govern the destination, resulting in not considering all stakeholders in the decision making process. In the High Tatras the perception of 102 residents was analysed using the semi-structured interview. Similarly to the situation in Val Gardena, the research sample was determined during the local events based on random sampling.

The first part of the semi-structured interview was aimed at identifying the most important impacts of tourism development on destination. Residents should have chosen four the most important economic, social and environmental impacts from the list provided based on literature review. After then, they should

evaluate the degree of consent with the presence of the impact in their destination. The four point Likert scale was used (1- strongly agree, 2 - agree, 3 - disagree, 4 - strongly disagree). The arithmetical mean was calculated for each impact.

To meet the aim of the article, two research questions were formulated.

RQ1: What are the differences in the approach to residents' involvement in destination governance issues?

RQ2: Is the perception of positive and negative tourism impacts different concerning residents' involvement in tourism destination governance?

Finally the perceptions of tourism impacts were graphically illustrated in order to distinguish between positive and negative ones.

Following the suggestion of Nunkoo, Smith, & Ramkissoon (2013, p. 20) stating that this area of research has reached an advanced level of theoretical and methodological sophistication, there is a need for more innovative studies on residents' perception of tourism, and this is likely to benefit research on sustainable tourism. Improved research on residents' perception of tourism that is relevant to sustainable development requires that tourism researchers and scholars have a broader understanding of the research methodologies that presently exist. The study therefore presents a new approach combining destination governance issues and residents' perception of tourism development.

### IV. Results

#### A. Destination governance in Val Gardena and the High Tatras

The most important economic industries in Val Gardena are woodcraft and tourism. Woodcraft has been developing here since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, while tourism development started in 1938 with the age of alpinism in Europe. Nowadays is Val Gardena

well-known international mountain tourism destination.

Tourism development is governed by destination management organization Val Gardena-Gröden Marketing which acts as a coordinating mechanism of stakeholders in the destination. It governs the activities of smaller tourism associations of Wolkenstein, St. Christna, St. Ulrich and cooperates with the province Bozen. Moreover it cooperates with and strategically leads tourism businesses such as hotels and restaurants. The members of organizations are also non-tourism businesses (e.g. shops, farmers). The DMO considers local residents as an important tourism stakeholder. As claimed by the manager of DMO, residents in Val Gardena are more or less engaged in tourism issues in the destination. More than 70 % of residents are directly employed in tourism and the majority of them is taking part in organising events in the destination.

*“The opinion of residents is important for the strategic success of the destination, as they co-create the tourism product in Val Gardena and they are also viewed as “first tourists” as they also use many of the tourism infrastructure.”*[Manager of Val Gardena Gröden Marketing]

Each resident can express his opinion on tourism development and planning on regular meetings, as well as anytime in tourist information centres personally, or by telephone or e-mail. Therefore it can be concluded that residents in Val Gardena can actively participate in governance issues in destination.

The High Tatra has been important tourism destination due to its recreational and climatic spa function. This destination has been a place of winter sports and health tourism. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century unique clinics and medical facilities were built here in order to heal the respiratory diseases. Since the early 20<sup>th</sup>

century the construction of ski lifts and cable cars has attracted the winter tourists from the region of central Europe.

Destination management organization Region High Tatra is responsible for tourism marketing of the region and strategic leadership in tourism promotion. Tourism stakeholders, mainly hotels, restaurants and travel agencies, are grouped in Tourism Association of the High Tatra. Nor the DMO, nor the Tourism Association actively cooperate with local residents. As expressed by the director of Tourism Association, residents are not truly engaged in tourism development issues.

*“There are more than 2,000 residents in the destination, many of them work in tourism, but they are not active in further tourism development. Although we know their view is important, so far no bigger initiative has been done to include them in tourism decision-making process.”*

[Manager of Tourism Association of the High Tatra]

The only thing how resident can affect the destination direction is indirectly through the local politicians. Therefore the High Tatra can be seen as an example, where residents are not directly part of tourism destination governance.

## B. Residents' perception of tourism economic impact

From the list of economic impacts, residents in the first step should have chosen the four most important for them and then express the degree of consent. The list included both positive and negative impacts.

