

COOPERATION AS ONE OF THE PILLARS OF TOURISM DESTINATION MANAGEMENT

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Abstract: Cooperation in tourism includes a wide range of relationships, which together shape tourism products and services. Understanding how effective cooperation can improve access to resources, information sharing, risks and opportunities is key to the success and sustainable development of tourism in a destination. Within the Slovak Republic, three levels of destination management have been established. The study focuses on the basic, first level, within which destination management organizations operate at the local level - tourism businesses as well as representatives of cities and municipalities. For destinations, it is important to know the opinions on the cooperation of the entities that operate there. The aim of the presented contribution is to examine and evaluate the opinions and attitudes of members of first-level destination management organizations in the Prešov self-governing region in relation to their cooperation. The main research method was a questionnaire survey followed by verification of established hypotheses using the Kruskal-Wallis's test. 307 members of seven destination management organizations operating in eastern Slovakia, within the Prešov self-governing region, participated in the research. The results showed that the length of membership in a destination management organization has an impact on the perception of trust among cooperating members of destination management organizations, with the most significant impact identified in the long-term membership. Furthermore, the association between the sphere in which members of destination management organisations operate in terms of their willingness to cooperate with each other was demonstrated. An interesting finding is that the sphere of operation of destination management organisation members does not affect the perception of trust in collaboration. Thus, the study provides a real insight into the perception of collaboration through selected factors among the members of a destination management organization, which is an important finding for destination management organizations to work with further. It also points to the need to implement it with a certain temporal frequency and on a larger geographical scale while respecting the territorial units.

Keywords: destination management, stakeholders, destination, cooperation, development

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the fastest growing and economically most important industries in the world. Its dynamism and complexity require constant adaptation and innovation, which often leads to the need for effective cooperation between different actors in this sector. At the international level, the tourism sector is one of the largest and fastest growing economic sectors in the world (Brilhane & Rocha, 2023), even though it has suffered shocks caused by several crises during the last decades (Gösling et al., 2021; Kosmala, 2021). In 2019, the tourism sector in the Slovak Republic contributed 6.3% to the country's GDP, but due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, it fell by -24% in 2022 compared to 2019, i.e. j. to 4.6%. In 2023, the share of tourism in GDP is expected to increase by 14.7%, i.e. j. to 5.1% of the country's total economy, with a predicted share of tourism in GDP of 6.9% in 2033 (WTTC, 2024). The stated values indicate the ability of tourism to regenerate quickly with a high tendency to return to the original state and tend to continue development. Its adaptive nature is also reflected in the systematic approach to destination management, which includes sustainable development, strategic planning (Gajdošík, 2023), emphasis on quality, as well as the condition of cooperation between interested parties and destination management organizations, further known as DMOs (Micháliková et al., 2023). Cooperation in tourism includes a wide range of relationships from local businesses to international

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partnerships that together shape the products and services offered to tourists. Critical to success in tourism is an understanding of how effective cooperation can improve access to resources, the sharing of information, risks and opportunities, and how it can contribute to the growth and development of the entire sector. Thanks to cooperation, destination management organizations can achieve greater efficiency and sustainability (Gracy, 2020).

According to Garbelli (2020), cooperation in tourism is a term that refers to a voluntary and interactive process in which independent stakeholders work together, use their resources and follow agreed rules, norms and structures. Examples of cooperation in tourism may include joint marketing activities, creation of package offers, sharing of information and resources, joint events and actions, as well as cooperation on environmental protection and sustainable development of destinations (Anuar & Marzuki, 2022). Destination management is an important element in the development of tourism, as it ensures the effective management and coordination of various actors and resources in the destination. Its task is to ensure the sustainable development of tourism, improve the competitiveness of the destination and strengthen its position on the market. The impact of destination management on tourism can be very positive when it is used properly. Destinations with effective management have a greater chance of sustainable development and better results in the field of tourism. Quality management can ensure better coordination between different service providers, improve the quality of services and increase visitor satisfaction. The benefits of destination management also include improving infrastructure, promoting cultural heritage and protecting the environment. Proper management can help minimize the negative impacts of tourism, such as overcrowded destinations, pollution, and the disruption of local culture (Castañer & Oliveira, 2020).

