

Developing the Destination Management Organization of the 3rd Generation: Insights From Slovakia

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Abstract: Destinations are traditionally created based on the administrative division of the territory. However, fragmented territorial structures can represent an obstacle to the implementation of effective development processes within destination management organizations. The activities of third-generation destination management organisations go beyond territorial divisions and instead focus on tourism flows and functional service chains in destinations. Even though the need to remove the administrative division of destinations is apparent and third-generation management organizations are being created, research in this area is not extensive. The aim of the study is therefore to present a methodology that leads to the efficiency of the activities of destination management organisations based on the monitoring of tourism flows and ecosystem of services in selected destinations in Slovakia (Dolný Zemplín and Horný Zemplín). Through a quantitative survey of visitors and tourism stakeholders in selected destinations, the authors found that the interested parties perceive the monitored destinations as a whole - not divided and the activity of existing destination management organisations as insufficient. The study provides recommendations for the implementation of efficient development processes within destination management organisations by connecting them based on the monitoring of tourism flows. The presented methodology can serve as a starting point for the restructuring of destination management organisations for other destinations in Slovakia and abroad.

Keywords: Efficient destination management, St. Gallen Model, Tourism flows

1. Introduction

Destination management has been the subject of research for several decades. Destinations were originally created on the basis of the administrative division of the territory, but in recent years, the opinions of researchers are leaning towards the idea of destinations that are created based on the requirements of visitors, based on tourism flows. In order for tourism to develop sustainably, it is necessary for a management organisation to operate in the destination. One of the tasks of the management organisation is to manage the relations between the stakeholders who, through the supply chain, create a suitable offer for the visitors. It is the management organisations of the third generation that can develop tourism in the destination by tourism flows and functioning supply chains. The aim of our paper is therefore to present a methodology that leads to the efficiency of the activities of destination management organisations (*hereafter DMO*) based on the monitoring of tourism flows and ecosystem of services in selected destinations in Slovakia (Dolný Zemplín and Horný Zemplín). We will achieve the goal through a quantitative survey of visitors and tourism stakeholders in selected destinations in combination with the usage of statistical data. The obtained data will be then used to create a modified St. Gallen Model for Destination Management. The visitors and tourism stakeholders in selected destinations expressed the opinion that they do not perceive the monitored destinations separately, but as a whole. They also expressed their dissatisfaction with the management organisation's activities so far. Therefore, we consider the selected destinations suitable for the implementation of our research. The paper addresses the following research questions: (RQ1) What are the current tourism flows and ecosystem of services in the selected destinations? (RQ2) What measures need to be taken in order to create a third-generation destination management organisation in the selected destinations? At the beginning, the paper discusses the theoretical background of the of 3rd generation DMO development, further informs about the methods of processing the research of the 3rd generation DMO development in selected region, further provides the results of this research through answers to the research questions, and finally offers a summary of theoretical and practical findings of this study.

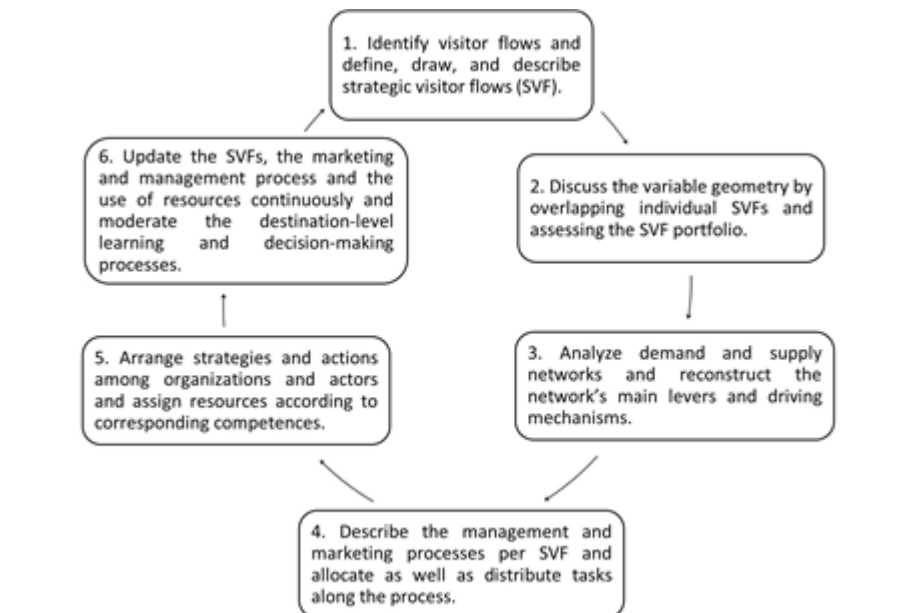
2. Theoretical Framework of Developing a 3rd Generation Destination Management Organisation

