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BENCHMARKING AND QUALITY MANAGING OF TOURIST DESTINATIONS

Dobrica Jovičić
Vanja Ivanović
University of Niš, Serbia
University of Rijeka, Croatia

Abstract: In an increasingly competitive environment for organisations, a self-evaluating process is one of the greatest challenges for management. One such strategy is benchmarking - "see what others are doing in order to be the best". Instead of their own approaches to problems, numerous companies opt for benchmarking methods to improve their performances. Complexity and significance of defining term - quality in tourism - points out the necessity of permanent monitoring of market trends. This includes, at the same time, necessity of permanent comparison with the main competitors on tourist market - that is, in fact, benchmarking process. Literature relative to benchmarking models in tourism is divided into two main groups: hotel models and destination models, that are the subject of this paper. Monitoring tourists perceptions of competitive performance is very important in assessing and comparing destinations. Thus, the benchmarking models, based on tourist satisfaction is specially focused in this paper, as the crucial tools for total quality management of tourist destinations.

Key words: benchmarking, management, quality, tourism, destination.

Sažetak: BENCHMARKING I UPRAVLJANJE KVALITETOM TURISTIČKIH DESTINACIJA. U uvjetima sve veće konkurencije na tržištu, proces samo-ocjenjivanja je jedan od najvećih izazova za menadžere poduzeća i drugih organizacija. Spomenuti proces oslikava bit benchmarking-a: vidi što drugi rade da bi postao najbolji. Složenost i značaj definiranja kvalitete u turizmu nameće potrebu stalnog praćenja tržišnih trendova, iz čega proizlazi i neophodnost stalne usporedbe sa najboljim konkurentima na globaliziranom turističkom tržištu. Uvid u raspoloživu literaturu pokazuje da se benchmarking modeli u turizmu mogu svrstati u dvije glavne grupe: hotelski modeli i destinacijski modeli, koji su predmet ovog rada. Kontinuirano praćenje percepcije turista o performansama turističkih destinacija ima važnu ulogu u ocjeni i međusobnom uspoređivanju destinacija i kvalitete njihove ponude koju plasiraju na tržištu. U skladu sa tim, u radu je naglasak stavljen na metode benchmarking-a zasnovane na praćenju i mjerenju zadovoljstva turista, kao bitnog instrumenta za upravljanje potpunom kvalitetom turističkih destinacija.

Ključne riječi: benchmarking, menadžment, kvaliteta, turizam, destinacija.

¹ **Dobrica Jovičić**, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, University of Niš, Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Serbia, **Vanja Ivanović**, M.Sc., Assistant, University of Rijeka, Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management in Opatija, Croatia.

1. INTRODUCTION

With the term *benchmarking* in contemporary theory and in the practice of management it is marked the research and observation of the best business of concurrency. *Benchmark* represents the etalon, quality standard that serves as a basis for comparing. There is a question of continuing and systematic process of comparison of proper business with business of the companies (destinations) which achieve the best results.

Benchmarking represents an important instrument not only for improving the quality but also for evaluation of success, from the point of view of other indicators. Benchmarking identifies company's performances which have to be improved and it goes much further from traditional analysis of concurrency. It's not enough only imitate present concurrent but it's necessary that with proper efforts and researches permanently searching for new options and new possibilities for progress to become the first and the best in some field.

The quality is stated or evaluated according to some referent value that can be agreed or defined based on market researches. Quality product/service it's not a product which has the highest performances but the one that is economic and adapted answer for expressed need. This is a reason why the quality management it's not directed towards assurance of the highest level of product's performances, but towards respecting obligatory performances. In that way it is possible to compare the quality of only those products and services which belong to the same class or which satisfy the same type of need and which have the same range of prices.

The quality of a hotel with two stars shouldn't be compared with those that have four stars, because the quality which has to be achieved is the one that is needed and sufficient to satisfy the requests in limits of a given price. It could be said that the excess of quality (which is paid), as well as the lack of quality, that is non-quality (Karlhof, 1995). This is why the quality has to be treated as the coordination with the requests if there is a wish to manage and to master it.

