

## ARTICLES

**DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS OF SLOVENE TOURIST DESTINATIONS**

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ABSTRACT

**Development patterns of Slovene tourist destinations**

The paper discusses the applicability of Butler's model of the life cycle of a tourist area in interpreting various development patterns of Slovene tourist resorts. In order to find out similar development patterns a hierarchical cluster analysis was performed. As a result, nine clusters were identified. The results show very heterogeneous development of individual resorts. Only in regard to a smaller part of them a pattern similar to the one from Butler's model could be discerned. Lesser importance of those factors of tourism development, which could be related to exceeded carrying capacity, is also a consequence of the fact that tourist resorts in Slovenia in regard to their size cannot be compared to the major European destinations.

KEY WORDS

tourism, tourist arrivals, resort, tourism area life cycle, Slovenia

IZVLEČEK

**Razvojni vzorci slovenskih turističnih destinacij**

Prispevek obravnava uporabnost Butlerjevega modela življenjskega cikla turističnih območij pri interpretaciji različnih razvojnih vzorcev slovenskih turističnih krajev. Za identifikacijo podobnih razvojnih vzorcev je bila uporabljena analiza razvrščanja v skupine. Na ta način je bilo ugotovljenih devet skupin. Rezultati kažejo zelo raznolik razvoj posameznih turističnih krajev. Samo pri njihovem manjšem delu je bilo mogoče opaziti vzorec, kakršnega prikazuje Butlerjev model. Manjši pomen tistih dejavnikov razvoja turizma, ki bi se lahko nanašali na preseženo nosilno zmogljivost, je tudi posledica dejstva, da se slovenski turistični kraji po svoji velikosti ne morejo primerjati z glavnimi evropskimi turističnimi cilji.

KLJUČNE BESEDE

turizem, prihodi turistov, turistični kraj, življenjski cikel turističnih območij, Slovenija

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## 1 Introduction

Tourism in Slovenia has a relatively long tradition (Janša 1968). Many places were visited by tourists even before the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Zorn, Erhartič and Komac 2009), but only after the World War II tourism developed into a mass phenomenon. Real tourism development started at the end of the 1950s and at the beginning of the 1960s, along with the increase of the standard of living of Slovenian population and increase of the arrivals of foreign tourists. The latter was to a large extent a consequence of the improvement of road network in Slovenia (then part of Yugoslavia) as well as in the neighbouring countries (Jeršič 1992). Despite the general trend of tourism growth, which continued in the 1970s and the 1980s, the periods of growth were interrupted by short periods of decline. Tourism was hit hard by the proclamation of independence of Slovenia in 1991 and the ensuing war. It resulted in a strong decrease of foreign tourist arrivals. The share of tourists not coming from Slovenia decreased from 74.32% in 1990 to 51.8% in 1991. The interest to visit Slovenia heavily reduced in traditional markets like Germany, the UK, and the Netherlands (Gosar 2005). The new situation was a start of a rethinking process in the tourism economy of Slovenia. The necessity for the change in tourism policy resulted, to a great extent, from the new geopolitical reality in the region (Gosar 1999; 2005). Among the results of the new development processes were a reduction of available beds, the increase of the quality of accommodation and other guest services, expansion of wellness programmes, the construction of several new amenities, like ports (marinas), sport facilities (e.g. golf, tennis), and swimming pools with thermal waters, etc. (Gosar 1999; 2005). In the subsequent years the growth of tourist arrivals and overnight stays has been continuous, but has not entirely compensated the earlier losses.

The pattern of tourism development, briefly presented above, was not characteristic of all of the Slovene destinations. Among them are resorts with a history of tourism development dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century as well as the ones, in which the process of tourism development did not begin until 1960s and 1970s, in some cases even later. Destinations experienced very diverse development processes, the reason for this being the influence of very heterogeneous factors.

