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# **SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND POWER OF DESTINATION BRANDS**

World is changing very fast. It's hard to believe, but in the last hundred years the population of the Earth became seven times bigger than in all previous history of our civilization. It means that everything changed and we can't compare our life to any other of previous generations. For sure, we live in the most interesting period of the known history. At the same time, we all observe how more and more people move from rural areas to the cities. Urbanization already reached the level of 50% of the planet population and continues to grow up to 70% in 2050, which will be 7 billion people at that time.

Due to growth of the world economy and technology progress the second half of the XX century were highlighted by two revolutions – travel and IT. There were only 25 million international tourists in 1950-s and more than 1,3 billion in 2017, who spent about 1,5 trillion US Dollars. Europe is the most popular continent for tourists, which is visited by more than 51% of the total amount of world tourists. That's why Poland and Ukraine should work closely on building its sustainable tourism destinations and smart marketing in this highly competitive region.

The global agenda of Sustainable development goals were approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization until 2030. Tourism plays one of the most important role in all 17 goals and according to UNWTO means “Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities”.

Marketing and branding of destinations are just as important to its progress and prosperity as a company's brand is to its success in the marketplace, because it exerts so much influence over the behaviours and attitudes of that country's 'target audiences': foreign investors, tourists, consumers, students, entrepreneurs, trading partners, the media, other governments, donors, multi-lateral agencies, or any number of other constituencies.

The reputation and image of the country or the city very similar to the trademarks of the companies and products. Brand and reputation of the country are equally important for its progress and prosperity, as well as the company's brand is the key to its success in the market.

Today, every country, city and region are obliged to compete with each other for their share of the commercial, political, social and cultural transactions in the single global market. As in any commercial sector of the market, brand value becomes critical, because none of us have time, patience and the desire to delve into the real differences between the proposals of one country or the city from the other. That is why the majority of people and businesses make their choices for travel or investments based on long-established beliefs about countries and cities. In the commercial market, everything happens in the same way, the reputation of a brand provides a short way to the purchase decision. This is the reason why the concept of destination branding has become so important. The idea of 'brand equity' sums up the idea that if a place, product or service acquires a positive, powerful and solid reputation, this becomes an asset of enormous value – probably more valuable, in fact, than all its tangible assets.

Citizens of countries with a reputation for disadvantaged, poor, uncultured, corrupt and dangerous given all at times harder than citizens of countries with good reputation and strong brand. The brand of such country is in front of them, and as the card opens doors, creates trust and respect, as well as increases the expectations of quality and competence. Thus, the reputation and brand of any territory, have a direct and measurable impact on almost every aspect of our life, as well as play an important role in the economic, social, political and cultural progress.

A problem often faced by countries in our security-obsessed age is knowing how to deal with a negative national reputation. The problem is that stories about war, terrorism, poverty, disease, corruption, crime and violence – whether entirely justified or not – tend to spread very rapidly, to be instantly believed, and to last for a very long time, playing havoc with a country's tourism promotion efforts. Unfortunately, negative or shocking stories are very often more interesting than good or positive or pleasant stories.

If we want people to change from the story they currently believe about a country, we have to give credit to their attachment to that story. Tourism is frequently the ‘loudest voice’ in communicating the country. It becomes increasingly necessary for countries to show real innovation, real action, real leadership and above all demonstrable results in this area. ‘Greenwash’ just will not wash, and as in every aspect of the fascinating field of national image and reputation, actions will always speak louder than words. In fact, if destination marketers only remember one piece of advice, it had better be this. Do not think about what to say next; think about what to do.

I speak to different audiences, but gathered here today are people close to me in spirit, people who care about the reputation and image of our country and its each corner. Our job to inspire other people to travel. As in music 7 notes – marketing have their own language, which sounds in all countries equally. Our common task is to write a marketing melody which will sound in all the countries of the world and will inspire people to come to us.