We can cite a few examples of successful destination management:

Hawaiian Islands: The Hawaii Tourism Authority has implemented a comprehensive destination management plan that prioritizes sustainability, community engagement and quality tourism experiences.

Swiss Alps: The Swiss Alps have implemented a destination management strategy that focuses on sustainability, infrastructure development and community involvement in the management of tourism in this popular mountain region.

Costa Rica: Costa Rica has implemented a sustainable tourism strategy that focuses on ecotourism, community engagement and infrastructure development to promote responsible tourism practices.

Overall, destination management is a key tool for the successful development of tourism and ensures the sustainable and prosperous growth of destination destinations. It is therefore important that destinations invest in quality management and collaborate with all stakeholders to achieve common goals (Jesus & Franco, 2020). The development of the study was motivated by a document of the Government of the Slovak Republic from 2020, which focuses on small and medium-sized enterprises in tourism with an emphasis on the development of the given sector. Barriers in entrepreneurship are identified within the above publication. One of the barriers to the development of the tourism sector is the weak cooperation between tourism enterprises (Ministry of Transport and Construction, 2020). Another incentive for the creation of the study was the interest of DMOs operating in the territory of eastern Slovakia (within the cooperation of an educational institution with a practice), who expressed an interest in independently ascertaining the opinion of their members.

The importance of cooperation for tourism businesses (Perkins et al., 2021; Hartman et al., 2020) as well as for tourism organizations (Berešcká & Svetlíková, 2020; Michálková et al., 2023) are published at the level of the territory of states. The authors agree with practitioners that it is necessary to identify the perception of cooperation even in a smaller area. This is due to existing regional differences in destination potential (Cobán & Sevkett, 2019; Miron and Miron, 2023) as well as the economic level of individual destinations (Islahuddin et al., 2021; Crotts et al., 2022). This brings the need to find out opinions on cooperation between members of DMOs in a specific territorial unit, as over time managers of DMOs can better understand the dynamics of relations and the attitude towards cooperation of members of DMOs, which is useful in developing appropriate strategies to manage changes in the direction of the destination in the future (Berešcká & Svetlíková, 2020). The study contributes to the current body of knowledge by pointing out the interconnectedness of cooperation with other activities and systems within the management of the destination (on a theoretical basis), encourages cooperation and identifies the specific perception and activity of cooperation of members of DMOs in a defined area.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Most authors consider destination management organizations to be strategic leaders of tourism development (Calero and Turner, 2020), highlight their position as coordinators of diverse relations between interested parties within the destination and point to the importance of their cooperation (Michálková et al., 2023). In the destination management paradigm, it is an approach to destination management that emphasizes a comprehensive and sustainable approach (Haid et al., 2021) to the development and management of destinations to optimize their economic, cultural-social and environmental contribution (Tourism 2030 Destinet Service, 2024). A tourist destination is the name given to any area, large or small, that attracts and appeals to tourists. Tourist destinations are a source of tourism income for the regions in which they are located. Tourist destinations can be natural areas, historical places or settlements with cultural significance (Philipp & Pechlaner, 2023). Stakeholders can be a community organization, business association, non-governmental organization or entrepreneurs in tourism and related industries. The goal is for the interested parties to agree on the creation of a partnership, acceptance of a common goal and subsequent cooperation (World Bank Group, 2022), ideally if they are also members of DMOs. In the conditions of the Slovak Republic, DMOs are established on the basis of Act No. 91/2010 Coll. on the promotion of tourism. At the regional level, they are the regional tourism organizations (first, basic level), at the regional regional tourism organizations (second level) (Maráková & Medveľová, 2015) and at the state level the Ministry of Tourism and Sports (from 1 February 2024) (third, top level). Specific interactions between interested parties, such as members of DMOs and DMOs themselves, are based on cooperation (Michálková et al., 2023). Van der Zee,

Vanneste (2015) emphasize the benefits that should result from cooperation. These are mainly: creation and dissemination of knowledge, digitization and innovation (Medeková & Pompurová, 2024), increasing the quality of the creation and offer of tourist products, increasing the quality of the services provided, streamlining the production process, increasing the sustainability of the destination and an overall more competitive destination (Haid & Albrecht, 2021).