The most influential interpretation of development of tourist areas was made by Butler (1980). His model, often referred to as Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC), explains development of a tourist destination going through six stages (exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation, and decline or rejuvenation). A tourist destination starts with a small number of visitors, which is a consequence of a lack of access, facilities and local knowledge. In the next stages tourist numbers begin to grow. When the levels of carrying capacity are reached, the tourism growth slows down. This stage could be followed by a decrease of tourist numbers or even a complete decline of tourism. On the other hand, rejuvenation may occur along with the increasing numbers of tourists.

Butler's model was frequently used and tested in various areas of the world. A very thorough review of a destination life cycle literature was presented by Lagiewski (2006). In the majority of cases only one or two destinations were studied. The most obvious exception is the research by Schuckert et al. (2007), which focused on changes in numbers of tourist nights (separately for summer and winter season) in 278 Austrian (Tyrolean) municipalities. In Slovenia the model was used in the case of a coastal resort Portorož (Vrtačnik Garbas 2005), and partly in the study of tourism development of the health resort Rogaška Slatina (Horvat 2000).

The model was applied on various spatial scales from individual settlements to whole states (e.g. Formica and Uysal 1996). It is hard to believe that one single model could be equally appropriate in such diverse cases. The question of spatial scale was discussed in detail by Johnston (2001, 9), who pointed out that Butler adapted the product life cycle model to individual destinations, which are going through their own life cycle, and not to the tourism products. He concludes (Johnston 2001, 10) that the spatial level, for which this model is most appropriate, is a tourist destination with its environmental or cultural resources as a basis for their attractiveness and recreation business district (or potentials to have one).

Butler (1980) focused predominantly on the role of factors in a particular area, which contribute to the attainment of carrying capacity. Among them are environmental factors, such as water and air quality, the capacity of transport infrastructure, accommodation facilities, etc., and also social factors, such as crowding and opposition to tourism among the local population. He pointed out also the possibility of influence of the factors which do not originate in a tourist area, but can anyway decisively influence tourist visitation (e.g. wars, epidemics or other catastrophic events). The above-mentioned factors, along with some others, influence changes in the number of tourists and can – according to the predictions of the model – lead to a decline of tourism or to rejuvenation of a tourist destination. Nevertheless, the propositions of the model have been questioned by some authors (e.g. Lundtorp and Wanhill 2001).

As already mentioned in the introduction, the long-term trend of tourism growth was characteristic of the majority of Slovene destinations but by no means of all of them. Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (SORS) has been publishing data on tourism for different types of tourist resorts (coastal resorts, mountain resorts, health resorts, Ljubljana, other tourist resorts, other places). These data show marked differences among types of tourist resorts. Many destinations have been faced in the last decades by stagnation or even a decline in tourist numbers. In relation to this the question of the conformity of development processes in Slovene destinations with the ones predicted by Butler's model could be raised.

The aim of this paper is to find out what development patterns, such as shown by data on tourist arrivals, have been present in Slovene destinations. Related to this is another question: to what extent their development has been influenced by common factors and, on the other hand, by processes specific to individual destinations. The paper also discusses the applicability of Butler's model in interpreting various development patterns.

## 2 Data and method used

To analyze tourist numbers, similarly as in Butler's model, data on tourist arrivals were used. Till 2009 SORS collected and published data on accommodation facilities, tourist arrivals, and overnight stays for municipalities as well as single settlements (the so called »important tourist resorts«). In the last two decades, the number of municipalities has changed several times; therefore data at municipality level are not appropriate for the analysis of changes in tourist numbers through lengthy periods of time. Because of that, data at settlement level were used for the analysis. Till 2002 data were published in a yearly publication *Letni pregled turizma* (Annual Review of Tourism). Since then, these data have been mainly published on the web page of SORS ([www.stat.si](http://www.stat.si)).

In the present analysis the data for the period 1966–2009 were included (in 1966 for the first time the data for ten new resorts were published). »Important tourist resorts« have been in the majority of cases identical with settlements, but in some cases also data for surrounding settlements were added to major tourist resorts.