Tourism destination is a complex system consisting of various organisations that offer tourism products and services (accommodation, food, transport, attractions, etc.), natural and man-made resources, as well as other entities providing support services to visitors (Foris et al., 2020), generally planned and managed according to the administrative boundaries of the respective territorial administration (Paulino, Lozano and Prats, 2021). Competition among various destination stakeholders forces these organisations to cluster and collaborate in

supply chains to increase their agility and improve their performance, focusing on meeting the needs of visitors based on their preferences (Piya et al., 2023). To ensure the sustainable development of tourism, the relationships between the various stakeholders in the destination (e.g., the service value chain) should be managed by the DMO (Nguyen, Johnson and Young, 2022). DMO is a public or private organisation that can operate at different levels (e.g., national, regional, local) and focuses on the planning, realisation and implementation of the tourism development policy in the destination, coordinated management of the tourism destination's components and the implementation of the marketing policy (Foris et al., 2020).

According to Paulino, Lozano and Prats (2021), destinations formed by administrative boundaries are obsolete because they may not represent a destination truly visited by tourists. Indeed, tourists do not necessarily stop when they reach a destination border, suggesting that destinations are often artificially divided. Over the years, several researchers have proposed a modification of the understanding and formation of destinations - a shift from administrative boundaries to the formation of destinations based on the movement of tourists (Beritelli et al., 2015; Steiner, 2015; Shoval and Ahas, 2017; Baggio and Scaglione, 2018; Kang et al., 2018; Paulino, Lozano and Prats, 2021). Tourism flows represent collective experiences of a similar kind, which are simultaneously or continuously realized by several related or unrelated visitors (Beritelli, Reinhold and Laesser, 2020). Understanding the spatial distribution of tourism flows and movement patterns of visitors can provide practical implications for tourism professionals regarding resource allocation, infrastructure construction, and effective tourism planning for a destination (Zhong, Sun and Law, 2019; Zhong et al., 2020), therefore tourism flows are an increasingly important topic in academia and in practice (Zhang et al., 2022).

According to Steiner (2015), third generation DMOs overcome the territorial focus of the original destinations and instead focus on tourism flows and functional service chains. Baggio and Scaglione (2018) agree and add that tourism flows are useful to transform the governance model of a DMO from a static central model to a dynamic network. One of the tools suitable for developing a management organization of the third generation is The St. Gallen Model for Destination Management (Beritelli et al., 2015; Steiner, 2015; Beritelli et al., 2019; Klimek, 2019).



Source: University of St. Gallen (2023)

Figure 1: The St. Gallen Model for Destination Management

The St. Gallen Model for Destination Management (Figure 1) is an approach for market-oriented destination planning and development, which summarizes the spatial behaviour of visitors in order to understand visitor profiles and activities. DMO can therefore understand strategic tourism flows, which enables it to align projects, products, and services with travel motives and visitor behaviour (University of St. Gallen, 2023). The approach follows a series of six steps and by moving from one step to another, DMO can comprehensively manage destination through identification, planning activities and management of strategic tourism flows (Klimek, 2019).

3. Research Approach and Methodology

DMOs began to originate in Slovakia in 2011, when the legal act on tourism support was enacted. However, this was not the first contact with the destination management, there were already various tourism associations that represented the cooperation of the private and public sectors in the destination. The legal act enables the establishment of DMOs at the regional and local level, taking into account the administrative boundaries of the given region. In 2012, 2 regional tourism organisations were established in the east of Slovakia, *Zemplín regional tourism organization* and *Horný Zemplín and Horný Šariš*. These organisations are based in the Horný and Dolný Zemplín regions (Figure 2), which were defined back in 2005 based on the document *Regionalization of tourism in the Slovak Republic* (Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic, 2005).