Medeková & Pompurová (2024) point out that DMOs are currently being presented as key entities in destination management that synchronize management and marketing for the purpose of managing and developing the destination. Fernandes et. al. (2020) note that cooperation often requires trust between participants. Without trust, effective cooperation can be difficult to achieve, as individuals (businesses) or organizations (DMOs) may fear that their requests or ideas will be misused or ignored (Czernek-Marszałek, 2020). In an extensive study, Hartman (2023) deals with the time factor and its influence on destination management, but also its influence on cooperating subjects. In recent times, authors turn to the evaluation of cooperation by DMOs members about their sphere of activity (Deladem et al., 2020; Serruto-Perea, 2024), while Cobán & Yildiz (2019) emphasizes the role of DMOs as a key factor in the effective management of the destination, which emphasizes coordination between public and private institutions.

In recent years, several authors have addressed the issue of distance management as a leader of tourism entities in a destination, an actor in the creation of networks and a supporter of cooperation. Mandić & Kennell (2021) focused on the role of destination management as an actor in creating cooperation within a smart destination. The result of their findings is that DMOs do not perceive smart destination management as beneficial unless the local population and cooperating stakeholders are involved in the management. Elvekrok et al. (2022) investigated 51 businesses cooperating within a destination network in a mountain village in Norway. The main findings of the study are: cooperation contributes to business results (increased sales, resistance to market fluctuations, etc.), respondents said that cooperation contributes to destination development and visitor satisfaction. Goffi et al. (2023) deal with destination competitiveness in Italy, from the point of view of DMOs and stakeholders. The results indicated that Italian destinations are competitive in natural and cultural resources, but less competitive in tourism policy and planning and in destination management. Nguyen et al. (2024) conducted research using process tracing to investigate the dynamics of stakeholder relationships in selected destinations in Vietnam. They found that intervention into cooperation in existing competition creates intervention into conflict in the existing state of cooperation. Baggio & Ruggieri (2024) deals with the coordination of joint activities in destinations, which they see as a value creation process and the basis for the attractiveness and development of destinations. According to the authors, destination managers are actors who propose an effective strategy to improve cooperation in the destination, while also measuring the effects of cooperation. The method offered is network analysis.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The aim of the presented contribution is to examine and evaluate the opinions and attitudes of members of first-level destination management organizations in the Prešov self-governing region in relation to their cooperation. In the presented study, the authors focused on the evaluation of the impact of cooperation within destination management at the basic level in relation to the members of DMOs. As part of the study, the authors took a closer look at the length of cooperation, the attractiveness of cooperation, the trust of members within DMOs and the willingness to cooperate with regard to the sphere of activity of interested parties as members of DMOs.

In relation to the focus of the study and the fulfilment of the goal, the following hypotheses were established.

H1: We hypothesize that trust between cooperating stakeholders is conditioned by the length of membership in DMOs.

H2: We assume that the sphere of activity of interested parties, as members of DMOs, has an impact on the perception of trust within the cooperation.

H3: We assume that there is a relationship between willingness to cooperate and the sphere of activity of DMOs members.

H4: We assume that active participation in cooperation is conditioned by the length of membership in DMOs.

