

## Comparative Analysis of Regional Tourism Policy in Slovakia and Austria

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### Abstract

The objective of this paper is to present results of the secondary and field research which has been conducted in Slovakia and Austria in 2005/2006 with the objective to compare particular aspects of regional tourism policy in Slovakia and Austria. The results demonstrate the fact, that objectives, instruments and organizations as subsystem of regional tourism policy are influenced by existing stage of tourism development in Slovakia and Austria. Austrian respondents are more satisfied with regional tourism policy than Slovaks. Based on the analysis and comparison of basic aspects of regional tourism policy in Slovakia and Austria we have proposed the methodology of creation and implementation of regional tourism policy in Slovakia. We formulate set of recommendations which can be divided into 3 main fields - objectives, instruments and main stakeholders.

**Key words:** tourism, regional tourism policy, Slovakia, Austria.

### 1 Introduction

The transition process of socio – economic development in Slovakia after 1989 has been connected with necessary qualitative and structural changes. This process has caused the decline of industries with low added value and has contributed to the growth of more perspective industries including tourism. Tourism is considered to be one of the strategic issues of regional development. Position of regions is strengthened also due to membership of Slovakia in EU. It is generally recognised, that effective regional policy is precondition for regional cohesion by means of development of perspective economic activities including tourism. The effective regional tourism policy as integral part of regional policy and is the base for achievement of synergy effects from tourism development on regional development. The paper deals with the problem of absence of systematic regional tourism policy in Slovakia and based on the field research conducted on sample of 1 526 respondents – stakeholders in tourism development in Slovakia and Austria provides the main results of the analysis of objectives, instruments and stakeholders of regional tourism policy in Slovakia and Austria.

## 2 Regional Tourism Policy

As more Slovakian and foreign tourism experts stress [1, p.200], [2, p. 190], [3, p.83], [4, p. 320] the absence of regional tourism policy is the main reason of un-coordinated and un-effective tourism development in the country. They stress the fact, that regional tourism policy is based on targeted and program oriented co-ordination of incentives and supporting instruments aimed on sustainable development of tourism in regional destinations by means of activities and policies of self government regions. The regional tourism policy is important part of the socio-economic policy in many EU countries. The optimal utilization of tourism resources is the basic objective of regional tourism policy. It is the continuing process of discovering and realization of activities aimed on increasing benefits for region and eliminating negative impact of tourism development on region.

Regional tourism policy is based on the set of preconditions. They include attractive tourism potential – supply, integrated marketing and management, correct and honest co-operation between private and public sector, existing organizational structure of tourism from national to regional and local level, regional information system and of course also positive attitude of inhabitants to tourism development. The regional tourism policy is system with interconnected subsystems – subsystem of objectives, instruments and incentives and stakeholders – organizations and entities responsible for creation and implementation of regional tourism policy. With the objective to compare the regional tourism policy in Slovakia and Austria we have conducted secondary and primary research aimed on the comparison of objectives, instruments and stakeholders – entities of regional tourism policy in both countries.

### 2.1 Characteristic of Research Sample

In the primary research we have tested two hypotheses. The first one: *Slovakia has up to now no clear and systematic regional tourism policy in spite of the great tourism potential in 21 officially recognized tourism regions.* The second one: *Austria with a long term tradition in tourism development has highly developed regional tourism policy.* The questionnaire has been the main research method in primary data collection. The sample in Slovakia was 604 respondents (50 % representatives of public and 50 % representatives of private sector and NGOs). The return rate was 19,54 %, 118 responses, 42,4 % of them from public sector and 57,6 % from private and third sector.

The research sample in Austria has been 922 respondents (50 % public and 50 % private and third sector). The return rate was 14,32 % (132 responses), 24,3 % of them from public sector and 75,7 % from private and third sector. The questionnaires were distributed by e-mails based on database created by researcher.