To find out similar development patterns (similar changes in the numbers of tourist arrivals) in 131 tourist resorts a hierarchical cluster analysis, the Ward's method, was performed, and as a measure of distance a squared Euclidean distance was used. Only those tourist resorts were taken into account, for which data for at least ten years were available. As a result, 131 tourist resorts were included in the analysis. Clusters were identified with the help of a dendrogram.

## 3 Results of cluster analysis

As a result of the cluster analysis, 9 clusters were identified. They vary in size in regard to the number of tourist resorts. Characteristics of clusters are briefly presented in the next pages. In order to graphically show the changes in numbers of tourist arrivals through time, the data for individual tourist

resorts were transformed into values on the interval between 0 (minimal value) and 1 (maximal value). This was made in order to avoid the prevailing influence of only a few most visited tourist resorts on the shape of the curve. The average values for resorts in individual cluster were computed for every year. The graphs thus show average changes in numbers of tourist arrivals. Tourist resorts with regard to cluster membership are shown on the map (Figure 5).

**Cluster 1:** The common characteristic of 22 resorts from cluster 1 is that tourist arrivals peaked in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A continuous growth of tourist numbers can be observed for the whole period between 1966 and 2009 (Figure 1). The decrease of tourist arrivals after 1991 was less pronounced than in almost every other cluster. Already in the mid-1990s the peak values from the past were exceeded. After 2008 the economic recession was the cause of a small decrease in tourist arrivals.

Cluster 1 includes 9 health resorts, but also some mountain and coastal resorts (see Figure 5). Among the more popular destinations prevail the ones in which the majority of visitors come from Slovenia. This was one of the most important reasons for the very modest decrease of tourist numbers after 1991. In cluster 1 there are also some resorts, in which tourism started to develop for the first time during the very period under study (1966–2009) (e.g. Kope, Zreče with Rogla, etc.). On the other hand, this cluster includes also resorts with tourism tradition dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century (e.g. Dolenjske Toplice). Accordingly, despite similar changes in tourist arrivals tourist resorts in cluster 1 are not within the same life cycle stage.

In the case of health resorts the growth of tourist numbers throughout the period under study (even in the 1990s) was caused by the construction of modern thermal parks and reorientation into mass tourism, based on recreation, healthy lifestyle and wellness (Horvat 2010). In addition, the uncertain political situation in the area of former Yugoslavia in the 1990s induced a large number of Slovenes to visit the newly equipped and modernized spas instead of spending their vacation along the Adriatic coast of Croatia (Gosar 2005). Mountain resorts from this cluster are partly new skiing centers (e.g. Cerklno, Kope), which are only at the beginning of their life cycle, or resorts which in the last two decades offered tourists new types of recreation and experiences (e.g. a thermal park in Bohinjska Bistrica, river-based recreation in the case of Bovec).

**Cluster 2:** In cluster 2 ( $n = 14$ ) growth of tourist numbers till the 1980s can be seen. It was followed by a strong decrease in tourist arrivals after 1991. The recovery was relatively rapid. Peak values were reached mostly shortly before the 2008 economic recession. In comparison with cluster 1 peak tourist numbers did not surpass the values from the 1980s as decidedly. Moreover, the numbers from the 1980s were surpassed later.

In cluster 2 there are some of the most important Slovenian resorts, e.g. Portorož, Izola, Bled and Rogaska Slatina. For the majority (but not all) of the resorts in this cluster foreign tourists are of above-average importance. A considerable dependence on foreign visitors was one of the reasons for a strong decrease in visitation after 1991 when foreign tourists started to avoid Slovenia.

In most cases, resorts from this cluster have not experienced radical changes (in the sense of Butler's rejuvenation stage) in tourism offer. However, they have introduced various novelties and have been taking care of the maintenance of appropriate quality of their tourism product, including new accommodation facilities (e.g. Ptuj) and investments in new tourist facilities, as in the case of Portorož (a new thermal recreation centre, medicinal beauty, physio-therapeutic and massage centre, conference rooms, etc.; see Vrtačnik Garbas 2005).

