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**REGIONAL PRODUCTS OFFERED BY TOURIST
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Annotation

Tourist information centers play an important role in the development of tourism. They exist in all countries with developed tourism and are therefore also important in regions of Slovakia. They contribute not only to the improvement of visitor information but also to the promotion of regional products. The aim of the paper is to examine and compare the offer and ways of promoting regional products in tourist information centers in Slovakia. In the first half of 2018 we conducted a survey in 52 tourist information centers, which is associated with the Association of Information Centers of Slovakia. Information was obtained by the method of interviewing employees of selected tourist information centers. Primary data were processed by Friedman and McNemar tests and descriptive statistics methods. The results show that in the offer of tourist information centers, collectors' items, craft and art products are generally the most represented regional products. In tourist information centers to promote regional products, they most often use personal sales and their own websites. Tourist information centers are currently also intensively involved in the preparation and promotion of organized events aimed at presenting the uniqueness of Slovakia's regions, which contribute to the development of creative tourism.

Key words

creative tourism, region, regional product, Slovakia, tourist information center

Anotácia

Turistické informačné centrá plnia v rozvoji cestovného ruchu dôležitú úlohu. Existujú vo všetkých krajinách s rozvinutým cestovným ruchom, a preto majú svoje opodstatnenie aj v regiónoch na Slovensku. Svojou činnosťou môžu prispievať nielen k zlepšeniu informovanosti návštevníkov, ale predajom a propagáciou regionálnych produktov aj k priaznivejším ekonomickým výsledkom miestnych a regionálnych podnikov. Cieľom príspevku je preskúmať a porovnať ponuku a spôsoby propagácie regionálnych produktov v turistických informačných centrách na Slovensku. V snahe naplniť cieľ príspevku sme uskutočnili v prvom polroku 2018 prieskum v 52 turistických informačných centrách, ktoré združuje Asociácia informačných centier Slovenska. Informácie sme získali metódou opytovania a technikou riadeného rozhovoru so zamestnancami vybraných turistických informačných centier. Primárne údaje sme spracovali Friedmanovým a McNemarovým testom a metódami deskriptívnej štatistiky. Výsledky analýzy preukazujú, že najviac zastúpeným druhom regionálnych produktov v ponuke turistických informačných centier sú vo všeobecnosti zberateľské predmety, remeselné a umelecké výrobky. Na propagáciu regionálnych produktov využívajú turistické informačné centrá najčastejšie osobný predaj a vlastné webové stránky. Z analýzy webových stránok turistických informačných centier zároveň vyplýva, že v súčasnosti sa intenzívne podieľajú aj na príprave a propagácii organizovaných podujatí zameraných na prezentáciu jedinečnosti regiónov Slovenska, ktoré prispievajú k rozvoju kreatívneho cestovného ruchu.

Klíčové slová*kreativny cestovny ruch, región, regionálny produkt, Slovensko, turistické informačné centrum***JEL classification:** R11, Z31**1. Introduction**

Tourist information centers are targeted tourism establishments set up in destination with the aim to best inform potential and real visitors about their primary and secondary tourism offer. One of the major factors in the development of tourism is the quality and up-to-date information. The existence of tourist information centers is typical for all countries with developed tourism. They are also well-equipped in Slovakia. Tourist information centers have the character of a public service provided on the basis of a public order as part of the country's information system. Their main mission is to provide comprehensive information about attractions and services at the destination, including promotional and information materials. Most tourist information centers in Slovakia have a regional character. Their information and promotion activities so can the various regions and tourist centers contribute to satisfaction of both visitors and also to the success of businesses.

Part of the Tourist Information Centers is associated in the Association of Information Centers of Slovakia (AICES) in order to create a high-quality information network of tourism in the Slovak Republic, aiming at a two-way flow of information covering the needs of visitors as well as local residents and business entities operating in tourism. At the time of the survey, the association had 55 full members, who regularly exchanged experiences in order to improve the quality of its work and to raise the professional level of awareness (www.aices.sk, 2018).