The quality is measured with quality expenses which represent the expenses of incompatibility with the requests. Those are, in fact, the expenses which are present during incorrect work. They are manifested through the rejects, final processing, additional service, controlling, guarantee, testing and similar activities which are necessary to execute if there is a problem of incompatibility with requests (Crosby, 1995). It is possible to categorize them on expenses of prevention, evaluation and failure. Aberration from realized quality regarding to the wanted quality, it is possible to calculate it for certain period of time, for given production or company or for its organizational part.

For a long time it was believed that improving of quality as a consequence of expense increasing and rentability diminishing. In the period when the quality system was realized through the control and the corrections in the end of product cycle and it was shown as a correct statement. On contrary, the quality represents a tendency that it is cheaper to perform a work well the first time. In keeping with this, the most

important principle of quality management² and the only standard for success is a criterion of *no mistakes*³.

Quality managing introduces one new approach to the expenses because the increasing of quality is, in the same time, followed by diminishing of expenses. Crosby (1995) states that the quality is free but that doesn't mean it has to be treated as a gift and that it brings a profit to very obvious way. The quality also can be the reason for diminishing of expenses and increasing of productivity, but it doesn't mean that low expense and/or high productivity trace their way towards the improvement of quality.

The quality as together of different characteristics it's not possible to add to the product later because this is not building an additional part or something which can be later assured. The product is a result of large number of processes so that what is needed to be improved is not a product but the process. The product/service gain requested characteristics, wanted quality, from the phase of projecting till the realization. In that way the product and service faults which can be related to the mistakes, dismissals and repeated work can be eliminated⁴.

2. QUALITY IN TOURISM

The quality is a complex term, made of several elements or criteria, which are coming from the essence of different types of products and services, depending on their usage, usefulness and importance for a buyer-consumer⁵.

From the fact that tourism it's not a special economic activity, but it represents a specific division of work between series of economic and outside economic activities, with major support on traffic and catering, it comes out complex defining of tourist offer/product quality. Because of that it's often said that a tourist product is a cluster made of products and services of series of different economic and uneconomic activities – hotel management, restaurant industry, traffic and communal infrastructure, trade, manual trade, sport, entertainment, culture, tradition, ethnosocial characteristics of local inhabitants and other.

Complexity of quality and, particularly quality managing of tourist destinations, it is more obvious in comparison to service quality of indirect factors of tourist offer. Satisfaction of tourists with some destination doesn't depend only on indirect tourist offers but on more widely factors as hospitality, security, state of life surrounding, arrangement of environment, communal infrastructure, climate circumstances and other.

The stated attitudes we can prove by a complex explanation "quality in tourism" made by World tourist organization according to which: quality in tourism is a result of a process that includes: satisfying of all legal needs, requests and

² Quality managing is a systematic way with which is guaranteed that the organized activities will be performed in the way it is planned. This is a discipline of managing which considers prevention of problem appearance as well as with control with which the prevention is assured (Crosby, 1995)

³ zero defects

⁴ Gogue, 1996.

⁵ Avelini-Holjevac, 2002.

expectations of a tourist/consumer, with acceptable price and harmonized with basic quality characteristics as – *security, hygiene accessibility, transparency, authenticity and harmony* of tourist activity with characteristics of natural and socio-cultural environment⁶.

Security. Tourist offer and services which are included in it shouldn't represent the threat on human's life, put in danger health, integrity and other vital interests of the consumer. The security standards are usually stated by legal and other law regulations and they should to be treated and explained as quality standards.

Hygiene. Accommodation capacities, for example, have to be certain and clean, and realization of these requests can't be related only to the buildings of high quality, from small "fast food" kiosks, to luxury restaurants and to the catering services in the plane.

Accessibility. This entry considers that potential physical, political, communication, service and economy barriers need to be removed in the aim to make possible to all people consuming of different type of tourist offer without discrimination and independently from their natural or achieved differences – especially regarding to handicapped persons.

Transparency. This is a key element which has to assure the legacy of expectations and protection of consumers. This term means the security of communication efficacy in tourism, as well as dissemination of true information about characteristics of tourist offer and its price. It is also important to underline what is and what isn't included in the price of offer which is placed in certain segment of demand.

