

BRANDING OF TOURIST DESTINATION AS AN IMPORTANT STRATEGIC RESOURCE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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***Abstract:** The process of branding in tourism can be long, lasting and demanding, but also profitable for many years. Branding is necessary to monitor and promote, and the constant monitoring of successful brands in the market enables continual assessment of the potential need for any necessary redesign. In order for unique branding of any destination to be successful it is important to know the target market, their role and positioning, what are the attractive destinations and the differences with the competition.*

Regardless of how well known the destination is, how rich its culture and natural beauties are, the level of the visitors experience, how they feel they are treated there and how they felt during their stay in a certain place are the most important factors. What is important is popularity and how famous the place is, and the key of success is certainly a mixture of location, variety of activities, different environments as well as emotions which tourists connect and relate with certain destinations. By continually working on quality and authenticity, many destinations in the world have become famous through constantly high visitor numbers, and thus very profitable. Branding the country as a tourist destination can be very important strategic resource of economic development, so it is necessary for branding strategies of Serbia to be carefully planned.

***Key words:** Tourism destination, branding, strategies, conception of marketing, economic development, branding of Serbia*

1. INTRODUCTION

There is almost no country in the world that does not develop both domestic and international tourism. What is important for such tourism is that several million people are involved in the tourism industry, which is massive. Today the services sector, to which it belongs employs over 80% of the total employed population. Tourist destinations includes geographical positioning, which has natural, social, anthropogenic, cultural – historical and traffic factors, factors needed for lodging, food, entertainment and recreation of tourists.

When considering promotion of tourist destinations, the basic starting point can be: how to turn a location into a destination? The answer lies in the branding of a tourist destination, and that means that it is important to understand that everything we see, hear, read, know or feel has an impact on a potential tourist destination.

Tourism is more and more directed to “tourism of adventure”, because tourists want to enjoy life, because they are more and more overworked. When tourists go on vacation, they want to experience new inspirations and motivation and therefore they search for unusual and interesting places providing culture, opportunities to view and reflect on places with historical interesting places providing a potential view of the future.

To provide a brand destination which may offer something different of the best chance of success, both the original and “tourist story” should be adapted for the tourists. In order to achieve really successful branding of a tourist destination, the brand must become alive and relevant for all visitors and tourists who wish to visit a destination. Acknowledging that some places have modern hotels, conference facilities, unique culture, natural attractions, interesting places of interest or some other forms of tourist attractions with which to draw attention and increase value, the future success of attractions for tourists depends on the creation of a unique identity and differentiation in relation to its competition.

In a market, where it is necessary to persuade tourists to visit a destination, it should offer a unique experience to them and then they will choose a certain place on the base of their feelings and state of consciousness, and not solely on the basis of price.

When we talk about branding of a destination, there are no two equal approaches and there is no unique formula of success, but in every case, what is important is a thoughtful, focused and planned activity of directing development on a certain location and constantly viewing the destination as a touristic product for which market competition is very important and such work should be constantly ongoing. When we talk about branding of Serbia, it is necessary to continuously work on improving the image through the original and inspirational strategy.

2. TOURIST DESTINATION AS A BRAND

Branding has become a powerful force. Brand means name, term, symbol, sign, design, as well as a combination of all these elements which help to designate the product and thereby differentiating it from the competition. [1]

It is necessary to differentiate between brand and branding. Brand is made by long-term, persistent, patient and diligent work including careful planning and (potentially large) long-lasting investment. A strong brand needs good and positive branding, in other words the strategic management process, which includes the designing and implementing of a marketing program and activity how to build, measure and lead the value of the brand.

This process has four key stages: [2]

- The first stage is the creation of awareness among potential customers,
- The second stage includes the recognition from future users,
- The third stage includes the decision whether it comes to preference of a brand or not. It will result in either the acceptance or rejection of the brand,
- The fourth stage means loyalty of the accepted brand from the users of the product.

