

REGIONAL IDENTITY IN THE CONTEXT OF MEASURING THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC ATTRIBUTES OF TOURIST DESTINATIONS IN SLOVAKIA

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of the study is to identify generally measurable socioeconomic and demographic indicators of tourist destinations in Slovakia, divided according to the level of existential conditions, standard of living, relational needs, and awareness of the population, and, through their measurement, to evaluate the level of the Regional Identity Index in the studied territories. In the processing of the selected issue, quantitative research is applied, according to the authors Rosičová et al. (2016), in the form of calculating the Regional Identity Index (IRI). It determines the level of IRI of selected regions, according to which the level of competitiveness of tourist destinations can also be determined. Twenty-four selected factors are examined, divided into four groups: existential conditions, standard of living, relational needs, and awareness of the region's inhabitants. The study sets two research questions, dealing with the examination of the level of regional identity of individual tourist destinations, and the overall average regional identity of the regions in the years studied. The results of the study show that the highest level of IRI is achieved by the Bratislava region tourist destination (a value of 57.15 in 2024) and the lowest value in the monitored period is the Košice region (a value of 23.70 in 2023, and 25.42 in 2024).

KEY WORDS: *regional identity, regional identity index, tourist destinations, socio-economic attributes, demographic attributes.*

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Introduction

Regional identity has recently become a highly significant category in academic research and political discourse worldwide. In the context of the EU, regional identity is often viewed as a tool for managing globalisation, according to Kathleen and Adams (2025). The reason for selecting and conducting this study is the fact that in the Slovak academic and scientific community, as well as in practice, there is a lack of monographs and comprehensive scientific studies addressing the issue of measuring soft or hard factors of regional identity in areas such as tourist destinations. In addressing the issue of analysing the regional identity of selected tourist destinations in the Slovak Republic, quantitative research is applied in the form of calculating the Regional Identity Index (IRI). This index determines the level of IRI for selected regions, which can also be used to determine the level of competitiveness of tourist destinations. Twenty-four factors will be examined, divided into four groups: living conditions, standard of living, relational needs, and the awareness of the region's inhabitants.

The main objective of the study is to identify generally measurable socioeconomic and demographic indicators of tourist destinations in Slovakia, divided according to the level of existential conditions, standard of living, relational needs and awareness of the population, and, through their measurement, to evaluate the level of the Regional Identity Index in the studied territories. The study was based on relevant indicators and procedures applied in the Košice Self-Governing Region in 2016, carried out by the authors Rosičová et al. (2016). The IRI calculation will also be based on the established indicators, according to Murgaš (2009), where individual indicators are treated with established weights.

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In the IRI calculation of the territories we studied, individual socioeconomic and environmental indicators are selected. They are presented in the Economic and Social Development Programme (PHSR) of each region. These are indicators that appear in all mentioned documents, and correspond to the impact on the regional identity of the eight researched regions as tourist destinations. The reason is the fact that the regions adopt PHSR for different periods and with different strategic and specific objectives. Therefore, it is not possible to define universal indicators resulting from only one strategic document.

We will monitor and subsequently compare the indicators for the years 2023 and 2024 in eight regions: Bratislava, Trnava, Nitra, Trenčín, Žilina, Banská Bystrica, Košice and Prešov. The IRI, as an indicator of the PHSR's impact, maps the level of regional identity over a specific period, and can thus serve as a useful indicator for the further development of a strategic document for a tourist destination.

1. Theoretical background

1.1. Regional identity and the competitiveness of tourist destinations

The rhetoric of regional competitiveness and global economic integration has reshaped cities and regions into key intermediaries between the state and the market. This has created a new mosaic of economic outcomes, and transformed the role of the state in strategic planning (Duda, 2024). The driving forces of regional competitiveness are thus reflected in a generative, innovative and dynamic workforce, in organised social capital and in a promotional space created to convey the vibrancy of regions (Pop-Racasan, Egresi, 2019). The ideology of territorial development based on competition is designed to leverage presumed regional economic programmes without always questioning the assumptions that actually underpin regional policy or roadmaps (Tirado-Ballesteros, Hernández-Hernández, 2016). Stoffelen and Vanneste (2018) show that in regions where actors are tempted to speak of competitiveness, identity becomes a brand or a 'market-oriented element.'

We can speak of the need for a concept of regional identity in which the strategic capabilities of regional actors serve as the starting point for mobilising competitive ambitions. Regions are not merely rhetorical vehicles through which political status or economic competitiveness is conveyed; they also possess the symbolic power of discourse, and can serve as an expressive spatial category (Terlouw 2012; Bose et al., 2021). Roca, Oliveira and De Nazaré Roca (2016) argue that there is a dual, constitutive and conditioned understanding of region-related identities. They formulate regional identity as an expression of energy, provided that the natural conditions, culture and demographic structure of the region's inhabitants are distinguished to delineate selective territorial differences (Banini, 2017). He thus crystallised regional identity itself as part of a reflective and symbolic meaning. Such discourses of identity are the subject of active regional policy by local elites, the media and regional organisations (Paasi, 2013). Regional specificities and markers are thus implemented and utilised in everyday life as a means of understanding space and structure, as components of spatial vocabularies, and as a medium of belonging (Ou, Bevilacqua, 2017).

Regions, as tourist destinations, are considered spatial units within geographical entities with administrative boundaries, such as a resort, city, country, micro-region, border area, and the like (Fialová et al., 2021). In the context of a region, it represents an economic spatial unit based on local residents, who play a key role in the tourism value chain and are an attribute of the tourist destination as a whole (Costa-Lima, 2018; Melušová, Halmo, 2025). We may also encounter a definition of a tourist destination as a geographic region that its visitors perceive as a unique entity with a political and legislative framework for tourism marketing and planning (Birkner, Máhr, Rodek Berkes, 2018). A tourist destination as a geographical unit is presented in the form of relationships as a whole that have spatial, economic, social, cultural, political, legal, environmental, internal and external dimensions. The existence of such a relationship makes a tourist destination a 'complex adaptive system' (Butowski, 2019).