### 2.2 Research Findings

The results of the field research demonstrate the fact, that tourism in Austria is co-ordinated based on the functioning regional tourism policy. The respondents from Austria has expressed their satisfaction with particular aspects of this policy. 30,56 % responses from Slovakia and 37,28 % from Austria stressed the need to support recreational tourism as a objective of regional tourism policy (Graph 1). 27,12 % of Slovakian respondents think, that the main instrument of regional tourism policy should be decrease of taxes and social burdens paid by entrepreneurs, on the other hand 18,72 % respondents from Austria consider credit compensation as main financial instrument of regional tourism policy (Graph 2). Regional

tourism policy needs to have entity, responsible for creation and implementation of this policy. The results of the field research demonstrate the fact, that according to 29,09 % of Slovakian respondents, it is necessary to create National Tourism Board, as specialized governmental organization which would be the main co-ordinator and creator of regional tourism policy in Slovakia. On the other hand 32,04 % of Austrian respondents consider tourist information offices as the main co-ordinator of tourism development on regional level (Graph 3). This situation is influenced by existing stage of tourism development in both countries. The cooperation between private and public sector is important precondition for creation and implementation of regional tourism policy. 65,25 % Slovakian respondents consider level of this co-operation as sufficient or un-sufficient and 71,97 % Austrian responses charge this level as excellent, very good or good. (Graph 4). The objective of our primary research has been also to find out the attitude of respondents to the level of bureaucracy and corruption in obtaining financial support from domestic resources. Based on the results of the field research bureaucracy is considered to be high as 75,42 % Slovaks and 51,52 % Austrian responses on this question were positive (Graph 5). Corruption seems to be great problem in Slovakia, as 19,49 % Slovaks has met with corruption in case that they were trying to get financial support from domestic resources in comparison with only 1,52 % Austrian positive responses on this question (Graph 6).

### 3. Conclusion

Based on the analysis and comparison of basic aspects of regional tourism policy in Slovakia and Austria we have proposed the methodology of creation and implementation of regional tourism policy in Slovakia. We formulate set of recommendations which can be divided into 3 main subsystem of the regional tourism policy system. They are objectives, instruments and stakeholders of this policy. The main objective of policy should be *cohesion of regions based on economic activities connected with tourism, support of socio-economic cohesion and competitiveness of tourism regions on international tourism market by respecting principles of sustainable tourism development*. The main emphasise should be given to support of recreational tourism, secondary to sport or adventure tourism, cultural, spa and wellness tourism and business tourism. This main objective should be elaborated to the set of partial objectives concentrated on marketing, co-operation and communication between private and public sector on all levels (national, regional and local), investment incentives to public tourism infrastructure, increasing number of incoming tourists and improvement of entrepreneurial environment.

Instruments are very important subsystem of regional tourism policy. In case of Slovakia it is important to utilize financial and non – financial instruments. They are mainly starting capital, decreasing of tax and social burdens for entrepreneurs, the access to loans, EU structural funds.

The subsystem tourism stakeholders – entities responsible for creation and implementation of regional tourism policy is the main weakness of regional tourism policy in Slovakia. There is great discrepancy between 21 tourism regions created in Slovakia based on the geographical approach and existing organizational structure of public sector. There is no systematic interconnection between Ministry of Economy, Tourism Unit and regions, the contacts and activities are based on ad hoc basis. The existing Self government regions (8) should be responsible for creation and implementation of regional tourism policy in the region. These self government regions should create the specialized regional tourism organization financed partially from the public sources and partially from its own marketing and entrepreneurial activities. This system is implemented in many EU countries including Austria. Its

implementation in Slovakia depends mainly on the political will to accept legislation aimed on the solution of these problems.