Question – whether a country, region or city be a brand – is no longer so enigmatic, as it was in previous decades, since today many researchers and brand managers want to “sell” countries, cities and regions as they are products. In the last decades of the twentieth century, countries, cities and regions have begun to promote and brand themselves as though they are products. It appears that such an approach comes from marketing domain “the effect of country of origin” (“the national image” which represents irrefutable proof, that for example the products with the mark “Made in Japan” (cars, cameras, electronics of wide use), “Made in France” (wines, cheese, clothes, perfumes) or “Made in Italy” (shoes, furniture, sport automobiles) of high quality, because of the reputation of those countries as leaders of the world producers and exporters.

Brand is of paramount importance for tourist destination. Branding is the process by which tourist organisations try to create the desired perception of being a tourist destination, as a specific product and encourage the awareness of consumers to a country as a tourist destination. It is a process by which a country is separated and it individualises its offer compared to offers from competitive countries. Strong association is needed between the destination and a brand personality. Destination branding is about packaging and marketing a set of images to promote a particular destination. There are however consequences that extend beyond marketing, for example, the brand vision can become an instrument for transforming the place and social engineering local cultures. [3]

The term „destination brand“ is closely connected to the term „destination’s competitive identity“. It is what makes a destination distinctive and memorable. It differentiates the destination from all others. It is the foundation of the destination’s international competitiveness. A destination brand represents the core essence and enduring characteristics of a destination. A destination can change its moods and the way in which it presents itself to different market segments.

But its core brand characteristics, like someone’s personality, are essentially always the same. A destination brand represents a dynamic interaction between the destination’s core assets and the way in which potential visitors perceive them. It really only exists in the eyes of others. It is the sum of their perceptions, feelings and attitudes towards the destination, based on the way in which they have experienced the destination or on how it has presented itself to them. A destination brand generally cannot be manufactured like a consumer product brand. It inherits its core assets: its landscape, people, culture and history. It exists in the way in which these assets are perceived by potential visitors and the emotional value they attach to experiencing them.

The theory of “competitive identity” arises from the way in which country images are naturally formed. By accident more often than by design, most countries engage with the outside world, and so create their images, through six basic areas of activity:

1. Their tourism promotion, as well as people’s first-hand experience of visiting the country as tourists or business travellers.
2. Their exported products and services, which act as powerful ambassadors for each country and region when their place of origin is explicit.
3. The policy decisions of the country’s government, whether it is foreign policy which directly affects the “audience”, or domestic policy reported in the international media.
4. To business audiences, the way the country solicits inward investment, and recruitment of foreign entrepreneurs, workers, researchers and students.
5. Through cultural exchange, cultural exports and sport.
6. The people of the country themselves: politicians, media and sports stars as well as the population in general; how they behave when abroad and how they treat visitors to their country. [4]

In modern tourism, all tourist destination seek, in addition to basic tourist services (accommodation, food and transport) to develop other tourist services (recreation, entertainment, sport, education, etc.). In this way services that are in quantity, quality, diversity and other positive characteristics adapted to the requirements and demand of tourism, contributes to greater tourist spending.

So that the tourist sector can meet more diverse tourist needs, it must develop activities that primarily belong to the catering industry, commerce, tourist agencies, etc. As it evolves, the new requirements and demands of the tourism industry will need to include other economic activities, which thus far have had little or no part in meeting the budget.

The goal of branding is to discover and highlight the unique attributes of certain destinations and in that way make it recognisable and different from others, in order to increase the number of tourists, increase foreign investments, preserve and promote their own identity and tradition, and strengthen the quality of life and the general image of the destination.

A strong brand provides added value, brings a powerful identity benefit, drives consumers' behavior, influences their perceptions of reality, opens doors, creates trust and respect and raises expectations of quality and integrity. In short it is about strong place reputations. A strong destination brand must deliver distinctive, compelling, memorable and rewarding experiences to its target audience.