**Cluster 3:** A late beginning of growth in tourist numbers (in the 1980s or even later) is a typical feature of cluster 3. The peak values were registered in the 1990s. The growth was soon interrupted by a strong decrease of tourist arrivals. The trends for the last decade and a half are mostly negative. The period with peak tourist numbers (which should represent Butler's stagnation stage) was relatively short. Among the resorts from cluster 3 there is not a single one with large tourist numbers (mostly below 10,000 tourist arrivals per year). Smaller tourist resorts (e.g. Log pod Mangartom, Izlake/Medijske Toplice, etc.) prevail. The curve of tourist arrivals seems to follow the pattern described by Butler but the sim-

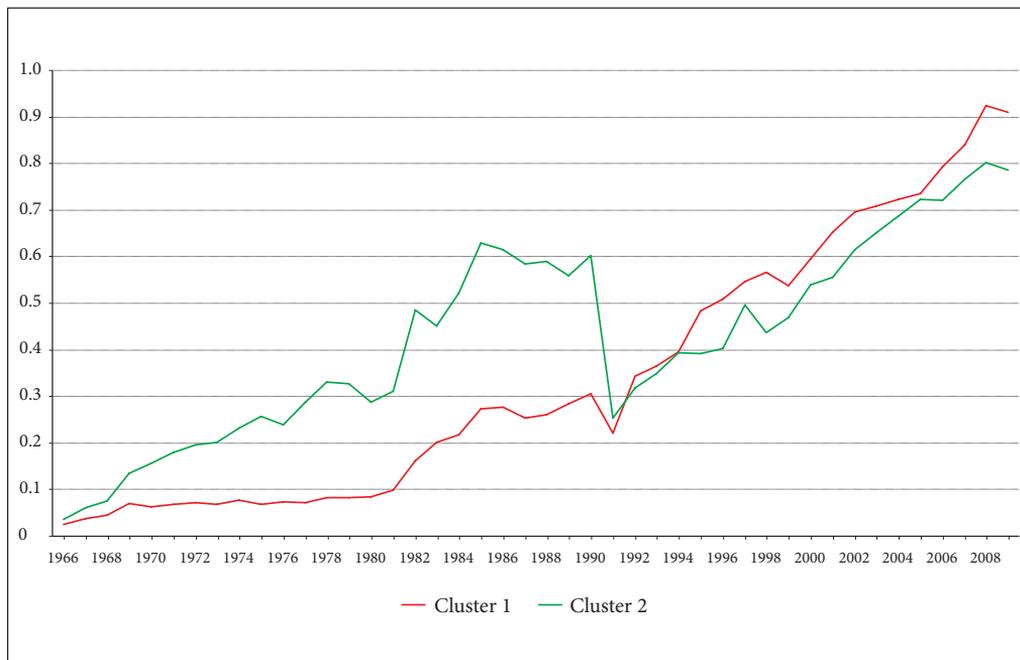


Figure 1: Changes in tourist arrivals in clusters 1 and 2.



Figure 2: Changes in tourist arrivals in clusters 3 and 4.

ilarity is only superficial. Over-development of tourism could by no means be blamed for the decline of tourist numbers. In fact, these destinations never got seriously involved with tourism. Tourism entrepreneurs (or sometimes even a single one) in individual resorts have not been able to start development of tourism on a larger scale. Often also natural and social potentials have been comparatively limited.

**Cluster 4:** Similar to cluster 3, also in cluster 4 there are no important tourist resorts. Destinations reached a well-marked maximum before the break-up of Yugoslavia, in the 1980s. After 1991 numbers of tourist arrivals have been much smaller. In some cases tourism stopped completely or at least diminished to such an extent that SORS stopped publishing data on tourism for these settlements (e.g. Črni vrh, Poljane nad Škofjo Loko). Cluster 4 includes also some urban centres (Slovenj Gradec, Ormož, Tolmin, etc.), which are visited by tourists with non-leisure motives. The second group of destinations in cluster 4 is formed by rural settlements with smaller tourist attractions (e.g. a ski slope in Črni Vrh, a spring of mineral water in Kotlje, etc.). As in cluster 3, the reasons for tourism decline are not related to the exceeded carrying capacity but to various other, more or less locally specific factors.