## Acknowledgement

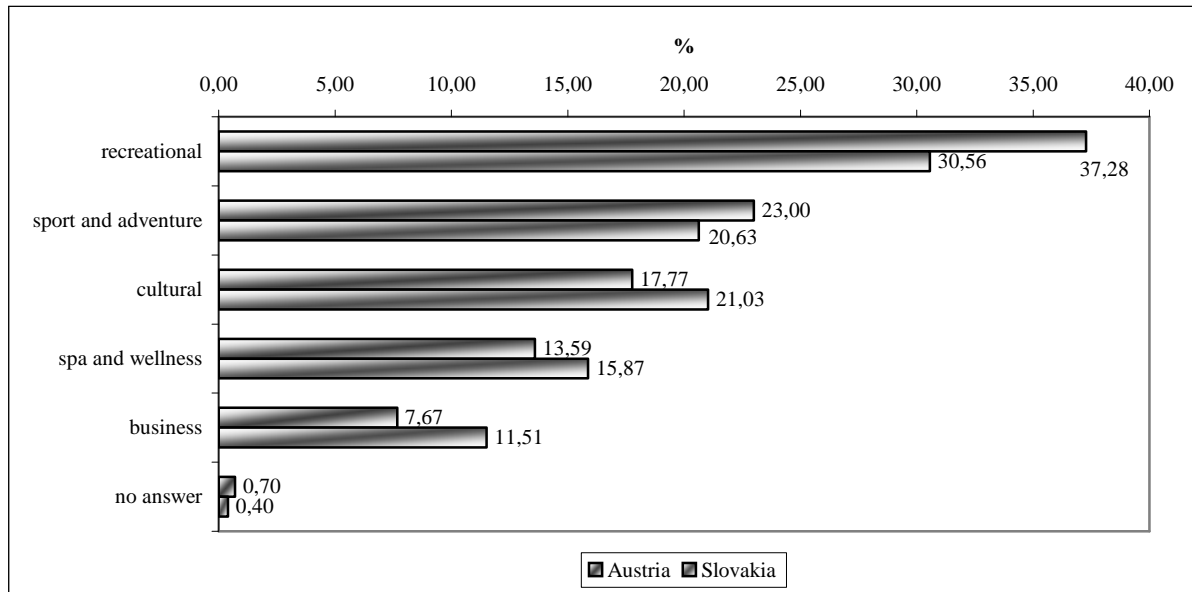
We would like to express our great thanks to all people from Slovakia and Austria, representatives of public, private sector and NGOs, who were so kind and filled in our questionnaire. Without their help we would not be able to conduct this research.

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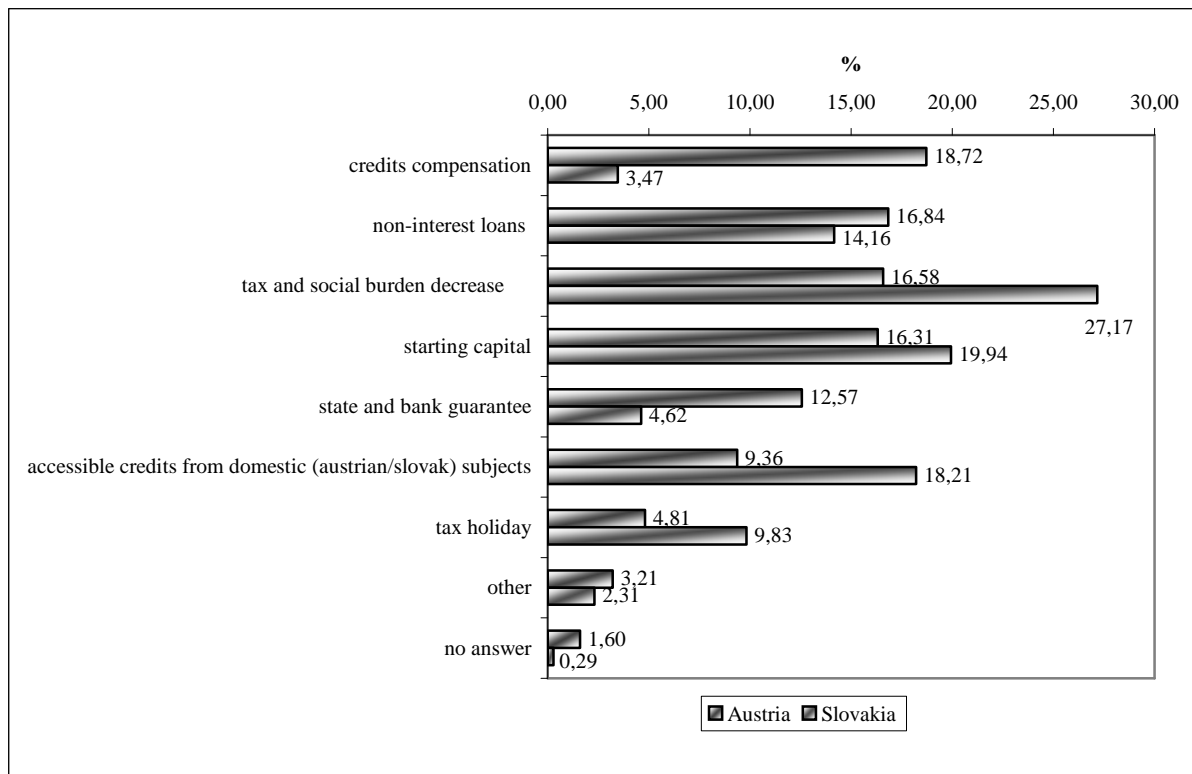
## Annexes: Graphs