The growing role and importance of brands and branding in tourism has resulted in the fact that strong brands that accompany public images positively affect the increased confidence of customers and tourists in the purchase of intangible offerings. Branding represents one of the key elements of accomplishing the competitive advantages in a service industry in general and consequently in tourist services. [5]

3. CREATION OF IMAGE OF A TOURIST DESTINATION

The creation of an unique and prestigious image of certain tourist destination is a strong tool for expansion of its tourism, extension of its season resulting in an increase in the average spending per visitor. Creating a respectable and modern destination brand, or tourist brands, and affirmation and evolution of its competitive identity and external reputation, all represent the important tool of strategic destination management. The branding of tourism has primarily been aimed at its further dynamic development which should result in an economic upswing.

Today, marketing managers who are faced with the task of branding certain places are making great efforts to create an unique image for their destination. They define the concept of “destination image” as the sum total of the impressions and opinions of people about a place. [6] The image of a place comes from its geographical position, history, art and music, famous citizens and other characteristics.

To attract tourists, organisations, and talented people and create export markets, many governments around the world are making great efforts in creating a real, competitive advantage compared to other countries and cities. Despite the fact that most of the research mainly focuses on cities, regions and countries, it seems that the image of a place is created by many indirect factors, such as museums, shopping malls, sport facilities etc. In this regard many countries are in the process of positioning their destinations to promote a positive image.

In the growing competitive environment among destinations, the focus of development policy is moving from the individual subject of the tourist offering (companies, hotels, etc) to the tourist destination, i.e. establishing an attractive, diversified and integrated product which will radiate a recognisable image and thus ensure a more favorable market position in attracting potential tourist demand.

In order to achieve a desirable competitive advantage in the international tourist market, the destinations should build and establish strong and expressive identities, which will differentiate them from their possible competitors. In doing so the measure of destination branding is seen through the accomplished tourist experience, and satisfaction of the guest, who wants to have new inspiration, authenticity, leisure, entertainment, experience a different environment and a change from their every day life. The fulfillment of such demands allow tourists to connect, more directly and emotionally with a particular destination, through which they will become its best promoters and ambassadors.

If the destination is recognised through a strong and compelling brand, then it is much easier to successfully sell its tourist product (as a combination of individual services) and more effectively attract potential tourists and direct foreign investments. The existence of a clear and prestigious image, charm and “spirit” of a certain tourist destination will be a main factor affecting the final decision of where people will travel, and where they will spend their vacation and money.

4. CONCEPTION OF MARKETING OF A TOURIST DESTINATION

Unlike marketing of different kind, the marketing of tourist destination is very complex, because the resources of supply are very limited. Although the modern marketing experts already understand that places should be treated and advertised as brands, there is still a difference between the marketing of consumer products and marketing of destinations. Unlike consumer products, considering places as products are more complex, and because of this they require a broader approach. [7]

There are three main differences between these two kind of products. Firstly, there are places that exist as holistic, comprehensive elements or as unique products and can be seen as a set of constituent elements of individual services and facilities. Because of that, one town may have an overall reputation as an old industrial city, while the individual

components (museums, sport facilities, universities and shopping centers) may have their own separate reputation due to completely independent reasons.

Secondly, when viewing a city as a product each visitor can create an independent view on the basis of their experience, selecting the individual constituent elements from the total experience. Third, places are multifunctional and each place may offer historical buildings, shopping centers and places for entertainment. All these elements may be enjoyed by certain consumers, whether they are the citizens of that city or specific consumers with specific interests. In addition, while any negative image of a product can be repaired, such as by product redesign, the rejection of a city can not. Brand hate is not often associated with destinations like cities, but certain negative stereotypes can be created, and could hinder the potential value of the brand and the tourism business. [8] Based on these differences, the activities of destination marketing primarily require selection of a specific portfolio of individual elements to form the basis of a destination of the product and then to provide control, with certain limitations, experience of a product, as well as to attract different consumer segments.