In the context of the Slovak Republic, regions/tourist destinations are defined as geographically delimited areas within which there is a structure of regional representatives responsible for regional development, the promotion of tourism, and the provision of public services to the public. This definition is based on Act

No 416/2001 Coll. on the Transfer of Certain Powers from State Administration Bodies to Municipalities and Higher Territorial Units, pursuant to which approximately 400 powers were transferred in five stages from state administration bodies to local government bodies. The aforementioned Act (2001) grants self-governing regions, under Section 4, authority in the area of creating conditions for the creation, presentation and development of cultural values and cultural activities, as well as establishing conditions for the development of tourism and coordinating it. Act No 538/2008 Coll. on regional development grants self-governing regions authority related to marketing in the areas of tourism development and the development of informatisation and digitisation in the region, while preserving the identity and cultural development of the regions and their settlements, and caring for their cultural heritage, as well as the development of physical culture, sports and tourism.

The regional level has become more important in shaping the living conditions of its population and the business environment (Ilovan, Dulama, 2016). Regions/tourist destinations must thus compete with one another for resources. One way to legitimise their claims to resources is by communicating a specific regional identity (Folgado-Fernández, Nunes, Seco-González, 2019). Territories compete with one another for attention and financial resources from the central level of governance. New forms of regional and urban cooperation tend to be more network-based than territory-based, and often connect regions across different areas. They focus more on specific tasks than on coordinating all activities in a given territory. In contrast, in natural regions, forms of interregional cooperation partially overlap and change over time, yet competition among regions becomes even more intense (Djankov, Krastev, Yancheva, 2018; Alaoui, Abba, 2019).

The regional identity can be viewed, evaluated and measured from various perspectives: historical, economic, cultural, environmental, quality of life, civic participation and regional awareness of the population. From an economic perspective, regional identity can be assessed thanks to indicators such as gross domestic product (GDP), human development index, economic freedom index, and competitiveness index (Bucher, 2012). According to the authors Ilovan et al. (2016), from the perspective of their identity, regions can be evaluated based on categories such as economic policy, agriculture and rural development in the region, education, environment, climate change, social security, financial sector, infrastructure, the private and public sector, poverty, science and technology, regional and local development, and so on.

1.2. Approaches and methods for measuring regional identity

Just as with the theoretical definition of the concept of regional identity, where there are numerous differing definitions from various authors, the approaches and methods for measuring it also vary. From a theoretical perspective, regional identity was defined by the Slovak authors Bucher and Nováková (2015), in a paper in which they describe the spatial orientation of a region, the development of regional awareness and identity, the institutional development of a region, and the stability of a region. The research by Bucher and Ištaková (2015) contributed to the discussion on the concept of sociocultural identity in geographical science. Its main goal is to present the concept of local and regional identity as a significant source of sustainable national wealth, and as an effective tool for regional development in Slovakia.

On the other hand, the authors Ira, Michálek and Podolák (2005) dealt with the measurement of regional identity by measuring the quality of life in districts of Slovakia. They categorised the indicators into six dimensions, which we will also use as a basis for calculating regional identity. These are the education and information dimension, the demographic dimension, the dimension of material comfort and social security, the security dimension, the dimension of housing amenities, and the environmental dimension.

Nikischer (2012) based his studies on the measurement of regional identity in the Liptov region on theoretical discourses from Paasi. He tried to reflect the importance of the regional identity of the population in the development of a given territory, and perceived the regional awareness of the community as an expression of the relationship with a certain region. He believed that it was important to know its causes, consequences and connections with the formation of the regional identity.

In the foreign literature, we map various studies presenting qualitative research on the measurement of regional identity. They rely mainly on the relationship of respondents to the observed period. The authors

Knaps and Herrmann (2018) developed and applied a method to investigate regional identity in two rural areas in northern Germany. They conducted 55 semi-structured interviews, and determined cultural markers using a new procedure with different phases of analysis (identification, collectivity, historical depth, relationships). The author Piechaczek-Ogierman (2019) identified determinants of local identity in an urban environment by describing the cultural identity profiles of the students and attempting to interpret their identity choices in the context of existing socio-cultural systems in the local urban environment.

Quantitative research on regional identity was conducted by Petříková and Jaššo (2019). Their article on the survey of the regional identity in the River Morava basin in both the Slovak and Czech parts included the results of the perception of various elements of regional identity: the depiction of the landscape and the river, relations to residential areas, values and image, river identity and identification with the territory, recent social developments, and future perspectives.

As noted, this is one of the few studies and surveys on regional identity conducted in Slovakia. However, all of the aforementioned studies were conducted via questionnaires or interviews. Quantitative analysis of regional identity, whether of territories, cultural regions or administrative (self-governing regions), is significantly lacking in the Slovak scientific and academic sphere.

The procedure for processing and calculating the IRI of tourist destinations was chosen for the presented study according to the authors Rosičová et al. (2016), who calculated it for the Košice Self-Governing Region for 2016. They were based on the established strategic objectives of the PHSR for the current period of the studied tourist destination. The purpose of the material is to establish a framework methodology for compiling and assessing the impacts of the implementation of the PHSR for the years 2016 to 2022, through a composite indicator, IRI. The authors claim that ‘The key impact pursued by the PHSR of the Košice Region is an increase in regional identity among the inhabitants of the territory, which should serve as one of the key motivational prerequisites for their higher activation, engagement and participation in endogenous development processes in the region (social cohesion, public service), including awareness of co-responsibility for the quality of social processes.’

