

CREATING THE UNIQUE DESTINATION PROPOSITION (THE CASE OF POLAND)

Ph.D. Maria Johann,
Warsaw School of Economics
ru

Abstract. The focus on competitiveness is significant at the macro-economic scale as well as the regional, urban and local scales. Nowadays, the interest has grown in the performance of individual regions and cities. The emphasis has been put on the identification of the key determinants of regional and urban competitiveness and the regional policies promoting those determinants. Development of tourism has become an important opportunity to increase the competitiveness of regions. Attracting tourists to a specific destination brings remarkable results and enables local businesses, societies and authorities to create more wealth and prosperity. However, the process of developing a destination brand is complicated and requires a carefully designed strategy as well as suitable operational plans. Additionally, promoting a country brand appears crucial for strategies aimed at creating and increasing regional brand awareness. Thus, all activities leading to the development of a unique value proposition for a specific region need to be synchronized with the national marketing activities directed at creating a country brand.

Keywords: destination marketing, destination marketing organization, destination brand, country brand

The Competitiveness of Tourism Destinations

Tourism has emerged as one of the fastest growing industries worldwide influencing the development of other industries, such as: construction, agriculture, transport and others. Tourism's share of global economic output accounts for 11% and 9% of worldwide employment¹. The increasing importance of tourism and its impact on the social and economic development of regions triggered interest in improving the competitiveness of tourism destinations. Tourism competitiveness might be defined as "the

1 United Nations World Tourism Organization, www.world-tourism.org

ability of a destination to create, integrate and deliver tourism experiences, including value-added goods and services considered to be important by tourists” (Wei-Chiang Hong, 2008, p. 9). A large number of variables might be used to assess the destination competitiveness. These include objectively measured variables, such as: number of visitors, market share, tourist expenditure, employment, value added by the tourism industry, and subjectively measured variables like richness of culture and heritage and quality of the tourism experience (Dwyer, Kim, 2003).

Thus, tourist destinations such as countries, regions, and cities make efforts and use funds to improve their tourist image and attractiveness. Regions which are attractive as tourist destinations benefit from increasing number of tourists, build their competitive advantage over other regions, and contribute to the economic performance of the region. Region attractiveness refers to attributes which tourists consider as important. Attributes for tourism destinations include natural resources (e.g. climate, landscape), cultural/heritage resources (e.g. history, music, paintings), functional/physical resources (e.g. accommodations, food, transportation) and others (Dwyer, Kim, 2003). Since regions vary in terms of their natural, cultural, historical and functional resources, some of them appear as more attractive than others. However, appropriate tourism management and activities performed by the local authorities and involvement of local businesses and societies can enhance the attractiveness of regions. Additionally, the activities leading to the development of a unique value proposition for a specific region need to be synchronized with the national marketing activities aimed at creating a country brand.

Building and maintaining a strong country brand brings positive effects to all sectors of the economy and is crucial for the enhancement of a country’s position in the global marketplace. Considering the global character of competition, an attractive country brand should be able to attract foreign investments, businesses and skillful workforce as well as support exporters and promote public diplomacy. It must also promote the goals of the tourism industry and strengthen national identity and increase self-respect (Moilanen, Rainisto, 2009). Since nations compete with each other striving to devise sources of competitive advantage (Porter, 1989), managing and controlling national brand has become crucial for the country’s overall success. Country

brand management consists of a variety of tasks including: managing the image, attracting tourists, attracting factories and companies, and seeking new market opportunities. Assessing a brand's image is the first step to designing a country's marketing strategy. Then, it is necessary to position the place's benefits to support an existing image or create new positive associations. The desired image should be communicated to the target audiences. Since tourists have numerous destination choices, a country should be very specific about the benefits it offers and the tourism market should be carefully segmented in order to attract the right consumers. Creating favorable conditions for new factories and business investments requires an understanding of how companies make their site selection choices, and providing accurate and reliable information on specified topics (Morgan et al, 2004). Thus, all activities aimed at building a country brand as well as other branding decisions concerning the regions, cities, and tourist resorts should be integrated and coordinated so that they can increase the destination competitiveness.