The aim of the paper is to examine and compare the offer and ways of promoting regional products in tourist information centers in Slovakia. Data on the offer and promotion of regional products in the destinations were obtained through primary surveys based on controlled interviews. We conducted the interviews in person in the first half of 2018. From a total of 55 tourist information centers, we were interviewed by 52 tourist information centers. The sample file represents 95% of the base file. We collected the data by mathematical-statistical methods, specifically using Friedman and McNemar tests. The survey was carried out in tourist information centers on western (19), central (19) and eastern (14) Slovakia.

2. The role of tourist information centers with emphasis on the promotion of regional products

Tourist Information Centers (TIC) are an important part of tourist destinations, resorts and regions in Slovakia. Domestic and foreign literature is often used also by the concepts of visiting information centers, welcoming information centers and city information centers, primarily depending on their location, function and target group that uses their services as a priority (Fraňová et al., 2017). Notwithstanding these specifics, they are characterized by the fact that providing information to visitors helps them in the decision-making process of destination, transport, accommodation and catering. The importance of their activities to the region is related not only to saving time and facilitating the decision making of domestic and foreign visitors, but also help to increase sales of tourism products and services. Special standing have regional products that capture the traditions, culture and history of the region. The promotion and sale of regional products in TIC thus contributes to expanding the visitor's awareness of the region's unique features and increasing its economic revenues.

TIC activity is divided into main and secondary by character and payment. The main activity is providing free information to the public. Information is provided by telephone, post, personally or via electronic media (internet and television). For this purpose, they also use information and promotional materials. The secondary activity of TIC is to provide other services for a fee. Typically, they include the sale of memorial items, tickets to cultural or sporting events, guiding services, exchange and copying services, advertising, providing special information, Some TIC also provide transportation services (Ryglová, Burian, Vajčnerová, 2011).

The main activity of TICs consists of several basic tasks, which are (Gúčik et al., 2012):

- visitor income,
- provision of necessary and reliable information,
- securing local animation that makes the destination more attractive,
- promotion of tourism.

Reception of visitors to the TIC takes place during the various stages of the visit, which include providing the necessary information about the city, the region or about the region's products and services. For the visitor it is important pleasant atmosphere, a clean environment and meet his specific information needs so in future visit visitor the destination again.

Reliable and necessary information for visitors should be obtained from TIC employees from certified sources, especially from the tourism service providers in the destination. Important are well prepared, communicative and helpful employees who are constantly expanding and updating overview of leisure activities around the area (information about sports, social events, cultural events, organized events, excursions, etc.).

In the context of local animation, TIC mission is to complement the offer of a destination with such attractive animation services as it is attractive to visitors, while at the same time creating a positive relationship between the local population and the development of tourism.

Promoting tourism is a very important step in the search for potential visitors. The TIC role as a promoter is to create a good reputation, offer brochures about a given destination, sell regional products, souvenirs and offer local guides (Gůčik et al., 2012). Each TIC should have its own website promoting its basic and complementary services. Complementary services TIC most commonly include operating attractions in a given city and region, reserve thematic tours and programs in the region, booking accommodation in selected accommodation facilities, provision of free promotional materials and roadmaps, sales of tickets to selected cultural and social events in a city and region.

Tourist information center also has a special role to play in promoting regional products. The definition of a regional product differs from the point of view of its consumers as well as the professional public, often associated with food and beverages. The regional product as a stay in the region, comprising four bases of the component: accommodation, catering, program and additional services. These components are not considered as a regional product, but only in combination (Ermann, 2005). Regional products are associated with regional food. Regional food and beverages are an integral part of the tourism experience, attracting the attention of many scientists and gaining a wealth of research results (Dorward & Morrison, 2015). Regional products contribute to the development of agriculture and local businesses, the creation of new jobs, the strengthening of links with tourism and the promotion of regional brands (Buck a kol., 1997 In Sharma, 2014). The importance of regional products is mainly related to the mitigation of negative environmental impacts which is mainly related to shorter distances between producer and consumer (Everett & Aitchison, 2008), while allowing food to better maintain nutrition and reduce the carbon footprint produced by distribution (Sharma, 2014). Thanks to its positive impact on the economy, environment and social impacts, regional products are an important tool for sustainable development (Hrubalová, 2016).