The authors (2016) relied on the procedure of Murgaš (2009, p. 126), who claims in his contribution that ‘Regional identity cannot be assessed directly, but through quality of life indicators. An indicator represents data or a value of various nature that expresses the immediate state or level of change of the monitored phenomenon.’ The author uses 21 indicators, divided into three domains: the prosperity domain (average wage, produced added value in industrial plants, etc), the deprivation domain (deaths, socially dangerous acts, unemployment), and the human capital domain (educated residents, households with technological equipment, life expectancy, ageing index, population growth through migration). The author (2009) further presents the entire procedure for calculating the quality of life index and determining its indicators, as shown in Figure 1.

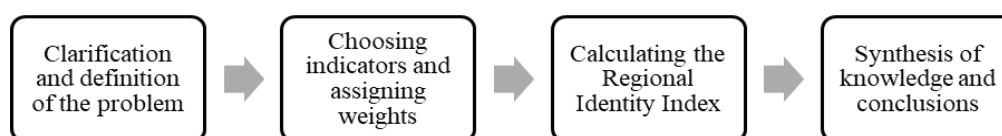


Figure 1. Steps in measuring regional identity

Source: Compiled by the author, based on Murgaš (2009, 122).

The result of the steps in calculating the aggregate Quality of Life Index, according to Murgaš (2009), are the indicators of the studied districts, very low level (27.10–37.09), low level (37.10–47.09), medium level (47.10–57.00), high level (57.10–67.09), and very high level (67.10–77.00). Figure 2 shows a map of the districts of Slovakia classified according to the calculated Quality of Life Index.

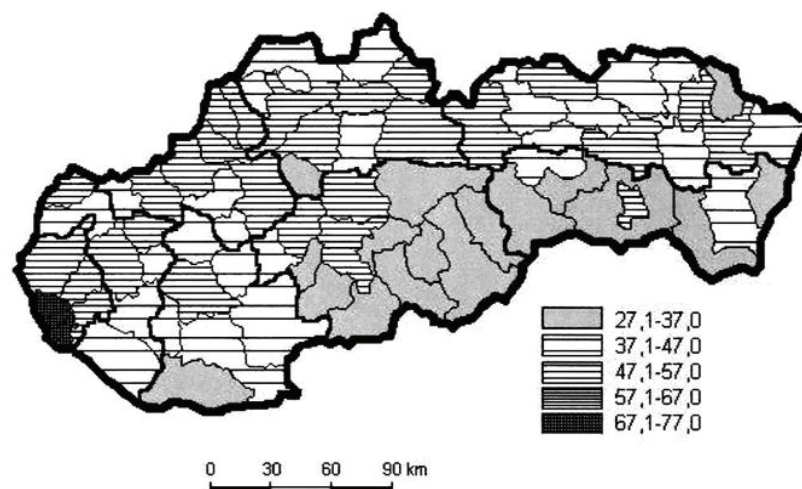


Figure 2. Measuring the regional identity according to the Quality of Life Index

Source: Murgaš, 2009, 132.

Taking into account the mentioned facts, we have proceeded to formulate the following definition of regional identity for our needs. We understand regional identity in the above sense as a permanently evolving social process, focused on the application of values in social life. From the above, we can conclude that the need for quantitative research on regional identity, not only in the conditions of the Slovak Republic, is absent, and the calculation of the tourist destination index can positively benefit the overall picture of regions and their further direction in the area of development or building competitiveness and quality of life. The following section presents the main goal, research questions and research methodology.

2. Research methodology

The main objective of the study is to identify generally measurable socioeconomic and demographic indicators of tourist destinations in Slovakia, divided according to the level of existential conditions, standard of living, relational needs and awareness of the population, and, through their measurement, to evaluate the level of the Regional Identity Index in the studied territories. The object of study is regions in the Slovak Republic as tourist destinations. We selected these areas for our research on regional identity for the following reasons: the issue of calculating a regional identity index in the field of tourism has received minimal attention in academic circles. We believe that the existence of regional disparities, in the context of regional identity measurement results, can positively influence the future direction of tourist destinations, in terms of building competitiveness, the economy, social security, natural conditions and the environment. To achieve the main objective, two research questions were formulated:

RQ 1: What level of regional identity do the examined tourist destinations in Slovakia achieve during the period under review? As part of the first research question, we will measure the IRI of tourist destinations based on pre-selected and formulated indicators. Drawing on the theoretical definition, we will establish indicators that can be used to measure the regional identity index of tourist destinations. Through the mathematical calculation of the IRI, we will determine the level of regional identity of individual regions for the period under review.

RQ 2: What is the average level of regional identity of tourist destinations in Slovakia during the period under review? Based on the calculations of the regional identity index of tourist destinations, we will monitor and evaluate their average level in 2023 and 2024.

When determining the indicators and calculating the IRI, the study chose a procedure according to the authors Rosičová et al. (2016), who calculated the regional identity index for the Košice Self-Governing Region for 2016. We base our work on the established indicators, defined within the economic, social and

environmental areas, strategic objectives, and the Programme for the Economic and Social Development of the Territory. Because there is no generally uniform procedure for a strategic document in terms of content, and each region develops the document independently, in our case, 24 indicators of regional identity were identified, which appeared in all analysed documents.

For the numerical expression of the measurement units of the indicators, public statistical data from the PHSR of the surveyed territories, the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, the Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, and Eurostat, are used. Units of measurement were assigned to the determined indicators, which will be used to calculate the IRI. The weights and units of measurement, calculated by the min values (min x_i) and max values (max x_i), are numerically processed for individual regions in Table 1, divided into four groups: existential conditions, standard of living, relationship problems, and awareness of the population. Given the fact that individual units of measurement of indicators achieve different values, we proceeded to standardise and weight them.