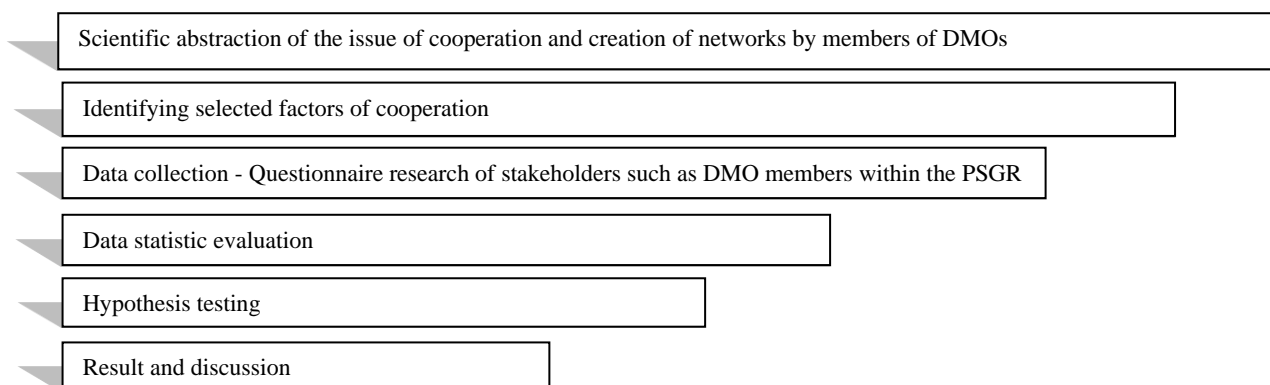


Figure 1. Methodology step scheme

The researched population consisted of DMOs at the first, basic level, i.e. regional tourism organizations in the Prešov self-governing region (next PSGR). The Prešov self-governing region is the largest administrative unit in the Slovak Republic. Within it there are natural gems (for example High Tatras) or cultural gems (for example most UNESCO monuments). Organizing various events is a matter of course. There are also important spas on the territory of PSGR (for

example, Bardejov or Ružbachy and others). Figure 1 shows the complete research step scheme, with the main research method was a questionnaire. The questionnaire survey was attended by representatives of interested parties, that is, members of DMOs at the basic level, operating within the framework of the PSGR. Sphere of activity of members:

- public sphere - representatives of VÚC - PSGR, and representatives of local governments (cities and municipalities),
- public-private sphere – managers of cultural institutions (museum, gallery, etc.), and managers of civic associations and non-profit organizations,
- private sector – managers of businesses providing services in tourism (accommodation, catering, rental companies, carriers) and managers of tourist information centres.

Currently, PSGR has 34 tourist information centres, 7 regional tourism organizations, and 1 regional tourism organization. DMOs add strategic, organizational and promotional activities to destination management systems, assist in the development and strategically evaluate the given destination. The highest number of members is represented by municipalities, followed by private companies. It is interesting that non-profit organizations and professional associations are represented only to a minority extent. However, a large membership base does not always lead to a significant market presence, indicating a gap between demand and supply (World Bank Group, 2019). One e-mail for sending the questionnaire was identified for each questioned subject. A total of 337 respondents were approached to participate in the study. The return rate was 91%, which means that 307 respondents took part in the questionnaire research. The distribution of the questionnaire and the collection of data took place between February and May 2024, through the online tool Google Forms.

Descriptive statistics were used for the statistical verification of the hypotheses, then the normality of the data distribution (Shapiro-Wilk test) was tested at the significance level $\alpha = 0.05$. The survey results did not confirm the normality of the data distribution, so we used the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test to verify/falsify the hypotheses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To answer the first research question and verify the first and second hypotheses, we summarized the statements of the questionnaire for each respondent and divided the data based on the length of membership in DMOs as a differential criterion for the first hypothesis (H1) and the type of member as a differential criterion for the second hypothesis (H2).

As part of the first hypothesis, we assumed that trust between cooperating stakeholders is conditioned by the length of membership in DMOs. Descriptive statistics of the data, as part of hypothesis 1, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for H1 – length of membership as a factor in cooperative trust (Source: own processing in the Gretl program)

	1 to 3 years	4 to 6 years	6 and more years
Average	7,5	8,1	6,035714286
Standard error	0,5	0,604611905	0,341847811
Median	7	9	5
Mode	7	9	4
Standard Deviation	1	1,91195072	2,558154773
Variance	1	3,655555	6,544144844
Pointness coefficient	4	1,86999381	0,332883466
Skewness	2	-1,84569369	1,242788887
Range	2	5	8
Minimum	7	4	4
Maximum	9	9	12
Amount	30	81	338

From the values of the averages in Table 1, the trust between cooperating stakeholders is closest to members who have been working in DMOs for 6 years and more, as the average of their resulting values is the lowest. However, this group of respondents achieved the highest dispersion of values as well as the range. To confirm the statistical significance of the length of membership in DMOs, as a differentiating criterion, it is necessary to use other statistical methods.