The Role of Destination Marketing and Destination Marketing Organizations

Building a place brand is a long-term investment which might bring many positive results, such as the attraction of businesses, investments, skillful workforce, inhabitants and visitors to the target area. However, branding strategy focused on destination development differs from a strategy designed for a single company's products. Since countries, cities and tourist resorts are multidimensional entities, much more complicated and complex than products, the process of developing and sustaining a place brand requires specific marketing solutions. The marketing activities aimed at the place development are referred to as destination marketing, which is defined as "a proactive, strategic, visitor-centered approach to the economic and cultural development of a location, which balances and integrates the interests of visitors, service providers, and the community"¹. Destination marketing facilitates the achievement of tourism policy which should be coordinated with the regional policy. Typical destination marketing activities involve marketing tools and techniques aimed at the destination development and promotion.

¹ Definition suggested by K. Albrecht, endorsed by the Destination Marketing Association International.

Destination development as well as creating and increasing brand awareness involves many promotional activities. Above the line promotional techniques are focused on the development of the destination brand and include advertising on television, radio, press, and outdoor. Below the line activities include participation in annual tourism and travel fairs and distributing brochures to partners and prospective customers. Among other promotional tools, public relations techniques are used extensively to promote tourism destinations. They include establishing tourism offices in the major markets, generating articles, promotional material, and stories about the destination, hosting journalists and celebrities to generate more interest. New technologies and the Internet allow to coordinate the entire range of products and services offered locally and providing information about them (Buhalis, 2000). Destination marketing activities are generally performed by the destinations marketing organizations along with other entities concerned with tourism and regional development.

Destination marketing organizations (DMO) are business entities - governmental, corporate or non-profit – responsible for planning and marketing of the region. Information and visitor centers promote economic development of a destination focusing mostly on providing information about local suppliers and distributing promotional material. Typically, there are three fundamental levels at which a destination marketing organization functions. At the country level, the organization is usually referred to as the National Tourism Organization responsible for marketing a country as a tourism destination. Other entities with interests in destination tourism development include a government ministry responsible for planning and policy as well as numerous private sector organizations. At the state or provincial level, the organization may be referred to as the State Tourism Office or the Provincial Department of Tourism with overall responsibility for marketing a state, province or territory. At the regional level, the organization is commonly identified as a Convention and Visitor Bureau which is in charge of marketing a concentrated tourism area as a tourism destination (Pike, 2008).

DMOs can adopt different types of corporate governance varying from departments of a single public authority or partnerships of public authorities through public-private partnerships to associations funded by a private sec-

tor partnerships¹. Each type of governance has its advantages and disadvantages, however, the form of organization lying somewhere between the public and private models seems to be the most favorable for DMOs. Whereas the public sector provides the general framework for tourism development, pursuing long-term approaches with the emphasis put on integration and coordination of all policy components, the private sector appears to be more dynamic in terms of setting the short-term objectives and paying more attention to such issues as sales and customer relationship management. The organizational structure that is adopted has a considerable impact on the DMO funding policy. Membership-based DMOs rely on membership fees while organizations set up by the national or local authorities depend on public sector funding. Hybrid organizations composed of public and private partnerships use both public and private funds (Brent et al, 2003).

The tourism policy formulation process consists of four phases, including the definitional phase, the analytical phase, the operational phase, and the implementation phase. The first phase of policy formulation is focused on the definition of tourism destination system and the explication of a tourism philosophy. Additionally, a destination vision should be developed and destination objectives along with potential constraints should be specified. The analytical phase – as opposed to the first phase, which requires decisions concerning the nature and directions of tourism development in a specified region – is mostly concerned with the collection of information necessary for the internal and external analysis. The internal analysis consists of a review of the existing policies and programs, a resource audit, and a strategic impact analysis. The external analysis is composed of the macro-level analysis, the micro-level analysis and a the review of competitive and supportive tourism development policies. The operational phase starts as soon as the various types of analyses have been carried out. In this phase policy and program recommendations should be formulated and subsequently operational plans should be developed. The last phase involves the implementation of the strategy for the destination development with the emphasis put on the allocation of responsibilities, establishing financial requirements, and providing timetable for programs implementation (Brent et al, 2003).