Table 1. A list of regional identity indicators by group

Indicators – I_1 (weight): living conditions	Unit of measurement	Source
Unemployment rate in the region (6.2)	%	SO SR
Employment rate in the region (6.8)	%	
Population at risk of poverty and social exclusion (6.2)	%	
Life expectancy at birth for men (7.7)	Years	
Life expectancy at birth for women (7.7)	Years	
Population growth – migration (1.8)	Residents/10 tis. residents	
Slovak nationality in the region (3.2)	Population	
Infant mortality in the region (4.6)	‰	
Indicators – I_2 (weight): standard of living	Unit of measurement	Source
Road network density in the region (2.9)	km/km ²	SSC
Average monthly wage of the region's population (4.9)	EUR	SO SR
Regional gross value added (5.4)	mil. EUR	
Capacity of social service facilities (3.2)	Capacity	
Carbon monoxide levels (6.7)	t/km ²	
Volume of particulate matter (7.9)	t/km ²	
Volume of nitrogen oxides (6.4)	t/km ²	
Indicators – I_3 (weight): relationship needs	Unit of measurement	Source
Crimes in the region (4.3)	Actions/10 tis. residents	SO SR
Divorces (3.9)	Divorce/100 tis. residents	
Suicides in the region (3.7)	Deaths/100 tis. residents	
Proportion of rural municipalities in the region – municipalities (2.8)	%	
Indicators – I_4 (weight): public awareness	Unit of measurement	Source
Percentage of municipal waste recycled (3.5)	%	SO SR
Percentage of residents connected to the sewer system (4.8)	%	
Number of overnight stays (3.3)	Number	
Separately collected municipal waste streams (4.8)	Tons	
Percentage of residents supplied by mains water systems (5.1)	%	

Source: Compiled by the author.

The procedure for calculating the IRI was chosen as follows: the selected individual indicators are divided into four groups, designated as I_1 , I_2 , I_3 and I_4 . The first group consists of indicators (I_1) that have the greatest impact on the relationship of individuals to their region. These are indicators dealing with existential issues that, in the event of adverse conditions, can trigger dissatisfaction among the region's citizens and lead to individuals moving away from the area. This area is the most important for the regional identity index. The second group (I_2) of indicators includes measures addressing existential problems, although not to the greatest extent. Their importance thus decreases slightly, but their positive progress can be beneficial for the region's residents. The third group (I_3) includes growth and relational needs; without fulfilling these, residents' behaviour would lead to dissatisfaction. They do not directly influence regional identity, but play an important role in its formation. The indicators in the fourth group (I_4) are nearly identical to those in the third group, but they include an added motivational factor.

We obtain the transformed resulting value of individual indicators by converting the numerical expression of the indicators to a consistent scale $<0.1>$. The conversion is based on two formulas. If the favourable rating of an indicator increases with rising x_i , then the calculation is performed according to the formula (Murgaš, 2009, 128) for transforming numerical values to a consistent scale:

$$Ix_i = (x_i - \min x_i) / (\max x_i - \min x_i)$$

If the positive rating of the indicator increases as the value of x_i decreases, then we perform the calculation using the following formula:

$$Ix_i = (\max x_i - x_i) / (\max x_i - \min x_i)$$

The resulting values of the regional identity indicators are summed up according to the specified groups into which the indicators are classified. Subsequently, coefficients are assigned to the groups (Group 1–4, Group 2–3, Group 3–2, Group 4–1), by which the obtained indicator values are multiplied. The formula (Rosičová et al., 2016, 9) for calculating the Regional Identity Index is as follows:

$$IRI = (4 * \sum I_1) + (3 * \sum I_2) + (2 * \sum I_3) + (1 * \sum I_4)$$

After evaluating and obtaining the resulting indicator values for each group, we will proceed to calculate the regional identity index for individual tourist destinations for the years 2023 and 2024. A five-level scale has been created, where a very low level of regional identity is represented by values ranging from 0 to 13.2. A low level of regional identity is achieved by regions with an index ranging from 13.3 to 26.4. Regions with an index ranging from 26.5 to 39.6 exhibit an average level of regional identity. A high level ranges from 39.7 to 52.8, and a very high level of regional identity is represented by an IRI ranging from 52.9 to 66. We obtained the maximum value of 66 by multiplying the final numerical indicators of the individual groups namely 32, 21, 8 and 5 by their respective coefficients. We then substitute the resulting values for each region across the four groups into the formula and calculate them. The average IRI level will be calculated according to the formula:

$$Average = \frac{\sum x}{n}$$

where: x = the resulting IRI values, n = the number of tourist destinations examined.

To measure the average level of regional identity of tourist destinations, the same five-point scale will be used (very low level, low level, average level, high level, and very high level).

3. Results

As stated in the methodological section, the individual indicators (24) of quality of life in tourist destinations are divided into four groups, designated as l_1 , l_2 , l_3 and l_4 . The first group (l_1) consists of indicators (8) which have the greatest impact on individuals' relationship to their region. These are indicators dealing with existential problems that, in the event of a poor situation, can cause citizen dissatisfaction; for the regional identity index, this area is the most important.

