

IMAGE AS THE ELEMENTS OF ATTRACTIVENESS OF THE DESTINATIONS OF THE NATURE-ORIENTED TOURISM

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Received: February 27, 2012

Abstract

NAVRÁTIL, J., PÍCHA, K., NAVRÁTILOVÁ, J., ŠVEC, R., DOLEŽALOVÁ, H.: *Image as the elements of attractiveness of the destinations of the nature-oriented tourism*. Acta univ. agric. et silvic. Mendel. Brun., 2012, LX, No. 4, pp. 281–288

The aim of this paper is to assess the relations between partial components of image of various touristically attractive locations. This research is focused on specific locations in vulnerable areas since the sustainable way of the tourism development concerns them in the highest manner and the touristic pressure on these locations permanently increases. The paper makes effort to extend the usual and nearly traditional understanding of the image in the tourism, which is usually related only to the problems of brand and/or the tourist destination. This is done through a survey realized at 26 selected locations with the aim to obtain 64 completely filled-in questionnaires in each location. Particular statements of respondents concerning the image of the visited location were summarized to the 20 categories. A multidimensional analysis was used to reveal the relations in partial answers. Authors have identified an important number of elements of image of the tourist attractions. By means of the analysis authors have identified differences between historic attractions and nature attractions. However, authors have identified simultaneously both the natural type of the image of the destination and the culture-historical type of image of the destination in all studied locations.

image, destination, nature-oriented tourism, PCA analysis

The increase of tourism manifests itself, among other things, through the increase of the number of locations where the tourism participants can satisfy their needs to travel. Besides, tourism participants are more and more informed about the travel conditions and are, therefore, more rational in their decision-making. These two evolutionary trends result in the permanently increasing competition among tourism destinations (Echtner and Ritchie, 2003). To be able to achieve a part of the tourism market, most of managers turn their attention to the activities related to the support of the image of these destinations (Bonn, Joseph and Dai, 2005).

Since 1970s, those studies being aimed at the identification of the importance of the image in tourism have resulted into two main conclusions. These conclusions are fundamental for the success of both enterprises and destinations: (1) the image

supports the choice of a destination in the moment when a tourist was pushed by its own motives to make the decision to travel (Royo-Vela, 2009); (2) the image influences the satisfaction with the visit, as it confronts the tourist's projections with the reality of the visit. The image is, thus, a dynamic construct as well and it could be divided into two main stages. The image before the visit is termed secondary image and it is built through the perception and consecutive cognition of the independent information from those channels directed towards the potential tourism participant (= organic or informal image) and also of the conditioned and purpose-driven information from the specialized organizations and institutions (= induced or formal image). The image after the visit is termed primary and it results from the concrete experience and their consequent evocation (Lopes, 2011). The visit

of a location, thus, manifests itself in the forming an image (e.g.: Hsu, Wolfe and Kang, 2004). An in depth discussion on this topic has recently been brought forth by Tasci and Gartner (2007) and it is concluded with the statement about the high variability of the studies of this topic but also with the pronouncement that most of authors „agree that visitation results in more realistic images due to firsthand experience of the product” (Tasci and Gartner, 2007, p. 418). The image has also a tendency to stay unchanged when the experience right in the location was pleasant for the visitor or it fulfilled the visitor's expectations (Gunn, 1988). Therefore, the key element for marketers is the management of information as it flows to the potential client (Molina, Gómez and Martín-Consuegra, 2010), what is, however, still more difficult in the conditions of the development of the global on-line virtual image of the world (Govers and Go, 2003) – particularly because of the changing conditions for building up and strengthening of the territorial brand (Govers and Go, 2009).

