PREREQUISITES FOR CREATING A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE IN NATURE PARKS THROUGH DIFFERENTIATION

Vučemilović, Vesna; Vištica, Biserka

Source / Izvornik: **Ekonomski vjesnik : Review of Contemporary Entrepreneurship, Business, and Economic Issues, 2017, 30, 459 - 472**

Journal article, Published version
Rad u časopisu, Objavljena verzija rada (izdavačev PDF)

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:145:304915

Rights / Prava: Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International/Imenovanje-Nekomercijalno-Bez prerada 4.0 međunarodna

Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2024-03-29**



Repository / Repozitorij:

EFOS REPOSITORY - Repository of the Faculty of Economics in Osijek





Vesna Vučemilović
College for Management in Tourism and Informatics in Virovitica
Matije Gupca 78,
33000 Virovitica, Croatia
vesna.vucemilovic@yahoo.com
Phone: +385989824422

Biserka Vištica
Ministry of the Sea, Transport and Infrastructure
Prisavlje 14,
10000 Zagreb, Croatia
biserka.vistica@gmail.com
Phone: +385995184593

UDK: 338.48: 502.4](497.5)(285.3 Kopački rit)
Review article

Received: April 3, 2017
Accepted for publishing: August 28, 2017

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

PREREQUISITES FOR CREATING A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE IN NATURE PARKS THROUGH DIFFERENTIATION

Abstract

Differentiation is a way for gaining a sustainable competitive advantage or achieving a market position which enables companies to satisfy customers' needs better than the competition. Differentiation can manifest itself through four dimensions: product, services, personnel and image.

Nature parks, national parks, strict reserves and special reserves are categories of protected areas of national importance. Nature parks and national parks have exceptional potential for visiting system development, but are also *responsible* for the *management* of these activities. There are numerous nature protection restrictions arising from legislation and management documents. The principal task is to protect and preserve the natural and landscape values and ecological characteristics.

Creating and realizing visiting activities as a part of tourist services supplied trough Public institutions are also specific. These services must be differentiated on the market in relation to the competition. Income generated from tourist services in the income structure of nature parks, will be even more important in the future, because of self-financing development and central budget dependency reduction. It must be emphasized that nature parks help the larger community through development of complementary economic activities.

This paper is based on market research conducted in the period from 16 May to 10 June 2016 in Nature Park Kopački rit, which is one of the most visited nature parks in the Republic of Croatia. A poll survey was carried out among 300 randomly selected visitors. The research results may be used for policy suggestions for how to create adequate products, services and promotional activities, ensure quality education for visitors about natural, historical and cultural protected area values and minimize visitors' impact on natural resources.

Keywords: Competitive advantage, nature parks, differentiation, positioning

1. Introduction

A competitive advantage is when a "company possess abilities and capabilities to satisfy consumers' needs better than the competition" (Renko, 2009: 99). Ansoff is regarded as the first author who introduced the term competitive advantage. Porter (1985) introduces competitive advantage which is characterized as long-term achievement of above

average profits and uniqueness that can be very difficult to imitate and overtake. Two basic ways of achieving a competitive advantage are low product price with acceptable quality and product differentiation based on creation of additional product values such as higher price followed by higher quality and protected by a strong brand.

Usually, there is only one company on the market capable of establishing and holding low cost strategy. Therefore, other companies must differentiate their product by adding to the product dimensions attractive to customers. According to Porter (1990), the generic business strategies concept is based on the fact that selection of the way to achieve a competitive advantage for each strategic business unit or part of the company is the essence of business strategy. Buble et al. (1997) claim that it is possible to achieve a competitive advantage through lower costs than the competitors or through differentiation on the market. If these two dimensions are combined with the companies' market width, three basic business strategies originate. They are cost keeping strategy, differentiation strategy and focusing strategy. Sources of competitive advantage are high efficiency in addition to unique differentiated value for the customer.

There are three new ways of achieving a competitive advantage. The first includes excellence in operating activities in a way where a company, by focusing on operating activities' efficiency, aims to cut production cost and reduce product price. The second is product leadership by which a company focuses on technology and product development. The last one is being close to the consumer, which demands better knowledge of consumers' needs than the competition and adapting to the specific consumer needs which results in a close relationship with consumers (Renko, 2009: 190). Basically, a competitive advantage is gained through asset management, specific skills and abilities and information regarding consumers and competition. When implementing a differentiation strategy, a company must create and add to its product or service, features which consumers regard as useful and important but different from the ones offered by competitors. The most common mistakes in the implementation of this strategy are uniqueness that is not evaluated, excessive differentiation, a too high purchase price, focus on product instead of whole value chain and oversight in market segmentation. Basic differentiation types are product differentiation, service differentiation, personnel differentiation and image differentiation. Differentiation through services is lately becoming one of the main trends because of significant growth in this sector (Kotler et al., 2006: 624).

