

# DESTINATION MANAGEMENT ORGANISATIONS AND THEIR SHIFT TO SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

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**ABSTRACT:** Competition between tourism destinations on national, regional and local levels continues to intensify due to the pressure of globalization (Friedman, 2006). Accordingly, Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) have to constantly reevaluate and re-engineer existing tourism offers to reposition themselves in a highly competitive tourism market. At the same time, tourism development pressures destination areas through increased resource consumption and, land fragmentation while policy measures to promote more sustainable tourism are progressing only slowly due to local resistance. Therefore, destinations are one of the most difficult entities to manage because of diverse, often conflicting interests of different stakeholder groups (Carmin *et al.*, 2003). Consequently, finding the right balance between the economic development of tourism destinations, the conservation of their resources and the well-being of the local population has become a challenging task for many DMOs (Notarstefano, 2008). The aim of this paper is to present the results of exploratory research conducted in 2011 in seven European countries among 72 managers of Destination Management Organizations (DMOs). The research objective was to evaluate the DMOs' efforts and their role in the set-up and implementation of sustainable tourism principles in the management of tourist destinations by means of a quantitative and qualitative analysis. **Keywords:** Destination marketing & strategy planning, destination management organization (DMO), sustainable tourism development, long-term competitiveness, new demand of XXI century.

**RESUMEN:** La competencia entre destinos turísticos a nivel nacional, regional y local sigue intensificándose debido a la presión de la globalización (Friedman, 2006). De este modo, las "Destination Management Organizations" (DMOs) tienen de reevaluar y reorganizar constantemente las ofertas turísticas existentes para que se repositionen en un mercado de turismo altamente competitivo. En simultáneo, el desarrollo del turismo pulsa las zonas turísticas a través del aumento del consumo de recursos, la fragmentación de la tierra, mientras las medidas políticas para promocionar un turismo más sostenible avanzan muy lentamente debido a la resistencia local. Por eso, los destinos turísticos son una de las entidades más difíciles de gestionar debido a intereses varios, muchas veces incompatibles, de distintos grupos de interés (Carmin *et al.*, 2003). Consecuentemente, encontrar el equilibrio cierto entre el desarrollo económico de los destinos turísticos, la conservación de sus recursos y el bienestar de la población local se volvió una tarea difícil para muchas DMOs (Notarstefano, 2008). El objetivo de este trabajo es presentar los resultados de una pesquisa exploratoria realizada en 2011 en siete países europeos entre 72 gestores de DMOs. El objetivo de la pesquisa fue evaluar los esfuerzos de las DMOs y su rol en la implementación de principios de turismo sostenible en la gestión de los destinos turísticos por medio de un análisis cuantitativo y cualitativo. **Palabras clave:** Marketing de destinos y diseño estratégico, "destination management organization" (DMO), desarrollo del turismo sostenible, competencia a largo plazo, nuevas exigencias del siglo XXI.

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**RESUMO:** A concorrência entre destinos turísticos a nível nacional, regional e local continua a intensificar-se devido à pressão da globalização (Friedman, 2006). Assim, as “Destination Management Organizations” (DMOs) têm de reavaliar e reorganizar constantemente as ofertas turísticas existentes para se reposicionarem num mercado de turismo altamente competitivo. Ao mesmo tempo, o desenvolvimento do turismo pressiona as zonas turísticas através do aumento do consumo de recursos, a fragmentação da terra, enquanto as medidas políticas para promover um turismo mais sustentável avançam muito lentamente devido à resistência local. Portanto, os destinos turísticos são uma das entidades mais difíceis de gerir por causa de interesses diversos, muitas vezes incompatíveis, de diferentes grupos de interesse (Carmin *et al.*, 2003). Consequentemente, encontrar o equilíbrio certo entre o desenvolvimento económico dos destinos turísticos, a conservação dos seus recursos e o bem-estar da população local tornou-se uma tarefa difícil para muitas DMOs (Notarstefano, 2008). O objetivo deste trabalho é apresentar os resultados de uma pesquisa exploratória realizada em 2011 em sete países europeus entre 72 gestores de DMOs. O objetivo da pesquisa foi avaliar os esforços das DMOs e seu papel na implementação de princípios de turismo sustentável na gestão dos destinos turísticos por meio de uma análise quantitativa e qualitativa. **Palavras-chave:** Marketing de destinos e planeamento estratégico, “destination management organization” (DMO), desenvolvimento do turismo sustentável, competitividade a longo prazo, novas exigências do século XXI.

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism is considered as a driver of economic growth and one of the leading service industries in many countries. Tourism activities in the Alps, for example, generate today some EUR 50 billion in annual turnover and provide 10-12% of jobs (BAK Basel, 2011). Furthermore, globalization, with its associated tendencies towards integration of services and concentration of capital, has put pressures on tourism destinations to better position their tourist offers in a highly competitive market, either by cost leadership or product differentiation (Baker & Cameron, 2008; UNWTO, 2009; 2010). In response to these developments integrated destination management and sustainable use of tourism resources has become a subject of growing importance, especially for many mature European tourist destinations. Furthermore, many tourist destinations are facing environmental problems (e.g. global climate change, lack of snow, natural hazards) which on the one hand are partially caused by excessive tourism development (i.e. pollution, excessive soil, energy and water consumption) and on the other hand strongly influence tourist flow (Bigano, Hamilton & Tol, 2006; Burki, 2003; Hall, 2006). Moreover, tourists are becoming more demanding, price and quality oriented customers, seeking new experiences, especially in unpolluted and “green” destinations (Brace, 2007; Holden, 2008; Holleran, 2008).