Successful branding tips will make up a unique and recognisable destination among the growing competition in the international tourism market. In addition to the visual content (logo, symbol, design, colour, etc.) and advertisements in the form of a catchy slogan, the brand of a tourist destination should be layered to evoke “promise” to a guests unforgettable moments and authentic tourist experience as an essence of travel and accommodation. The meaning and definition of core branding can determine any sublime competitive and recognisable identity (as the backbone of the tourism brand), which will be presented in an appropriate manner along with all key tourism resources and attractions including: [9]

- the historical tourist resources and attractions,
- newly an specifically built tourist resources and attractions,
- imitating factors and resources,
- destination management,
- touristic challenges and attractions in the environment

The interweaving, harmonious participation and optimal combination of these five tourist resources should be based to create and develop a positive destination brand. A successful brand is expressed through the appropriate visual elements and clear and relevant marketing literature, which will be closely associated with the destination and in the appropriate way present all key attributes and the attractions of complex tourist product.

5. STRATEGIES OF BRANDING TOURIST DESTINATION

Branding the country as a tourist destination requires clear communication of value, vision and mission by those employed in National touristic organisations, to the local population and tourists. The destination becomes only a brand if it is imbued with high values. Brand is more than the product or service. It implies trust. Marketing must not contain promises that cannot be achieved or kept. People who promote the development of touristic destinations must be responsible for promoting and ensuring the favorable brand image. This is achieved firstly by raising the awareness of a destination, and then by knowledge, because anyone who knows that a country is a touristic destination does not need to know everything about this place. Familiarising the consumers with the destination’s products seek to create good feelings and preferences for the place. Tourists may like it, but they need not necessarily prefer it to some other competitive countries. In order to construct preferences, the benefits must be pointed out in such a way that will lead tourists to consider the destination, and finally then to visit the destination. The strongest brands are positioned in the minds of consumers. Consumers must believe that this brand is the best they can choose. As with the proliferation of digital channels of tourist bookings, the number of channels is relevant for the number of tourists, where more channels bring in more tourists. [10] But the choice of the consumer will initially be shaped by brands that are already positioned in their minds.

The gap between the physical attributes of a destination and the perception of potential visitors is overcome by branding of a destination. Because of that, it must be original and different, whilst at the same time sustainable and reliable, so that people can believe in that which is being offered. If we want a destination to become a brand, it is necessary that all touristic organisations be included in the process of branding. It means: national, regional and local touristic organisations need to establish cooperation with all stakeholders. Attention must be paid to the following activities: the development of infrastructure, the development of the touristic product, the protection of the natural environment, changes in the organisational culture and promotion. In order to identify the needs and wishes of consumers, it is necessary to continually research the market. The research of the market represents the first stage in the process of branding the destination.

Branding involves the development of a system and creation of a standard product which will ensure a consistent and deliverable quality product. It also needs the investments into accommodation capacities, public services and safety. Citizens must also be educated in tourism, especially those employed in trade, restaurants, financial institutions, public and private transportation, accommodation, tourist sites of interest, police and public firms. Creating the product and building the image must be done simultaneously. There is a difference between brand and touristic product. The

difference is in added value, which often represents emotional value which is hard to define. It is a value that creates the feeling of prestige in the minds of consumers due to the distinctive positioning set out in the marketing strategy. The added value of a brand may be a result of experience, any influence of reference groups, belief that brand is more effective and looks of brand.

When a country is branded as a touristic destination, it is necessary to develop a promise of that brand that would meet the expectations and wishes of all stakeholders. In this process, managers should shape the brand on the basis of their vision, those employed would participate in the creation of the brand through a unique organisational culture, so that the stakeholders could perceive the image of a brand in an adequate way.

The integration of tourism and tourism promotion into the overall nation brand strategy is to be encouraged: but this integration brings real challenges. The main challenge is about balanced representation of the country. Tourism is frequently the “loudest voice“ in communicating the country; the tourism sector often has the biggest marketing budgets and the most experienced marketers of any sector. This can, over many years, have the effect of drowning out the economic, political, industrial and even cultural voices, and creates a “soft“, leisure-oriented nation brand which conflicts with the country’s reputation as an exporter of quality products, a serious political player, a technological power, or a suitable destination for investment.