To verify or falsify H1, we used the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test, the results of which are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Verification of hypothesis 1 – Kruskal-Wallis Test (Source: own processing in the Gretl program)

Krusal-Wallis Test	1 to 3 years	4 to 5 years	6 and more years
median	7	9	5
ranksum	193	493,5	1798,5
r^2/n	9312,25	24354,23	57750,75
H-stat			7,74985
H-ties			8,23466
df			2
p-value			0,016288
alpha			0,05
sig			yes

The p-value is 0.016288, which is lower than the established significance level of $\alpha=0.05$. This indicates that the first hypothesis (H1) can be considered confirmed. The length of membership in DMOs, long-term cooperation, has been shown

to have a statistically significant effect on trust between cooperating members of DOMs (i.e., stakeholders). As part of the second hypothesis, we assumed that the sphere of activity of the members of DMOs has an impact on the perception of trust in cooperation between the members themselves. We present the descriptive statistics of the data of hypothesis 2 in Table 3. From the average values in Table 3, trust, as a selected criterion, between cooperating stakeholders is closest to non-profit organizations, as the average of their resulting values is the lowest.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for H2 – interested parties (members of DMOs about the sector of their activity) (Source: own processing in the Gretl program)

	public sector (city/village)	private sector (enterprises)	public-private sector (non-profit organization)
Average	6,882352	6,0645162	4,5
Standard error	0,458278	0,4248601	0,2886748
Median	6	5	4,5
Mode	9	4	5
Standard Deviation	2,6713255	2,36552339	0,5773564
Variance	7,137255	5,59569879	0,3333333
Pointness coefficient	-1,13771	0,65631017	-6
Skewness	0,412738	1,19363474	0
Range	8	8	1
Minimum	4	4	4
Maximum	12	12	5
Amount	234	188	18

Table 4. Verification of hypothesis 2 – Kruskal-Wallis Test (Source: own processing in the Gretl program)

Krusal-Wallis Test	1 to 3 years	4 to 5 years	6 and more years	
median	6	5	4,5	
ranksum	1307,4	1024,6	83	
r ² /n	50281,07	33857,06762	1722,4	85871,29
H-stat				3,320122
H-ties				3,527218
df				2
p-value				0,171542
alpha				0,05
sig				no

The p-value is 0.171428, which is higher than the established significance level $\alpha=0.05$. This indicates that we cannot consider the second hypothesis (H2) to be confirmed. It was shown that the sphere of activity of interested parties, as members of DMOs, does not have a statistically significant influence on the perception of trust among the cooperating members of DMOs. The second research question focused on which sector tourism cooperation is interesting for.

We summarized the points for the statements from the questionnaire for each respondent and divided the data based on the type of membership organization as a differentiating criterion. As part of the third hypothesis (H3), we assumed that there is a relationship between willingness to cooperate and the sphere of activity of DMOs members. Descriptive statistics of these data are presented in Table 5. From the average values in Table 5, it can be seen that cooperation in tourism is more interesting for the private sector of member organizations, since the average of their resulting values is the lowest.

To verify or falsify H3, we used the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test, the results of which are shown in Table 4.

Table 5 Descriptive statistics for H3 – willingness to cooperate in relation to the sphere of activity of DMOs members (Source: own processing in the Gretl program)

	public sector (city/village)	private sector (enterprises)	public-private sector (non-profit organization)
Average	8,26471	6,3872	6,5
Standard error	0,55742	0,52814	0,95734
Median	8	5	7
Mode	8	4	8
Standard deviation	3,25062	2,94072	1,91845
Variance	10,5624	8,64561	3,66677
Skewness coefficient	-0,6454	0,91917	-1,2891
Skewness	0,47412	1,27452	-0,85461
Range	10	10	4
Minimum	4	4	4
Maximum	14	14	8
Amount	281	198	26

The p-value is 0.033544, which is higher than the established level of significance $\alpha=0.05$. This indicates that the fourth hypothesis (H4) can be considered confirmed. It turned out that cooperation in tourism is more interesting for the private sector within the members of DMOs, that is, that there is a relationship between the willingness to cooperate and the sphere of activity of a member of DMOs.

Table 6. Verification of hypothesis 3 – Kruskal-Wallis Test (Source: own processing in the Gretl program)

Kruskal-Wallis Test	1 to 3 years	4 to 5 years	6 and more years	
median	8	5	7	
ranksum	1401,4	889,46	124	
r^2/n	57771,23	25521,86	3842	87136,78
H-stat				6,490732
H-ties				6,789675
df				2
p-value				0,033523
alpha				0,05
sig				yes