In Val Gardena (table 1) residents perceive positively that tourism creates employment possibilities in the

**Table 1.** Perception of economic impacts by residents in Val Gardena and the High Tatra

Economic impacts in Val Gardena	Value	Economic impacts in the High Tatra	Value
New employment possibilities	1.22	Inflation	1.34
Stimulus of investments	1.39	New employment possibilities	1.62
Inflation	1.40	Stimulus for investments	2.01
Creation of seasonal and unstable employment	2.43	Rise in the standard of living	2.80

destination. Moreover, they think it is a stimulus of investments to general as well as tourism infrastructure. From the negative impacts they see, that the prices of goods and services are higher due to tourism development (inflation) that puts a pressure on their financial situation. The creation of seasonal and unstable employment is basically viewed as negative factor of tourism development. However, in Val Gardena residents do not consider this as a negative fact. In the off season they have time for relax or for the reconstruction of the facilities.

In the High Tatras the most perceived economic impacts include inflation, new employment possibilities, stimulus for investments and the rise in the standard of living. The residents see that tourism development contribute to price inflation of goods and services. It also rises the prices of real estates. On the other hand, a positive fact is that the majority of residents agree with the employment function of tourism. Residents in the High Tatras are employed in the middle or lower management positions mainly as receptionists, food and beverage managers, waiters or ski instructors. Another important economic indicator of tourism development is investment stimulation. In the High Tatras, several major investments in mountain transport facilities, snow making system, as well as in reconstruction and construction of new accommodation facilities have been observed since 2009. Residents consider these investments as a driving force of development. Although the rise in the standard of living should be viewed as positive economic outcome of tourism development, in the High Tatras the majority of residents disagree with this phenomenon.

### C. Residents' perception of tourism social impact

Social impacts of tourism are related to the cognitive function leading to the enrichment of residents' life. Tourism can also change the residents' lifestyle, values and habits. It can lead to acculturation, when the tourists' lifestyle is adopted by residents.

From the list of social impacts, the most important for residents in Val Gardena are the higher offer of sport and cultural facilities, rise of self-esteem, protection of local traditions and higher criminality (table2).

The majority of residents think that thanks to the tourism development, there is a higher offer of sport and cultural facilities in the destination. It leads to the better use of free time and personal development. Tourism also rise the self-esteem of residents. As tourism destination becomes more famous, the residents are proud of it and are willing to identify with it. Due to the international significance of Val Gardena, it can be claimed that it is the place of cultural interaction. Residents can promote their own traditions and thus to protect it for further generations. As stated by one resident, in the past in Val Gardena the local traditions started to disappear, but along with the tourism development the traditions become the part of tourism product. The social problems as vandalism and criminality are negative impacts of tourism. As expressed by average value 3.61, Val Gardena residents do not agree with this fact and they are not influenced by criminality.

In the High Tatras the most important social impacts of tourism by residents are the rise of self-esteem, higher offer of sport and cultural facilities, privacy invasion and criminality. However the degree of

**Table 2.** Perception of social impacts by residents in Val Gardena and the High Tatras

Social impacts in Val Gardena	Value	Social impacts in the High Tatras	Value
Higher offer of sport and cultural facilities	1.68	Rising the self-esteem of residents	2.21
Rising the self-esteem of residents	1.80	Higher offer of sport and cultural facilities	2.35
Protection of local traditions	2.17	Privacy invasion	2.98
Higher criminality	3.61	Higher criminality	3.01

consent is much lower than in Val Gardena. Although the rising self-esteem is important for residents as a social impact, in the High Tatras the average value indicates that residents do not really identify with the destination. Moreover, as the residents do not take part in the governance issues, the infrastructure (sport and cultural facilities) are used mostly exclusively by tourists. Nevertheless the negative impacts as privacy invasion or higher criminality connected with high number of tourist are also not so evident. Residents do not mind the presence of tourists and the host-guest relationship is neutral.

#### D. Residents' perception of tourism environmental impact

Tourism development has an impact on natural environment of the destination. As the mountain destinations are located mainly in protected areas, the environmental impact are very important subject of research.

The environmental impacts are perceived mainly as negative ones. It is also the case of examined residents in Val Gardena where among the most important ones they have chosen three negative - noise, water and air pollution, parking problems and extensive construction (table 3).

The majority of residents in Val Gardena agree that development of tourism leads also to protection of natural resources. In the destination tourism has enhanced the physical appearance of the destination and due to tourism development, there are also more parks in the destination. Moreover, the negative environmental impacts are not perceived bad in the destination. As the average values are higher than

2.5, the majority of residents do not agree that tourism brings more noise, water and air pollution to destination. Also the parking problems and extensive construction are not seen by the residents in the destination.