One way of avoiding this trap is for tourist boards to ensure that they always take care to properly represent the reality of the country’s population in their marketing. Empty landscapes, in any case, tend to be less effective images for tourism promotion since the cultural aspects of tourism are so important to travellers; and stereotyped representations of smiling natives in national dress are seldom very convincing. Tourism promotion that gives some sense of the real abilities and real activities of the population is likely to be more engaging, more convincing, more agreeable to the population itself (which is, after all, the “product“ which is being „sold“ and therefore has a large stake in the process), and is less likely to set up images of the country which will clash with its economic, political or industrial reality.

The second challenge is objectivity. Of all the qualities needed by those who are responsible for nurturing a country’s image, objectivity is one of the most valuable, and one of the hardest to achieve. After all, marketers who are responsible for marketing a product are generally salaried employees, are seldom the inventor or manufacturer of the product, and so do not find it too difficult to take a cool, objective view of the brand they are building: indeed, good ones are valued precisely because of their ability to see the brand in the same way as the consumer.

But when the product doesn’t come out of a factory, but is the homeland of the people trying to market it – where they and their parents were born, raised, schooled and trained – objectivity becomes an extremely elusive quality. A lack of objectivity can be fatal to the image strategy of a country, no matter how good the intentions at the start.

From the point of view of a busy consumer halfway across the world, of course, the historical achievements and natural advantages of most countries are of little interest, and seldom add up to anything that could be described as a coherent or powerful brand. Indeed, since competitive identity is most urgently needed by the smaller, poorer and newer countries, it is all the more likely that such facts will seem pretty unimpressive to the detached observer.

There is a real risk for smaller countries with limited achievements simply confirming the world’s belief that they are a smaller country with limited achievements, by telling people about the handful of world-class or nearly world-class assets they have, and of which they are greatly and perhaps justifiably proud. But the fact is that the potential tour operator or tourist is already comparing them with countries that are in a completely different league, and their expensive marketing will simply serve to emphasize the differences, to their own disadvantage.

Rather than attempt to measure themselves up against much bigger, richer or more successful countries, it is far better for countries to identify where their real genius lies, their unique abilities or potential that really do put them in a class of their own. This potential may well be the result of their small size, small population or small economy, not something that they manage to achieve despite it. All countries, if they look hard enough, will find something that is uniquely theirs, and inherently competitive.

The ability to see one’s own country, its people, its achievements and its landscape through the eyes of an indifferent consumer on the other side of the world, through the complex lenses and filters of an entirely different culture, is an indispensable skill for all those involved in promoting the nation. Proper consumer research and communications testing is one facet of this, but unless the research findings are fully “internalized” by marketers and become part of their own perspective, they are unlikely to create real objectivity.

The values that are a starting point of a touristic organisation and the values of touristic destination as a brand should be harmonised, they must not be in opposition with each other. An appropriate mix of strategic and analytical skills should be applied, so that the touristic destination could move from a level of “interesting destination” to the level of “destination that tourists specifically want to visit”. In order for a touristic destination to become a brand, the statement about a mission is not enough, nor the differentiation of the product or an acceptable price. It is also necessary to make connections with the visitors, as with the employed and the local population, by involving these stakeholders the organisational culture becomes a brand. Destination as a brand must be created from within, the employed and the local population must be ambassadors of the brand, they must believe that the performance of “their” brand is authentic. [11]

6. STRATEGIC APPROACH TO BRANDING OF SERBIA

Branding of a country is a difficult and slow process whose results are difficult to measure. Regardless of this fact, it can be freely said that this process is becoming less and less matter of choice. On the contrary, national branding today appears to be inevitable.