In this context DMOs can be considered “as a mirror of the organizational aspects of tourism destinations” which should constantly re-engineer and adapt their tourist offer to changing market conditions (Beritelli & Reinhold, 2009: 137).

The aim of this paper is to present the results of exploratory research done in 2011 in six Alpine countries (i.e. CH, A, D, I, F, SLO) and in Poland to evaluate and to compare the efforts of 72 DMOs

concerning sustainable management of tourism destinations. The research was based on the “bottom-up” approach, referring to the idea of building “grounded theory” from Glaser/Strauss.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As most tourist activities take place in destinations, these entities constitute the most important element of the tourism system and compose the essential unity of tourism research (Bieger, 1998; Buhalis, 2000; Pike 2004; Wang & Pizam, 2011). Traditionally, destinations should be considered as an amalgam of direct and indirect tourism amenities (e.g. accommodation, catering, public & private transport and roads, visitor information, recreation facilities, etc.) and a wide range of natural and cultural tourist attractions (e.g. landscape, monuments, atmosphere) offered to a tourist during his/her stay in a chosen place (Davidson & Maitland, 1997; Hall, 2008; Leiper 1995; UNWTO, 2007). However, for economic and marketing sciences, a tourist destination is more than a distinctive, geographical area (Bieger, Beritelli & Laesser, 2009; Bornhorst, Ritchie & Sheehan, 2010; Magas, 2010).

Very often, tourists perceive a destination as a whole, so this area is often not only considered as a “tourist place” but becomes a “tourist product”. Hence, a tourist destination can be defined as “a collection of experiences gained by travelers” and should be perceived as a system of products and services which suppliers are ready to deliver and tourists are willing to consume (Gunn, 1972: 11; Keller, 2000; Manete & Minghetti, 2006).

Development of tourism destinations is associated with the constant growth of tourism demand in global tourism markets. By the year 2020, the number of international tourist arrivals is expected to exceed 1.5 billion (which means an average annual increase of 4.2% in the number of tourists) with related revenues of 1 trillion dollars US (Dwyer, et al., 2008; UNWTO, 2011).

Since resources are finite, the competitiveness, especially of many mature and nature-based destinations (e.g. the Alps), is becoming increasingly connected to the maintenance of their natural assets and sustainability (Abegg, et al., 2007; Agrawala, 2007; Bramwell et al., 1996; Bartaletti, 2002; Bourdeau, 2006; CIPRA, 2011; Hardy, & Beeton, 2001; Johnsen, Umbach-Daniel, & Schnell, 2003; Ritchie, 2003). With regard to the environment, it could seriously condition and even limit the long-term growth of travel. Thus, environmental and sustainable technologies and enduring management approaches are becoming increasingly preferred, not only to reduce the negative impacts of tourism development (e.g. carbon emissions, air and water pollution, waste production, deforestation, agricultural abandonment), but also as strategic investments for resource conservation (Amadeus, 2008; Conseil de l’Union Européenne, 1996; Gössling, 2002; Roussat, Dujeta, & Méhua, 2009).

Healey and Ilbery (1990) classified natural tourism resources into four main groups: “ubiquities” which exist everywhere; “commonalities” which are similar and available in many tourist areas; “rarities” which occur in very few destinations and “uniquities” which arise only in one place. As rare and unique resources are the key assets to destinations’ attractiveness, DMOs should harmonize development of destinations with coherent use of these, especially to differentiate and to attract visitors to the place (Buhalis, 2000; Klimek, Scaglione, Schegg & Matos, 2011; Lui, 2003, Matos-Wasem, 2005).

The DMO concept has been widely viewed and described in the literature. It refers to a coalition of many organizations and interests working together towards mutual goals (Bieger, 1997; Elbe, Hallen, & Axelsson, 2008; Sheehan, Ritchie & Hudson, 2007; UNWTO, 2007;). The main role of a DMO consists in fulfilling marketing, promotional and sales tasks, as well as coordinating long-term destination planning and management since the consumer perceives and buys a destination as one integrated product (Bieger & Müller, 1998; Bieger, Beritelli & Laesser, 2009; Pearce, 1992; van Harssel, 2005). However, from the point of view of sustainability, the role of a DMO is more complex. It requires finding the right balance between competing and challenging environmental, social and economic goals such as:

- preserving natural resources and minimizing negative impact on tourism to conserve a destination’s richness for future generations, (Buhalis, 2000; Bonardi, Ludovici, & Furlani, 2006; Fennel, 2008; Honey, 1999;)
- increasing destination appeal and reputation as sustainable and “environment-friendly”, (Crouch, 2007; Osmankovic, Kenjic & Zranic, 2010; Wight, 1998; Wray, et al., 2010).
- maximizing tourism’s economic contributions to local populations (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999; Ritchie, 2003; Simpson, 2008; Tosun & Timothy, 2003)
- fulfilling the needs of visitors and shifting their interest to products focused on sustainable resource consumption (Budeanu, 2007; Leire & Thidell, 2004; Lohmann, 2004; Miller, 2003; Paul, et. al., 2002; Sharpley, 2006).
- increasing the well-being of local populations and public and private stakeholders (Aas, Ladkin, & Fletcher, 2005; Bornhorst, et al., 2010).

