

# Image as an Important Factor of Destination Management

Katerina Ryglova & Jana Turcinkova

Department of Marketing and Trade, Faculty of Business and Economics,  
Mendel University in Brno, Czech Republic  
katkag@mendelu.cz  
turcinko@mendelu.cz

**Abstract:** For successful development of tourism in a region is a necessary condition to learn planning and using management principals. General characteristics of successful planning can be derived from experiences of their application in advanced countries but must be adapted to specific local regional conditions. Since 1989 (after the “Velvet Revolution”), the Czech Republic has become an attractive destination for many tourists from all over the world – it was a new, unknown and not financially demanding area. In the meantime, this trend has changed and Czech Republic has become a common tourist destination, which cannot exploit this competitive advantage any longer. Nowadays, when the differences between individual countries and regions are diminishing, and the main competitive forces are factors, such as image, which create the power of the “brand” of a particular destination. We can find that “the present tourism industry is formed by battle for destination, where the good brand sells”.

## Introduction

After political and economic changes in 1989, the tourism in the Czech Republic went through progressive transformation process and became an important part of the Czech economy. Opening of the borders, freedom of enterprise and changes in financial markets multiplied the speed of changes on a thus far strictly regulated market of tourism. The most significant changes were visible in rapid increase of demand of Czechs for outgoing tourism and increase of demand after the attractiveness of the iron curtain with very low prices and relatively acceptable services.

The Czech Republic has conditions for tourism development mostly in the wealth of natural and historical sites, cultural heritage and a well developed spa industry. To keep a position on the market of tourism in times of growing competition of European and overseas destinations is, however, very difficult. One of the inevitable necessities for staying competitive is strategic planning in tourism. While doing that, it is also necessary to apply a system of destination management in individual regions as a strategic method for strengthening of the position on a market of tourism.

## Image as an important factor of destination management

The destination management can be defined as “a system of managerial skills and activities used for coordinated planning and organizing of tourism for a particular destination” (Janečková & Vašítková 1999). In other words, in the process of strategic planning for regional development representatives

should be involved not only from the public sphere, but also businessmen, non-profit sector and civic initiatives. Primarily in tourism the cooperation of public and private sectors is especially important, because the satisfaction of a client in tourism influences the entire complex of services and if one of the services doesn't function properly or doesn't function at all, then it projects negative impressions on other service providers, even if their services are of high quality. That concludes, that a well functioning cooperation of a public and private sector contributes to forming of positive image of a region, which then significantly influences the decision-making of potential customer in destination selection. In relation to this we can often see a term “marketing of local government”, which might be for many people somewhat unusual term. Nevertheless, it's nothing else but “attracting investors to a region, attracting tourists, communicating with public and promotion of a region” (Bernátová & Vanova 2000). These are the main objectives of the local government representatives. Marketing of a region (place or area) is thus marketing of local authorities.

A destination can be considered as a product of tourism, which is a combination of many partial products (services), components. Under a product destination, we understand everything, that a town offers its residents, visitors, businesses and potential investors, and what contributes to satisfying their individual or common needs. Some entities are then both parts of the product and its consumers. Janečková and Vašítková (1999) define destination as a symbiosis of impact of material resources (such as recreation area, infrastructure) and non-material

resources (climate, personalities – such as guides etc.). The level of the product interrelates directly with its image, its quality, and quantity. The image of local authorities and the image of individual services provided in the destination put the finishing touches to summary image of a destination. The image of a place, a region or a town is not only an important part of the product, but first of all it can play an important role in destination promotion.

Each tourist destination should strive for creation of a specific image. An image of a place or a destination is rather a complex variable. It is influenced both by internal and external environment that is formed by a number of factors. It stems from the history of a town or a region, as much as from its present.

According to Janečková and Vašítková (1999), an image of a place is also interconnected with its positioning in individual market segments, because for each of these segments the destination presents its different image. Very clearly define positioning Ries and Trout (1996), who say that “positioning is not what you do with a product, but what you do with perception or the mind of the potential customers.”

The image of a country may, but doesn't necessarily need to conform to its reality. Often an image comes across the same way as a cliché. It underlines certain characteristics of a country while it leaves out different ones. Despite the fact, or maybe because of that has an image such importance and many times it influences people's behavior and attitudes.

Philip Kotler (2001) defines image as a set of ideas and impressions that a person has about an object. The attitudes and people's actions are highly dependent on object's image.

Nakomah et al. (1996) summarize that a majority of researches of place's image from the point of view of tourism take account of the acquired image, most of all the characteristics of how the people perceive the particular places and how they react to these perceptions, and whether this acquired image influences their present, existing concepts and their behavior as customer of tourism products.