**Cluster 5** includes only 7 resorts. What they have in common is the fact that they experienced peak tourist numbers already in the 1980s. Despite the subsequent recovery they have not been able to approach those numbers. The period of high visitation lasted much longer than in the case of cluster 4. The most important tourist resorts from this cluster are Kranjska Gora and Bohinj. The reasons for the disability of resorts to reach tourist numbers from the 1980s are diverse. In the case of Bohinj one of the important reasons is the fact that many accommodation facilities have been, already for some time, in a bad state of repair, since their owners have not invested in their renovation (Arh et al. 2006). In the case of Kranjska Gora, some of the factors influencing smaller numbers of tourists could be placed in the context discussed by Butler, e.g. excessive growth of apartments and second homes, obsolete infrastructure, problems with parking regime, etc. (Strategija razvoja turizma ... 2005). Nonetheless, looking for causes only among the previously mentioned factors, would be oversimplifying the situation and overlooking other important factors, e.g. problems with winter seasons because of the lack of snow cover, a strong decline of tourists of some nationalities after 1991, who later did not come back (especially Serbs), etc. The new

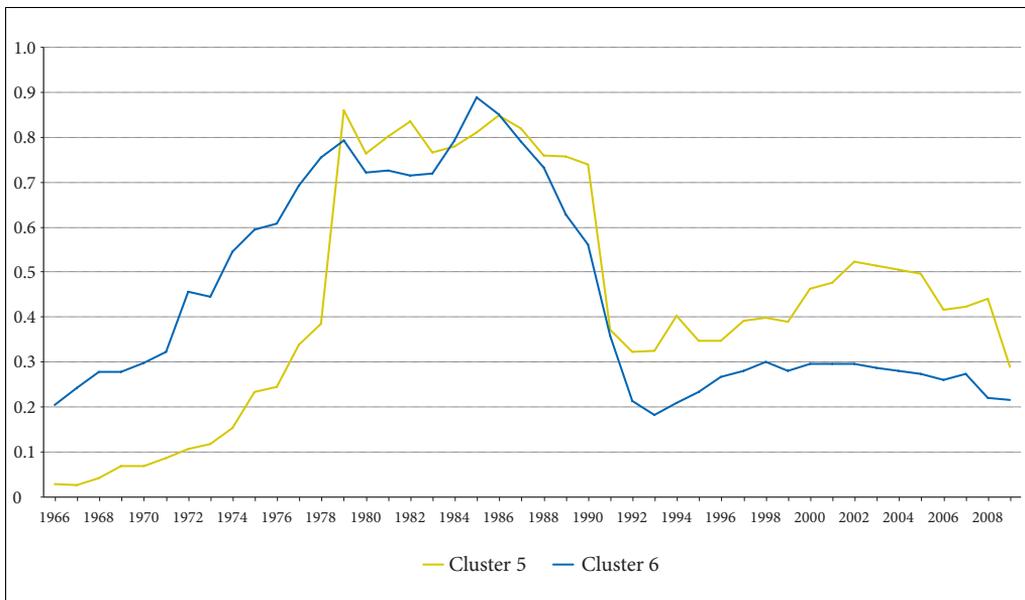


Figure 3: Changes in tourist arrivals in clusters 5 and 6.

geopolitical reality in the South-Eastern Europe negatively influenced also some other tourist resorts from this cluster, which had previously depended to a large extent on tourist flows to neighbouring Croatia due to their favourable location along the main traffic routes (Lipica, Kozina, Podlehnik).