As stated by Briassoulis (2002); Byrd, Cardenas, & Dregalla (2009) and other authors throughout the literature, stakeholders and local populations must be involved in any successful sustainable tourism development plan to handle multiple perceived issues of destinations and must be reflective of community interests and opinions. Byrd (2007) distinguished four

main groups which should be involved in sustainable destination development. They are: the present host community (i.e. residents, entrepreneurs, local authorities), the future host community, present and future visitors. This distinction of different interest groups is related to the definition of sustainable tourism development, which refers to fulfilling the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for future generations (UNWTO, WTTC, & Earth Council 1996).

Otherwise, in many destinations the decision-making process is top-down, i.e. “leaders” decide which often may result in communication breakdown and lead to conflicts (Ioannides, 1995; Beritelli & Laesser, 2011). On the other hand, DMO financial resources are highly dependent on various groups of public and private stakeholders (Beritelli, 2011). This fact can often cause pressure and lobbying by different groups of interest that influence DMOs’ functioning (the extreme example of bad cooperation between public and private stakeholders which led to the dissolution of a DMO was the case of the regional DMO in Val d’Anniviers (Switzerland), which broke down in 2010 and was divided into several small local entities). Thus, DMOs should stay independent and play an important role in leadership and advocacy for the whole destination (Ritchie, 1993; Byrd and Gustke, 2004).

Wray, et al. (2010) enumerated the most important features of successful and sustainable destination management. Effective DMOs should have:

- long-term vision of destination development
- clear designation of responsibilities and appropriate operational structures
- transparent and responsible decision-making engaging local groups of interests

Another challenging task for contemporary DMOs concerns the changing nature of tourism consumers. In fact, an increasing number of “21st century visitors” (especially coming from well-developed countries) are showing their willingness to go back to nature, and eco- and nature-based holidays are becoming trendy (Page & Dowling, 2002; Forster, et al., 2011). This shift from mass-tourism based on the formula of the 3 “S’s” (Sea, Sand, Sun) to sustainable and responsible tourism based on the 3 E’s (Entertainment, Excitement, and Education) is linked with the fashionable “green” lifestyle and growing awareness of ecological problems (Dwyer, et al., 2008; Kester, 1999; UNTWO, 2002). Moreover, according to Chitra (2007), the majority of green consumers are willing to pay more for green products and send out a positive signal to an eco-friendly marketing mix.

A good example of this demand change, is the emergence in Alpine regions of a new form of tourism called “4-L tourism” (Landscape, Leisure, Learning and Limit) (Franch, et al., 2008). “4-L tourists” can

be characterized by their high level of respect for natural attractions, their recognition of the importance of the local culture and traditions, their interest in learning about the unique features of the destination and their awareness of the limits of resources.

Otherwise, more and more visitors are becoming experienced and empowered consumers capable of comparing the value of the tourist offer via easy internet access (Laesser et al, 2007). Due to the abundance of information, tourists are better informed, but also more individualistic and more unpredictable (Gretzel, Fesenmaier, & O'Leary, 2006). Lack of loyalty, increasing demand for individualized holidays (often in the form of dynamic packaging) and having new experiences seem to be the most important features of contemporary tourist demand (Ritchie & Hudson, 2009).

It should be added that the internet is present in each stage of tourist consumption. In the phase of planning it serves to find “the best deal”, during a holiday to stay connected and in the phase of post-consumption to share travel experiences, e.g. through social media, websites, weblogs and storytelling (Lohmann, 2004; Mossberg, et al., 2010). The need to share experiences has become so strong that modern travelers have become important players in creating a virtual network of recommendations for tourism destinations (Carter, 2007). As a result, DMOs as purveyors of information about destinations are increasingly required to reengineer their activities around the use of different web solutions (Buhalis & Zoge, 2007; Clarke, et al., 2009).

Taking into consideration all the challenging tasks stated in the literature which contemporary DMOs are facing, the aim of the empirical research was focused on finding answers to the following questions:

1. What kind of stakeholders is involved in sustainable tourism development in the six Alpine countries and in Poland?
2. Are DMOs positive vectors for the implementation of marketing policy and sustainable development strategy?
3. Does sustainable development based on sustainable destination strategy have a real impact on a destination's performance?
4. What are and will be the most important success factors for Alpine DMOs in comparison with Polish tourism organizations until 2020? Are they linked with sustainable development?

## METHODOLOGY AND DATA

This research uses the “bottom-up” approach based on the idea of building “grounded theory” from Glaser (1998). This method offers clear advantages in enabling the researcher to build theory from the actions, words and behavior of the people under study.

The literature review and discussions with practitioners from tourism destinations in Switzerland and in Poland have been the basis for the development of the overall study design and more specifically the research instruments which have been created, tested and validated.

The research methodology of the study was based mostly on quantitative research (using questionnaire surveys) in six countries situated in the Alpine Arc (Switzerland, Germany, Austria, France, Italy, Slovenia) and in Poland. The research was carried out between 15<sup>th</sup> May and 15<sup>th</sup> November 2011.