When creating an image of a place, according to Bramwell and Rawding (1996), the municipalities or organizations involved must start with their own ideas and expectations about the place, town, destination, from its history and local conditions. The important factors are:

- Size of the location
- Natural and tourism conditions
- Economic activities
- Regional and international importance of the location
- Relations among the communities
- Marketing activities of the town and municipalities
- Relations among local municipalities and interest groups
- Local politics.

When planning and building image, Ashworth and Goodall (1998, p. 190) use these three basic types of research sources:

1. **Geographic research:** analyzes the natural, cultural and economic specifics of a destination (e.g. cultural traditions, customs). Exploiting the local traditions can intensify the feeling of pride of the locals for their place (area, region), which helps to better acceptance of and life together with tourists.
2. **Marketing research:** the goal is to find a competitive advantage of the analyzed destination. We presume that the individual destinations are substitutes for each other and our effort is to convince the potential clients to select our particular destination as their recreation resort. Marketing theory describes this technique also as branding. The goal is simple and quick identification of a particular destination (which we consider as the product of a certain brand) by introduction of a specific name, logo and other symbols contributing to differentiation from other competing destinations.
3. **Sociological research:** it is based on differences among people in various communities.

The foundation for properly built image is in its authenticity and specification, which provides the place with competitive advantage. People should perceive the destination as something unique. The right image, according to Ashworth and Goodall (1998), is being created over a certain period of time by using various communication tools with the objective to address our target segment(s) and hope that our message will be decoded and lead to satisfactory reaction.

An important term in this subject is also so called as Corporate Identity. It is the summary image of a destination (generally applies also to any organization or institution). It is represented by shared values, opinions, and attitudes of each sector (commercial, public and non-profit) in a destination, which differentiate the destination. On the outside, the destination is represented both by tangible elements (corporate design, name, logo, symbols, etc.), and intangible elements, such as the shared values, that contribute to the corporate culture.

Figure 1 shows the most important factors that play a significant role in the image creation.

The four advantages of using the image of a country:

1. **Building a country's identity:** By analyzing the image of a country, we can reveal the important unique selling proposition of a country. If the country's image proves to have positive influence on the perception of the country and its products, then it is in interest of the export policy to support the image and systematically develop it. This position is described as USP-strategy. This strat-

egy provides numerous advantages – first of all, it promises success with use of just a bit of resources. If people are convinced that the Czech Republic has exceptional position, for example in brewery industry, then it is appropriate to concentrate on this strength and develop it even more.

2. **Cost-saving effect:** In the Czech Republic, the majority of the businesses are small or middle size, and when entering the international market, they are not well known or not known at all. Raising awareness and building a high level of knowledge about them is very costly from the financial point of view. Exploiting the world famous, Czech Republic's typical elements for the support of exports can then bring advantages for many companies to help them establish themselves on these new markets.
3. **Image transfer strategy:** As we have already mentioned, if there are any strengths associated with a country, where it is reasonable to take advantage of them and use them as a support also for other services and products of that particular country that are not so well known. In this sense, it is useful to transfer the capital stemming from the image of the Czech Republic not only to tourism, but also to export policies. By using the specific indication of the country of origin, or by using typical Czech elements which can then transfer the image of the Czech Republic also to other products and services. This strategy helped many countries to increase their exports.
4. **Increased efficiency of advertising:** Based on emotionally charged elements of promotion supporting exports, the efficiency of marketing communication can be increased. It leads to higher sensitivity to advertising and positive image transfer.

An important factor of building an image is establishment of the **brand of a destination**. It is clear that a country (a destination) with strong, positive and generally accepted associations lead to trust, quality and integrity, which provide the producers or services provider with a competitive advantage.

Smart country representatives base their brands and their reputation and their attitudes exactly the same way as smart companies do. Globalization and harmonization effects of European integration contribute to the pressure on countries to create, manage and increase the value of their "brand". The countries are aware that most of them provide similar products: area, infrastructure, educated citizens and very often also almost identical government system. To stand out in a crowd, it is necessary to really work on building your own brand. It is a difficult and long-term task, which can, however, significantly influence foreign investment decision-making and a market capitalization of the country. The countries need to search for a market niche and get involved in competitive struggle with marketing of other countries with the goal to satisfy customers and first of all to create a loyalty to their brand. In reality, a brand is ethically neutral term – it is simply a name representing perceived values related to the reputation of a product or a company.