The problem of the image is usually narrowed to the problems of the brand and/or destination in tourism (Hosany, Ekinici and Uysal, 2007). Based upon it, tourism managers quite often focus their mind only on the possibilities of how to manipulate with the image with regards to the new potential clients (Bonn *et al.*, 2005). However, the importance of the image is much higher and the knowledge of the image among existing visitors is another key element for the destinations' management of the destination (Ahmed, 1991). The reason is particularly the way of how the image is formed, as it is based on information. The only focus on the addressing the potential clients using the promotion tools cannot be successful unless the reputation spreading is supported. The “word-of-mouth” still remains the most important source of information in tourism and thus the one of pillars in the decision-making when choosing a destination to travel in (O'Leary and Deegan, 2005). We have to see this importance in the very substance of the tourism – in the services. In case of services, there exists a higher risk of purchase compared to the products as it is usually impossible the try them before buying them. Although the services can have some tangible components, its core is intangible and purchasers decide thus more often according to the recommendation of those having already an experience with the service (Haywood, 1989). The problems of the image in tourism are also very often associated with the problems of the image of the destination. This is due to the strategic importance of the destination and its image for the success in running business (Ritchie and Crouch, 2003). In practice, the attention of managers is frequently turned to the monitoring of the impact of offered services that are associated with the visit in mind of visitors. The image of the destination is, however, influenced as well by the second component of environment having impact on the forming of

image – the second component is the mood of the destination (Echtner and Ritchie, 2003). It consists particularly of the landscape, historical attractions, infrastructure and the tourism enterprises (Bonn *et al.*, 2005). Although these are used when communicating with the potential client (Bramwell and Rawding, 1996), no strong attention is paid to them, despite the fact that they represent the core of competitiveness of destinations. The cited second component belongs to the important elements efficient in the support to the development of the otherwise economically weak areas (Foret and Klusáček, 2011). The aim of this paper is consequent upon these facts – to assess relations between partial components of image of various touristically attractive locations. The research is focused on the specific locations in vulnerable areas since the sustainable way of the tourism development concerns them in the highest manner and the touristic pressure on these locations permanently increases (Lundmark and Müller 2010).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In spite of its longterm evolution, the study of the image of the destination is still a problem. The image is usually understood as “the effect of a location” or “the perception of an area” (Echtner and Ritchie, 2003, p. 41). It is commonly studied ex-situ, by means of the structured questionnaires using the semantic differential or the Likert scaling (compare overviews in Govers and Go, 2003; Hosany *et al.*, 2007) and with regard to the two components forming the image – cognitive and emotional (Crompton, 1979). Part of researches tends, however, step by step to the belief, that in the time of the fast developing information technologies and the increasing degree of accessibility and speed of the dissemination of information the standardized and structured scales are no more applicable, but the unstructured questions with the free possibility to answer should be preferred (Govers and Go, 2003). Actually, respondents are only this way able to express their picture of the destination. This approach combined with the structured one was used for instance for the assessment of the geographical aspects of the image of Kansas (Hsu *et al.*, 2004).

The image was, thus, observed directly in the locations by means of an unstructured tool with the task for the respondent: “Please state on the word or the phrase that comes to your mind in relation with this location.”

Data collection and analysis

The defined aim is studied within the area of South of Bohemia (the Czech Republic). The South Bohemian Region was the second most favourite destination in Czech domestic tourism in 2008, as 2.2 million tourism trips were made into this region (CzechTourism, 2009, table 12). The selected area comprises most of two tourism marketing regions (as defined by the national tourism agency – Czech

I: Characteristics of the inquired sample of respondents (n = 1664)

Characteristics of the inquired sample	%
Sex	
woman	50.2
man	49.8
Age	
18–25	18.8
26–35	23.9
36–45	24.3
46–55	17.3
56–65	12.3
66–75	3.1
75 +	0.3
Education	
primary	4.4
secondary	14.5
secondary school leaving exam	43.2
higher	10.3
high	27.6
Buying behaviour	
I prefer the quality.	9.4
I prefer the best quality-price ratio.	73.7
I prefer the lowest price offer.	16.8
Visiting behaviour	
first visit	59.1
repeated visit	40.9
Type of the visit	
trip within the holiday	56.1
business trip	1.4
visit of relatives and acquaintance	11.9
journey on or from holiday	5.5
excursion	1.6
trip from home	22.8
other	0.7

Tourism); South Bohemia and Šumava Mountains that are the most attractive domestic destinations in the Czech Republic (Novotný, 2004, p. 23). As an example, we have used the research of the water-enhanced tourist attractions, as water being a substantial element of the attractiveness of the studied area (Navrátil, 2008; Navrátil and Švec, 2008).