The sample selection was intentional. Initially a list of 272 national, regional and local DMOs and destination managers in the Alpine Arc and in Poland was drawn up. Afterwards, an online questionnaire entitled “The role of DMOs in (sustainable) management of tourism destinations” was created. The questionnaire was translated into French, German, English and Polish and composed of 44 questions concerning general information about DMO types and tasks, sustainable tourism and public-private partnership, success factors of destinations, sustainable tourism and destination performance. Afterwards, an e-mail with a link to an online survey was sent to each DMO contact (usually the CEO or director) in the most appropriate of the four languages used.

The return rate of the online survey amounted to 26.47%, which means that 72 tourism organizations participated in the study - 47 DMOs from Switzerland, 13 from Poland and 12 from other Alpine countries (see Figure 1).

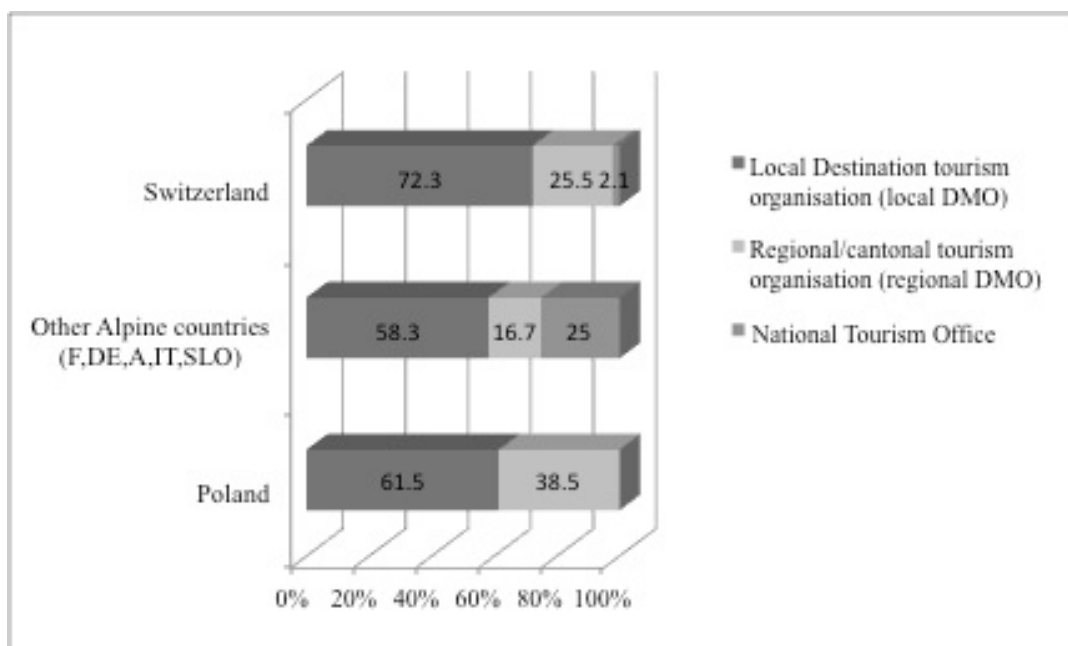


Figure 1. Types of organization - by country

It should be mentioned that local and Swiss tourism organizations represent more than half of the total sample. Nevertheless, according to many studies, Switzerland is one of the pioneer countries in the implementation of the DMO concept and should be considered as a solid benchmark in integrated management (Bieger, 1997; 1998, Bieger, Laesser & Beritelli, 2010, de Ascaniis, Bischof & Cantoni, 2013).

The quantitative research was complemented by a qualitative study using direct and phone interviews with 16 selected tourism organizations in Switzerland and in Poland (see Table 1).

**Table 1. The list of interviewed DMOs**

Names of Destination Management Organizations			
1	Fribourg Region/CH	9	Leysin Tourism/CH
2	Les Paccots/CH	10	Sion Tourisme/CH
3	St Moritz Tourism Board/CH	11	Lago Maggiore Tourist Office
4	Yverdon-les-Bains Tourism Office/CH	12	Kociewie Local Tourism Office/ PL
5	Lenk-Simmental Tourism Office/CH	13	Ława Local Tourism Office/PL
6	Jura Region Tourism Office/CH	14	Mazury Regional Tourism Office/PL
7	Bern Tourism/CH	15	Roztocze Local Tourism Office /PL
8	Genève Tourism/CH	16	Opole Regional Tourism Office

The interviewed DMOs were selected on the basis of survey results and fulfill at least one of the following criteria:

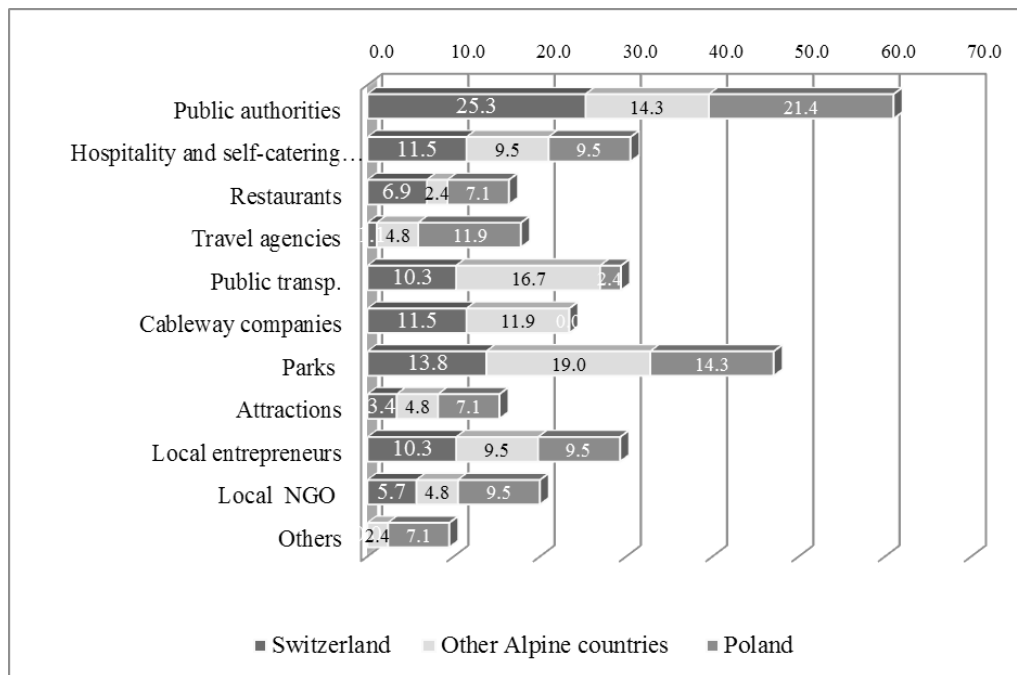
- involving sustainability principles in their marketing concept
- being certified by an eco-label
- being strongly implemented in sustainable tourism product development
- operating in “environmentally clean” regions

## MAIN FINDINGS

Concerning the involvement of public and private stakeholders in sustainable development, public authorities play a significant role in this process in all the DMOs under study. Yet, Swiss and Polish tourism organizations seem to cooperate more in this area with public partners than DMOs from other Alpine countries (see Figure 2.).

For Alpine destinations (including Switzerland) collaboration with cable car companies and public transport seems to be more important than for Polish tourism organizations. Otherwise, the involvement of parks (national, natural), the hospitality sector and local entrepreneurs in different sustainable undertakings constitutes an important issue for all destinations under study.





**Figure 2. Public and private partners involved in sustainable development of tourism destinations - by country**

When it comes to the degree of involvement of DMOs in implementation of sustainable tourism in destination marketing, 75% of DMOs coming from other Alpine countries and almost 70% of Swiss tourism organizations take into consideration the importance of sustainability in marketing planning (see Figure 3).

An important element in the destination marketing-mix is green product creation and eco-labeling. Both of these elements play an important role in influencing consumer choice and endorsing destination branding (Chang, 2009). In terms of “green” products, almost 40% of DMOs under study coming from other Alpine countries, 50% of Polish and 60% of Swiss tourist organizations currently propose this kind of offer.

Some interested examples of “green” tourism products developed by selected DMOs under study are presented in Table 2.

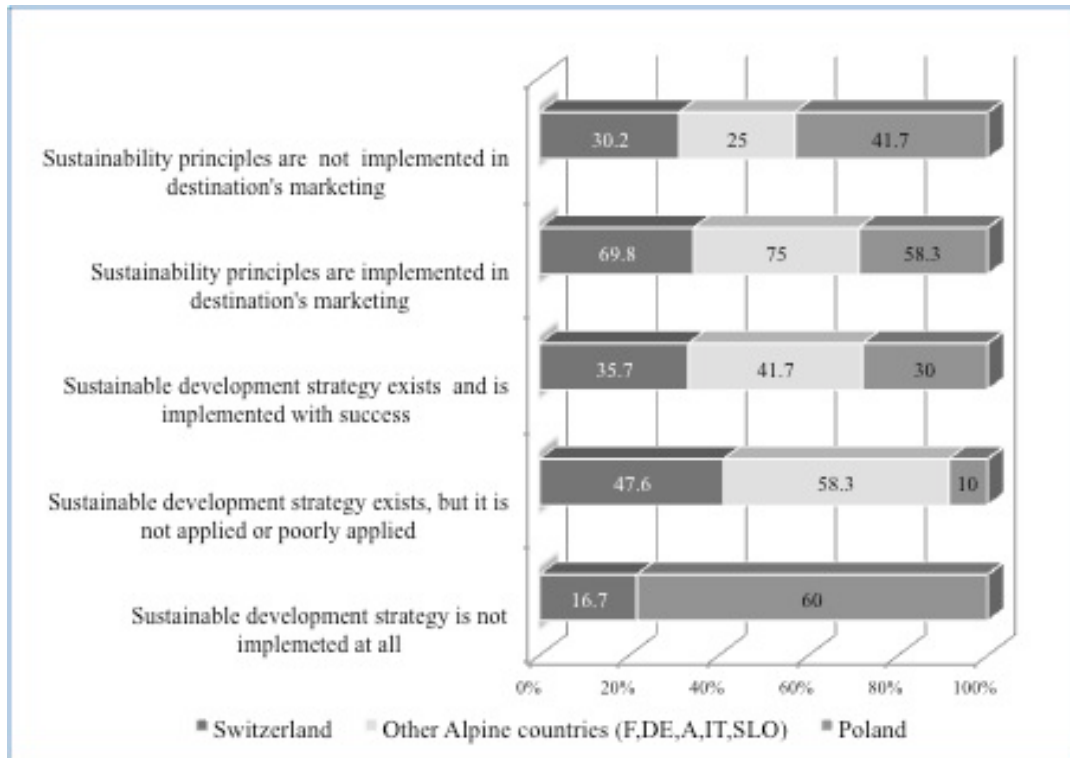
In general, “green” products are commercialized in the form of packages. However, interviews expose the differences between Alpine destinations and Polish DMOs on this topic. In contrast especially to the Swiss destinations, “green” tourism products in Poland are not at all commercialized in the form of “integrated” packages. These products are rather sold as separate services of different local/regional stakeholders’ (e.g. in Roztocze and Kociewie region). The main reason for this is lack of sufficient cooperation between private and public partners and high pressure from competition. The result of a previous study (Klimek, 2010) and observations of the Polish tourism market confirm that many Polish DMOs are mostly at an early stage of consolidation.