The best example in shift in perception of a Country of origin information is Japan. After the WWII the "Made in Japan" indication used to be associated with rejects and low-end products flooding the markets. Its products were cheap and they were considered as worthless products. In many respects we could compare them to still present perception of Chinese products. Nowadays, though, Japan is perceived as a country with advanced technologies, high production

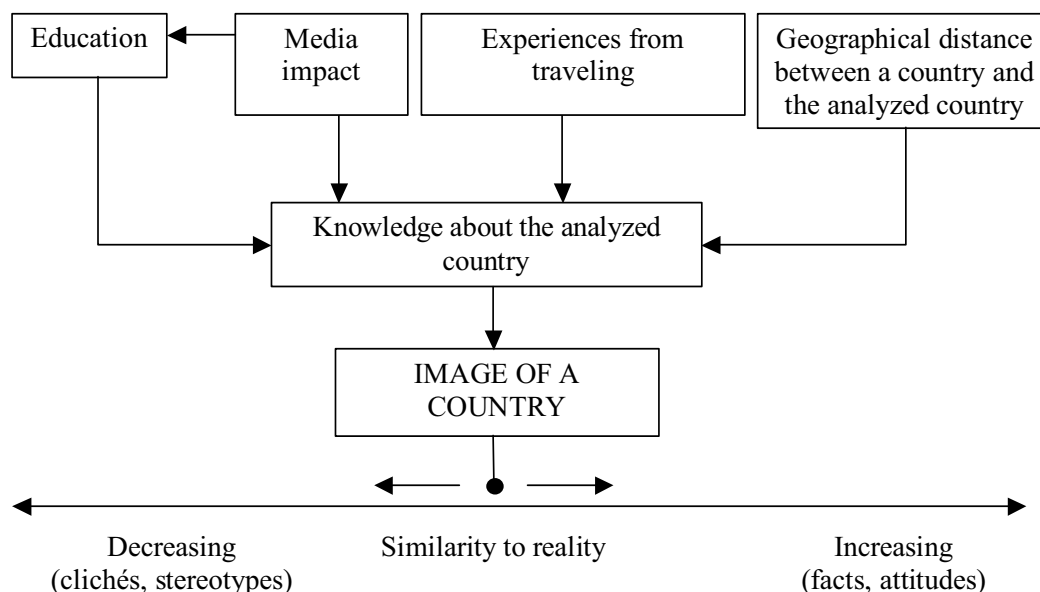


Figure 1. Factors with impact on a country's image.

quality, even of high style and social position. Customers are willing to pay more even for functionally identical product only because of the fact that the product comes from Japan.

The advertising agency Young&Rubicam claims that successful brand have these two following characteristics: brand vitality and brand caliber. Each of these characteristics has two attributes. A brand distinguishes itself with brand vitality, if it is in the awareness of a consumer differentiated from other brands and this differentiation is relevant according to customer's need. A brand has a necessary caliber, if it basks in significant respect and if it is well known on its target market.

### Image of the Czech Republic in Austria

A marketing research analyzing the image of the Czech Republic in Austria was conducted during March and April 2002. To obtain necessary information about public opinion about the image of the Czech Republic in Austria, the major part of the research is based upon survey among Austrian citizens. A comparative sample of respondents was selected also in the Czech Republic in order to be able to compare differences between the real image and the expected image by the Czech citizens (a self perception).

The results show that the Czech Republic is a much-frequented tourist destination. The Czech Republic is associated with interesting historical sites, culture, good food and picturesque landscape; however, it is also perceived as a country with low interest for environmental protection. As other problematic characteristics are perceived the political stability and technical development.

Products with indication "Made in Czech Republic" are mainly associated with reasonable prices and good craftwork; characteristics such as high quality were mentioned by less than 50% of respondents.

As factors that connect the Czech Republic with Austria were indicated history, culture, proximity, family relations, economic relations and character traits.

Austrian respondents were able to recall great number of Czech personalities, who they associate with the Czech Republic, such as Václav Havel, Bedřich Smetana, Antonín Dvořák, Masaryk, Emil Zátopek, Eduard Beneš, Franz Kafka, but also Karel Gott, Karel Schwarzenberg, Alexandr Dubček, Milan Kundera, Miloš Zeman, and Martina Navrátilová.

Škoda, beer, glass products and china were named as the most known Czech products. Besides these products, the respondents mentioned also regional products, such as Karlsbad biscuits, Olomouc cheese and Znojmo pickles.

Answers to the question – what factors do the Austrian respondents consider as positively influencing the image of the Czech Republic, were culture, hospitality, friendliness of people, economic

development, food, landscape and the care of the historical sites. As negative factors were selected: the activation of the nuclear power plant Temelín and Beneš Edicts. Very sensitively is perceived the "injustice", when the Czech Republic joined the other EU countries with sanctions against Austria, when Haider was elected in the lead of Austrian government.