**Cluster 6:** 13 resorts from cluster 6 were classified by SORS only into two groups (Ljubljana is an exception) of tourist resorts: mountain resorts (e.g. Gozd Martuljek, Jezersko, Krvavec), and »other tourist resorts« (e.g. Ajdovščina, Grosuplje, Murska Sobota, etc.). In the second group urban settlements prevail. Ljubljana (as the capital) was classified into a special group but has – in regard to its tourism attributes and tourism offer – many similarities to some other destinations in this cluster (e.g. Murska Sobota, Škofja Loka, Radovljica, etc.) for which urban or business tourism is of importance.

Cluster 6 shows similar development as cluster 5. The main difference is in the more distinctive decline of tourist numbers after 1991. Despite the subsequent partial recovery tourist arrivals remained far behind the 1980s numbers. At the end of the period under study they were similar to those from the 1960s.

Ljubljana is the only resort in cluster 6 with a large number of tourists (526,813 tourist arrivals in 1985). Therefore, also in cluster 6 the exceeded carrying capacity was not the cause of decline.

**Cluster 7** ( $n = 26$ ) is formed, similarly to clusters 3 and 4, mostly by destinations in which significant tourism development has not taken place. The majority of resorts were classified by SORS into the group of »other tourist resorts«. The peak numbers were attained sooner than in the majority of other clusters. The decrease after 1991 was very strong and subsequently tourist numbers remained at below-average levels. In some destinations in the last period at least some growth could be observed (e.g. Maribor), while others still show negative trends (e.g. Kamniška Bistrica). Among the resorts from cluster 7 only a few possess the amenities and attractions that could help them to play the role of a real tourist resort.

Many resorts from this cluster were strongly affected by the political instability in the area of former Yugoslavia, the reason for this being their location along the main traffic routes to Croatia (similar to some resorts from cluster 5), e.g. Postojna, Otočec, Brežice, Ilirska Bistrica, etc. Furthermore, the diminished tourist numbers were also a result of interruption of economic and social contacts with the other areas of former Yugoslavia, from where previously the majority of tourists came (e.g. Celje, Jesenice, Kranj, Novo mesto, etc.).

**Cluster 8:** Resorts in cluster 8 ( $n = 5$ ) were relatively important tourist destinations already at the beginning of the period under study (1966–2009) – especially Piran and Mariborsko Pohorje. Till the end of the 1980s tourist numbers did not significantly change, unlike in the majority of other clusters. Very modest tourist numbers were not just the consequence of the political instability and violence in the nearby areas after the break-up of Yugoslavia, but had been indicated already at the end of the 1980s. This trend was related to diminishing numbers of domestic tourists (Slovenian tourists as well as tourists from other Yugoslav republics) as a result of economic problems. The first peak of tourist numbers was registered soon after the beginning of the period under study. Only in the last decade similar numbers were reached.

**Cluster 9:** The majority of resorts from cluster 9 ( $n = 20$ ) are classified by SORS as »other tourist resorts«. They registered the highest tourist numbers at the beginning of the period under study (the second half of the 1960s, the first half of the 1970s), when they were visited by relatively large numbers of tourists, although they were far from being major tourist resorts. From the 1970s onward a trend of a decreasing number of tourists set in. An additional impulse to this process was given by the break-up of Yugoslavia. Later, tourist numbers remained below the 1970s level. In some cases tourism virtually disappeared.

Tourist arrivals were often influenced by non-leisure motives or by good traffic location. Higher tourist numbers were registered only in Koper (which is a coastal town but also an economic centre of Slovenian Istria), Sežana and Vrhnika (in-transit visitors, business tourism). The average length of stay was very short. The same holds true for many other destinations in this cluster.



Figure 4: Changes in tourist arrivals in clusters 7, 8 and 9.

Cluster 9 includes also some smaller, rural destinations, in which the decline of tourism was again caused by diverse locally specific factors (e.g. a withdrawal of the main tourism entrepreneur in the case of Lokve; Skok 2005).