Source: Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic (2005)

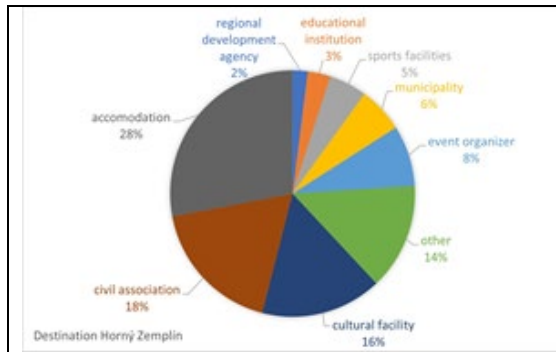
Figure 2: Horný and Dolný Zemplín Regions

As one of the requirements for the sustainable tourism development is strategic planning from the position of a DMO (UNWTO, 2018; Bowen and Sotomayor, 2022; Wagenseil, Wyss and Huck, 2022), our study focuses on the activities of the existing DMOs in the examined region. The study represents explanatory research, as it answers research questions using a questionnaire survey and provides results and recommendations for further research. In our research, we have utilised primary data capturing both demand (visitors) and supply (stakeholders) side perspectives. The questionnaire for visitors were distributed in the months of October, November and December in 2021 and questionnaire for stakeholders in December 2021 and January and February 2022. Both questionnaires were distributed electronically.

The questionnaires were created in an original way by the authors. The visitors answered 5 questions: 1. When you hear the word Zemplín, what do you imagine?; 2. What activities do you associate with the Zemplín region?; 3. What attributes do you associate with the Zemplín region?; 4. Have you ever visited the Zemplín region?; and 5. Do you have any recommendations for the tourism development in the Zemplín region? With the exception of the last question, which was open, visitors were given a choice of options. Stakeholders also answered five questions: 1. Which places and activities represent the region?; 2. Which types of tourism are preferred in the regional tourism development?; 3. What is the level of satisfaction with the DMO activities?; 4. How is the cooperation with stakeholders in the application of management and marketing activities?; and 5. To what extent is destination governance applied in the DMO management? Similar to visitors, stakeholders had a choice of answers for all questions and the answers for the questions 3, 4 and 5 were rated on a scale of 1 to 5. The data obtained from the questionnaire survey in both cases were not weighted, so they have the same scale.

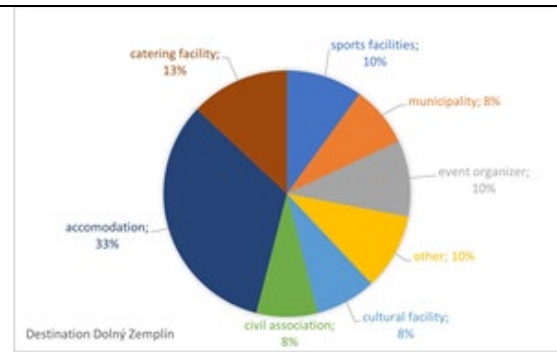
Based on a questionnaire survey among visitors in the region, in which participated 474 visitors, as well as on the basis of a questionnaire survey among stakeholders in the destinations, in which participated 101 stakeholders (Figure 3, Figure 4), we found that both visitors and stakeholders perceive the destinations as one unit, one region. The average age of respondents (visitors) was 30 years, while these visitors come from all over Slovakia and 62% of them have visited the studied region in the past. In consideration of these findings, we decided to propose a strategy for the further development of the studied region based on tourism flows

and ecosystem of services with the aim of creating a 3rd generation DMO instead of the two existing management organizations.



Source: Own elaboration, 2022

Figure 3: Stakeholders from Horný Zemplín



Source: Own elaboration, 2022

Figure 4: Stakeholders from Dolný Zemplín

The course of the research was based on the St. Gallen Model for Destination Management, which initially consists of 6 steps (Figure 1). For the requirements of our research and due to the availability of data, we adjusted the model to 4 steps. We combined the first two steps of the model together, as the results of these steps were shaped by the conducted questionnaire survey. In the end, we omitted the last step of the model, as it can only be implemented in the course of several monitored periods. The answer to RQ1 will be resolved through steps 1 and 2, the answer to RQ2 through steps 3 and 4.

1. step: tourism flows were identified through a questionnaire survey distributed among visitors who come from all regions of Slovakia. The accuracy of the outlined tourism flows was confirmed by a questionnaire survey distributed among stakeholders operating in the region.

2. step: the analysis of tourism supply and demand was conducted with secondary data, especially the websites of the DMOs and the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic. Since statistical data are only available for the districts in which the tourist attractions of the Zemplín region are located, we present an overview of attractions by municipality (Table 1). Subsequently, data obtained from secondary sources were compared with the data from the questionnaire surveys, so that the product and services offer in the new developed destination could be formed on the basis of existing tourism flows.