The familiarity with symbols and logos representing the Czech Republic is rather low. Partly it is due to the fact that the symbols aren't used on a lot of materials, and when compared with Austrian products, the usage of the logos representing Czech Republic on products is just now growing.

The results of the research proved that image of the Czech Republic has many strengths, however, it also has problematic areas that need to be worked on. It is a difficult and very complex task.

When building and maintaining the image these following factors are important:

1. **The research of current attitude and awareness about the country.** An important and basic condition of success is knowledge and availability of information. Knowing, how the country is perceived, is very important information.
2. **Be active.** When creating and sustaining an image, we cannot wait for someone to come to us. It is necessary to take the initiative and let the others know about us. Then you can control the extent and form of provided information. That gives more possibilities to better prepare for various problematic topics.
3. **Clearly define image you aspire to have.** In order to work on image and influence its characteristics, it is necessary to have clear idea of how it should be like, what we aspire to. Otherwise it could happen that media or someone else would define, who we are and where we fit. It is important to realize that an image has certain time stability and, therefore, it requires longer time period to change the image.
4. **Stress benefits and the uniqueness.** Especially nowadays, when the Czech Republic is joining the European Union, the citizens of the current member countries want to know, what kind of benefit the new coming members will bring, why they should be interested in cooperation, support, etc. So it is reasonable to present the country's strengths and benefits with guaranties that can be relied upon.
5. **Define the audience.** Just as in marketing plan of a product, the marketing plan of a country needs to define certain target segments that we want to address. Targeting the message can save costs and increase efficiency.
6. **Create and use marketing plan.** Marketing a country is a very complex thing. It is necessary to create mutual cooperation among individual participating entities in order to reach consistency

- and efficiency. Marketing plan should include these basic elements: analysis of current situation, objectives, strategies and methods, how to reach the stated objectives, time schedule and budget.
7. **Create and maintain a steady flow of information.** If we want to create or change perceptions, it is impossible just to wait for something to happen. It is up to our own initiative to provide enough press releases, promotion materials, advertisements, surveys.
  8. **Be specific** in your information. If we want to differentiate from other countries, we have to clearly exhibit, why we deserve the support and interest. We should offer the best or at least an original idea.
  9. **Don't exaggerate.** The right solution is not boasting and promises you cannot fulfill, the goals can be reached, when the communication and presentation will be direct, confident and honest. The goal is to gain goodwill and respect.
  10. **Be patient.** Image can hardly change over a short period of time. Creating and maintaining an image is not a question of few years, but rather decades of a consistent work.
  11. **The first rule of effective public relations is to be good.** When creating the marketing plan to support an image of a country, it is necessary to stay realistic. A skilled PR person can tell something good about anything. But you cannot look good unless you are good. Using PR to hide problems is unfruitful, expensive and can lead to embarrassing situations. A guarantee of high quality of production, providing services, respectful treatment, quality of legal system then lead to achievement of the requested results.
  12. **Using celebrities as spokespeople can bring both positive and negative effect.** Celebrities usually attract more attention faster, they can help to win, by association, goodwill of their fans. The effect can also be opposite – the celebrity's private life can hurt the image of the country even more. So the choice of such a personality has to be very sensitive, if we want to achieve our objectives.
  13. **Image Marketing overlaps practice and budget areas.** The brands, logos and symbols representing the country is necessary to apply to as many different fields as possible (promotion materials, catalogues, web sites, headed papers, etc.), so their knowledge is as high as possible, otherwise they don't fulfill their purpose.
  14. **Image is based on emotions.** Promotion and other marketing activities can help to influence, how people will perceive our country. Making a list of benefits and unique features of what we represent can help us to better affect emotions and feelings, which stay after our campaign is over.

## Conclusion

The present tourism is a battlefield of destinations, where good brand sells. To create a tourist destination out of "a place" is not easy. It is not enough just to print out promotion material on a coated paper, it is rather complex, long term process, which requires a lot of effort, teamwork, cooperation and coordination. Tourist destination needs to be appropriately managed. The management function should be played to great extent by the local authorities. Not everybody agrees that tourism represents influential contribution to the lives of regions, towns or cities, so in the recent history in many cases tourism was abandoned and left to activities of all kinds of entrepreneurs and services providers with only very low level of control and restrictions.

The art of establishing itself abroad, from the point of view of the Czech Republic, is especially nowadays, soon after accession to the EU, very important. Image plays as significant role in winning foreign investment and in success in exports, as much as for the development of incoming tourism.

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