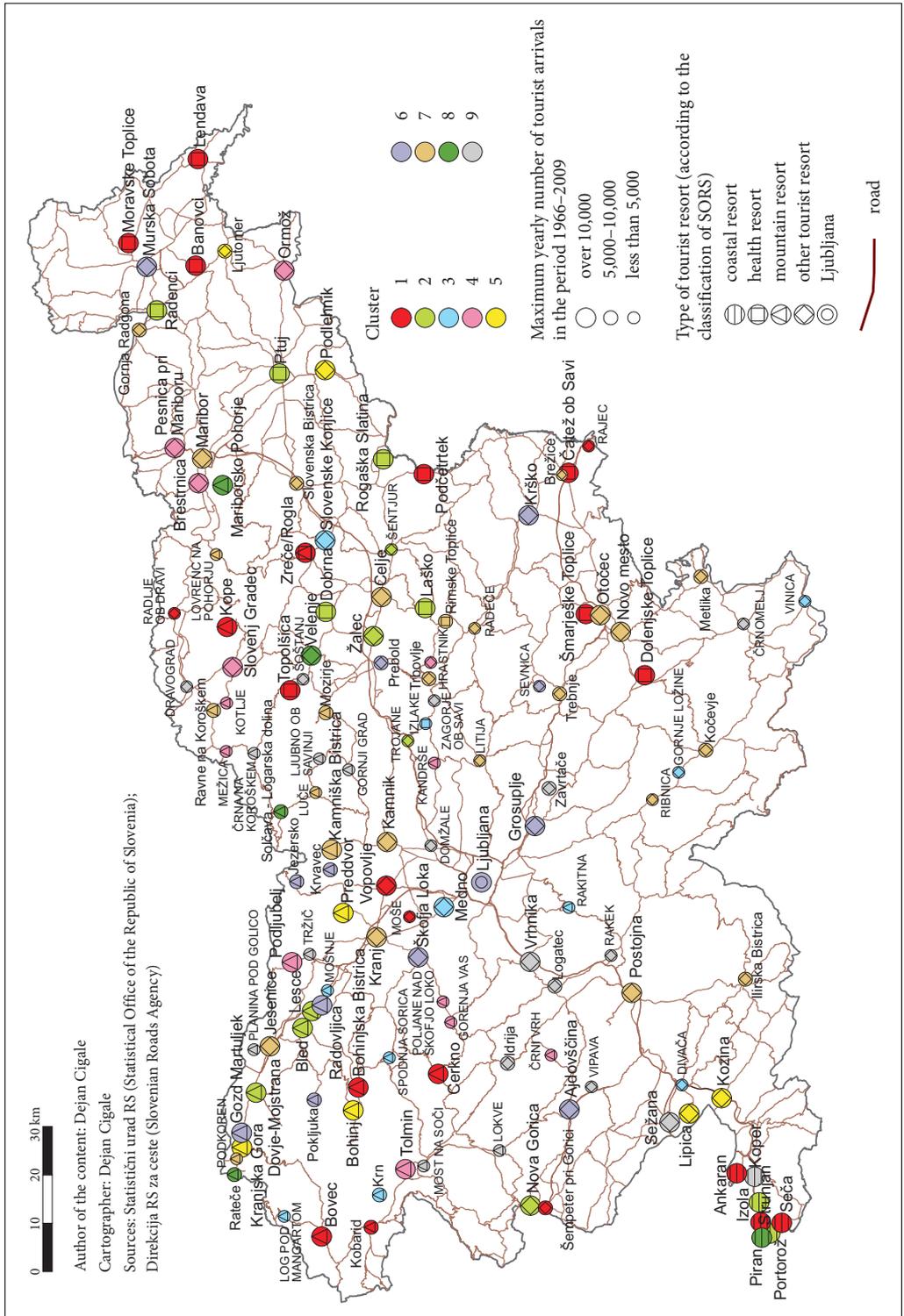
## 4 Conclusions

The analysis of the data on tourist arrivals in »important tourist resorts« offered an insight into development processes and characteristics of tourism development in Slovene destinations. Very diverse development patterns, as having been identified, are also the consequence of the landscape diversity of the Slovene territory and, consequently, heterogeneity of tourism offer and tourist attractions. The analysis pointed out some common factors of influence which could, according to Johnston's (2001) terminology, be labelled as macro-structural conditions. These factors comprise the influence of the state economic policy and especially tourism policy (the growth of tourist numbers in the sixties), the influence of political instability (independence of Slovenia) and a new geopolitical situation in the area of former Yugoslavia, economic problems (e.g. economic recession after 2008), etc.

Other factors are more closely related to the specificities of development in individual places. Nevertheless, there are still many similarities between different destinations in regard to the characteristics of development as well as the influence of different exogenous and endogenous factors. For this reason they show a similar evolution of tourist numbers.

The changes in the number of arrivals through time are thus partly related to the type of destination (similar development patterns in many health or coastal resorts) and consequently to the type of its tourism offer. Less positive trends in mountain resorts are, for example, related to the problems of

Figure 5: Tourist destinations and their cluster membership. ►



winter tourism (scarcity of snow) and to the decrease of tourist numbers in summer because of changed expectations of visitors. However, in many cases similar development patterns can be found in tourist resorts in different natural geographical regions (e.g. in the alpine and coastal region). Natural features are an important part of attraction of an individual destination but what matters is also its ability to adapt to changes in tourism demand.

The most negative trends are characteristic of the clusters 3, 4, 7 and 9. In resorts from clusters 3 and 4 tourist numbers remained very modest throughout the period under study. In the case of clusters 7 and 9 numbers of tourist arrivals were on average much larger. Nonetheless, in the majority of cases tourism was only a marginal economic activity and its contribution to a local economy was not of greater importance. Only in exceptional cases tourism completely declined. Usually, this was the consequence of the problems of the single or the most important tourism entrepreneur in the resort.