The third research question (Table 6) examined whether active participation in cooperation is conditioned by the length of membership in DMOs. To answer it and verify the fourth hypothesis (H4), we summarized the statements of the questionnaire for each respondent and divided the data based on the length of membership in DMOs as a differentiating criterion. As part of hypothesis H4, we assumed that active participation in cooperation is conditioned by the length of membership in DMOs. We present the descriptive statistics of the data of hypothesis 4 in Table 7.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics for H4 – attractiveness of cooperation with regard to the length of membership in DMOs (Source: own processing in the Gretl program)

	1 to 3 years	4 to 6 years	6 and more years
Average	10,5	10,1	7,957245
Standard error	0,5	0,94819	0,401887
Medan	10	11	7
Mode	10	11	6
Standard deviation	1	2,998231	3,014888
Variance	1	8,989888	9,09815
Pointness coefficient	4	1,375489	-0,56978
Skewness	2	-1,695767	0,781265
Range	2	8	10
Minimum	10	4	4
Maximum	12	12	14
Amount	42	101	446

From the average values in Table 7, it is clear that active participation in cooperation is closest to members who have been in DMOs for 6 years or more, as the average of their resulting values is the lowest. This group of respondents achieved the highest dispersion of values as well as the range.

Table 8. Verification of hypothesis 4 – Kruskal-Wallis Test (Source: own processing in the Gretl program)

Kruskal-Wallis Test	1 to 3 years	4 to 5 years	6 and more years	
median	10	11	7	
ranksum	195,4	448,67	1840	
r^2/n	9555,12	20116,78	60523,89	90 193,23
H-stat				4,771201
H-ties				4,860723
df				2
p-value				0,087782
alpha				0,05
sig				no

The p-value is 0.087728, which is higher than the established significance level of $\alpha=0.05$. This indicates that we cannot consider the fourth hypothesis (H4) to be confirmed (Table 8). It turned out that the length of membership in DMOs (otherwise, the assumed long-term cooperation between DMOs members) does not have a statistically significant effect on active participation in cooperation. Cooperation in tourism refers to the joint efforts of various stakeholders, including governments, local communities, businesses and tourists themselves, to promote and develop tourism in a responsible and sustainable manner. Examples include organizations that bring together local stakeholders to promote and manage tourism in a particular destination. They work together to develop marketing campaigns, improve infrastructure and improve the overall tourist experience. Another example is cooperation between government agencies and private companies, which can lead to the development of new tourist attractions and services. For example, the government may partner with a private company to build an accommodation facility. The main advantages of cooperation in tourism include:

Increased competitiveness - cooperation can help destinations differentiate themselves from the competition and thus attract more tourists.

Efficiency – shared resources and expertise can streamline processes and reduce costs.

Sustainability – working together on sustainable initiatives can help reduce the negative impacts of tourism on the environment and local communities.

Economic benefits – cooperative efforts can lead to increased investment and job creation in the tourism sector (Ma et al., 2020; Mathew & Sreejesh, 2017; Stare & Križaj, 2018).

The aim of the presented contribution is to examine and evaluate the opinions and attitudes of members of first-level destination management organizations in the Prešov self-governing region in relation to their cooperation. The areas of research were based on a comprehensive evaluation of the questionnaire, where, in contrast to a general evaluation, the authors focus more closely on a specific issue, the intention of which is, however, broader than the set hypotheses.

The first research question examined whether long-term cooperation increases trust between stakeholders who are members of DMOs (the first, basic level of destination management), resulting in two hypotheses. As part of the first hypothesis, we assumed that trust between cooperating stakeholders is conditioned by the length of membership in DMOs. The results showed that trust between cooperating stakeholders is closest to members who have been in DMOs for 6 years or more. Their average of the resulting values is the lowest. This group of respondents achieved the highest dispersion of values as well as the range. We statistically confirmed hypothesis 1. As part of the second hypothesis, we assumed that the sphere of activity of interested parties, as members of DMOs, has an impact on the perception of trust within the cooperation. The chosen criterion, among the cooperating interested parties, is the closest to non-profit organizations, since the average of their resulting values is the lowest. We failed to confirm hypothesis 2.

The second research question investigated the interest in cooperation among the members of DMOs with regard to their sphere of activity. From the values of the averages, it can be seen that cooperation within DMOs (for example, in the creation of new tourism products, etc.) is most interesting for the private sector of member organizations (i.e. tourism enterprises and related enterprises), since the average of their resulting values is the lowest. We statistically confirmed hypothesis 3.