Table 1: Overview of attractions by municipality. Source: Own elaboration, 2022

Tourist attraction	District
Horný Zemplín	
Medzilaborce (Andy Warhol Museum)	Medzilaborce
Poloniny (national park)	Snina
Veľká Domaša (reservoir)	Vranov nad Topľou
Humenné (municipality)	Humenné
Dolný Zemplín	
Vihorlatské vrchy (mountains)	Humenné
Vinianske jazero a hrad (lake and castle)	Michalovce
Zemplínska Šírava (reservoir)	Michalovce
Michalovce (municipality)	Michalovce
Trebišov (municipality)	Trebišov
Tokaj (wine region)	Trebišov

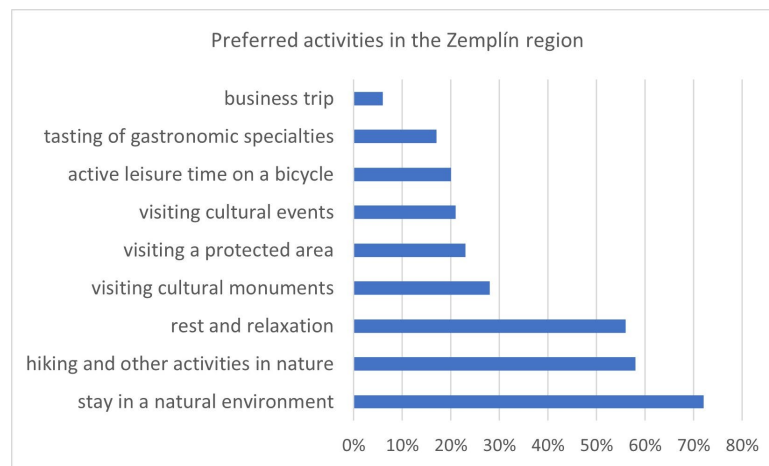
3. step: the assessment of the existing management and marketing processes of both DMOs was carried out based on a questionnaire survey with stakeholders, which focused on opinions on the cooperation of subjects in the destinations, opinions on the operating of the management organizations and on managing the

destinations. Based on this, we were able to identify ecosystem of services in the destination, which together with tourism flows are a prerequisite for the creation of a 3rd generation DMO.

4. step: based on the identified tourism flows, ecosystem of services and on the basis of recommendations from visitors and stakeholders, based on the optimising the position of DMO taking into account efficiency measures, an action plan was created in order to ensure the sustainable tourism development in the Zemplín region.

4. Results and Discussion

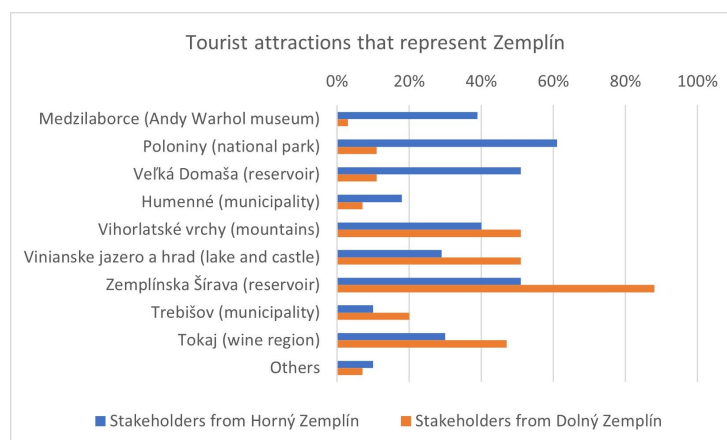
(RQ1) 1. step: The results of the questionnaire survey distributed among visitors in the region revealed that visitors perceive the regions of Horný and Dolný Zemplín as a whole, therefore the results of this survey in this step are presented for the entire region together. The questionnaire survey was focused on the perception of the destination by visitors, their activities in the destination and the perceived image of the destination. Among the attractions, the reservoirs Zemplínska Šírava and Domaša dominate the most, followed by the Tokaj wine region and the natural attractions of Poloniny and Vihorlat. Visitors come to Zemplín region mainly for the natural environment. The activities include hiking, rest and relaxation, visiting cultural monuments and protected areas. The mentioned activities (Figure 5) reflect the preferred types of tourism and follow the specifics of the tourism offer of the region.