**Table 2. Examples of “green” tourism products**

<b>Destination /DMO</b>	<b>Green product name</b>	<b>Clients /market segment</b>
Austria Tourism Board /A	Eco-Friendly Family Holidays	Families with children
Haute Savoie Tourism Office/F	“Green X-perience” in Haute Savoie “Walk in nature and legends”	Individual tourists/Families
Fribourg Regional Tourism Office/CH	Charmey : Alpine Well-Being Estavayer-le-Lac: Nature Safari “Grande Cariçaie” Les Paccots: “ Oxygen package » Schwarzsee » Witch Family Package	Individual tourists/Families
Lago Maggiore Regional Tourism Office/CH	Tour guide of Locarno on e-bike Green package with public transport: “Centovalli - Breath-taking panorama of the “100 valleys”	Individual tourists/small groups
Lenk-Simmental Local Tourism Office /CH	“Alpsculture packages” sold by on-line platform : <a href="http://www.alpkultur.ch/">http://www.alpkultur.ch/</a>	Families with children
Les Paccots Local Tourism Office /CH	“Escapade gourmande” in nature	Families/individual tourists
Siser Alm Marketing/A/I	“Dolomiti Super Kids”- Discovering a great natural heritage with your children	Families with children
Slovenia Tourism Broad/SL	“Green meetings”	MICE clients
St Moritz Tourism Office /CH	« Elektro-Bike Special package » « Mountain Magic” for Sportsmen and Bon Vivants	Individual tourists/small groups
Kociewie Local Tourism Office / PL	“Kociewie region on four hooves”, “Bicycle tour” in Kociewie region , Kayaking in Wierzyca”	Individual tourists, small groups, families

Moreover, none of the Polish destinations under study are certified by an eco-label to endorse the destinations’ “green” brand. As far as Alpine tourist organizations are concerned, almost one-third of the destinations under study, (i.e. 19% of Swiss and 8% of Other Alpine) are currently in possession of an eco-label.

Another important issue concerns the implementation of the sustainable tourism concept in the destinations’ strategy of development. Further analysis reveals that the principles of sustainability are well known but are not sufficiently implemented in management tasks. In almost 48% of Swiss, 58% of Alpine and 10% of Polish destinations under study, sustainable development strategy exists but is not applied or is applied poorly. As many as 60% of Polish DMOs do not apply sustainable strategy at all. The most successful DMOs in this area seem to be tourism organizations from other Alpine countries. In fact, more than 41% of them currently execute sustainable strategies with success (compare Figure 3).



**Figure 3. The implementation of sustainability principles to the DMOs' marketing and destination strategy-by country**

Evidence for this tendency has also been found in the interviews. The responses received, for example from Bern Tourism, Geneva Tourism and Congress, Jura Tourism, Les Paccots Tourism, Yverdon les Bains Tourism, as well as the Roztocze Tourism Office in Poland, show that sustainability is not currently playing an important role in the development strategies of those destinations but will be taken in consideration in the future.

Despite the fact that only one-third of the DMOs under study are actively implementing sustainability in their development strategies, 86% of all Alpine destinations and almost 15% of Polish destinations are conducting different environmental, social and economic actions to strengthen their sustainable development.

The factorial analysis shows that Swiss DMOs seem to be more focused on environmental actions than other Alpine and Polish tourism organizations. Introductions of clean public transport offers, eco-quality standards (e.g. ISO 14000) and of "green" destination brand appear as the three most important environmental actions realized by Swiss DMOs (e.g. in Crans-Montana, Zermatt, St-Mortiz,) (see Figure 4).

Other Alpine tourism entities seem to be more devoted to economic actions (i.e. eco-labeling for companies and promotion of local products). Polish entities (e.g. Opole, Iława, Kociewie, Roztocze Tourism

Offices) seem to be more linked to social actions (i.e. enhancement and preservation of cultural and local traditions, increasing solidarity and social equity, communication of sustainable development principles). Better management of natural resources (air, water, soil) and awareness-raising for citizens / tourists related to energy conservation appear as the two most important actions undertaken by DMOs from all countries under study.