1 United Nations World Tourism Organization, www.world-tourism.org.

Poland: Building a Destination Brand

In Poland, tourist promotion is the responsibility of the national tourist organization. The Polish Tourist Organization (PTO) was established on June 15, 1999 and is currently one of the 200 national tourist organizations active worldwide to promote their own countries. It is concerned with promoting Poland as an attractive tourist destination both in Poland and abroad, and conducts activities aimed at encouraging foreign visitors to come to Poland and increasing their number. The activities of the organization are financed with the budget grants, non-refundable foreign aid, payment of local government units, and payment of organizations and companies operating in the field of tourism. The PTO has offices in 14 countries responsible for the promotion of Poland as a tourist destination on foreign markets. Basing on the knowledge of the various markets, it is possible to adjust the promotional activities to the specific character of a given target audience. Additionally, by cooperating with the local and regional tourist organizations, PTO undertakes activities aimed at increasing the interest in the Polish cities, regions, and tourist products among Polish and foreign tourists. Its numerous tasks include: organizing the conferences, seminars, and trainings, issuing promotional publications about Poland; developing the Internet tourist information system; performing statistical analysis, marketing expertise and prognostic studies in the field of tourism; and initiating and supporting the organizational measures taken by the competent authorities for the development of tourism infrastructure, tourism products, and their promotion¹.

The Polish Tourist Organization pursues its long-term promotion policy based on the document entitled Marketing Strategy of Tourism in Poland for the years 2012-2020² which is an updated version of the document describing the marketing strategy for the years 2008-2015³. Given the changes in the world economy which affected the tourism sector and had a significant impact on international tourism demand, strategic and

1 www.pot.gov.pl, 25.10.2012.

2 Polska Organizacja Turystyczna, *Marketingowa Strategia Polski w sektorze turystyki na lata 2012-2020*, Warszawa 2011.

3 Polska Organizacja Turystyczna, *Marketingowa Strategia Polski w sektorze turystyki na lata 2008-2012*, Warszawa 2008.

operational objectives have been revised, however, the vision and mission statements remained the same. According to the described vision "Poland will eventually have an attractive image, in line with reality, contributing to the choice of the country as a tourist destination, an image that has a positive effect on the development of tourism economy". The mission stresses the necessity of "creating and enhancing the image of Poland as a country, which is an attractive and welcoming country, and has competitive high-quality tourism products". PTO has set the strategic objective of improving the competitive position of Poland in the foreign markets and three operational objectives including: meeting the information needs in the field of tourism, marketing support for the development of the tourism product, and increasing the reach of the promotional message on the tourist attractiveness of Poland. The implementation of all measures to achieve those objectives requires cooperation with the regional and local tourist organizations, Polish tourist information centers located abroad as well as with organizations, institutions, and other partners with the interest in tourism development in Poland.

Considering the market attractiveness and the position of Polish tourism in particular markets, priority markets have been distinguished. The most attractive markets with a huge growth potential include: Germany, Great Britain, France, Italy, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Russia, and Ukraine. However, they differ from the countries featured in the marketing strategy for the years 2008-2015. This demonstrates the dynamic changes in the environment and the necessity to adjust the strategy to changing conditions. Besides priority markets, main target audiences have been portrayed, such as: potential tourists, tourists, journalists, tour operators, agents, tourism products owners, Poles living in Poland and abroad, exchange students visiting Poland, opinion leaders in Poland and abroad, foreign organizations, associations, and others. Depending on the market attractiveness and target audiences characteristics, different marketing strategies have been proposed and suitable marketing tools have been selected to meet the communication objectives.

Promotional efforts are focused on selected products, most of all on urban tourism, which refers to the consumption of city spectacles, such as architecture, monuments and parks as well as cultural amenities including

museums, performances, and restaurants. Additionally, the emphasis is put on promoting business tourism and other types of tourism like recreational tourism, specialized tourism and agritourism which are also popular products in the Polish tourism market. The main idea standing behind promoting tourism products and shaping the image of Poland as an attractive tourism destination is to stress the fact that Poland lies in the heart of Europe on the border between Eastern and Western world. As a consequence, it should keep its original character, not trying to conform to the west, so that it can attract visitors thanks the unique atmosphere of the place. It is also recommended to take advantage of positive stereotypes and encourage Polish people to act as ambassadors of Poland. Elements considered the most important in the communication message include: vitality (energy and youth), culture (modernity and heritage), people (hospitality, beauty, creativity), physical beauty (diversity, regionality), health (cuisine, ecology, nature), cities and well known Polish people. The slogan Polska. Move your Imagination is going to be used to promote Poland in the coming years.