Source: Own elaboration, 2022

Figure 5: Preferred activities in the Zemplín Region According to Visitors

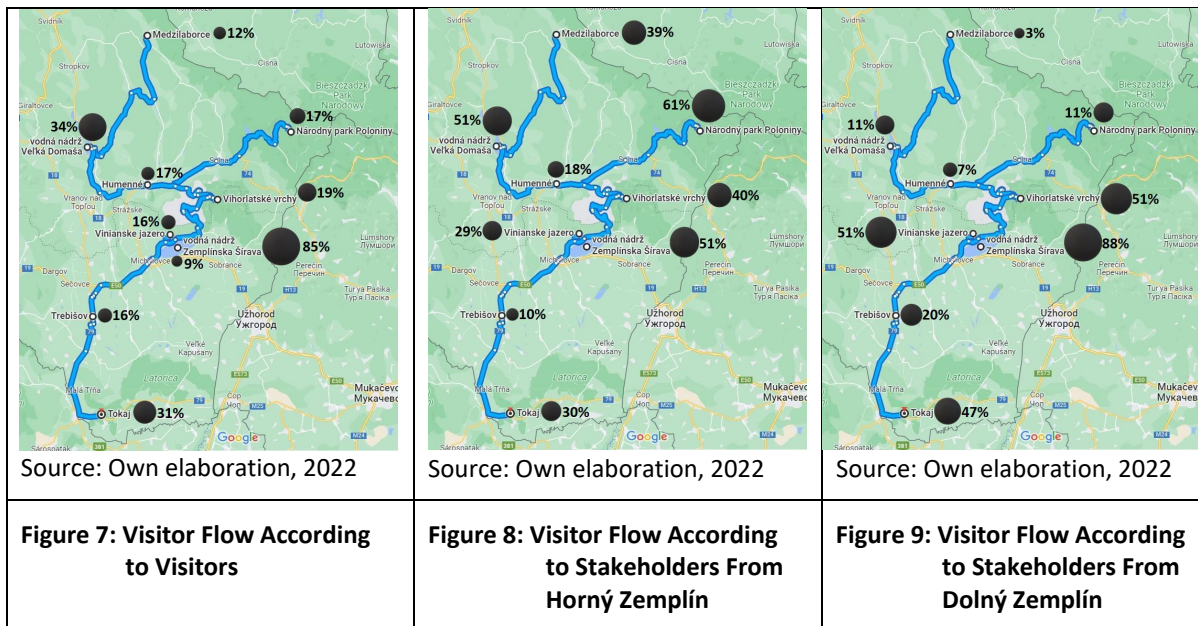
The questionnaire survey among stakeholders, as well as the survey among visitors, showed that stakeholders also perceive the attractiveness of the Horný and Dolný Zemplín destinations as attractiveness of one region. However, the order of the most important tourism attractions according to the stakeholders differs between destinations (Figure 6).



Source: Own elaboration, 2022

Figure 6: Tourist Attractions That Represent Zemplín According to Stakeholders

Based on the activities executed by visitors in the region, and which are characterized by stakeholders as the most important, it was possible to compile a map of existing tourism flows (Figure 7, Figure 8, Figure 9).



(RQ1) 2. step: The nature and scope of the destination's product is conditioned by the tourism offer. The Zemplín region has many natural resources, while the surface of Horný and Dolný Zemplín differs. While Horný Zemplín is more mountainous, Dolný Zemplín is created by lowlands. Of the natural attractions in the destination of Horný Zemplín, the Poloniny National Park and the Veľká Domaša reservoir dominate, while in the destination of Dolný Zemplín it is the Zemplínska šírava reservoir. Andy Warhol's Museum of Modern Art in Medzilaborce is an important cultural-historical monument on the territory of Horný Zemplín. On the other hand, Dolný Zemplín is known for the smallest wine-growing region in Slovakia – Tokaj.