The second group (l_2) of indicators also includes indicators (7) addressing existential problems, though not to the greatest extent. Their importance thus decreases slightly, yet their positive progress can be beneficial for the region's residents. The third group ($l_{3,4}$ indicators) includes growth and relational needs, which do not directly influence regional identity, but play an important role in its creation. The fourth group ($l_{4,5}$ indicators) is nearly identical to the third group, but they include an added motivational factor. In connection with the above, we proceed to an analysis of individual indicators of the regions in the monitored period. The overall level of living conditions, shown in Figure 3, is obtained by adding the weighted values of the first group

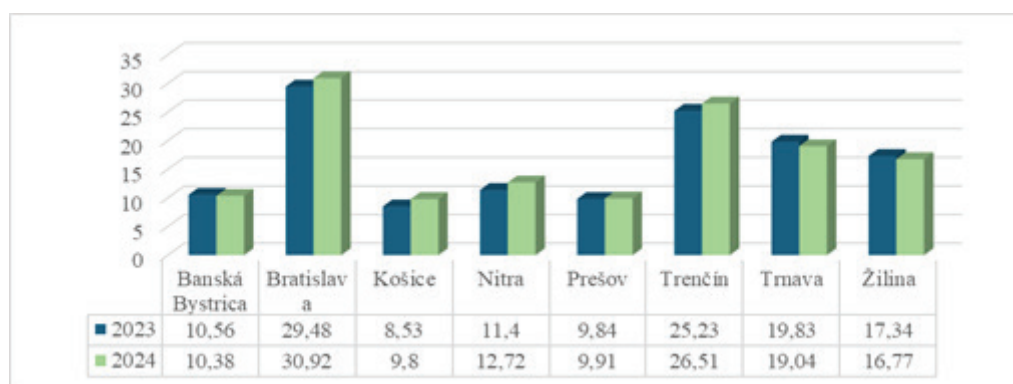


Figure 3. Living standards in tourist destinations in 2023 and 2024

Source: Compiled by the author.

To establish a scale of living conditions in each region, we added the number of indicators (8) in the first group, and multiplied it by the coefficient assigned to the first group (4). The result is 32, which represents the highest possible value for the level of living conditions in each region. In areas where the level ranges from 0 to 6.4, we observe very poor living conditions for the period under review. Poor living conditions are indicated by values ranging from 6.5 to 12.8, average living conditions range from 12.9 to 19.2, good living conditions range from 19.3 to 25.6, and very good living conditions are indicated by values from 25.7 to 32. As we anticipated, the Bratislava Region achieves the highest living standards, primarily due to the level of net wages and the employment rate. Conversely, living standards are lowest in the Košice and Prešov regions. The resulting standard of living in tourist destinations in 2023 and 2024 is shown in Figure 4.

To determine the scale of living standards in each region, the number of indicators in the second group (7) was added and multiplied by the coefficient assigned to the first group (3). The resulting value is 21, representing the highest possible living standard for individual regions. In areas where the standard of living ranges from 0 to 4.2, we observe very poor living conditions. A poor standard of living is indicated by values ranging from 4.3 to 8.4, an average standard of living is represented by numbers ranging from 8.5 to 12.6, a good standard of living ranges from 12.7 to 16.8, and a very good standard of living is indicated by values from 16.9 to 21. In Figure 5, we present the resulting values of relational needs in the region for the years 2023 and 2024.

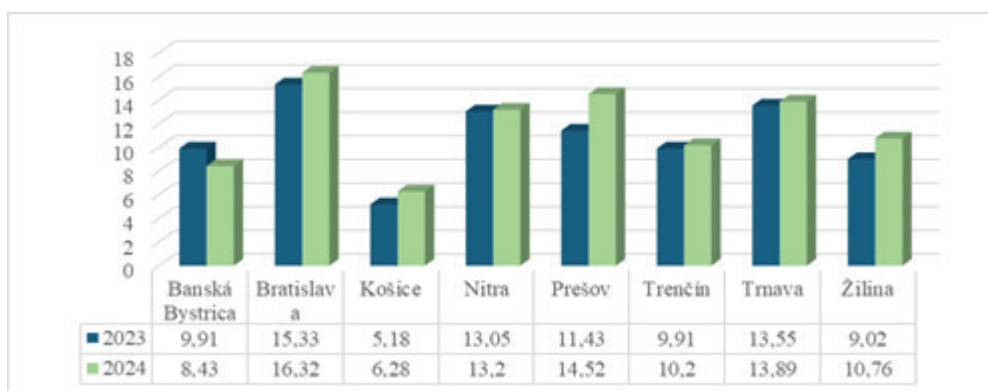


Figure 4. Standard of living in tourist destinations in 2023 and 2024

Source: Compiled by the author.

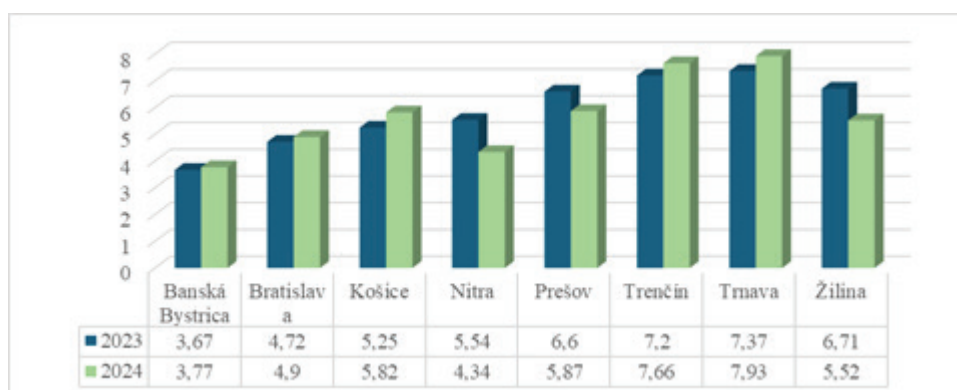


Figure 5. Relationship needs in tourist destinations in 2023 and 2024

Source: Compiled by the author.