The third research question turned into the fourth hypothesis (H4). As part of hypothesis 4, we assumed that active participation in cooperation is conditioned by the length of membership in DMOs. From the values of the averages, it is clear that active participation in cooperation is closest to members who have been in DMOs for 6 years or more. Their average of the resulting values is the lowest. Hypothesis 4 was not statistically confirmed.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it is possible to make several recommendations for improving cooperation between interested parties, members of DMOs and thereby improving the processes taking place in the destination as well as its competitiveness and attractiveness on the tourism market.

The first priority is the introduction of programs to support long-term cooperation, where DMOs should create and support initiatives that allow members to work together on joint projects for a long time. These programs could include joint marketing campaigns, member exchanges and joint educational programs.

The next applied step should be education about the importance of trust, which will contribute to the support of cooperation (as shown in tables 1 to 4). DMOs should organize seminars and workshops focused on the importance of trust in cooperation and methods of building it.

Equally important are regular surveys and feedback, if DMOs conduct among members and find out their opinions on the effectiveness and results of cooperative activities, it could help identify areas for improvement.

It is necessary to support the strengthening of cooperation not only between the members, but also among the DMOs themselves. Considering the confirmed differences in active participation in cooperation between individual members of DMOs (Tables 5 and 8), it would be appropriate to intensify mutual cooperation and sharing of best practices, even among DMOs themselves with a higher level of activity.

Furthermore, support is focused on OOCR for optimal conditions for cooperation. DMOs should analyze and address barriers that prevent more effective cooperation. Adapting internal processes and structures can help improve these conditions.

The result of the study is the creation of a platform for sharing knowledge. This could be an online or physical platform where successes, strategies and case studies could be regularly shared among all DMOs. These recommendations could help increase the quality and competitiveness of tourism services in the PSGR, improving the overall experience for both tourists and local residents. In addition, it would benefit the connection of practical experience with the educational activities of secondary schools, but especially universities, which would use the given method of sharing knowledge in the form of e.g. case studies in the preparation of future managers in tourism.

In conclusion, we can cite a few examples of successful cooperation in tourism:

The Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) works closely with local governments and private companies to promote Japan as a tourist destination.

The European Tourism Commission (ETC) brings together national tourist boards from European countries with the aim of promoting Europe as a tourism destination.

The African Tourism Board (ATB) is a continental organization that promotes tourism in Africa through collaboration between governments, private companies and local communities.

Cooperation in tourism is essential to support sustainable development, improve the overall experience and increase competitiveness. Effective cooperation requires effective communication, trust building and cooperation between stakeholders with different interests and priorities (Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2017).

The benefit of the study to practice: The presented study focuses on the evaluation of cooperation from the point of view of DMOs and its members (interested parties, stakeholders) within the perception of cooperation in terms of trust between the monitored subjects, with regard to the sphere of activity of DMOs members and in terms of the influence of length on membership in DMOs. The findings resulting from the tested hypotheses provide significant feedback of the

current situation for DMOs, as the main leader of the destination and the activator of relations between its members, precisely for the purpose of creating cooperative ties. The fact that cooperation is one of the basic pillars of destination management must be realized by destination management organizations and their members in order for the destination to survive in the highly competitive tourism market.

The benefit of the study in the educational process: As part of the educational process of the study, the perspective brings practical examples of successful cooperation, and also emphasizes and instills in tourism students the importance and necessity of cooperation itself. It points to the facts that cooperation brings, such as contacts, solidarity and trust, understanding of a common vision and, subsequently, by combining the forces of companies in different spheres of activity (i.e. different types of companies) through the creation of attractive tourist products and the prosperity of the destination.

Limitations of the study: It is at the level of research in that not all entities that can be considered stakeholders have been involved. Likewise, the trajectory of time and experience, where due to the implementation of joint projects and the creation of tourist products, opinions and attitudes can change, both in the positive and in the negative sphere, among the monitored subjects. Another limitation of the study is the geographical factor, namely the focus on the largest administrative region of Slovakia, which summarizes the rich natural (High Tatras) and cultural (UNESCO sites) tourism offer. However, the limits do not reduce the quality and importance of the study, rather they point to the necessity of its implementation at a certain time frequency and on a larger geographical scale with respect to territorial entities (for example, Slovakia).

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