Based on the previous experience of the authors and an extensive field survey undertaken during the spring 2009 within these regions, several types of water-enhanced tourist attractions were identified (sites on marked tourist paths): mountain glacier lakes, springs, water-falls, stony rivers in deep valleys, rivers in flat broad mountain valleys, canals, ponds, peat bogs, water closely linked with an historical monument, high situated point with a view on a water-course in deep timbered valleys, points with a wide view on a dominant water level.

Water thus acts in the area as a landscape element in a wide spectrum of tourist attractions (for detailed process of site selection, please see Navrátil and Pícha, 2012).

The interviews took place during the summer visit season 2009 (from June to September inclusive) by means of trained students. The pilot survey was realized on the sample of 30 respondents in May 2009. Based on that, we have prepared the final version of the questionnaire (Robinson, 1998). The selection of respondents was limited only to the domestic tourism participants

The randomness of the sample of respondents was supported by the specific rules set for their selection in previous studies. The research was done during both working days and week-ends (Petrick *et al.*, 2001). In the case of the low visit rate (units of visitors per day), every visitor was approached (Farber and Hall, 2007); in case of the middle visit rate (tens of visitors per day) every fifth visitor was approached and in case of the high visit rate (hundreds of visitors per day) every tenth visitor was approached (Navrátil, Pícha and Hřebcová, 2010). The objective was to obtain 64 completely filled-in questionnaires in each location, thus 1664 questionnaires in total. For the profile of the inquired sample see Tab. I.

The first stage of analysis was the frequency processing of data according to the particular types of locations. Subsequently we have determined the relations in answers measured by the unstructured tool using the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) in the programme CANOCO 4.5 (ter Braak and Šmilauer, 2002). Data were first logarithmically transformed in order to strengthen the impact of less frequent answers in the PCA (Robinson, 1998) as the data originate from the absolute numbers and not from the scales. The scores of particular elements of image were divided by the standard deviation in order to achieve the state where the length of arrows of the elements of image in the ordination diagram correspond to its axis and are independent of the frequency of answers (Lepš and Šmilauer, 2003).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Particular statements of the respondents concerning the image of the visited location were summarized to the 20 categories. The following elements were identified to be the fundamental ones: watercourses, water surfaces and wetlands, landscape, nature, air, mountains, holiday and recreation, history, historic monument, magnificence, relaxation, calm, romanticism, memories, excitement, interesting, bark beetle, lookout, satisfaction, dissatisfaction, lots of people (Tab. II). Water surfaces, watercourses and wetlands were determined to be an element of image in all selected types of tourist attraction except for the mountain flat valleys. The water is the most important in image of those locations, where the water is the core of their attractiveness (rocky rivers, peatbogs, ponds, waterfalls, mountain lakes).

II: Percentage of the elements of image found out by means of the unstructured tool for the particular types of the water-enhanced tourist attractions (%)