To establish a scale of relationship values in the region, the number of indicators in the third group (4) was added and multiplied by the coefficient determined for the first group (2). The result is 8, representing the highest possible standard of living for individual regions. In areas where regional relations range from 0 to 1.6, we observe very poor relational needs. Poor relationships in the region show values ranging from 1.7 to 3.2, average relationships reach values from 3.2 to 4.8, good relational needs of residents range from 4.9 to 6.4, and very good relationships are indicated by values from 6.4 to 8. Figure 6 presents the results for the examined regional relationships, comparing the years 2023 and 2024. To determine the scale for the last group, we added the number of its indicators (5) and multiplied it by the coefficient assigned to the first group (1). Figure 6 shows the resulting level of awareness of residents in tourist destinations in 2023 and 2024.

Through measurement and calculations, the resulting number is 5, as the highest possible value of the fourth group in each region. In areas where the score ranges from 0 to 1, we observe very poor levels of environmental awareness. Poor awareness among residents is indicated by values ranging from 1.1 to 2, average awareness is indicated by numbers ranging from 2.1 to 3, good awareness ranges from 3.1 to 4, and very good awareness ranges from 4.1 to 5. Table 2 shows the examined weighted values of the IRI groups of tourist destinations for the monitored period.

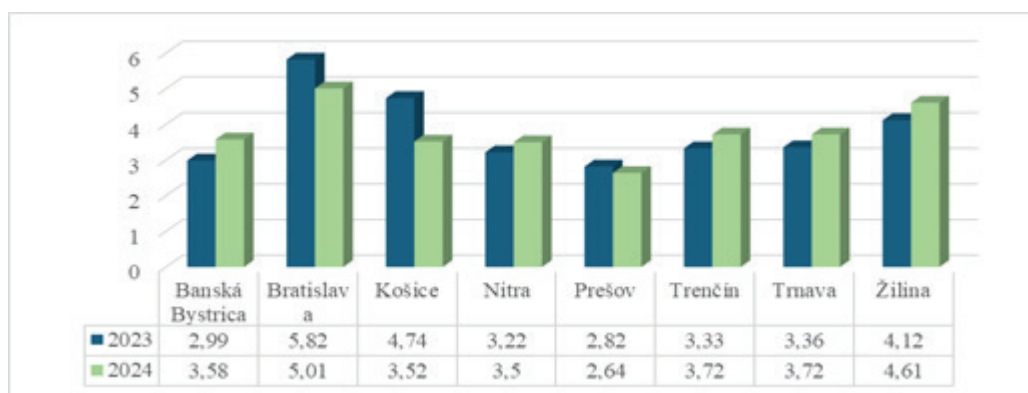


Figure 6. Residents' awareness in tourist destinations in 2023 and 2024

Source: Compiled by the author.

Table 2. IRI group values for tourist destinations, for the period under review

Tourist regions	Weighted values ($I_{xi} \times \text{weight}$)							
	I_1		I_2		I_3		I_4	
	2023	2024	2023	2024	2023	2024	2023	2024
Banská Bystrica	10.56	10.38	9.91	8.43	3.67	3.77	2.99	3.58
Bratislava	29.48	30.92	15.33	16.32	4.72	4.90	5.82	5.01
Košice	8.53	9.80	5.18	6.28	5.25	5.82	4.74	3.52
Nitra	11.40	12.72	13.05	13.20	5.54	4.34	3.22	3.50
Prešov	9.84	9.91	11.43	14.52	6.60	5.87	2.82	2.64
Trenčín	25.23	26.51	9.91	10.20	7.20	7.66	3.33	3.72
Trnava	19.83	19.04	13.55	13.89	7.37	7.93	3.36	3.72
Žilina	17.34	16.77	9.02	10.76	6.71	5.52	4.12	4.61

Source: Compiled by the author.

After evaluating and obtaining the resulting indicator values for each group, we will proceed to calculate the regional identity index for individual tourist destinations for the years 2023 and 2024. A five-level scale has been created, where regions with scores ranging from 0 to 13.2 represent a very low level of regional identity, and areas with an index ranging from 13.3 to 26.4 achieve a low level of regional identity. Regions with an index ranging from 26.5 to 39.6 exhibit an average level of regional identity. A high level ranges from 39.7 to 52.8, and a very high level of regional identity is represented by an IRI ranging from 52.9 to 66. We obtained the maximum value of 66 by multiplying the final numerical indicators of the individual groups namely 32, 21, 8 and 5 by their respective coefficients. The resulting values for individual regions across the four groups were then substituted into the formula and calculated. The calculated IRI values for tourist destinations for the year 2023 are shown in Figure 7.

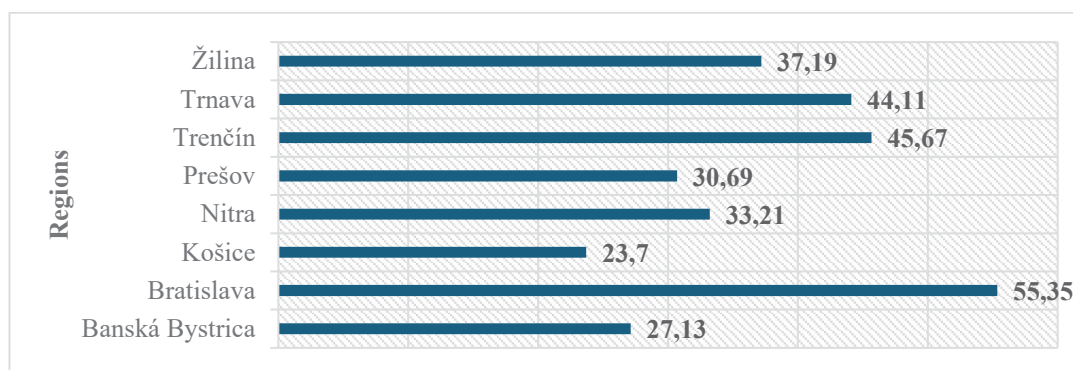


Figure 7. The regional identity index of tourist destinations in Slovakia for 2023

Source: Compiled by the author.