According to Angelkova et al. (2012), a competitive advantage of a tourist destination is the ability to increase tourist consumption and attract visitors by supplying them with an experience which satisfies them, is remembered and is improving the wellbeing of people in the destination and preserving the natural heritage for future generations. Sustainable development of the tourist product offer in protected areas is imperative according to present legislation. Nevertheless, the Republic of Croatia has numerous protected areas of national importance. According to the official Protected Areas Register kept by the Nature Protection Directorate of the Ministry of Environmental and Nature Protection, "a total of 409 areas have been protected in the Republic of Croatia in various categories". Today, protected areas account for 8.56% of the total area of the Republic of Croatia, which makes 12.24% of the terrestrial territory and 1.94% of the territorial sea. Nature parks account for the largest share of all protected areas (4.56% of the total national territory)"[1]. The Republic of Croatia has to the present time declared eight national parks and eleven nature parks, which are regarded as protected areas of national significance together with strict and special reserves.

The Kopački rit area is classified as a nature park, and it represents one of the most valuable and preserved alluvial wetland plains in Europe. It is distinguished by its ecological values, rich biodiversity and impressive landscape esthetics. It was formed through history by the work of the Danube and Drava rivers as well as their flood waters. The distinctive look of Kopački rit is conditioned by the specific layout of the ponds, canals and so-called "grede" (beams), and its territory is especially famous for its phenomenon of the inner delta created by the Danube River with the assistance of the Drava River. "A phenomenon like this is not notable for other European rivers in this form and therewith gives this area a global significance"[2].

A tourist destination is dictated by the wishes, inclinations and the needs of the tourists (Vukonić, Čavlek, 2001). Each "tourist destination has to combine various resources and create a specific tourist product that will be recognizable and competitive on the tourist market" (Bosnić et al., 2014). Kopački

rit Nature Park is a specific tourist destination according to its nature prerequisites. Each protected area is specific and attracts visitors, but our aim was to point out the main factors by which each protected area may differentiate itself among similar locations. The aim of this paper is to point out possibilities coming out from an active approach in the process of creating services and contents offered in nature parks. Our intention was to emphasize a more active role of self-financing in the future through these activities using Kopački rit as an example. Through differentiation in the segment of services, personnel and image, nature parks such as Kopački rit, can achieve a competitive advantage among similar destinations.

2. Methodology

Information used in this paper are primary and secondary data. Secondary data include statistical data from publications of the State Bureau of Statistics, legal acts, international agreements and conventions (UNESCO MaB, RAMSAR and GGN), regulation and EU directives regarding nature protection and Strategy and Action Plan for the Protection of Biological and Landscape Diversity of the Republic of Croatia (Official Gazette 143/08)[3]. Based on this data, by using the method of analysis, specificity of creating offers and differentiation of nature parks was studied.

Primary data are collected through market research conducted in Kopački rit Nature Park, which is one of the most visited nature parks in the Republic of Croatia. A poll survey was carried out among 300 randomly selected visitors in the period from 16 May to 10 June 2016. The research was conducted through a structured survey questionnaire that comprised a total of 38 closed and open questions. Visitors were asked to participate in the research after they finished a selected program in Kopački rit Nature Park.

Themes covered by the research were the respondents' motive for visiting Kopački rit Nature Park, activities selected and performed during their stay in the Nature Park, length of the respondents' stay, image of the Nature Park, price and quality ratio, source of information about the Nature Park, etc. Respondents were asked to grade on a scale from one to five the availability of information materials about the Kopački rit Nature Park, personnel professionalism, arrangement of infrastructure for visitors and quality of selected program.

The majority of respondents (95.6%) were from the Republic of Croatia. The following table shows the respondents' structure according to the counties they are coming from.

Table 1 Respondents' structure according to the counties they are coming from

County	Respondents
Zagreb County	43
City of Zagreb	47
County of Osijek-Baranya	40
County of Vukovar-Srijem	24
Varaždin County	68
County of Slavonski Brod-Posavina	11
Međimurje County	7
County of Primorje-Gorski Kotar	10
Other	50
Total	300

Source: Authors

The share of female respondents is higher (67.2%) than the share of male respondents (32.8%). The majority have a college education (68.3%) and mostly are not members of associations for nature protection or associations involved in recreation activities in nature. The respondents' age structure is represented in Table 2. Almost half of the respondents are between ages 25 to 44.