Depending on the binding of ingredients, manufacturers and manufacturing processes to the site or region, the definitions on local and regional products take into account to a different extent the geographical aspect. A regional product is a product with a regional identity and an exceptional link to the region. The strength of regional identity varies depending on the representation of regional ingredients, manufacturers, recipes, manufacturing processes and others. The local product is bound to a particular location that is usually geographically smaller than the region. A regional or local product may be a tangible product, service or combination of tangible product and service (Štensová, 2013).

According to Hrubalová (2016), regional products are:

- regional food and beverages, coupled with their tasting,
- regional handicraft and art product,
- collectibles,
- regional themed clothes.

Linking food with tourism has a significant potential for diversifying rural areas and regional development. In order to maximize the benefits of tourism for regional development, the link between tourists, producers and regional product providers need to be strengthened (Hall, 2005, In Hrubalová, 2015). Food and drink are becoming increasingly motivated by visitors to travel. Various food festivals, street foods, beer festivals, wine tasting presentations and tastings, exhibitions, farmers' markets, etc. are organized, where visitors can taste their meals or watch local food production in a creative way (Everett, 2016). Creativity is a means of developing and distinguishing a product and its authenticity. Traveling leads to an engaging and authentic experience. Tourism provides an authentic atmosphere for local culture through practical workshops and creative experiences.

In addition to the basic tasks, TIC performs due to the changing demands of demand and tourism development, new tasks, including (Gúčík et al., 2012):

- acting as a tool for tourism development, which is responsible for the distribution of services at the target site and contributes to their sales,
- adapting to the development of demand and its new needs,
- acting as a steering body to link the tourism development strategy, tourism entrepreneurs and the local population,
- commercialization and marketing,
- technical assistance to partners, organizing events at the destination, and more .

Due to the nature of the basic and new tasks being carried out, the importance of TIC in the development of tourism is indisputable. TIC can greatly influence the extent and quality of services consumed by visitors, in particular through a wide range of information, broadening their content, searching for relevant information, offer booking of services in several ways, including on-line reservation and support for e-commerce. TIC navigate visitors when they arrive at the destination while staying in the destination, offer potential attractions and events in and outside the region (linking the region's offer to the surrounding regions), contributing not only to extending visitors to the region and neighboring regions, but also to increased consumption of services (Jakubíková, 2009).

3. Results and Discussion

The aim of the paper is to examine and compare the offer and ways of promoting regional products in tourist information centers in Slovakia. Primary data collection was conducted by the method of controlled interviews with TIC employees in 52 tourist information centers, which AICES associates for the purpose of providing quality information services. The sample file represents 95% of the base file. From the tourist information centers that we personally visited in the first half of 2018, 19 TICs were located in Western Slovakia, 19 in Central Slovakia and 14 in Eastern Slovakia.

The interview consisted of 22 logically related questions focused mainly on: the concept of regional product, the offer of regional products in TIC, the form of promotion of regional products, the interest of visitors in regional products, the organization of events in destination in cooperation with TIC in Western, Central and Eastern Slovakia.

At the beginning of the interview we focused on the concept of regional product. We wanted to find out what TIC employees mean by regional product, while choosing from six closed responses (Table 1).

Tab. 1: The concept of regional product in TIC in Slovakia

Regional product	TIC in Western Slovakia		TIC in Central Slovakia		TIC in Eastern Slovakia	
	count	in %	count	in %	count	in %
Made in the region	14	74	16	84	14	100
Made from regional ingredients	10	52	12	63	8	57
Made by local manufacturers	10	52	12	63	12	86
Typical for the region	12	63	12	63	9	64
With brand "regional product"	4	21	8	42	3	31
Made according to traditional recipes and procedures	7	37	6	32	6	43

Source: authors' own survey, 2019

Most of the TICs examined in Slovakia agree that a regional product should be produced in a given region. In TIC in Eastern Slovakia, all respondents agreed (100%) in this response. At least surveyed TICs (21% in Western, 42% in Central and 31% in Eastern Slovakia) thinks that the regional product should be labeled as "regional product".