The promotional tools which are most frequently used to create the image of Poland as an attractive tourism destination include: study tours, e-marketing, social media, PR, viral marketing, and workshops. Additionally, ATL and BTL communications is used to build a desired image, as well as direct marketing, events, fairs, publications, and other promotional materials. Study tours are organized for journalists, tour operators, and VIPs to present to them the country with all the tourism opportunities. E-marketing, social media and viral marketing are used to spread information and knowledge about Poland, whereas the participation in international tourism fairs is an opportunity to present the tourism offer more directly, distribute promotional material, and develop relationships with important partners. Events, such as the 200th Birthday Anniversary of Frederic Chopin in 2010, the EU Leadership by Poland in 2011, the European Football Championships in Poland and Ukraine in 2012, are used to promote Poland at home and abroad. Promotional campaigns based on ATL and BTL communications are aimed at building a destination brand Poland and increasing the number of both visitors coming to Poland and domestic trips.

Summary

Tourism, as one of the fastest growing industries worldwide, creates opportunities to increase competitiveness of regions. Regions which are attractive as tourist destinations attract more tourists which results in the better economic performance of the region. For this reason tourism policy involving destination marketing should be developed and coordinated with regional policy. Destination marketing organizations should develop strategies aimed at the development and promotion of a specific destination in order to increase the number of visitors. They might use a number of marketing tools including primarily promotional activities to create and increase brand awareness of a particular place.

Strategies formulated at the regional level need to be synchronized and coordinated with the national strategy aimed at promoting Poland as an attractive tourist destination. Polish Tourist Organization conducts the activities directed at increasing the number of visitors coming to Poland and stimulating tourist demand within the country. The organization pursues its long-term promotion policy based on the document entitled Marketing Strategy of Tourism in Poland for the years 2012-2020. The document contains information on trends in tourism sector, detailed analysis of competitors, description of target markets, as well as the vision and mission statement, strategic and operational objectives and promotional programs necessary to build the desired image.

According to the main idea of the communications strategy, Poland as a tourist attraction would represent a set of values, including: vitality (energy and youth), culture (modernity and heritage), people (hospitality, beauty, creativity), physical beauty (diversity, regionality), health (cuisine, ecology, nature), cities and well known Poles. The slogan Polska. Move your Imagination is going to be used to promote Poland in the coming years. Creating and developing a country brand as an attractive tourism destination requires carefully designed promotional programs and application of diversified communications tools, such as: events, fairs, study tours, e-marketing, social media along with ATL and BTL campaigns. Besides its positive impact on the tourism sector, building and maintaining a strong country brand is expected to positively influence other sectors of the economy and enhance a country's position in the global marketplace.

However, developing a country brand as a tourism destination should be coordinated with the activities undertaken by other organizations and institutions aimed at creating a strong country brand. All those actions have not been synchronized so far, so that there is a risk that various images of Poland coexist at the same time, instead of one clear and consistent image. Thus, all efforts to promote Poland as a competitive and attractive country should be coordinated by one institution with the responsibility to develop a national brand, which would cause positive connotations with Poland, Polish people, and products of Polish origins. This institution should also assure efficient flow of information, so that all parties involved in creating a brand image have an access to information on undertaken activities.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Brent J.R. Ritchie, Crouch G.I., (2003), *The Competitive Destination. A Sustainable Tourism Perspective*, CABI Publishing, UK.

Buhalis D., (2000), *Marketing the Competitive Destination of the Future*, *Tourism Management*, 21.

Dwyer L., Kim Ch., (2003), *Destination Competitiveness: Determinants and Indicators*, *Current Issues in Tourism*, volume 6, No 5.

Marketingowa Strategia Polski w sektorze turystyki na lata 2008-2012, (2008), Polska Organizacja Turystyczna, Warszawa.

Marketingowa Strategia Polski w sektorze turystyki na lata 2012-2020, (2011), Polska Organizacja Turystyczna, Warszawa.

Moilanen T., Rainisto S., *How to Brand Nations, Cities and Destinations. A Planning Book for Place Branding*, (2009), Great Britain, Palgrave and Macmillan.

Morgan N., Pritchard A., Pride R., (2004), *Destination Branding: Creating the Unique Destination Proposition*, Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann.

Pike S., (2008), *Destination Marketing. An Integrated Marketing Communication Approach*, Elsevier Inc.

Porter M., (1989), *The Competitive Advantage of Nations*, New York: Simon & Schuster Trade, 1989.

Wei-Chiang Hong, (2008), *Competitiveness in the Tourism Sector*, Physica-Verlag, Heidelberg.

www.pot.gov.pl

www.world-tourism.org