Table 2 Respondents' age structure

Age	Respondents
18 – 24	8
25 – 44	143
45 – 64	110
65 and more	39

Source: Authors

3. Nature parks as protected areas of national importance

The Republic of Croatia's national wealth, among other indices also presents particularly attractive and preserved nature, which constitutes one of the fundamental values of the country and enjoys protection. Although it stretches over merely 88,073 km² (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2015: 46)[4] of surface, because of its geographical location and specific biogeographical impact, the territory of the Republic of Croatia is distinguished by exceptional biological and landscape diversity. There are numerous protected areas of national importance on its territory, which demonstrates a preserved natural heritage and its potential. The Republic of Croatia preserves its nature and this is mentioned even in the Constitution where it is stated that "*The sea, seashore, islands, waters, air space, mineral resources, and other natural assets, as well as land, forests, flora and fauna, other components of the natural environment, real estate and items of particular cultural, historical, economic or ecological significance which are specified by law to be of interest to the Republic of Croatia shall enjoy its special protection" (Official Gazette 85/10)*[5]*. Nature protection of the Republic of Croatia is carried out based on the national legislative framework as well as the implementation of numerous international treaties, conventions, regulations and guidelines of the EU in the field of nature protection. The basic document of nature protection in accordance with the Nature Protection Act* (Official Gazette 80/13)[6] is the Strategy and Action Plan for the Protection of Nature of the Republic of Croatia which determines the long-term objectives and guidelines for the conservation of biodiversity and geodiversity and implementation methods. The document is made based on the Nature Status Report of the Republic of Croatia. The main legislation regulating the issues of protection of nature is the Nature Protection Act, which defines the protected area as "clearly defined geographical space that is intended to protect nature and which is operated for long-term conservation of nature and associated ecosystem services" (Official Gazette 80/13). According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), a protected area is "a clearly defined geographical space, recognized, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values" (IUCN Definition 2008)[7]. The Nature Protection Act (Official Gazette 80/13) stipulates nine different protected areas: strict reserve, national park, special reserve, nature park, regional park, nature monument, significant landscape, park forest and horticultural monument. The stated protected areas are distributed in classes of state or local importance, in which the strict reserve, national park, special reserve and nature park are areas of state importance, while the rest of the protected areas are of local importance. Some of those areas protected under national legislation are also protected in accordance with International Conventions and Agreements. Based on the Nature Protection Act, protected areas are managed by public institutions. Each national park and nature park is managed by a separate public institution established by the Government of the Republic of Croatia. The primary activities of public institutions concern the protection, maintenance and promotion of the protected area with the aim of protecting and preserving the authenticity of nature, ensuring an undisturbed course of natural processes and sustainable use of natural resources. Public institutions in the administered area are obliged to supervise and implement the conditions and measures for the protection of nature and to participate in collection of data for monitoring the state of conservation of nature. Based on the Nature Protection Act, the protected areas are also intended for visitation. Those activities should be implemented in such way

that they do not jeopardize their fundamental values, nor nature protection. Visiting protected areas is permitted to everyone under the same conditions, but it can be limited of even forbidden if the visitation can jeopardize nature conservation as well as visitor safety.

Table 3 The total amount of funds allocated for the protection of nature in the state budget in the currency kuna (the expenses for the employees of the competent ministry are not included)

Year	Nature protection Total	Financing source		
		State budget funds	Subventions and grants	Loans
2008	82,690,770.35	62,503,541.57	20,187,228.78	0.00
2009	76,537,586.18	59,356,487.74	17,181,098.44	0.00
2010	63,763,946.86	58,878,489.18	4,885,457.68	0.00
2011	62,272,807.97	56,907,990.36	0.00	5,364,817.61
2012	67,607,295.00	46,272,882.54	3,160,935.52	18,173,476.94

Source: State Institute for Nature Protection (2014), "Analysis of the state of nature in the Republic of Croatia for the period 2008-2012", p. 417, available at: https://www.dropbox.com/sh/1gktiq2c7r3n4mz/AADOGmz4-eAes5xex9Xnbb_-a?dl=0 (Accessed on: June 27, 2016)[8]

Financial assets for the work of public institutions are provided from the state budget, budgets of local and regional governments, revenues from the use of protected natural areas, as well as income from fees and other sources identified by the Nature Protection Act and special regulations. Financing nature protection in the Republic of Croatia is largely reliant on the State budget funds. A smaller portion of funding for nature protection comes from subventions and grants and loans as well as the budgets of regional and local governments. In the previous period, the protection of nature was actively funded by instruments of pre-accession funds and other international sources of funding, which were granted for the implementation of various program activities and projects. As can be seen from Table 3, the total funds for the protection of nature, which are separate from the state budget, have a declining trend in the period from 2008 to 2012. The decreasing trend was related to the proceeds of donations and financial assistance while the financing of nature protection increased only in the segment of financial loans. This trend indicates the increasing importance of the share of self-financing through visits to protected areas and the development of ancillary services while performing basic activities relating to the protection, maintenance and promotion of the protected area with the aim of protecting and preserving natural origin, ensuring the smooth running of the natural processes and sustainable use of natural resources.