Authenticity. In the modern and commercialized world, the authenticity is an entry of quality which is the most demanding and where the character of subjectivity is the most obvious. The authenticity as the entry of quality includes dimensions of marketing and concurrency on the market. It is culturally defined and it has to result with a profit of this type of offer that is different from other similar types of offer on the market. The authenticity has to satisfy the consumer's expectations. She becomes smaller and even disappears in the cases when tourist offer loses connections with natural and cultural characteristics of environment from which it's coming from.. In that sense, e.g., "the real" ethno restaurants can't be completely authentic if it's built outside the place of its original emergence. This, however, doesn't mean that this type of restaurant or some other capacity cannot be attractive for tourists and that it can't be evaluate from the aspect of quality of principal marketing instruments – a product, price, distribution and promotion. For example, a thematic park is an example of tourist destination with an offer that doesn't have an authentic character because there are recreation and cultural contents characteristic for completely different geographic spaces, regarding the location on which this park is situated.

Harmony. Harmony or coordination with natural and socio-cultural environment indicates on the need of viable tourism development as well as long-term concept and directions of tourist development. Viable tourism development means

⁶ WTO, 1997.

optimal managing of ecological, economic and socio-cultural influences of tourism, creation of correct indicators for measuring the viability of tourist development as well as preservation of tourist offer and service quality which are included in it.

From the tourism complexity as an activity, and especially from tourist destinations as poly functional space as a whole in which the tourist traffic is realized, follows also variety of elements that make a quality in this region. The elements of tourist destination quality include all that what is offered to tourists on certain area and on which depends the quality of realized tourist experience, and those are: infrastructure (traffic and communal), state of life surrounding and arrangement of environment, culture and entertainment, sport and recreation activities, hotel and catering buildings, informing tourists, shopping, characteristics of local inhabitants (culture, tradition, folklore, hospitality), security and protection of guests (life security, health security and property protection).

Of course, quality managing in tourism starts and finishes with a tourist – wishes, expectations, impressions, subjective perception of experience and similar, about what the holders of offer and destination managers have to pay special attention during all phases of realization of tourists' visits to some destination.

Table 1: Influences on tourist's satisfaction with destination quality

Phase of travelling	Activity	Influences
Before travelling	1. Bringing the decision of travelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertisements • Brochures • Internet • Information of national, regional and local tourist boards
	2. Planning of travelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourist agencies and tour operators • Tourist publications
	3. Predictions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friends
Travelling and coming on destination	4. Travelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personnel of air company • Airport personnel
	5. Transfer in hotel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customs • Luggage carriers • Guides
Staying in destination	6. Accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hotel personnel • Restaurant personnel
	7. Catering services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guides • Drivers
	8. Entertainment and leisure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information centers • Guides (publications)
	9. Trips and excursions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings with domestic inhabitants and other visitors
Returning to the main place	10. Memories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Photos • Souvenirs • Chatings with friends • Touristic publications • Advertisements • Brochures

3. MANAGING OF TOURIST DESTINATIONS' QUALITY

Systems of quality managing in tourism till nowadays were mostly focused on some companies as indirect holders of offers and creators of tourist product and less on tourist destinations as space units. But, more and more dynamic developments of tourist destinations, polyvalent influence to which they are exposed, and complexity of effects which appears in them, impose the necessity of creation of system approach to managing of their quality.

Tourist destination is pervaded with different mutual relations and influences of primary (tourist motives or attractions) and secondary (infra and sup structural contents) elements in its composition, on which indirectly depends the quality of experience realized by tourists. Also, the tourists are meeting in the destination with influences of other elements and activities, which are not indirectly connected with tourism (communal activities, health services etc.) but in large measure they influence on conception of destination in the tourist awareness.

From these reasons, reformation of a system of destination managing it has to consider following segments:

- ◆ socio-economic development in its wider sense;
- ◆ cultural heritage;
- ◆ ecological characteristics of some region;
- ◆ market characteristics,
- ◆ tourist companies, including employeed personnel;
- ◆ domestic inhabitants.

Quality managing on the level of tourist destinations it's more complex regarding quality control of services of some tourist company. System of tourist destination has its "hardware", or tourist motives/attractions, contents of infrastructure and sup structure which make interpersonal relations, in which there are problems less structural and that is why the consequences of undertaken activities are heavily predicted.