We can conclude that in 2023, the Bratislava region achieved the highest level of regional identity, with a score of 55.35 (a very high level), followed by two regions with a high regional identity, the Trenčín Region and the Trnava Region, with a score of 44.11. Areas with an average level of regional identity are the Žilina Region, with a value of 37.19, the Nitra Region, with 33.21, the Prešov Region, with 30.69, and the Banská Bystrica Region, with 27.13. The Košice Region has the lowest IRI value, of 23.70 (a low level). Figure 8 presents the resulting regional identity index for individual tourist destinations for the year 2024.

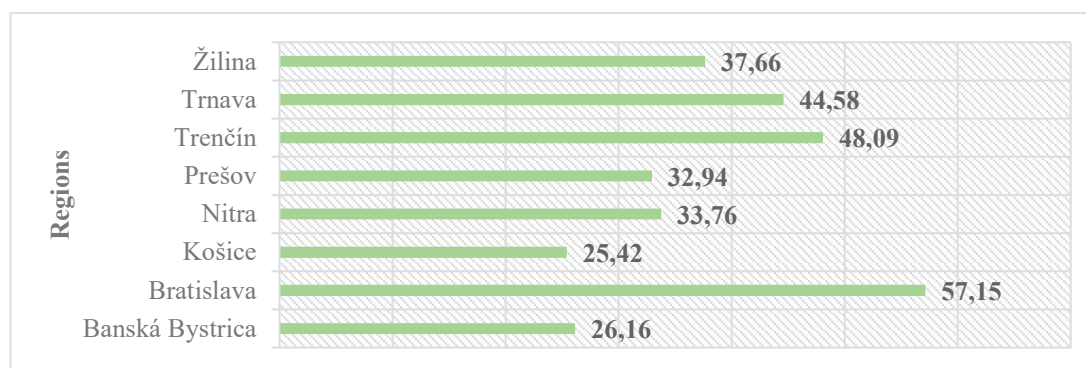


Figure 8. The regional identity index of tourist destinations in Slovakia for 2024

Source: Compiled by the author.

The graphic representation of the regional identity of individual tourist destinations in 2024 shows clearly that the Bratislava Region has a very high level of regional identity (57.15). The Trenčín Region (48.09) and the Trnava Region (44.58) exhibit a high level of regional identity, while the Žilina Region (37.66), the Nitra region (33.76) and the Prešov Region (32.94) represent an average level of regional identity. The Banská Bystrica Region, compared to 2023, has a lower IRI value (26.16), indicating a low level of regional identity. The Košice Region, as in the previous year, shows a low level (25.42).

However, it is encouraging that none of the regions showed a very low level, meaning that none fell below 13.2. Compared to 2023, the Bratislava Region maintained a very high level of regional identity in 2024 (39.7 to 52.8). The Trenčín and Trnava regions also achieved a high level of regional identity (26.5 to 39.6). We observe an average level (13.3 to 26.4) in the Žilina, Prešov and Nitra regions. In the Banská Bystrica and Košice regions, low values of regional identity predominate during the period under review. However, the

IRI values for individual tourist destinations are lower in 2023 than in 2024. The average regional identity of all tourist destinations, after calculating the IRI for individual regions, reaches a value of 37.13 in 2023 and 38.22 in 2024.

4. Discussion

Based on the analysis and results of the study, we conclude that measuring socio-economic factors, regional identity and quality of life is of key importance for the competitiveness of regions as tourist destinations, as the results of the IRI measurements positively influence a destination's attractiveness, and its sustainable and credible standing impacts both visitors and investors. Measuring factors such as residents' net income, employment, education, crime rates, residents' civic-mindedness and the availability of services helps destination management stakeholders determine the actual situation in the region. It is precisely through the IRI assessment that tourism representatives can identify the region's strengths and opportunities, which can be leveraged in marketing strategies, regional development, investment activities, support for tourism jobs, and similar initiatives.

The systematic monitoring and measurement of regional identity in the context of soft and hard factors would undoubtedly contribute positively to building the competitiveness of tourist destinations, increase the awareness of destination management stakeholders regarding the region's economic and social standing, and also track residents' relationship to their surroundings and the evolution of their attitudes towards tourists and tourism. It is advisable here to regularly supplement IRI measurements, for example, with a calculation of the Doxey Irritation Index, which examines residents' views on tourists. Therefore, it is useful to view the overall issue of regional identity in a broader context and from multiple perspectives.

Based on the results of the study, it is possible to observe the limits of the quantitative measurement of regional identity in the identification of factors that strengthen regional identity, and for which it is possible to assume a clear causal connection. Strategic documents are generally designed on the assumption that the implementation of planned activities will strengthen the regional identity. However, it is problematic to measure and determine a clear causal connection between the measures taken and the actual benefits for supporting the regional identity.

In conclusion, we believe that the level of regional identity can be expressed using quantitative and qualitative data processing, such as the degree of unmistakability, similarity, and harmony in the behaviour of residents in a given territory at a certain time. A key part of shaping its form is the initiative of individuals, their attitudes, opinions and values, their migration tendencies, the socio-demographic characteristics of the population, the image of the region, its history, the settlement of the region, its location, the quality of institutions and public infrastructure (educational, technical, social, informational, etc). Furthermore, the conditions for self-realisation, the standard of living, the degree of urbanisation, the level of economic development, job opportunities, regional culture and media, etc, as well as the sum of these diverse categories and factors, can form the core of measuring and assessing the state of IRI.

