

Against all odds or not? Sustainable use of resources in a transition economy – a case study of Slovenian tourism sector

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Abstract

The paper analyses use of natural and cultural resources in tourism development in Slovenia as conditioned upon resource rents and institutional framework. The existing literature warns about the misuse of natural resources on which tourism is based, but currently provides little depth as in explaining under which conditions is resource sustainability threatened by speculation and rent-seeking. Slovene tourism, despite being undoubtedly grounded on mountainous Alps for skiing, mineral, hot waters for spa and medicinal tourism and Adriatic coast for beach and summer tourism, is largely free of unsustainable and speculative pattern of resource use. What are the reasons behind this relative success? The main argument of the paper is that low resource rents, in interaction with autonomous public administration in spatial planning and environment protection, engaged civil society, expert groups and citizenry deliver a sustainable use of resource equilibrium. The paper is based on the political economy of tourism development, transition and rent-seeking literature. Theory-wise the paper relies on a hybrid between political economy of resources and neo-institutional framework. Methodologically, the paper is a case study analysis based on data collected through a series of semi-structured interviews with civil servants from the Slovenian tourism, investment promotion and spatial planning agencies, experts dealing with tourism and the political economy of transition in Slovenia and the region, professionals from the industry, activists from the civil society and representatives of the media. Interviews were informed by data collection through governmental reports on spatial planning, environment and cultural heritage protection and existing academic literature.

Key words: political economy of tourism, resource use, rents, political institutions

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