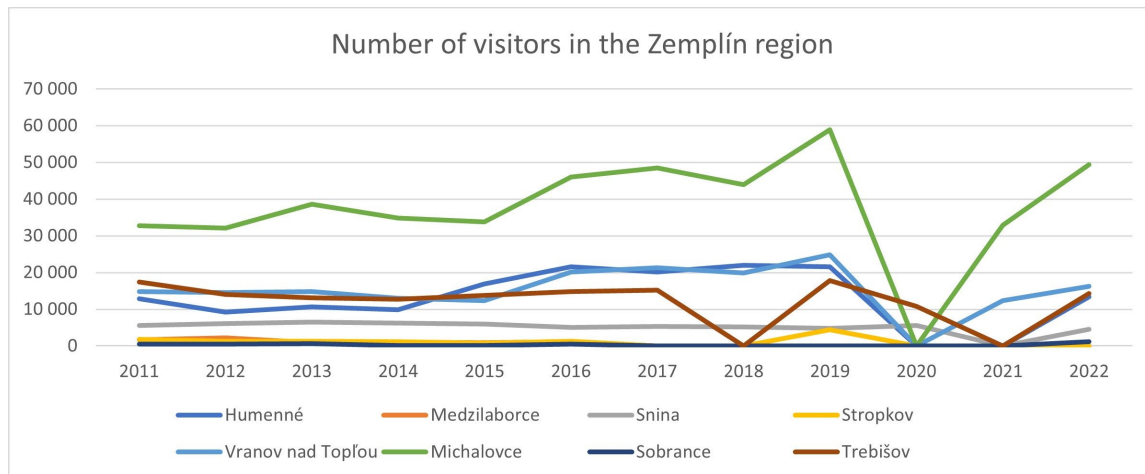
The nature and scope of the destination's product is also conditioned by the range of services. In the Zemplín region, there are more than 150 accommodation facilities of various types, and gastronomic services are provided by 219 facilities (Table 2). The obtained data show that the offer of tourism services in the area of accommodation and catering facilities does not completely correspond to the existing tourism flows. A similarity can be found in the view of the Zemplínska šírava, but only with regard to tourism flows identified by visitors and stakeholders from Dolný Zemplín. From the point of view of the number of facilities, Michalovce is on the first stages, while in terms of visitors it is on the last and while stakeholders do not even consider Michalovce as part of tourism flows. Medzilaborce is also interesting, which according to the number of facilities and tourism flows according to visitors and stakeholders from Dolný Zemplín is on the last stages, but according to stakeholders from Horný Zemplín it is of medium importance.

Table 2: Accommodation and Catering Facilities in Zemplín Region by District. Source: Elaboration Based on the Statistical Office of Slovak Republic (2022)

District / Number of facilities	No. accommodation facilities	No. catering facilities
Horný Zemplín	78	122
Humenné	10	66
Medzilaborce	4	2
Snina	26	5
Stropkov	12	9
Vranov nad Topľou	26	40
Dolný Zemplín	80	97
Michalovce	36	84

District / Number of facilities	No. accommodation facilities	No. catering facilities
Sobrance	8	2
Trebišov	36	11

The number of visitors in the Zemplín region from 2011 to 2022 also does not correspond completely to tourism flows (Figure 10). The differences between the identified tourism flows and the number of visitors are the same or very similar to the number of facilities. However, these results may be influenced by the method of statistical data collection, as the fact that a visitor did not spend the night in a given district does not mean that he did not even visit it during his stay in the region.

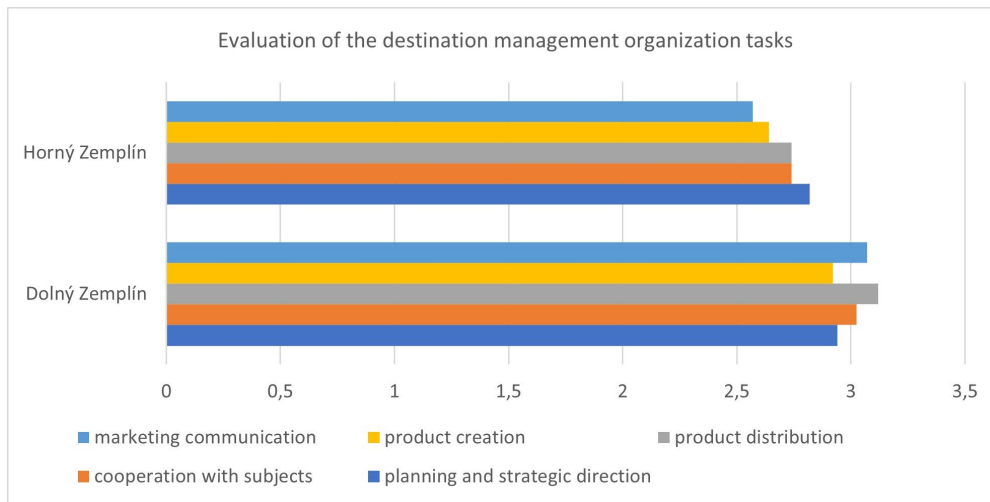


Source: Elaboration based on the Statistical office of Slovak Republic (2022)

Figure 10: Number of Visitors in the Zemplín Region by District

(RQ2) 3. step: The cooperation of stakeholders is a tool for harmonizing interests in the destination in order to ensure its success on the tourism market (Roxas, Rivera and Gutierrez, 2020; Errichiello and Micera, 2021; González-Torres, Rodríguez-Sánchez and Pelechano-Barahona, 2021). The results of the questionnaire survey showed that the stakeholders in both destinations consider the cooperation between the units in the destination to be low. As both destinations are in the engagement phase of the destination life cycle, which is characterized by relationship building, these results are acceptable. Stakeholders in the Horný Zemplín destination cooperate mostly with the management organization, community associations, event organizers, local government and cultural facilities. Stakeholders in the destination Dolný Zemplín, on the other hand, mostly cooperate with cultural facilities, municipalities, event organizers and tourism associations. For the creation of a complex product in both destinations, and thus the region as a whole, it is necessary to increase cooperation especially with accommodation and hospitality establishments; in the case of the destination Dolný Zemplín, it is also necessary to increase cooperation with the management organization.