	Historic monuments linked with the water	mountain lakes	mountain flat valleys	rocky rivers	peatbogs	ponds	artificial water courses	waterfalls	lookouts with the wide sight horizon	high placed lookout to the narrow valleys
watercourses, water surfaces and wetlands	7.81	13.02	0.00	26.56	22.66	25.52	7.81	25.00	7.03	5.21
landscape	2.34	2.08	2.34	2.34	1.56	1.04	1.56	3.13	0.78	2.60
nature	10.94	20.31	32.03	20.31	16.80	8.85	10.16	25.00	6.25	5.73
air	0.00	2.08	3.91	0.00	0.39	0.00	0.78	3.65	0.78	0.00
mountains	0.00	2.60	0.78	0.00	2.73	4.17	0.78	2.60	4.69	0.00
holiday and recreation	22.66	2.60	3.91	11.72	9.77	6.25	7.81	6.25	3.91	2.60
history	5.47	0.52	4.69	3.13	0.78	4.17	16.41	2.08	16.41	20.83
historic monument	9.38	0.00	0.00	14.84	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	10.16	17.19
magnificence	14.4	18.75	10.94	7.81	20.31	17.19	25.00	11.98	18.75	10.94
relaxation	2.34	6.77	3.91	4.69	7.42	5.21	3.13	6.25	0.78	1.56
calm	7.03	15.10	26.56	1.56	9.38	18.75	17.19	6.25	3.91	17.19
romanticism	7.03	3.13	1.56	2.34	0.78	4.17	0.00	5.21	3.91	2.08
memories	0.00	1.56	2.34	2.34	0.78	1.56	1.56	0.00	1.56	0.52
excitement	0.00	0.52	0.00	0.78	1.17	0.00	0.00	1.04	0.00	0.00
interesting	0.78	2.60	4.69	0.78	2.73	0.00	5.47	0.00	0.78	2.08
bark beetle	0.00	5.73	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
lookout	0.00	0.52	0.00	0.00	1.95	0.52	0.00	1.04	17.19	8.85
satisfaction	2.34	1.04	0.78	0.00	0.78	1.04	2.34	0.52	1.56	1.04
dissatisfaction	1.56	0.00	0.78	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.56
lots of people	0.78	0.52	0.00	0.78	0.00	0.52	0.00	0.00	1.56	0.00
without answer	4.69	0.52	0.78	0.00	0.00	1.04	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Other important elements of image are the nature (together with the landscape) and the history. What is certainly interesting is the finding that the analysis has identified in all types of locations both the visitors for whose the substance of the location attractiveness is the nature and the visitors for whose such substance is the history. This result indicates that even the traditional classification of localization preconditions of tourism into the natural and the culture-historical ones (Mariot, 1983) is not completely sufficient. Each attraction incorporates obviously both the nature-interesting part and the historically interesting part (Ritchie and Crouch, 2003) in that measure that it is able to attract both types of visitors. Particular locations are thus visited by various types of tourists having various vision of attractiveness of the location (Navrátil, Pícha, Rajchard and Navrátilová, 2011).

The results confirm that the selected locations surveyed are the tourist attractions (Alhemoud and Armstrong, 1996), as there was a high part of respondents expressing their experience at the location using such elements of the image as pretty/magnificent/beautiful environment and so without a concrete specification of the history or the nature as an element of image. We have also identified the

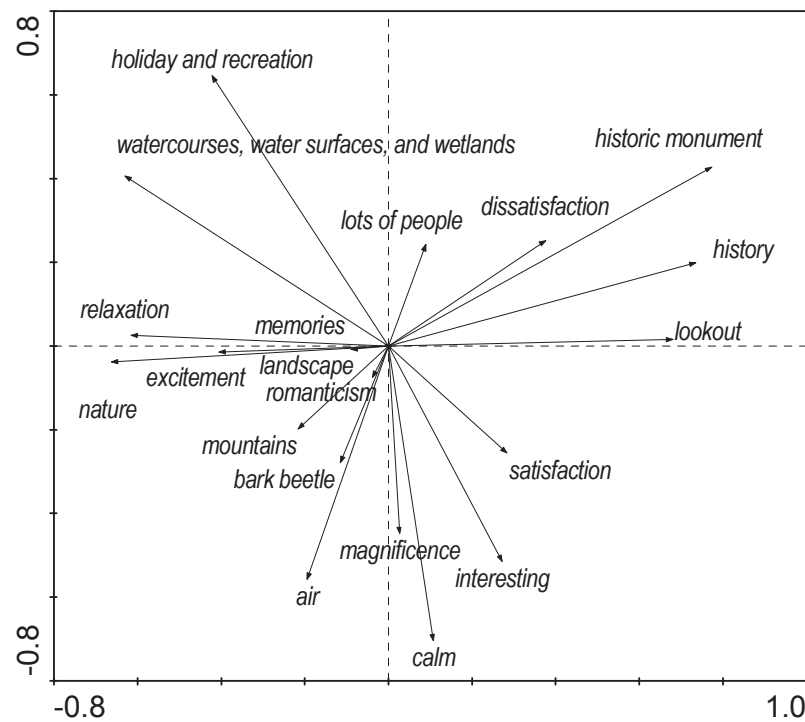
high percentage of answers in the categories calm, relaxation and being at ease (Tab. II). It is thus also the matter of tourist destination of the recreational tourism in suitable "nature" conditions (Monz, Cole, Leung and Marion, 2010).