National, regional and local tourist organizations/communities as the key factors of tourist destination management, only in small number of cases are creators of services offered to the tourists because their indirect holders are individual tourist companies and other subjects in destination. *According to this, the possibilities of destination management regarding the control of standard instruments of marketing mix are very limited, in comparison with, for example, the managers of industrial companies.* Large number of economic subjects creates wide specter of tourist offers, from which there are many outside the influence of national or regional tourist organization, according to their quantity, design, price and promotion of those services⁷.

As the consequence of inadequate quality managing, there are situations where standards of promised or promoted services in communication with the tourist don't correspond to real situation, or they are not adequate to the experience quality

⁷ Middleton, 1988.

which tourist realize during their staying in some destination. This fact is so important if you have in mind that the tourism is service activity which doesn't offer to tourists the possibility of probe or checking of destination before making decision of buying tourist services which will be delivered to them in certain destination.

Also, fragmentary nature of tourist economy means that in the deliverance of services to the tourists during their staying in certain destination is included a large number of different subjects. During this it's happening that they are not satisfying adequate service standards in business. Absence or not respecting of cited standards brings the dissatisfaction of tourists who, not satisfied with quality of services and realized experience, won't come back any more to this destination. However, with their returning home, disappointed guests transmit their unpleasant memories and experiences to their relatives, friends and colleagues who, also, won't choose this destination for a visit.

From this mentioned comes out the conclusion that successful control of service quality which are offered in a destination can't be realized without close collaboration, coordination, trust and harmony, between the management of destination and each holders of an offer. They, together, have to construct successful system of quality managing of destination, focusing themselves on essential question and the presumption of successful tourist foreseeing: **What are the wishes and expectations of a tourist?**

Wishes and expectations of useful things which the tourists can realize in the destination represent the frame of quality managing of tourist destinations. This frame emphasizes a need for a research of market with which is necessary to identify the expectations of a tourist from destination, coming from the fact what is their perception of the destination in actual moment and how, according to them, the destination needs to look like. The managers of destination bring the key development decisions with which evaluative flow of a destination is fixed, coming from actual situation and changes which could be performed.

Also, it is indispensably to make the decisions about the means/techniques of communication through which the target demanding segments will convince that with the arrival in wanted destination they will realize an experience adequate to the product/service that is promoted on the market (this means that it won't be the difference between that what is delivered and that what is told to the consumers regarding the service).

In the quality managing of tourist destinations it is more and more present the concept of **Total Quality Management – TQM**. Here is the question the concept or phylosophy that enables the potential advantages also in *operative* and *strategic* sense.

Operative advantages:

- improves service deliverance;
- minimizes the risk of a failure;
- reduces the expenses;
- improves the work conditions;
- diminshes fluctuation of personnel.

Strategic advantages:

- increases the possibilities to go towards the consumers;
- improves the efficacy;
- increases the business possibilities;
- develops the image;
- increases the profit.

TQM approach is, partly, focused on realization of short-term aims, but is mostly focused on continuous improving of services in accordance with turbulent changes on the market, this is inevitably to satisfy the consumers' needs, that is to stimulate and to improve their expectations and this is the most important in the tourism.

TQM concept makes possible the efficacy and flexibility of tourist business as a whole. This is the most important way of organizing and arranging of all destinations: each its part, of all activities on all levels of organization. TQM is founded on effective, integral, technical and managing procedures for optimal synchronization of human actions and product capacities, and this has to assure the satisfaction of consumers and economy of expenses and improving of quality. This approach has a character of *preventive* control, that means that through the training and planning of procedures, already in the first deliverance to tourists is assured the real service, without the need for additional correction with which it is assured successful and economic business without unnecessary expenses.

The application of TQM concept on the level of tourist destinations focuses three priority principles which have to be holding on in managing:

1. *All elements or subsystems inside system of tourist destinations have to be directed with the need of continuous improving;*
2. *Identification and satisfying of expectations/needs of tourists it's essential task of all holders of offers in the system of tourist destinations;;*
3. *The managers of destination and the managers of tourist companies have to be maximal dedicated to the efforts for improving the quality services which are offered in the destination..*

4. BENCHMARKING OF TOURIST DESTINATIONS

The complexity and the importance of definition of quality in tourism imposes the need of permanent following market trends, from which comes out also the inevitability of continuous comparisons with the best concurrent on tourist market – this is the essence of benchmarking.