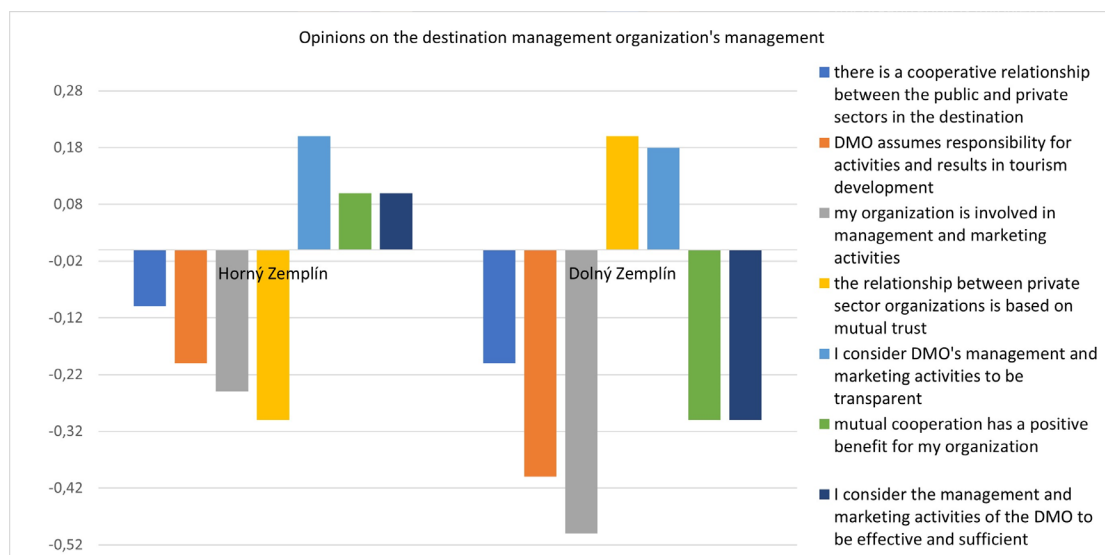
The management organization in the destination is supposed to fulfil several tasks, in particular representing the interests of stakeholders and developing cooperation between them, participating in the creation and distribution of the product, in the marketing communication of the destination, as well as in creating plans and determining the strategic direction of the tourism development in the destination (Eckert et al., 2019; Nadalipour, Imani Khoshkhoo and Eftekhari, 2019). Stakeholders evaluated the activities of their DMOs on a scale from 1 (excellent) to 5 (inadequate) (Figure 11).



Source: Own elaboration, 2022

Figure 11: Evaluation of the Destination Management Organization Tasks According to Stakeholders

The most common good governance principles are responsibility, transparency, involvement of stakeholders, clear structure, efficiency and power (Pulido-Fernández and Pulido-Fernández, 2019; Bichler, 2021). Stakeholders evaluated the management of their DMOs on a scale from -2 (completely disagree) to 2 (completely agree) (Figure 12).



Source: Own elaboration, 2022

Figure 12: Opinions on the Destination Management Organization's Management According to Stakeholders

The biggest negative in the existing cooperation in the Zemplín region can be considered that approximately 60% of the stakeholders we approached in both destinations are not members of the DMO, while the most common reason they cite is: *"no one approached us for cooperation"*.

(RQ2) 4. step: Based on the previous analysis, it was possible to identify areas for improving destination governance in the region. Only the union of the Horný and Dolný Zemplín DMOs with the aim of creating a 3rd generation DMO that will govern the tourism development in the Zemplín region is not enough. The research showed that both destinations have insufficient general infrastructure, especially transport accessibility. The results of the survey further demonstrated that in both destinations it is necessary to strengthen the cooperation of stakeholders, including the motivation of membership in the organization and to use marketing communication tools with an emphasis on electronic media. The competitiveness of the Zemplín destination should be strengthened through destination management focused on the creation of authentic and

sustainable products and internal marketing with the support of public and private sector institutions (Table 3).