Conclusion

In line with the established main objective, we proceeded to analyse two research questions based on the subject of our study. For the research itself, the formulation of research questions is crucial, as it builds on and relates to the problem we described and outlined above. As part of our research, we posed the first research question: What level of regional identity do individual tourist destinations in Slovakia achieve during the period under review? As part of the first research question, we also examined the occurrence of indicators of regional identity in the professional literature.

Based on the theoretical definition of regional identity, indicators were determined that can be measured for the regional identity index of the eight regions studied. The level of regional identity for individual regions was subsequently determined through the mathematical calculation of the IRI for 2023 and 2024. The results of the IRI calculation for tourist destinations show that the highest IRI level is achieved by the Bratislava Re-

gion (57.15 in 2024) and the lowest value, during the observed period, is the Košice Region (23.70 in 2023, and 25.42 in 2024). The reasons include the fact that in the Bratislava region, we observe a significantly higher standard of living, higher wages and lower unemployment. Conversely, relational needs in the Bratislava region reached lower values during the observed period compared to the other regions under review.

Following the calculation of regional identity in individual tourist destinations for the years 2023 and 2024, we posed a second research question: What is the average level of regional identity among tourist destinations in Slovakia during the period under review? Based on this research question, it was found that the resulting value of the average regional identity of the regions under study reached 37.13 for 2023 (the average level), and 38.22 for 2024 (also the average level).

In conclusion, it can be stated that in the academic environment, in conditions not only of the Slovak Republic, similar quantitative research dealing with the calculation of the regional identity index is absent. A systematic annual calculation of these indicators could thus serve as a benchmark not only for self-governing regions but also for local government (local authorities and cities) in the preparation of strategic documents in the field of territorial development, adopting local policies or developing a territorial marketing strategy, thereby enhancing competitiveness and regional development at all levels of local government. Research into the soft and hard factors of regional identity is an innovative, and, as yet, insufficiently explored topic in Slovak and Czech academic literature.

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REGIONINĖ TAPATYBĖ, VERTINANT SLOVAKIJOS SOCIALINES IR EKONOMINES TURISTINIŲ VIETŲ CHARAKTERISTIKAS

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Santrauka

Pagrindinis šio tyrimo tikslas – nustatyti bendrai išmatuojamus Slovakijos turistinių vietovių socialinius, ekonominius ir demografinius rodiklius, kurie suskirstyti pagal gyvenimo sąlygas, gyvenimo lygį, socialinius poreikius bei gyventojų informuotumą, ir, remiantis šiais rodikliais, įvertinti tiriamų vietovių Regioninio tapatumo indekso (RTI) (angl. *Regional Identity Index* – IRI) lygį. Nagrinėjant temą taikomas kiekybinis tyrimas – skaičiuojamas Regioninio tapatumo indeksas (toliau – RTI). Tai leidžia nustatyti pasirinktų regionų RTI lygį, į kurį atsižvelgiant gali būti nustatomas turistinių vietovių konkurencingumas. Kaip ir teorinio regioninio tapatumo apibrėžimo atveju, egzistuoja daugybė skirtingų autorių pateikiamų apibrėžimų, skiriasi ir matavimo metodai bei požiūriai. Tyrimas pagrįstas atitinkamais rodikliais ir procedūromis, kurios 2016 m. buvo taikomos Košicės savivaldos regione skaičiuojant RTI, be to, F. Murgaš'o (2009) nustatytais rodikliais bei K. Rosičov'os ir kt. (2016) tyrimu. Rodikliai fiksuoti ir lyginti 2023 m. ir 2024 m. aštuoniuose regionuose: Bratislavos, Trnavos, Nitros, Trenčyno, Žilinos, Banská Bystricos, Košicės ir Prešovo. Iš viso tirti 24 veiksniai, suskirstyti į keturias grupes: gyvenimo sąlygos; gyvenimo lygis; santykiniai poreikiai; regiono gyventojų informuotumas. Rodikliai buvo nustatyti identifikuojant juos visuose tiriamų regionų strateginiuose dokumentuose. Tyrimo keliami du tyrimo klausimai, orientuoti į paskirų turistinių vietovių regioninio tapatumo lygį ir bendrą vidutinį regionų tapatumą tiriamaisiais metais. Tyrimo rezultatai: aukščiausias RTI lygis pasiektas Bratislavos regiono turistinėje vietovėje (labai aukštas RTI lygis tiek 2023 m., tiek 2024 m. – 57,15). Tai lemia gerokai aukštesnis gyvenimo lygis, didesnis darbo užmokestis ir mažesnis nedarbas. Žemiausia vertė stebimu laikotarpiu užfiksuota Košicės regione (žemas RTI lygis: 2023 m. – 23,70, o 2024 m. – 25,42). Vidutinis visų turistinių vietovių regioninis tapatumas, remiantis RTI skaičiavimais, 2023 m. siekė 37,13, 2024 m. – 38,22. Remdamiesi analize ir tyrimo rezultatais darome išvadą, kad socialinių ir ekonominių veiksnių, regioninio tapatumo bei gyvenimo kokybės matavimas yra pagrindinė regionų, kaip turistinių vietovių, konkurencingumo sąlyga. RTI matavimo rezultatai daro teigiamą įtaką vietovės patrauklumui, o jos tvarus bei patikimas statusas tiesiogiai veikia tiek lankytojus, tiek investuotojus.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: *regioninė tapatybė, regioninės tapatybės indeksas, turistinės vietovės, socialiniai ir ekonominiai rodikliai, demografiniai rodikliai.*

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