Benchmarking is very often divided on *internal, external and generic*, depending from the subject and the way of comparison. Internal benchmarking means the comparison of results of subsystems' parts inside tourist destination; external benchmarking compares a tourist destination as a whole with concurrency on the market, where the goals of comparison are new ideas, innovations, new methods, new products and services, and generic benchmarking includes quality evaluation of certain services, that is the destinations as a whole.

Benchmarking is a complex procedure, it's performed in several phases (planning and characterization; collecting and analysis of data about other companies; realization of improving; continuous implementation of improving), enables gradation and measuring of results as well as the establishing of standards (Renko et al, 1999). With this to all users of tourist services, that is to market demand, offer relevant information about tourist capacities and destinations but also the possibility of their mutual comparison.

The complexity and the meaning of above mentioned method affirms also Kozak who differs even 20 elements of gradation, as crucial fields of benchmarking in tourism and in the catering: welcome, hospitality, behaviour; care for a guest and attention, atmosphere and surrounding; appearance of personnel; way of food and drink offer; tourist information; decoration; furniture; illumination; additional equipment in the rooms; accessibility to services in the rooms; legal obligations.

Insight in available literature shows that benchmarking models in the tourism can be classified in two main categories: destination and hotel models. Also, it's visible that there are fewer researches dedicated to measuring and to performance marks of small companies in tourism and hotel managing. But, even if the flexibility and market adaptability are the most expressed in small companies, the need for application of benchmarking is exactly the biggest at this type of organizations. On the other hand, it's well known that small companies don't dispose with enough means for application of demanding benchmarking process even if this one would help them in measuring of their proper performances and in increasing of business standards.

Benchmarking models with their major part are founded on the factors suitable for measuring, like productivity, profitability, geographic position and similar, which the tourist experts can analyze and explain without any problem. But, impact of some other factors can be successfully evaluated only from the point of view of a tourist as a consumer of services (e.g. climate conditions, hospitality, tradition and customs), because of that continuous monitoring of perceptions of a tourist about concurrency and attraction of destination has a great importance in modern tourism. Regarding to this (satisfaction, value, trust and similar. It's clear that without satisfied guest it is illusory talking about viable tourist development.

On principle it could be said that the destination benchmarking is simpler to perform in comparison with that one that is realized in some companies, as to indirect offers of services. In fact, for destination benchmarking are not obligatory legal acts, it lasts longer, it rarely repeated and it is not specified in details. But, essential entries which refer to seriousness, importance and complexity of destination of benchmarking are coming from the fact that they are based on quality measurements or on value considering, and it is focused on partner relationships of regional, local bodies of management and private sector. In fact, quality managing of tourist destinations is impossible to perform on the correct way, without a good partnership, collaboration and coordination of the activities of public and private sector.

Generally it could be said that in Europe, destination benchmarking isn't still performed on effective and efficient way, in the aim of learning from concurrency, using their experience but also achieving of better business results. However, in the

developed destinations as the Alps and Mediterranean, benchmarking is having bigger application, making possible the continuous strengthening of their market concurrency. We will illustrate this with the example of benchmarking model applied in the mark and concurrency of tourist destinations of the Suisse Alps during the summer season.

5. APPLICATION OF BENCHMARKING IN DESTINATION OF SUISSE ALPS

Suisse, together with Austria, belongs to the typical Alpine country, regarding its 60% of its territory which belongs to the Alps. As the tourism is the key factor of a development of mountain part of Suisse, this country is called a country of Alpine tourism, which is better illustrated by the fact that about 35% of hotel beds of Suisse are constructed in the part of the Alps. But, during the last ten years of the 20th century, Suisse Alps destinations are passing through certain crisis, which is manifested with the fall of participation of mountain tourist places in total national tourist business, with contemporary growing of participation of city tourism in the total business. Bad tourist results in mentioned period, especially during summer season which was falling behind with the winter season, explain themselves not only with tourist revival of cities but also with strengthening of concurrency destinations in other Alpine countries.