3.1 Visiting of the protected area

Protected areas with their rich nature and beauty of the landscape, usually attract many visitors and can be categorized as important tourist attractors which affect the overall tourism potential of a country. Table 4 shows the number of tickets sold in National Parks and Nature Parks in the period from 2008 to 2012.

Table 4 Number of tickets sold/registered visitors in National Parks and Nature Parks in period from 2008 to 2012

Protected area	Year					Total
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	
NP Brijuni	180,276	162,644	145,152	156,549	150,943	795,584
NP Krka	694,785	650,423	668,027	683,739	732,999	3,429,973
NP Mljet	91,788	88,475	96,391	95,498	97,148	469,300

Protected area	Year					Total
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	
NP Plitvička jezera	948,891	939,747	962,322	1,083,451	1,157,019	5,091,430
NP Risnjak	18,308	17,846	13,356	15,864	16,359	81,733
NP Sjeverni Velebit	13,739	15,920	15,416	19,336	16,620	81,031
NP Paklenica	115,943	110,350	112,665	118,288	114,321	571,567
NP Kornati*	10,811*	12,550*	13,622*	14,096*	13,641*	64,720*
Total NP	**2,063,730**	**1,985,425**	**2,013,329**	**2,172,725**	**2,285,409**	**10,520,618**
PP Biokovo	37,803	36,984	40,773	44,299	42,350	202,209
PP Kopački rit	36,814	34,850	30,195	32,599	28,756	163,214
PP Lastovsko otočje	20,694	26,346	28,130	32,730	31,196	139,096
PP Lonjsko polje	17,500	15,500	14,650	14,700	15,600	77,950
PP Papuk	7,166	6,615	6,244	5,627	6,508	32,160
PP Telaščica	107,959	97,149	97,277	105,497	97,565	505,447
PP Učka	1,913	1,435	1,563	2,654	2,173	9,738
PP Velebit	30,831	27,451	27,743	29,820	33,471	149,316
PP Vransko jezero	5,504	5,671	12,882	14,507	11,347	49,911
PP Žumberak-Samoborsko gorje	2,356	2,231	1,037	2,696	3,016	11,336
PP Medvednica	14,252	11,308	17,124	21,806	21,620	86,110
Total PP	**282,792**	**265,540**	**277,618**	**306,935**	**293,602**	**1,426,487**
** The visit is charged per boat/tourist vessel, not per person.*						

Source: State Institute for Nature Protection (2014), "Analysis of the state of nature in the Republic of Croatia for the period 2008-2012", p. 328, available at: https://www.dropbox.com/sh/1gktiq2c7r3n4mz/AADOGmz4-eAes5xex9Xnbb_-a?dl=0 (Accessed on: June 27, 2016)

Usually linked terminology to protected areas are nature base tourism and ecotourism.

Ceballos-Lascuråin (1987) was the first to define ecotourism as travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring, and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestations found in these areas (Weaver, 2001: 5). According to the dictionary of tourism, "ecotourism is tourism in which the emphasis is placed on the stay of tourists in a natural and unpolluted environment, especially in areas with a certain degree of environment protection" (Vukonić, Čavlek, 2006: 84). The concept of ecotourism is environmentally healthy tourism based on conserved nature with an educational aspect that arises from the need of raising ecological awareness of the tourism offer and demand with emphasis on the interaction between local residents and tourists with a minimal negative impact on the visited area (Bosnić, Bakan, 2012). According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) definition, ecotourism has some specific characteristics. Trips that are included under the term ecotourism are motivated by the desire for observation and enjoyment of nature, and traditional and cultural values of a particular area of nature. Eco-tourist services usually provide specialized tour operators who prefer to work with smaller groups of visitors, while their partners at the destination are mostly local businesses and small entrepreneurs. An important feature of ecotourism is that it supports the maintenance of nature areas because it consciously generates benefits to local residents through employment

and the creation of new revenue. Ecotourism supports organizations and managers of areas with the primary intention of supporting the protection of nature and its values, as well as enabling economic benefits to local communities. Ecotourism strongly contributes to increasing awareness of the need to preserve natural and cultural assets, both among locals and tourists. It also minimizes the negative impact on the natural, social and cultural environment (The British Ecotourism Market, UNWTO 2002)[9]. The main characteristics of ecotourism are preserved nature, plain accommodation, strict nature protection and limited number of visitors which altogether gives a unique experience (Carić, Marković, 2011). Wetlands are part of the unique tourism experience. They represent one of the most productive world's ecosystems, providing various "ecosystem services", as well as important opportunities for tourism and recreation. People are usually attracted to wetlands because of their unique ecological values, aesthetic appeal and specific beauty of nature. One of the most significant wetland areas in the Republic of Croatia is Kopački rit Nature Park, which is characterized by unique beauty and exceptional ecological values. The area of Kopački rit "also called the European Amazon, is situated in the central part of the Danube floodplain, between two important European rivers, the Drava and the Danube"[10]. Many populations of endangered and rare species inhabit its territory, and in national and international circles it is known for its rich ornithofauna. It is also seen as the most important fish hatchery in the middle Danube. Due to exceptional natural values, in 1993 Kopački rit was included on the List of Wetlands of International Importance, under the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar)[11]. Also, due to the importance as a wetland habitat and habitat of many birds, in 1986 it was included in the inventory of Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBA)[12] in Europe. The number of visitors in the Kopački rit Nature Park had a decreasing tendency that was recently stopped. It is important to note that the attendance by months is satisfactory because visitors come to the park in the period from April to October, which can provide a continuous source of income for most of the year.