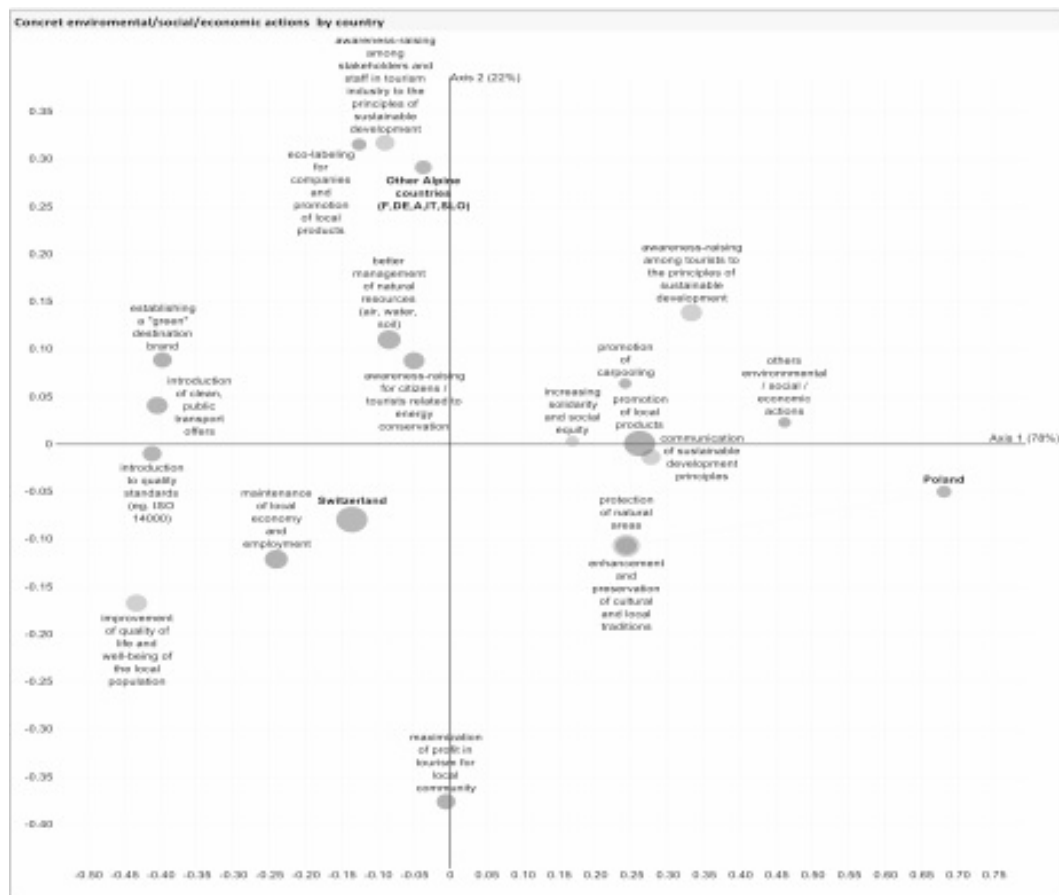


Figure 4. Factorial analysis of concrete data

## ENVIRONMENTAL/SOCIAL/ECONOMIC ACTIONS BY COUNTRY

Another important issue concerns the link between sustainability, sustainable destination strategy and destination performance. The respondents were asked either to agree or disagree on a five point scale with four statements related to the role of sustainability in the present and future economic development of their destination (see Table 3). The importance of sustainability in reinforcing the global competitiveness of a destination seems to be more important for Polish managers than for those coming from Switzerland and other Alpine countries. In contrast to Polish respondents, the Alpine DMO managers are rather

indifferent about the relation between sustainability, high added-value market segment and tourism enterprise performance. Moreover, only the last two statements relating to countries show slight significance. For the question concerning the link between performance and sustainability p-value is 0.094 and for the statement concerning ROI p-value is 0.085.

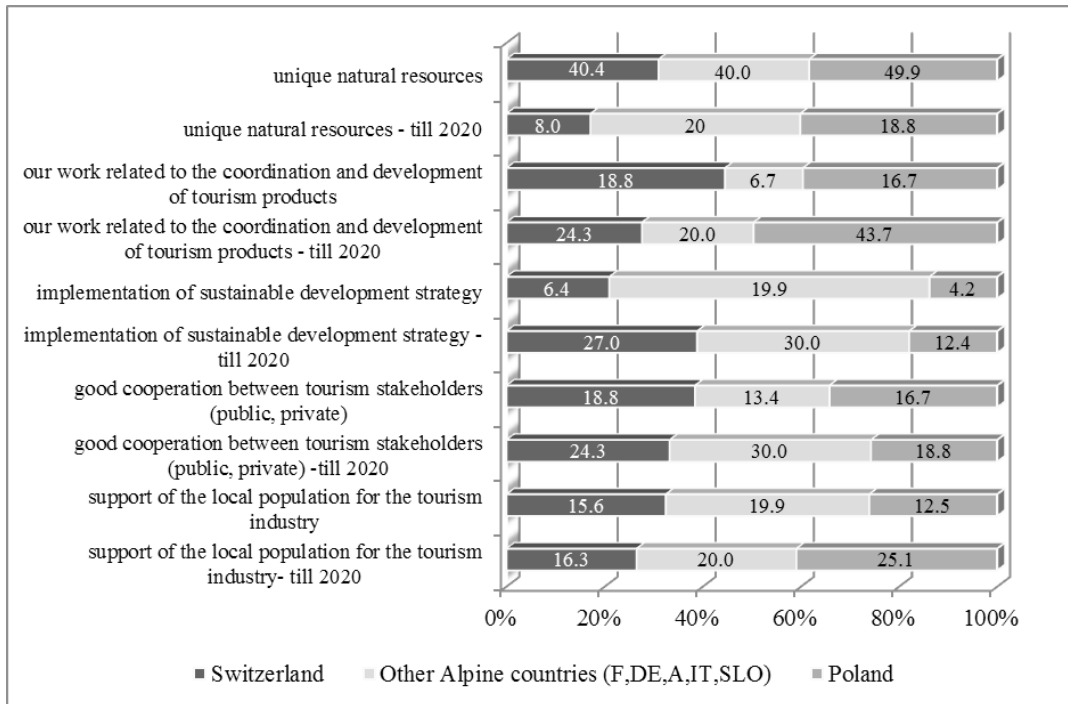
**Table 3. The links concerning sustainable development strategy and the success factors of a destination - by country**