Table 3: 3rd Generation DMO Action Plan. Source: Own Elaboration, 2022

Strategic purpose	Task	Priority
Creation of authentic and sustainable products and their communication	creation of regional products based on identified tourism flows	high
	monitoring the impact of tourism development in the region regarding sustainability	high
	marketing communication using appropriate social media	medium
	creating an official destination hashtag	low
Ensuring institutional support for tourism development	professionalization of the 3 rd generation DMO activity through the retraining of the employees of the original DMOs	high
	active cooperation with municipality, businesses and residents	high
Carrying out internal marketing of the destination	initiating and presenting the benefits of DMO membership	high
	regular informing of stakeholders	high
	consulting and ascertaining the opinions of stakeholders	high
	representing the interests of residents	high
	active involvement of stakeholders	medium

According to the work of Beritelli et al. (2015), Steiner (2015), Shoval and Ahas (2017), Baggio and Scaglione (2018), Kang et al. (2018), Beritelli, Reinhold and Laesser (2020), Zhong, Sun and Law (2019), Zhong et al., (2020), Paulino, Lozano and Prats (2021) and Zhang et al. (2022), we consider destinations created on the basis of administrative boundaries to be inefficient and the creation of destinations based on tourism flows as the future of destination management. Through a questionnaire survey among visitors and stakeholders, we demonstrated that the studied region is perceived as one whole, which means that there is no need for the existence of two destinations and two different DMOs, so we agree with the statements of the selected authors. Several authors (Beritelli et al., 2015; Steiner, 2015; Beritelli et al., 2019; Klimek, 2019) consider the St. Gallen Model for Destination Management correct for destination management based on tourism flows, therefore, our study was focused on developing the 3rd generation DMO according to tourism flows via the St. Gallen Model. Through the survey, we also confirmed the opinions of the authors UNWTO (2018), Bowen and Sotomayor (2022), Wagenseil, Wyss and Huck (2022), according to which strategic planning from the DMO position is one of the pillars of the sustainable tourism development, on the basis of which we propose the creation of one DMO for the researched region. The creation of one DMO can also support the cooperation of stakeholders in the destination, which we consider to be a key aspect for success in the tourism market, similar to the authors Roxas, Rivera and Gutierrez (2020), Errichiello and Micera (2021), González-Torres, Rodríguez-Sánchez and Pelechano-Barahona (2021). The strategic management of the destination is also related to good governance principles, which are at a low level in the current divided destinations, so the unification of destinations can also support these principles.

5. Conclusions

DMOs around the world have existed for decades. Their establishment was influenced by the administrative boundaries of regions or smaller municipalities. However, information technology and various transport possibilities offer visitors the opportunity to visit more than what is located within the borders of the region. DMOs should therefore transform into 3rd generation organizations that, instead of creating a product within the borders of the region, create a product based on tourism flows and ecosystem of services. Despite this trend, not many researchers deal with this topic, or they focus on the concept of 3rd generation DMOs only on the basis of tourism flows, not with regard to existing service chains. Our research thus contributes to the theory of destination management as well as to practice, as we proposed a strategy for the establishment of a 3rd generation DMO not only based on tourism demand analysis, but also based on tourism supply analysis. Through the application of the St. Gallen Model for Destination Management, we answered both research questions.

Merging smaller, local DMOs into larger units brings several advantages, mainly professionalizing activities, increasing financing options and achieving a critical size of the destination to reach more distant visitor markets. Based on a critical analysis of the tourism demand and offer, we identified the key competencies of the destinations Horný and Dolný Zemplín. Both destinations have suitable conditions for the development of recreational and cultural tourism and can differentiate themselves from other destinations mainly by highlighting adventure, the unknown and pristine natural environment. The most important finding of the analysis was that the destinations of Horný and Dolný Zemplín are perceived by visitors and stakeholders as part of the larger Zemplín region, which can ensure better competitive position on the tourism market (RQ1).

Based on the analysis of tourism offer and demand and on the basis of a questionnaire survey with visitors and stakeholders, we proposed an action plan for the successful establishment and management of the 3rd generation DMO (RQ2). Our research can serve other destinations in the analysis of their tourism flows and ecosystem of services, with the aim of creating a new generation DMO. The given methodological procedure is applicable and transferable also in other destinations, it allows better use of limited resources, thus increases the efficiency of the functioning of DMOs and therefore contributes to the growth of destination competitiveness in the long term. The mentioned procedure needs to be repeated because there are changes on the demand side (tourism flows) as well as on the supply side (ecosystem of services), also following the destination life cycle.

Limitations. The research took place only in one region in Slovakia and was limited by the availability of statistical data. We recommend further research with a larger sample of destinations and comparisons with foreign destinations.

Acknowledgements

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