In the aim of the evaluation of market concurrency of the Suisse Alpine destinations in the summer period, as the basis for undertaking of adequate activities of improving the summer tourism and parrying to growing concurrency, Hotel school in Lausanne, in 2002, made a research through the benchmarking model. This model was completely based on the mark of tourist satisfaction with the offer during the summer season and it included two levels: the level of hotel and the level of a destination as a whole. We will show these results:

Table 2: Benchmarking model for Swiss Alpine destinations (Mungall, Thouraya, 2004)

Level of destination as a whole	
<i>General factors of concurrency</i>	<i>Concurrency indicators</i>
Welcome	- Sensation of kindness - Professional skills
Entertainment	- Variety of offered activities - Variety of evening activities - Time of a beginning of leisure and recreative activities during the summer period
Relation quality/price	- Relation quality/price for all leisure and recreative activities
Comfort	- The key reason (activity) of destination visit - Accessibility to destination - Public transport - General infrastructure

With this research it was included 20 destinations in the Suisse Alps, grouped in 4 tourist regions: Bern Oberland, Region Mont Blanc (Suisse part of the region), Graubinden (Grison) and district of Penin Alps. Each indicator of concurrency included 4 levels, or the marks form 1 to 4, which the polled tourists gave to each destination.

The results of this research showed that the tourists in the Alpine destinations the most satisfied regarding 2 indicators related to the factor of comfort (key reason/activity of destination visit and the accessibility of destination), whilst the major dissatisfaction was showed towards evening entertainment activities and public transport. Also, the relation quality/price wasn't on the satisfactory level. Regarding the tourists' structure, the most satisfied were the older tourists (50 to 60 years old), who are coming with the family, stay relatively a longer period (5 to 6 days) and use sport and recreational activities.

This research showed that the tourist destinations in the region of Bern Oberland have the best performances during the summer period and those are primarily, Adelboden and Gstaad, while on the second place is the region of Graubinden with its well known destinations Arosa and Klosters.

The Bern Oberland takes the central position in North Alpine, outside chains, in which two lines of geographic individuality have special importance for the tourism – high sea-level and presence of numerous icebergs (e.g. Alech). Many mountain peaks have the height of 4000 m, and more (Finsterarhorn, Jungfrau), during which the region still in the 19th century was interesting for Alpine tours. British tourists contribute a lot to the promotion of this tourist region: in the beginning they were coming there during the summer to admire the icebergs and giant peaks, and later they promote winter-sport tourism. Bern Oberland is the one of the most developed regions of top-level winter-sport tourism but, in some way, it kept the charm and attraction even during the summer period which approve the results of relation research.

Generally, the research showed that the tourist offer of Alpine destinations in Suisse during the summer period is not on the adequate level (except leading destinations of Bern Oberland) and that each segment of clients (sex, age, social status, profession) has an important remark regarding the quality and variety of tourist services. According to this, in front of hoteliers, local and regional bodies and other subjects there are serious tasks of improving strategy of marketing and improving of offer during the summer period. Only in this way it is possible to parry the growing concurrency in other Alpine countries and to achieve better business results.

Table 3: Average degree of satisfaction/mark of clients towards indicators of concurrency in Swiss Alps destinations (Mungall, Thouraya, 2004)

General infrastructure	3,18
Public transport	2,22
Accessibility of destination	3,33
Key reason (activity) of visiting the destination	3,56
Sport-recreation activities – Relation quality/price	2,81
Time of the beginning of sport-recreational activities in summer period	2,75
Variety of evening entertainment activities	2,04
Variety of offered activities	3,13
Professional skills	3,12
Feeling of kindness	3,22

6. CONCLUSION

Because of bigger and bigger concurrency on the globalize tourist market, the procedure of self-evaluation represents one of the biggest challenge for the managers of tourist destinations. According to this, benchmarking will, in the quality managing of tourist destinations, have more and more importance. Instead of closed and isolated approach without basic overview of the occasions in the concurrent surrounding, modern quality managing of destinations imposes the need of bigger and meaningful application of the benchmarking model for constant improving of business performances. The syntagm "see what others are doing to become the best" synthesizes in the illustrative way the key tasks which are standing in front of the management of tourist destinations, that is in front of the public and private sector included in tourist business in certain area.

In the procedure of destination benchmarking it is particularly important a comparison with concurrent of similar business model, in the way that with this comparison and evaluation of important elements (choosing the target markets, conquer of new markets, expenses of production and the selling price, relation value/price, etc.), would profile the optimal and viable business model of a certain tourist destination.

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