Graph 1: Tourism Forms Enabling Cohesion of Regions (%)



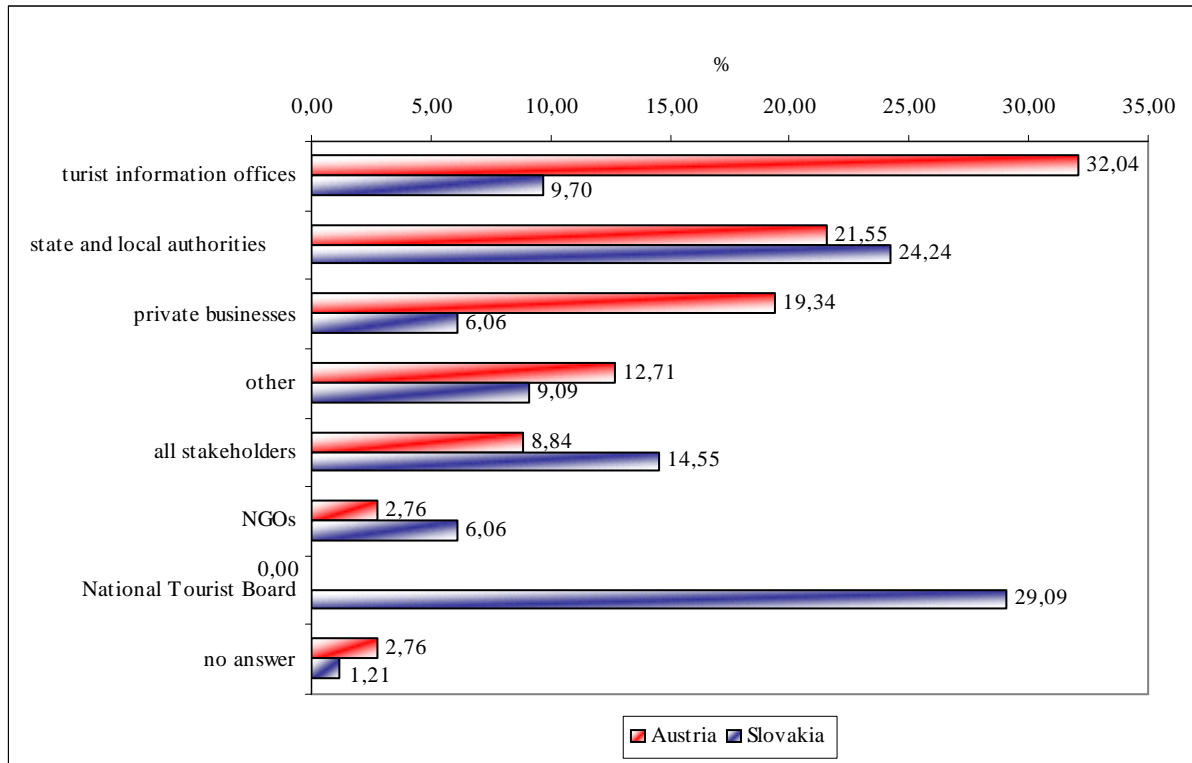
Source: Own research.