A high percentage was also registered in the category "holiday"; the locations have thus an image of the locations directly linked to the holiday. Therefore they have the image true tourist areas (Williams, 1998). The last element of image that was cited at almost all locations (except one) is romanticism (Trauer and Ryan, 2005). So we can state also the element of the strong place attachment in the image of the locations (Gross and Brown, 2008; Gu and Ryan, 2008). The visit of these locations is also given by motivations resulting not only from the place itself but also from the internal needs of the visitors (Yoon and Uysal, 2005). Another interesting result is the calamity occurrence of the bark beetle as an element of image – particularly at the Plešné lake – which is a medialized topic of the National Park of Šumava (compare DUHA, 2010; Centrum pro výzkum biodiverzity, 2011; Vašíček, Krejmer, Podrázský, Mrkva and Zahradník, 2011)

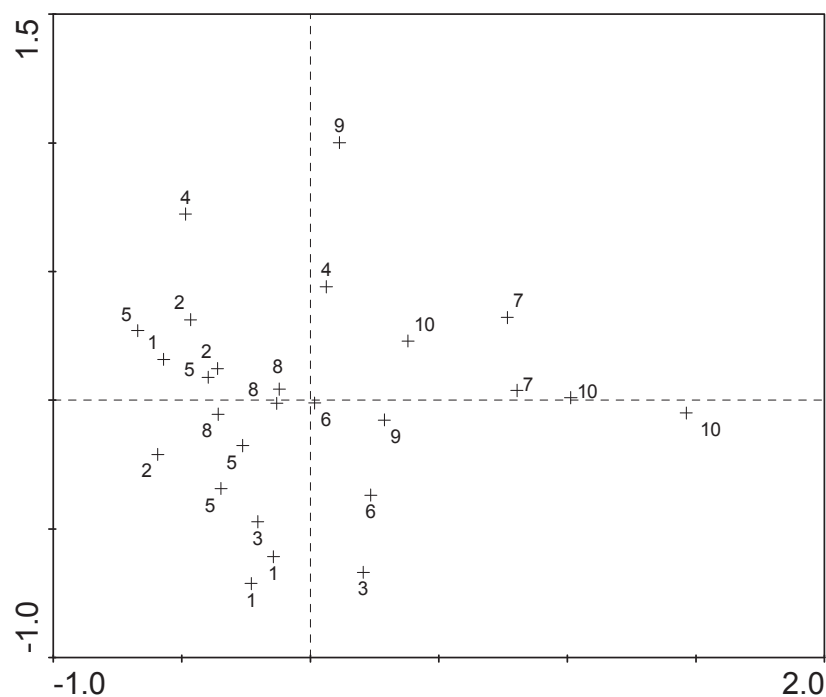
The results of the data provided by the unstructured tool for study image of the location

with the water-enhanced tourist attractions in the South Bohemia and Šumava mountain gave us a possibility to use the multidimensional analysis and to reveal the relations in partial answers. The main gradient in the locations' image (1st PCA axis, eigenvalue = 0.272; Fig. 1) is determined by the variable lookout, history and historic monument

on the one side and by the relaxation, nature and excitement on the other side. Therefore the analysis has identified those differences between historic attractions and nature attractions. The lookouts toward the watercourse/water surfaces were localized nearly exclusively in the location of tower houses, castles, ruins and fortresses. The simple



1: 1st and 2nd PCA axis of the data on image. Elements of image are drawn (see Tab. II).



2: 1st and 2nd PCA axis of image. The locations are drawn.

reason is that there is usually no other stop point on the tourist trails providing a lookout on the water surface and particularly the watercourse. The image of nature attractions is quite close to the relaxation and thus to the motive of the energy recovery by means of the stay in the unimpaired nature (Weiler and Davis, 1993; Schänzel and McIntosh, 2000). The excitement is related, above all, to the fact that the nature is perceived by a part of respondents in the sense of the wilderness (Saeporsdottir, 2010), which is in the visitors' perception typical particularly for the peatbogs (Navrátil *et al.*, 2011) and mountain (Navrátil and Pícha, 2010). The most important structure in the image of the studied locations is thus given by the polarization water – history, which corresponds with the general structure of the perceiving the environment natural versus man/made (Real, Arce and Sabucedo, 2000).