Destinations, which to a large extent depended on business tourism and in-transit visitors (they are strongly represented in clusters 5 and 7) were seriously affected by the decline of tourist travel to the neighbouring Croatia and the decrease in contacts (economic, social) with other areas of former Yugoslavia. Such factors could be counted among exogenous factors. It is worth to mention also the role of the national origin of visitors in influencing the changes in numbers of tourist arrivals. After the independence of Slovenia the decline in tourist numbers was greatest in the resorts (e.g. from clusters 2 and 6) which to a large extent depended on foreign tourists who perceived Slovenia as a potentially dangerous destination. Also the influence of the economic crisis after 2008 has been often more apparent in those resorts in which foreign tourists prevail.

Analysis showed very heterogeneous development patterns of individual destinations. Only in regard to a smaller part of them a pattern similar to the one from TALC model could be discerned. Nevertheless, it should be taken into account that for many destinations the period under study represents only a part of a life cycle of much longer duration. It should also be mentioned that Butler's model considers especially endogenous factors. As it is evident from the data analysed, in many periods the influence of exogenous factors was much more noticeable and had a long-term effect. Besides, it should be born in mind that the model describes a hypothetical development path which would set in in the absence of planning (Butler 2004).

In spite of the fact that several clusters showed declining tourist numbers, there is hardly a single destination where reasons for the decline could be ascribed to factors discussed by Butler, which were related to an exceeded carrying capacity. Among the destinations that show a decline in tourist arrivals the ones with very low tourist numbers prevail. These destinations were only superficially changed by tourism development and tourism was never a dominant economic activity. In such cases we could not really talk about tourist resorts. Because of that, it could be expected that processes observable in larger tourist resorts appeared here only to a limited extent. In fact, it is questionable whether they could be discussed within the framework of the development of tourist resorts, although they are classified as such by the Statistical Office. Lesser importance of those factors of tourism development which could be related to exceeded carrying capacity, is also a consequence of the fact that tourist resorts in Slovenia in regard to their size cannot be compared to the major European destinations.

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