Graph 2: National Financial Instruments of Regional Tourism Policy (%)



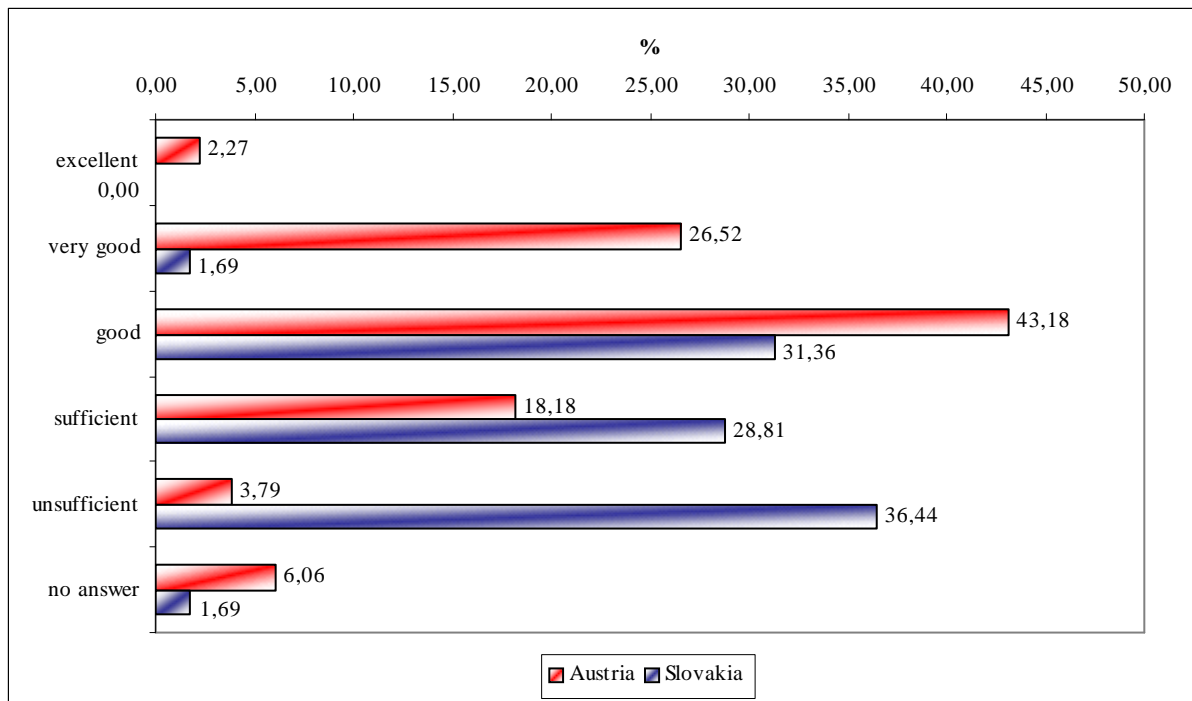
Source: Own research.