The second main component (2nd PCA axis, eigenvalue = 0.153) is already markedly weaker. It separates rather emotional components of image related to the visit rate of the locations, as it makes opposing the calm, relaxation, esthetical experience and clean air on the one side and lots of people and the recreation on the other side. This component could be, therefore, identified with the dimension of the orientation on the internal experience versus the mass aspect of the tourism and the holiday market (Horner and Swarbrook, 1996). The structure of image according these two main components reflect in the high extent the typology of the locations covered by our research, because it is true for most of them that the locations of the same time are close one to another in the ordination diagram having therefore the analogical structure of image according to the frequency of respondents' answers in particular locations (Fig. 2).

CONCLUSION

We have identified an important number of elements of the image of the tourist attractions. Water is a part of these elements even in that case where the attraction is not, with regard to the classification of tourist attraction, the natural tourist attraction (e.g. tower house or ruins). On the other hand, we have simultaneously identified both the natural type of the image of the destination and the culture-historical type of image of the destination in all studied locations. Although the main diversity of the image is given by the component "natural versus culture-historical tourist attraction", we can discover the indications of the disunity of the image of the particular locations. The image of those locations is thus multilateral, which is an important finding for promotion of these locations to the potential clients, because the location has a different importance for different visitors. The preference for one aspect of the image in the promotion to the potential client could result in the loss of the other potential visitors. It brings on the contrary the possibility to opt for the orientation on that clientele being more advantageous for the destination with regards to its physical predisposition and to the interests that meet in the given place. The above mentioned diversity of the image of particular locations is also influenced by the second component, which is close to the dimension of the internal satisfaction – the massness of travelling. It just identifies the possibilities of preferences of clients with the environmental-friendly life style, which is important for the support to the sustainable increase of the visit rate of the vulnerable areas.

SUMMARY

The aim of this paper is to assess the relations between partial components of the image of various touristically attractive locations. As the region of the South Bohemia (the Czech Republic) was designated the second most favourite destination in Czech domestic tourism in 2008, authors have chosen this area for the survey. As one of the key elements of the attractiveness of the South Bohemian is the water, authors focused their survey to the water-enhanced tourist attractions. The interviews took place during the summer visit season. A pilot survey on the sample of 30 respondents preceded the very survey and after that the final version of the questionnaire was prepared. The selection of respondents was limited only to the domestic tourism participants. The objective was to obtain 64 completely filled-in questionnaires in each location, thus 1664 questionnaires in total. The research was done during both working days and week-ends. In case of the low visit rate (units of visitors per day), every visitor was approached; every fifth visitor was approached in case of the middle visit rate (tens of visitors per day) and every tenth visitor was approached in case of the high visit rate (hundreds of visitors per day). Particular statements of respondents concerning the image of the visited location were summarized to the 20 categories. A multidimensional analysis was used to reveal the relations in partial answers, specifically the Principal component analysis. Authors have identified an important number of elements of image of the tourist attractions. By means of the analysis authors have identified differences between historic attractions and nature attractions. However, authors have identified simultaneously both the natural type of the image of the destination and the culture-historical type of image of the destination in all studied locations. Another interesting finding is that the water is a part

of the elements of image even in that case where the attraction is not, with regard to the classification of tourist attraction, the natural tourist attraction. Managers should thus make carefully the choice of important elements to be the core part of the promotion of their destinations.

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank Vivian Lee White Baravalle Gilliam for the language revision. We are also grateful to all who participated in this research. This paper was compiled with the support of the Czech Science Foundation – GACR P404/12/0334 *Factors of visitors' relation to the ambience of attractions in vulnerable areas* and GACR 403/09/P053 *The typology of tourist's attitudes towards environment, the case of waters in landscape*.

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