	Switzerland	Other Alpine countries (F, DE, A, IT, SLO)	Poland	Total
The sustainable development strategy of our destination has strengthened our competitiveness in the global tourism market.	3.52	3.75	3.88	3.62
The implementation of a sustainable development strategy is an asset to attract a new high added-value market segment for our destination.	3.70	3.83	4.00	3.78
The performance of tourism enterprises having implemented a sustainable development strategy is better than average according to our experience.	3.28	3.67	3.75	3.42
The return on investment of a sustainable development strategy will be held in the medium and / or long term.	3.95	4.42	3.75	4.02
Total	3.61	3.92	3.85	3.71

*Scale structure:; 1 = Strongly disagree ; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Indifferent; 4 = Agree ; 5 = Strongly agree*

Therefore, the responses to the questions presented above fail to give a definite answer to the question of whether a sustainable development strategy constitutes a positive vector for destination performance. This result is also consistent with previous research conducted on this topic (Klimek, et al., 2012).

To conclude, the survey respondents were also requested to identify the most important present and future success factors of their destinations. The managers of all DMOs recognize unique natural resources as the fundamental issue for current tourism development in their localities (see Figure 5).



**Figure 5. Present and future most important success**

#### FACTORS FOR TOURISM DESTINATION -BY COUNTRY

Yet, according to their vision, the importance of natural attractions will be depreciated in all destinations under study until 2020. This would mean that the offers of Alpine (especially Swiss) and Polish destinations should be reorganized and based on other, e.g., cultural, attractions. Hence, the statement “our work related to the coordination and development of tourism products” is the subject of growing importance in DMOs from all the countries in the survey. It would not be possible without the support of the local population and good cooperation between tourism stakeholders – success factors essential for both present and future development of all the destinations under study. However, only 26.3% of Alpine and 4.2% of Polish DMO managers consider that the implementation of a sustainable development strategy could strengthen present destinations’ competitiveness. Sustainable management is nevertheless perceived as a key factor for future development of most of the tourism areas analyzed in this study.

#### CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER STUDY

The results show that the implementation of the holistic concept of sustainable tourism development within destinations is a challenging task. As stated by Byrd (2007), Middleton and Hawkins (1998), finding the right balance between the interests of stakeholders with the environmental vision of a destination, and at the same time fulfill

the demands and expectations, require long-term marketing and management planning and dialogue among different groups of interest.

Thereby, the majority of Swiss and other Alpine countries and almost half of the Polish DMOs are implementing sustainable development, especially by their marketing planning. In more than half of DMOs under study, marketing provides perspective on sustainable tourism, particularly by green products and packages' creation.

The results show that mainly Austrian, Swiss and French DMOs are involved in commercialization of green products in the form of integrated packages to adapt their offer to XXI century eco-tourists' needs. However, only one-third of Alpine destinations under study, are currently in possession of an eco-label.

As far as Polish DMOs go, many of them are finding it difficult to create and commercialize integrated tourism products. In this context, Swiss and other Alpine country DMOs seem to be an ideal reference point for Polish tourism organizations.

Furthermore, the vast majority of Alpine DMOs under study undertake concrete environmental, social or economic actions with partners to strengthen their striving for sustainability.

Referring to Healey and Ilbery's (1990) classification, the natural "uniquities" constitute a fundamental issue for current development of all destinations under study. However, only one-third of DMOs, managers from countries under study, believe that implementation of sustainable development strategy could strengthen the present destination's competitiveness. In more than 50% of Alpine and 10 % of Polish DMOs under study, this strategy exists but is not applied or is applied poorly. Nevertheless, sustainable integrated management is perceived as a key issue for destinations' development until 2020.

Moreover, the analysis failed to find enough evidence supporting the link between destination performance and sustainable development based on sustainable development strategy. Of course, this does not mean that this link does not exist. This failure can be acknowledged as a limit of this research.

Due to sampling limitations, generalization is limited. The results, however, should give a good preliminary insight into the topic of sustainable management in the Alpine Arc and in Poland. The author will carry out further in-depth research on a larger scale.

The critical appraisal of sustainable tourism offer and e-distribution strategies of DMOs on an international level would be another interesting opportunity for an extension of this research. Indeed, it would help to get more input in these key areas and could constitute a solid benchmark for strengthening the competitiveness of Polish and other European tourism destinations.

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