As in the case of a classic product, the image of the country is being built for a long time. However, the image is very easy to lose, so one should not lose sight of the fact that branding is a lasting process that requires continuous efforts invested in finding new chances for development. Branding of the country should not be overestimated, but should be considered as a final moment in such development. The effort invested in branding the country itself can not solve its problems. Positive change of the country and society itself, leads to a positive change in its brand, and therefore more favorable positions in the global ranking. Therefore, national branding is not a goal for itself, but part of the bigger importance.

The question is what is the brand of Serbia. Is it something from national food or drinks? The Serbian brand is not an object or location, it is not a name of the state and is not in the physical world. The brand of Serbia is in the consciousness of people and represents the first thought or feeling they have when it comes to Serbia. Unfortunately, in recent years, we have not been followed by a good brand because we were mainly branded from Western media as aggressive and genocidal. And how important it is to create a successful brand emotionally, economically and as a heritage for future generations, tells us that it is more convenient for a tourist to leave money in the country than to buy exported food and drinks abroad. It is economically more profitable to serve in Serbia the same product that is being exported.

It is very important to invest in building a successful brand. A successful brand is one that customers value as superior to other marketers. A successful brand is the one that customers want, search for and buy with confidence. There are two key moments of truth when it comes to brands. The first point is when the customer examines the brands and decides for one. The second moment of truth is happening at home, when a customer relationship between the buyer and the brand creates a special relationship or not. The decisive role in the success of companies is the ability to realize these moments of truth.

The image of our country sent to the world is far from ideal. If we assume that the idea of our culture is induced by more foreign media, the question arises as to how to change the rooted attitude. It is much more difficult to change the existing perception in saturated people's consciousness than to create a new. It is easier from neutral position to get to positive than to start from negative and return it to positive. If the brand is a feeling, an idea, a concept in people's awareness, how to measure one such abstract psychological category? Only by reaction it causes in our consciousness. What kind of reaction do we want from the brand of Serbia? Surely we would want this reaction to be better than what it was. What should happen, so that the world around us wants to work with us, do business, and invest in us, to meet us and visit us?

If we look through symbolism and the brand's form of Philippe Kotler and his colleagues, Serbia could adopt the following measurements:

- **ATTRIBUTES:** All tourist services must be raised to a high level, and this relates to the quality of services (Ethno villages, spas, springs, monasteries, caves, lakes, archaeological excavations, food, Guča, Exit, Kustendorf, etc.),
- **BENEFITS:** By using services it is necessary to obtain within the benefits: consumer satisfaction, enjoyment, exotica, authenticity, and the need to repeat it.
- **VALUE:** Change in the past belief in the Serbian people. Permanent service and its quality would raise the value of Serbian brand and, therefore, change their thinking.
- **CULTURE:** Getting acquainted with Serbian culture, customs, tradition (cultivating silk bugs, preparing meals, making unique textiles and jewelry from many folk costumes), painting, architecture, contemporary culture, etc.
- **PERSONALITY:** Nikola Tesla, Novak Đoković, Emir Kusturica, Milutin Milanković, etc.
- **USER:** Potential customers of Serbian brand from Europe and other countries of the world. [7]

Serbia's branding strategy should be understood as a strategy for its socio-economic development, the results of which should reflect the growth of the general welfare of its citizens. There are plenty of opportunities for improvement. This includes the improvement of the tourism product, the development of the road infrastructure for the purpose of attracting tourists and other. One of the first steps along the way is the knowledge of the dimensions of national branding, the target audience and its specific needs.

The main step to be taken is to form an action group that would actively direct any process at all levels to the public sector, government institutions, companies, cultural and educational institutions, non-governmental organizations, the public and others. Prior to defining the vision and strategy of building a brand of the state, as well as in the case of branding a classic product or service, it is necessary to carry out the necessary research of the target markets. In that sense, it is necessary to take a view of citizens of the country themselves, as well as foreign tourists, investors, experts and other stakeholders, in order to get to know the current perceptions related to the country. It is only when considering the analysis of the results of the research, and not only the desire for a certain image of the country

embodied in the preliminary vision, it is possible to adequately define the strategy, the basic idea and the identity of the national brand.