Table 5 Number of visitors to Kopački rit Nature Park from 2009 to 2015 by quarters

Year	I quarter	II quarter	III quarter	IV quarter	Total year
2009	524	20,587	8,231	5,508	34,850
2010	875	16,293	7,785	5,242	30,195
2011	964	18,007	9,103	4,525	32,599
2012	703	15,540	8,660	3,853	28,756
2013	543	12,294	9,819	3,938	26,594
2014	1,443	14,488	6,153	2,903	24,987
2015	947	14,836	9,202	4,851	29,836
Total	5,999	112,045	58,953	30,820	207,817

Source: Archive of the Public Institution "Kopački rit Nature Park" – data for 2016.[13]

4. Research results

4.1 Services differentiation

The range of services offered in Kopački rit Nature Park consists of several combinations of different services such as panoramic view of Kopački rit, video presentation, multimedia exhibition, walk over the new boardwalk, transfer with the tourist train from the Visitor Centre to the quay, guided boat tour through the wetland, transfer with the tourist train back to the Visitor Centre and individual visits to the Tikveš Castle Complex. It is also possible to take a train tour, amphibian tour or walks on the bridges of Kopački rit. There are also several canoe tours, the bird watching program, the photo safari program and the junior ranger program. The most quoted motive for visiting Kopački rit Nature Park given by the respondents was enjoyment in

its landscape beauty and nature richness. They are slightly less interested in education about the protected areas. Recreation in nature is mainly not a motive for visiting. The following table presents the respondents' motive for visiting Kopački rit Nature Park. Respondents had the opportunity to choose several answers.

Table 6 Respondents motive for visiting Kopački rit Nature Park

Respondents motive for visiting	Respondents
Enjoyment in landscape beauty and nature richness	255
Education about protected areas	91
Recreation in nature	29
Something else	45

Source: Authors

Performed activities during the respondents' stay in Kopački rit Nature Park are mostly in accordance with visiting motives. Respondents have an interest in taking a boat tour, walk over boardwalks and photographing nature, plants and animals.

Table 7 Respondents' activities during their stay in Kopački rit Nature Park

Respondents' activities during their stay	Respondents
Boat tour	269
Walk over boardwalks	249
Visiting reception center Mali Sakadaš	143
Visiting castle Tikveš	90
Photographing nature, plants and animals	156
Recreation in nature (walking, running, riding bicycles)	41
Consumption in restaurants and café bars	112
Souvenir shopping	117

Source: Authors

Accordingly, the creation of services offered in the Nature Park should be focused on contents which will enable visitors to enjoy in the beauty of nature and observe the landscape from water, air and land. That would enable visitors to experience the beauty of the special and unique environment that can be seen only in a wetland such as Kopački rit which distinguishes this nature park from the majority of other protected areas in the Republic of Croatia. The respondents gave high grades to the quality of selected and performed programs during they stay in Kopački rit Nature Park (average 4.39).

Table 8 Respondents' grade regarding the quality of the selected program in Kopački rit Nature Park

Grade	Respondents
5	149
4	96
3	29
2	2
1	2
Without answer	22
Average grade: 4.39	

Source: Authors

The price and quality ratio is mostly satisfactory for majority of respondents. Nevertheless, 17.6% (53 respondents) regards that the price and quality ratio is not adequate which should not be neglected, and we suggest additional research regarding this subject.

Table 9 The price and quality ratio of the selected program in Kopački rit Nature Park

Price and quality ratio	Respondents
Optimal	221
Price is too high for that program quality	41
Price is not adequate for that program quality	12
Without answer	26
Total	**300**

Source: Authors

The majority of respondents stay in Kopački rit Nature Park half a day (54.4%) or one day (34.6%) which points out a lack of content for a longer stay and visitor's perception of this nature park as a destination for short excursions. This problem should be a part of research which would emphasize it because that is market potential for developing a new range of services. The arrangement of infrastructure for visitors (boardwalks, info center, parking etc.) respondents rated with a rather high grade which is on average 4.62.