Graph 3: Main Co-ordinator of Tourism Development in Regions (%)



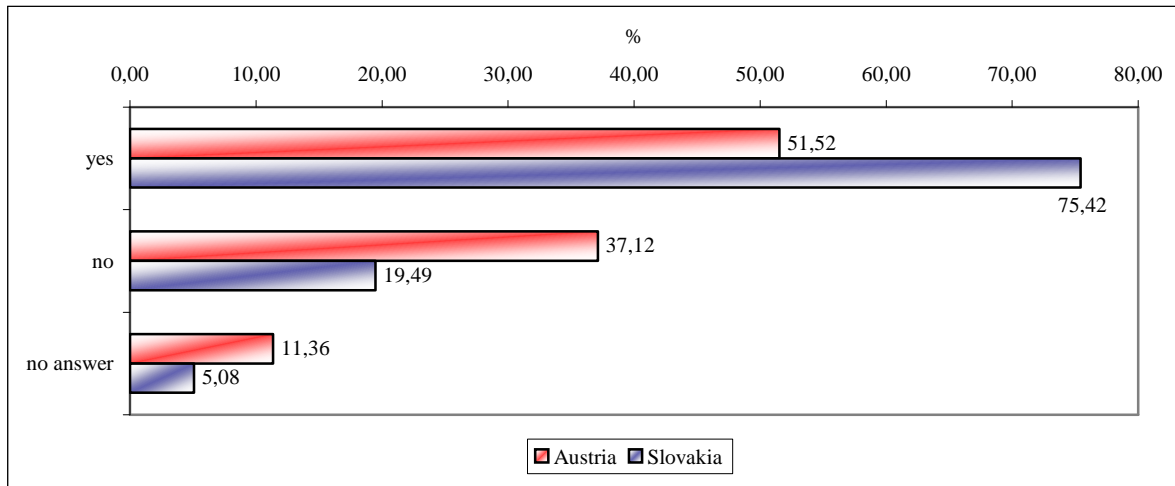
Source: Own research.

Graph 4: Level of Cooperation of Public and Private Sector in Tourism Development in Regions (%)



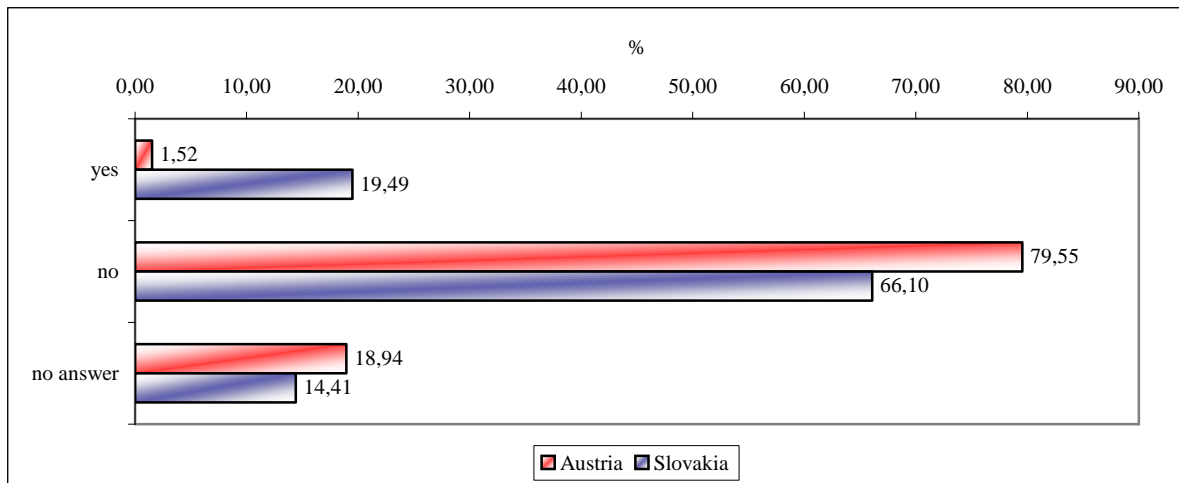
Source: Own research.

Graph 5: Bureaucracy in Obtaining Financial Resources for Tourism Development in Regions (%)



Source: Own research.

Graph 6: Corruption in Obtaining Financial Resources for Tourism Development in Regions (%)



Source: Own research.