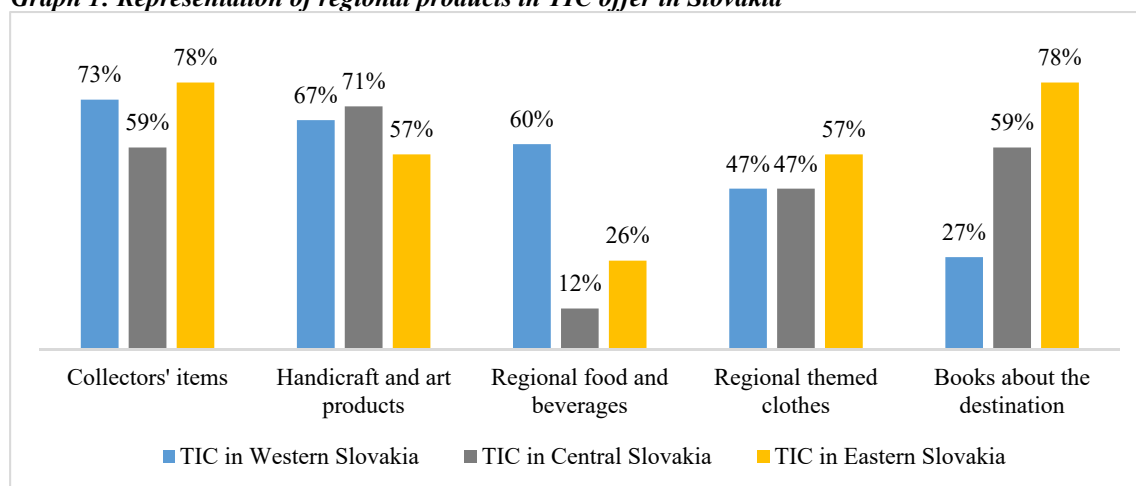
As the regional product brand contributes to a high level of promotion, visibility and quality assurance for customers, it should also be more represented in TICs offer (Table 2, Graph 1).

Tab. 2: Order of regional products in TIC offer in Slovakia

Regional products	Friedman test (Average order)	McNemar test	
		Order	P-value
Collectors' items	3.32	1.	-
Handicraft and art product	3.27	1.	1.000
Regional food and beverage	3.03	2.	0.063
Regional themed closed	2.88	2.	0.250
Books about the destination	2.50	3.	0.008

Source: authors' own survey, 2019

Collectors' items such as magnets, badges and stickers are most often offered in TIC in Western (73%) and Eastern (78%) Slovakia. Crafts and art products (71%) are most often found in TIC in Central Slovakia.

Graph 1: Representation of regional products in TIC offer in Slovakia

Source: authors' own survey, 2019

Promotion of regional products can take place at different times (prior to the arrival of visitors to the destination or during the visit of the visitors at the destination) and in different ways (Table 3).

Tab. 3: Order of promotions ways of regional products used by TIC in Slovakia

Ways of promotion	Friedman test (Average order)	McNemar test	
		Order	P-value
Personal sale	4.07	1.	-
Web page	3.06	1.	0.000
Promotional materials	3.06	2.	1.000
Social networks	2.77	2.	0.031
Others	2.05	2.	0.000

Source: authors' own survey, 2019

The most frequently used way of promoting regional products in TIC in Slovakia is personal sale and presentation on the website. Personal sales are used by all TICs in Eastern Slovakia, because it is an easy way to inform the customer and convince them to purchase the product. They often use their websites in TIC in Central Slovakia (37%) and in TIC in Eastern Slovakia (64%). Mostly, however, it is a region-wide website. For example, the TIC in Košice has its own e-shop, where visitors can find Slovak souvenirs (such as T-shirts, sweatshirts, flags, costume dolls, jerseys, sweets) or souvenirs directly for Košice (T-shirts, mugs, bells, pictures, books). The least used way of promoting regional products is social networks. Less than half of the surveyed TICs use them, although they are currently a very effective way of promoting.

After selecting the promotions ways, it is important that the TIC offer includes products that visitors are interested in (Table 4).