Table 10 Respondents grade for the infrastructure arrangement for visitors in Kopački rit Nature Park

Grade	Respondents
5	200
4	74
3	12
2	2
1	1
Without answer	11
Average grade: 4.62	

Source: Authors

Objections regarding the range of services stated by respondents in open questions are the lack of translation for foreigners, length of boat tour, differences in range of services offered in Kopački rit Nature Park during the week and on weekends, lack of mobile applications which can be used as a tour guide in the nature park and insufficiency of public transportation signs for directions on the highway and in the city of Osijek for directing visitors towards Kopački rit.

4.2 Personnel differentiation

Personnel differentiation means that companies can gain a strong competitive advantage through having better-trained people. Kotler et al. (2006: 427) state that personnel differentiation demands a careful personnel selection process and high-quality education, especially for personnel which is in direct contact with customers.

Respondents rated personnel professionalism with high grades (average 4.73). Nonetheless, in the open questions there are suggestions for improving several job positions, especially in the reception center.

Table 11 Personnel professionalism in Kopački rit Nature Park

Grade	Respondents
5	231
4	45
3	12
2	0
1	2
Without answer	10
Average grade: 4.73	

Source: Authors

4.3 Image differentiation

Kotler et al. (2006: 428) define image differentiation as the buyers' different responses to company and brand images. Identity comprises the ways that a company aims to identify or position itself or its product, whereas image is the way the public perceives the company or its products. The image is affected by many factors beyond the company's control. An effective image establishes the product's character and value proposition; it conveys this character in a distinctive way; and it delivers emotional power beyond a mental image. The company's image cannot be established trough one campaign within a short period of time. It is long term process which demands commitment and consistence in all communication vehicles.

Table 12 Source of information about Kopački rit Nature Park

Source of information	Respondents
Internet	139
Print media	76
Radio or TV	90
Brochures	70
Friends' recommendations	167

Source: Authors

The Internet and recommendations from friends were mostly stated by respondents as the information source about Kopački rit Nature Park. They had the possibility to choose several offered answers. We can conclude from respondents' answers that it is crucial to have satisfied visitors because they are one of the major information sources for potential visitors in the future. The Internet is the second important source of information, so the web page must be accurate, precise and if possible, interactive. Availability of information materials is rated with high grades so we may conclude that it is at an adequate level.

Table 13 Availability of information materials about the Kopački rit Nature Park

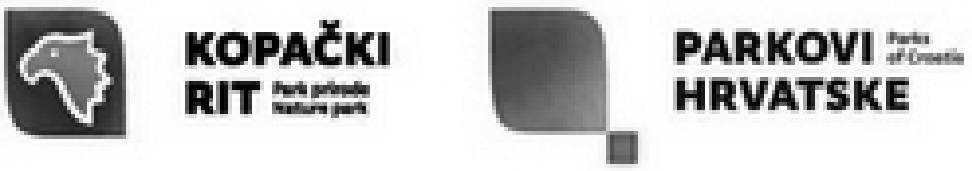
Grade	Respondents
5	162
4	80
3	29
2	6
1	1
Without answer	22
Average grade: 4.42	

Source: Authors

Respondents also answered the question about the respondents' intentions to put their impressions on one of the social networks. Almost half of them (48.5%) answered positively to that question and stated that it will be on Facebook. This is valuable information because a friend's recommendation is an information source for potential visitors in the future.

According to Kotler et al. (2006: 428), a difference selected for communication to the public is worth establishing if it satisfies several important criteria. It must be important, which means that the difference delivers a highly valued benefit to a sufficient number of buyers, that it is distinctive, superior, preemptive, which means that the difference cannot be copied easily by competitors, and that it is affordable and profitable.

Figure 1 Kopački rit Nature Park logo



Source: Kopački rit Nature Park, available at: http://pp-kopacki-rit.hr/mediaen.html (Accessed on: July 19, 2016)[14]

Kopački rit Nature Park has an image of the white-tailed eagle on its logo which is the trademark and symbol. The same motive is on promotional materials which ensures consistency in image application through which Kopački rit Nature Park is building its image.

During the whole calendar year, numerous events are being organized, especially on important dates related to nature protection. Nevertheless, except on Open day for visitors, there are no noteworthy events which attract a higher number of visitors in Kopački rit Nature Park. The number of visitors in Kopački rit Nature Park has no significant seasonal oscillations, except during the winter period. The visiting season is rather long compared to destinations on the cost. Therefore, more events should be organized and adequately promoted during the entire year in Kopački rit Nature Park which would position this nature park as an attractive destination with a wide range of services offered to visitors.