In the High Tatras, the situation is worse. The majority of residents sees the extensive construction as an environmental problem. Since 2009, the ski resort operator in the destination has invested more than 44 million € for modernisation of ski lifts and other technical infrastructure. This construction has also led to noise, water and air pollution, which is also negatively perceived by residents. Residents do not agree with the statement that tourism leads to protection of natural resources in the High Tatras. Therefore it can be assumed that the environmental impacts are perceived negatively in the High Tatras. Positive facts remains, that residents do not think, that there is a high number of visitors in the destination and therefore the effect of overcrowding is not present here.

#### V. Discussion and conclusion

The approaches to residents' involvement in destination governance issues vary in examined destinations. While in Val Gardena, the residents are part of tourism product and are able to actively take part in decision making concerning tourism development, in the High Tatras the situation is different. Residents are only “passive spectators” of tourism development without taking part in destination governance structures. Therefore the differences in

**Table 3.** Perception of environmental impacts by residents in Val Gardena and the High Tatras

Environmental impacts in Val Gardena	Value	Environmental impacts in the High Tatras	Value
Protection of natural resources	1.89	Extensive construction	1.45
Noise, water and air pollution	2.68	Noise, water and air pollution	1.68
Parking problems	2.69	Protection of natural resources	3.21
Extensive construction	3.18	High number of visitors	4.01



the approach to residents' involvement in destination governance issues (RQ1) are the inclusion in product development, decision making process and destination structure. This findings correlate with theory of good destination governance and its principles of structure and stakeholders' participation (e.g. Laws, Richins, Agrusa, & Scott, 2011; Ruhanen, Scott, Ritchie, & Tkaczynski, 2010), where the organizational structure of destination should contain all relevant stakeholders, including residents and every stakeholder should have a right to participate in decision making process of destination development.

The perception of positive and negative impacts is also different in both examined destinations (RQ2). In Val Gardena residents stronger agree with positive impacts of tourism than in the High Tatras (Figure 1).

Moreover the statistical difference was proven by Kruskal Wallis test (table 4). The significance 0,002 indicates that there is a statistical difference in the High Tatras and Val Gardena concerning positive impacts perceived by residents.

On the other hand, in the High Tatras the negative impacts are perceived worse than in Val Gardena (Figure 2).

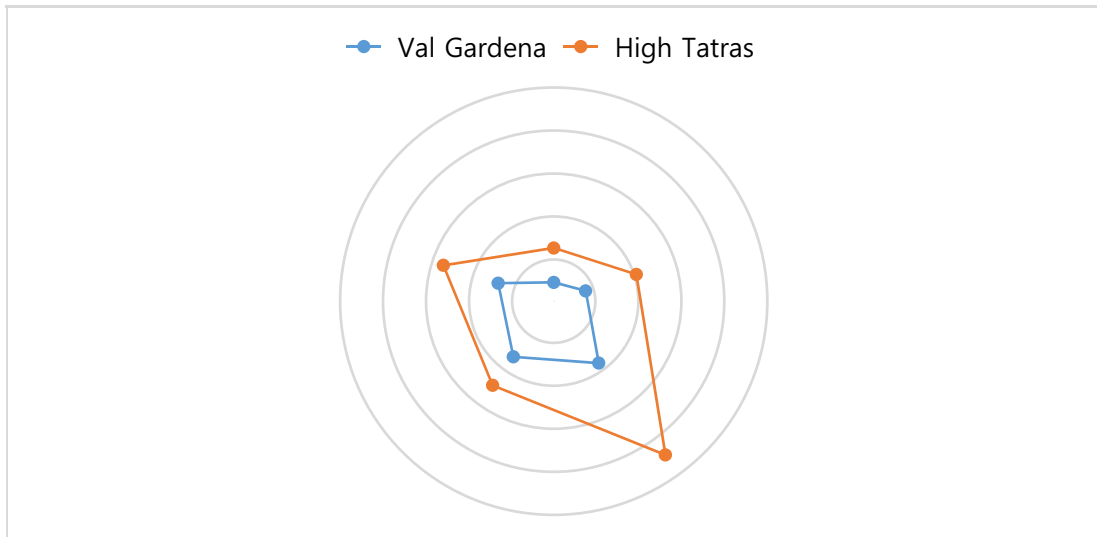


Figure 1. Residents' perception of positive tourism impacts

Table 4. Kruskal Wallis test for statistical difference in positive tourism impacts