Tab. 4: Visitors' interest in regional products from the perspective of employees in TIC in Slovakia

TIC	Answer	Count	Expressed in %
in Western Slovakia	yes	14	74
	no	5	26
Total		19	100
in Central Slovakia	yes	18	95
	no	1	5
Total		19	100
in Eastern Slovakia	yes	13	93
	no	1	7
Total		14	100

Source: authors' own survey, 2019

According to our results, most visitors showed interest in regional products offered in TIC (74 % in Western, 95 % in Central and 93 % in Eastern Slovakia).

Organized events can also contribute to the promotion of regional products. By offering regional products at events, visitors are increasingly aware of regional products. Visitors can directly talk to local or local producers, try the production of traditional products, taste regional specialties in the form of food and beverages, or establish cooperation for their own business (Table 5).

Most of the TICs in Slovakia are involved in organizing events at the destination, either by promoting or co-organizing events. Organized events to offer and promote regional products are part of creative tourism. The names of these events relate to the cultural identity of the Slovaks, which is shaped by belonging to national culture, regional culture (often made by other ethnical cultures), as well as by belonging to a culture of majority, to European culture and to the world culture, in broadest contexts. (Králik, Lenovský, Pavlikova, 2018, p. 64). Domestic and foreign visitors in destination are looking for such events as an opportunity to learn, see something traditional, interesting, new or creative.

Tab. 5: Events organized in cooperation with selected TICs in Slovakia

Region	Name of TIC	Name of event
Western Slovakia	TIC Skalica	– Trdlofest – Skalica Days
	TIC Nitra	– Festival of Flavours – Wine Degustation
	Levická information agency	– Levice Castle Festival
	Bratislava Tourist board	– Coronation Festival – Day of Open Cellars – Days of open Bee Hive
	TIC Prievidza	– Mining Fair – Markets
	TIC Handlová	– Markets – Fairs
	IC Piešťany	– Wine Degustation – Honey Degustation
Central Slovakia	TIK Snowland	– Valča Folklore Festival
	KIC Kremnica	– Kremnica Fair – Kremnica Gags – Kremnica Easter Egg – Kremnica Wine Festival
	TIC Rimavská Sobota	– Current Exhibitions in TIC
	IC Banská Štiavnica	– Unforgettable Crafts
	IC Čadca	– Festival Drôtómánia – Bartolomej's Fair
	MIC Lučenec	– Easter Fair – Days of Lučenec city
	TIK Brezno	– Ondrej's Fair – Spring Holiday – Bombura Days
	TIC Banská Bystrica	– Radvan Fair
	Novohradské TIC	– Fiľakovo Castle Games
	TIK of Žilina city	– Old Town Festivities – Fašiangy Fair
Eastern Slovakia	TIC Spišská Nová Ves	– Folk Crafts Market
	TIK Levoča	– Carpathian Craft Market – Traditional Spring Welcoming
	TIC Stropkov	– Christmas markets – Fair
	TIK Štrbské pleso	– Handcraft days (Štrba)
	MiC Michalovce	– Zemplín Fair – Christmas Markets – Spring Markets
	TIC Veľké Kapušany	– Harvesting festival – Nové Zámky Market – Porcinkula – Nové Zámky Sausage Festival – Christmas Markets
	MiC Košice	– Wandering through the City of Košice with the Theme of Wine – Wandering through the City of Košice with the Theme of Beer

Source: Own survey according to the data on the TICs websites, 2018

Conclusion

The aim of the paper was to examine and compare the offer and ways of promoting regional products in tourist information centers in Slovakia. We collected the data by mathematical-statistical methods, specifically using Friedman and McNemar tests. Based on the results of the primary research, we can say that in the Slovak tourist information centers the most frequently offered regional products are collectors' items, craft and art products. To promote regional products, tourist information centers use personal sales and their own websites most often. Mostly it is a website for the whole region. Relatively few TICs use social networks to promote regional products. At the same time, the analysis of the websites of tourist information centers shows that they are currently intensively involved in the preparation and promotion of organized events aimed at presenting the uniqueness of Slovakia's regions, which contribute to the development of creative tourism.

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