5. Discussion and conclusion

Tourism as an economic activity and its income, significantly contribute to the economy of the Republic of Croatia as a whole. Therefore, it is important to understand that all participants in the process of creation of tourist services should act in a way which will preserve and increase achieved tourism results. Global trends indicate that tourism, despite problems and recession, manages to find ways of keeping growth figures. Today tourists are looking for new destinations and spend more time outside exploring different and beautiful landscapes. Tourists' habits and expectations are changing, so that tourist services providers should redesign their range of services and constantly coordinate business policies according to actual changes in touristic demand. Protected areas may contribute in that process with specific programs and offer using the concept of ecotourism. Each protected area should develop a tourist offer which will distinguish it from similar locations. Differentiation as a way of achieving a competitive advantage is already present in all protected areas which are tourist destinations. Nature parks are differentiated by elements and specific landscape that characterize each nature park and make it different from similar tourist destinations. Creating a range of services according to specific features of the Nature Park and visitors' motives and expectations is important. The range of services offered in the Nature Park must be adequately promoted and communicated to gain recognizability and an appropriate image. Kopački rit Nature Park has an image of a specific wetland area. In the continental part of the Republic Croatia, Lonjsko polje Nature Park and Papuk Nature Park are potential competitive destinations. Over the past several years these two destinations have not had a considerable number of visitors.

Basic elements of the differentiation strategy for Kopački rit Nature Park should include further

investments in boardwalks, boat tours and canoe tours. That will differentiate this nature park from nearby protected areas as a tourist destination with a complete range of services provided according to visitors' motives and expectations. It can also have a positive impact on the price and quality ratio by offering more for the same price.

Current interaction with the local community is insufficient for further ecotourism development. Local people should be involved in the entire process of ecotourism, especially those involved in contact with visitors. Only through mutual and coordinated activities of all participants, including local authorities and private entrepreneurs, can the prerequisites for differentiation be achieved. Educational activities and programs should be made not only for visitors but also for the local population. There is also huge potential in the usage of modern communication technologies for creating a way to inform visitors about events and news from the nature park. A significant number of visitors that are coming to Kopački rit Nature Park for a second time or several times should have certain benefits through the customer relationship management.

We can conclude that there are several ways to improve the actual position on the tourist market and that the emphasis should be on further implementation of the concept of ecotourism and usage of modern technologies.

There is one critical issue that should be pointed out as a potential problem. Kopački rit Nature Park is perceived as a destination for half a day or one day excursions so we recommend further research regarding that issue.

References

1. Angelkova, T., Koteski, C., Jakovlev, Z., Mitrevska, E. (2012), "Sustainability and competitiveness of tourism", Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, Vol. 44, pp. 221-227, available at www.sciencedirect.com (Accessed on: June 27, 2017)
2. Ansoff, J. (1965). Corporate Strategy. New York: McGraw-Hill.
3. Bosnić, I., Bakan, R. (2012), "Prospects for development of ecotourism in regional park Mura-Drava", 6th International Conference "An Enterprise Odyssey", International Conference Proceedings, University of Zagreb, Faculty of Economics and Business, June 13-16, 2012, Zagreb, pp. 1257-1267.
4. Bosnić, I., Tubić, D., Stanišić, J. (2014), "Role of destination management in strengthening the competitiveness of Croatian tourism", Ekonomski vjesnik: Review of Contemporary Entrepreneurship, Business, and Economic Issues, Vol. 27, No. 1, pp. 153-170.
5. Buble, M. (1997). Strategijski management. Split: Faculty of Economics.
6. Carić, H., Marković, I. (2011), "Integralno planiranje u turizmu kao temelj održivog razvoja", in Čorak, S. (Ed.), Izazovi upravljanja turizmom, Znanstvena edicija Instituta za turizam, Zagreb, pp. 123-135.
7. Kotler, P. (2001). Upravljanje marketingom – analiza, planiranje, primjena i kontrola. Zagreb: MATE.
8. Kotler, P., Wong, V., Saunders, J., Armstrong, G. (2006). Osnove marketinga. Zagreb: Zagreb School of Economics and Management, MATE.
9. Pearce II, A. J., Robinson, Jr., B. R. (2000). Formulation, Implementation and Control of Competitive Strategy. 7th edition. Boston: Irwin McGraw-Hill.
10. Porter, E. M. (1985). Competitive Advantage. New York: The Free Press.
11. Porter, E. M. (1990). Competitive strategy: Techniques for Analyzing Industries and Competitors. New York: The Free Press.
12. Renko, N. (2009). Strategije Marketinga. Zagreb: Naklada Ljevak
13. Vukonić, B., Čavlek, N. (2001). Rječnik turizma. Zagreb: Masmedija.
14. Weaver, D. B. (2001). The Encyclopedia of Ecotourism. Wallingford: CAB International.