Ranks			
	Destination	N	Mean Rank
Positive impacts	High Tatras	102	149,91
	Val Gardena	111	68,88
	Total	214	
Test Statistics <sup>a,b</sup>			
			Positive impacts
Chi-Square			92,361
df			1
Asymp. Sig.			,002

a. Kruskal Wallis Test  
 b. Grouping Variable: Destination

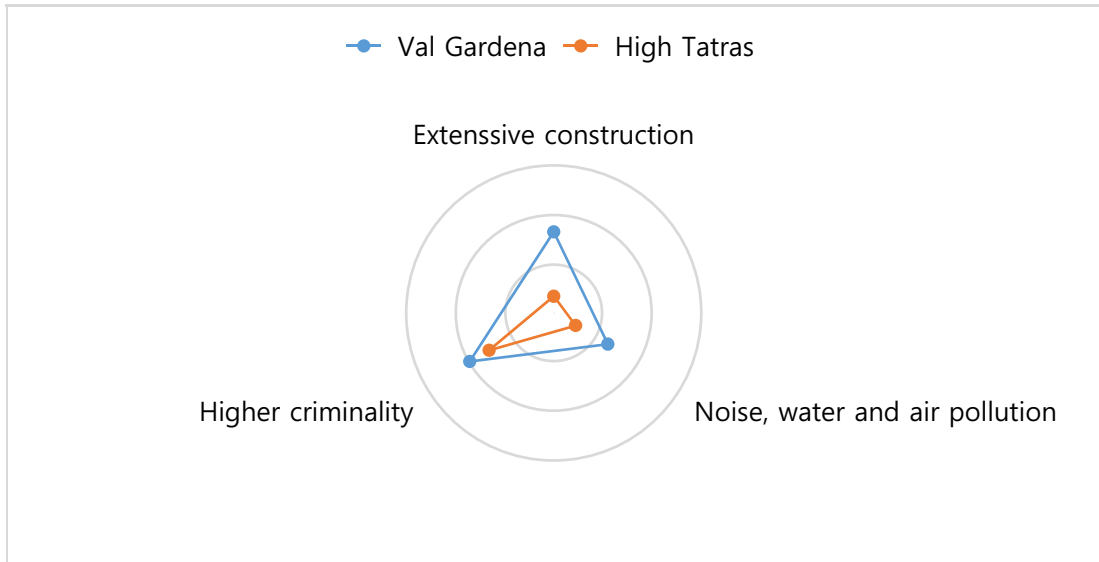


Figure 2. Residents' perception of negative tourism impacts

Table 8. Kruskal Wallis test for statistical difference in positive tourism impacts

Ranks			
	Destination	N	Mean Rank
Negative impacts	High Tatras	102	63,83
	Val Gardena	111	146,67
	Total	214	
Test Statistics <sup>a,b</sup>			
			Positive impacts
	Chi-Square		98,772
	df		1
	Asymp. Sig.		,001

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: Destination

The Kruskal Wallis test also indicates the statistical difference (significance 0,001) in perceived negative impacts in the High Tatras and Val Gardena (table 5).

Based on the presented results it can be stated that the involvement of residents in destination governance influence the residents' perception of sustainable tourism development. Nevertheless, it can be observed that residents are in general more positive on tourism impacts, which can be expressed by choosing more positive impacts from the provided list and the average agreement on positive impacts

in examined destinations is 1,93 (close to agree) and average agreement to negative impact is 2,60 (close to disagree). It is in line with the research of Vargas-Sánchez, Porrás-Bueno, & Plaza-Mejía (2011) in Spain leading to the conclusion that the perception of the positive impacts outweigh the negative ones.

It can be concluded, that residents are important part of a destination as a primary stakeholders. They co-create the tourism product and can be also viewed as “first visitors” of destination, due to using some of the tourism infrastructure, they take part in

organized events and are protectors of primary resources in a destination. Therefore it is important to form the relationship of residents towards tourism development and to include them in planning, product development and decision issues. The analysis shows that their inclusion in destination governance issues should lead [*ceteris paribus*] to their higher satisfaction and provision of more welcoming atmosphere for tourists. The host-guest relationship is important issue for the strategic success of a destination and its competitiveness (Bornhorst, Ritchie, & Sheehan, 2010; Cohen, 1972).

The limitations of presented study lie in the analysis of only two mature destinations in a short period of time (one year) using sort of quantitative analysis. This situation might have slightly distort the outcomes, nevertheless it was the pilot study combining the destination governance and residents' perception of tourism development. Therefore the implications for further research arise. It would be useful to analyse the interaction of destination governance and residents' perception of tourism development in other type of destinations (e.g. rural, urban) in different stages of destination life cycle and for a longer period of time (longitudinal study). Moreover the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods should bring more light to the emerging topic of destination governance and residents' perception of tourism development.

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