A successful branding process goes in the direction from the product to a brand. This would mean that, above all, it is necessary to work on product quality in order to build a good brand on these grounds. Otherwise, when huge efforts are made to brand a product that does not have the proper quality, the negative consequences can be unimaginable. Such efforts are completely out of the question, since they can lead to a counter-image that is reflected in the collapse of the image of a product. In the case when the product which is in the focus refers to a country that needs to be branded, the first task is a comprehensive reform of the society itself. It is the society that is created by the brand of the state and which, after all, will have the greatest benefit from the growth of its value.

7. CONCLUSION

The contemporary business environment continues to be more and more turbulent and complex. This whole process leads to confrontation and competition between companies, even between countries. The companies tend to draw the biggest number of consumers, sell more products and thus generate larger profits. When we talk about tourism, we can see that countries tend to achieve a similar result. The countries try to draw the greatest possible number of tourists, and if they want to do that, they must create an image and identity of their touristic destination allowing them to clearly differentiate themselves compared to other countries.

Tourism destinations around the world will increasingly recognize the importance of their brand as the source of their international competitiveness. Those that do not clearly understand, articulate and apply their brand essence and values in marketing communications and behavior will fall behind their competitors. Branding of places will become increasingly important, and valuable. Destinations will have to develop partnerships with other sectors to project an overall, holistic brand, as part of an overall national, regional or city effort to project it as somewhere attractive to live, work, study, invest, visit and do business. But they will still need to apply their own distinctive destination brand when talking directly to potential visitors.

In today's era of globalisation, branding has become a necessity, because destinations are fighting more effectively generating greater competition. Branding within tourism is a process that separates a certain destination by its characteristics, creating the identity of a destination. And the greatest success means emphasizing its authenticity. The brand is a feeling that includes more people at the same time in a touristic product or touristic destination, and managing a brand means managing the differences that are in the consciousness of different people.

National Tourism Organisations need to find ways to remain relevant and useful to potential visitors in the digital era. Contemporary environment requires a change of mindset in the ways organisations approach their marketing communications. But the role of the brand – as a consistent representation of the destination's brand essence – remains the same. It has its place amongst the other information available on-line from different sources.

We can say that a destination is a brand when it gives visitors a unique and unforgettable experience, which is impossible to find in any other place. The task of a manager of a touristic organisation is to shape its development strategy and turn it into a brand, because only with the help of this brand will it be possible to achieve popularity of its touristic product and differentiate it among the multitude of similar touristic destinations. Today, tourism as a branch of a market, represents the greatest opportunity to increase exports, as well as an increase in market share, branding of a country as a touristic destination is a real necessity.

When we talk about tourism in Serbia, the basic measures that can contribute to the improvement of the tourist offer are related to: introduction of a full quality system in all tourist institutions and enterprises, acceleration of the privatization process, establishment of a clear tourism development strategy and tourism policy that will stimulate entrepreneurship, stimulating the work, creativity and motivation of the tourist staff, using all natural potentials and cultural heritage, enriching the tourist offer with various products and services that make tourism in Serbia more recognizable and attractive. Since one of the key factors of success is high motivation, it is necessary to establish a general public's consent to the necessity of change. Positive change of the country and society itself will lead to a positive change in the national brand and a better rating.

It is necessary to continuously work on improving the image through the original and inspirational strategy. The message sent to a modern consumer must be authentic. In order for Serbia to truly differentiate itself from other countries and position it in the global market, it is necessary first of all to discover and then to emphasize everything that makes it unique and specific. It is important to emphasize, the campaign should be based on honesty and objectivity, avoiding every kind of false presentation. A well-formulated strategy should then be implemented through a series of individual but coordinated programs, and the proper implementation of the strategy should be considered as one continuous process.

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