(Endnotes)

1 State Institute for Nature Protection (2016), "Protected areas in Croatia – national categories", available at: http://www.dzzp.hr/eng/protected-areas/protected-areas-in-croatia/protected-areas-in-croatia-national-categories-1137.html (Accessed on: June 30, 2016)

2 Kopački rit Nature Park, available at: http://pp-kopacki-rit.hr/oparku.html (Accessed on: July 5, 2016)

3 Strategy and Action Plan for the Protection of Biological and Landscape Diversity of the Republic of Croatia, Official Gazette of the Republic of Croatia No. 143/08.

4 Croatian Bureau of Statistics (2015), "Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Croatia"

5 The Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, Official Gazette of the Republic of Croatia No. 85/10, available at http://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2010_07_85_2422.html (Accessed on: July 27, 2016)

6 The Nature Protection Act, Official Gazette of the Republic of Croatia No. 80/13

7 International Union for Conservation of Nature (2008), "Definition of protected areas", available at: http://www.iucn.org/theme/protected-areas/about (Accessed on: June 27, 2016)

8 State Institute for Nature Protection (2014), "Analysis of the state of nature in the Republic of Croatia for the period 2008-2012", p. 417, available at: https://www.dropbox.com/sh/1gktiq2c7r3n4mz/AADOGmz4-eAes5xex9Xnbb_-a?dl=0 (Accessed on: 27June2016)

9 UNWTO (2002), "The British Ecotourism Market", available at: http://sdt.unwto.org/content/ecotourism-and-protected-areas (Accessed on: July 1, 2016)

10 Kopački rit Nature Park, available at: http://pp-kopacki-rit.hr/index-en.html (Accessed on:July 5, 2016)

11 Ramsar Sites Information Service (2007), "Nature Park Kopački rit", available at: https://rsis.ramsar.org/ris/583 (Accessed on: July 5, 2016)

12 BirdLife International (2016), "Important Bird and Biodiversity Area factsheet: Alluvial wetlands of the River Danube", available at: http://www.birdlife.org (Accessed on: July 5, 2016)

13 Archive of the Public Institution "Kopački rit Nature Park" – data for 2016.

14 Kopački rit Nature Park, available at: http://pp-kopacki-rit.hr/mediaen.html (Accessed on: July 19, 2016)

Vesna Vučemilović
Biserka Vištica

PREDUVJETI ZA KREIRANJE KONKURENTSKE PREDNOSTI U PARKOVIMA PRIRODE KROZ DIFERENCIJACIJU

Sažetak

Diferencijacija je jedan od načina stjecanja održive konkurentske prednosti, odnosno ostvarivanja tržišne pozicije koja gospodarskom subjektu omogućava zadovoljiti potrebe potrošača bolje od konkurencije. Diferencijacija može biti kroz proizvod, usluge, osoblje i imidž.

Parkovi prirode su, uz nacionalne parkove, stroge rezervate i posebne rezervate, kategorije zaštićenih područja od državnoga značenja. Parkovi prirode i nacionalni parkovi imaju izraziti potencijal u razvoju sustava posjećivanja, ali imaju i obvezu održivoga upravljanja ovim aktivnostima. Brojna ograničenja proizlaze iz zakonskih propisa i dokumenata upravljanja vezanih za zaštitu prirode. Osnovna zadaća je ipak zaštita i očuvanje prirodnih i krajobraznih vrijednosti te ekoloških obilježja.

Oblikovanje i provođenje aktivnosti posjećivanja koje kao dio turističkih usluga na tržištu pružaju Javne ustanove koje upravljaju zaštićenim područjima, također je specifično te se ove usluge mogu i moraju diferencirati na tržištu u odnosu na konkurenciju. Prihodi od turizma u strukturi prihoda parkova prirode u budućnosti će imati sve veći značaj kroz razvoj samofinanciranja i smanjenje ovisnosti o proračunskim sredstvima. Treba naglasiti da parkovi prirode pomažu i široj društvenoj zajednici kroz razvoj komplementarnih gospodarskih aktivnosti.

Ovaj se rad temelji na istraživanju provedenom u razdoblju od 16. svibnja do 10. lipnja 2016. u Parku prirode Kopački rit koji je jedan od posjećenijih parkova prirode u Republici Hrvatskoj. U anketnom istraživanju među posjetiteljima je slučajnim odabirom anketirano 300 ispitanika. Rezultati istraživanja mogu biti korišteni kao prijedlog pri oblikovanju odgovarajućih proizvoda, usluga i promotivnih aktivnosti, osiguranja kvalitetne edukacije posjetitelja o prirodnim, povijesnim i kulturnim vrijednostima zaštićenoga područja te minimiziranju utjecaja posjetitelja na prirodne potencijale.

Ključne riječi: konkurentska prednost, parkovi prirode, diferencijacija, pozicioniranje