
BUILDING A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE OF RZESZÓW BY CHANGING ITS IMAGE AS A CENTER OF THE INDUSTRY OF MEETINGS AND DISTRIBUTION OF TOURIST TRAFFIC

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Abstract:

The purpose of this article is to show the changes from the last few years, which concerned the image of Rzeszów and the development of business tourism. Especially during the last decade, the city was developing very dynamically, it became the headquarter of many companies, a place where more and more tourists come mainly for business purposes. The capital of Podkarpacie turned out to be a leader in various rankings assessing development opportunities and challenges of Polish cities, which are also important for investors, stimulates the development of business tourism and builds a competitive advantage.

The elaboration provides data confirming the development of business tourism in Rzeszów and a change its image as a center of the industry of meetings and distribution of tourist traffic throughout Podkarpacie and even the macroregion.

In the article was used the method of Desk Research, including verification of data obtained from available sources (professional literature, Internet-Web Research), statistical data compilation, results of previously research conducted on the analyzed issues, other publications, verified and ordered. The source of data used in the article are, among others: The Central Statistical Office, the City of Rzeszów, the Marshal's Office of the Podkarpackie Voivodeship, published research results, publications on territorial marketing, promotion, tourism, and Internet sources. This is review article.

INTRODUCTION

On the basis of the successes in shaping the right image of the organization and its role in building a competitive advantage in the markets, a process of creating the image has become the subject of interest also for the territorial authorities. Such activities are an element of territorial marketing, which is an intensively developing area. According to Andrzej Szromnik, it is "a purposeful and systematic activity of the local government administration aiming at (...) recognizing, shaping and satisfying the needs of the local community" [Szromnik 2008: 131].

It is a market concept for the management of a territorial unit, which also has to take into account the expectations and desires of guests due to their earlier recognition, while rational use of all resources [Szromnik 2011: 19].

Building the image of a place is a constant search for a balance between communicating development and aspirations, as well as achievements and traditions that inspire confidence among recipients - maintaining continuity while keeping up with modernity [Wiktor 2001: 34].

The cities are similar - apart from what they offer their residents and entrepreneur - what they associate with is also important. The subject of the image of cities is relatively well-known, and numerous research, surveys and rankings are being conducted in this matter. Cities as products for years compete with each other for customers, which are residents, investors and tourists. Therefore, local authorities use various forms of promotion, creating a distinctive image of their own territorial units based on unique features [Adamczyk 2011: 11-12]. A city that has the image of a dynamic, friendly, interesting, good center for living will probably attract more tourists and investors.

The purpose of this article is to show the changes from the last few years, which concerned the image of Rzeszów and the development of business tourism. Especially during the last decade, the city was developing very dynamically, it became the headquarter of many companies, a place where more and more tourists come mainly for business purposes. The capital of Podkarpacie turned out to be a leader in various rankings assessing development opportunities and challenges of Polish cities, which is also important for investors, stimulates the development of business tourism and builds a competitive advantage.

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Competitiveness and the image of the city

As mentioned, one of the important element of territorial marketing is building a positive image of a given area. It is important to properly understand this concept. The image of a region or city is the sum total of beliefs, ideas and impressions that people have about a given place [Knecht 2006: 6] and depends on various factors. Common opinions and colloquial images of the city are of great importance, which is not easy to change, especially if they are negative or when there is no recognizable element that distinguishes a given city on the map of the country or the world. It is worth remembering that the image of a given object, institution, product as well as the region is a subjective picture, which does not necessarily coincide with an objective assessment of reality [Glińska, Florek, Kowalewska 2009: 37]. In fact, it is a product of the individual's own psyche, shaped also by the media, informal messages, family, professional and social environment as well as the wider social environment. It is also an image created on the basis of a large number of associations and fragmentary information related to a given place [Florek 2006: 93].

It can be difficult to change the perception of the city, especially when the image, created in the past, still persists, despite the changes of the real image of the place. For people who do not have constant contact with a given city, it will be associated with the shaped picture from the past. According to Bogumiła Barańska, "There is a need for strong incentives that the environment would remove the previous picture and begin to receive the opposite information" [Barańska 2008: 47].

Rzeszów for many people in Poland is a city without associations, located in Poland B, a transit center on the way to Slovakia, Ukraine and the Bieszczady mountains (often Rzeszów - it is Bieszczady), little known, uninteresting, so-called "the end of the world". The main object that is associated with the capital of Podkarpacie is a characteristic monument, and for several years a roundabout pedestrian bridge. Asseco Resovia volleyball team and the person of Tadeusz Ferenc, president of the city, are also recognizable marks [Updated Strategy of the Rzeszów Brand for 2014-2020 and the Promotion Program of the City of

Rzeszów for 2014-2020, Annex No. 1 Report on quantitative and qualitative research 2014: 40-43] .

The attempt of changing the image of the city and the creation of a new development vision were undertaken, among others, by Rzeszów authorities adopting in 2009 the Rzeszów Brand Strategy, the Promotion Program of the City of Rzeszów and the promotional slogan "Rzeszów - Capital of Innovation". About the adopted vision of the city's brand development, it is possible to read among others, on the website of the City Hall of Rzeszów: "Having an authentic product based on the city's economic potential, aerospace and IT major industries and people with vast knowledge full of innovative ideas, activities focused on economic promotion in the country and abroad, participation in fairs and investment missions, and international projects. (...) Rzeszów is an example of effective cooperation of local self-government, representatives of business and the world of science. These are factors that are also conducive to development and innovation" [www.rzeszow.pl, access 23.10.2016].

The assumptions of the vision of development are undoubtedly consistent with the leading slogan, however, the perception of the city seems to be still inadequate and requires intensive promotion. Rzeszów, which historically was a city with big traditions connected with cultural diversity, is in principle not recognizable in Poland or in the world. The analysis carried out by PwC, which concerned the development opportunities and challenges of Polish metropolises (Rzeszów participated in this analysis for the first time in 2015, previous editions took place in 2007 and 2011) shows that in the field of general image, the situation in Rzeszów requires improvement and greater concentration on foreign tourists. "The city attracts relatively few tourists. Rzeszów is hardly visible on the Internet, and the tourist attractions of the city are not widely commented on travel portals. One can expect that this situation will change taking into account the dynamics of city development, revitalization of the urban tissue and increasing interest in Rzeszów as a tourist spot on the Polish map among domestic tourists "[Report on Polish metropolises: Rzeszów 2015: 20].

A chance to improve the image of Rzeszów is to use the potential that lies in the growing scale of business tourism (mainly related to the Rzeszów innovative cluster "Aviation Valley"). Rzeszów, focusing on innovation, appears as an appropriate center for business development. In order to attract investors, the Science and Technology Park "Aeropolis" and the Special Economic Zone Rzeszów-Dworzysko were established in Rzeszów. Rzeszów is the largest economic center in the region with over 18 thousand active business entities. In addition, Rzeszów cares about its presence on the international arena. The city authorities have established a partnership with twelve cities in various parts of the world, the aim of which is wide cooperation in many areas, including tourism [Report on diagnostic tests for tourism development in Rzeszów, Rzeszów 2014: 4-5]. In addition, Rzeszów is a member of the Union of Polish Metropolises and the Association "Eurocities" associating major European cities.

The accessibility of Rzeszów for travelers has significantly improved due to ongoing infrastructure investments. The construction of the A4 motorway (east-west) and the modernization of the E30 railway line are being completed. The planned construction of the S19 expressway from Rzeszów to Lublin and then S17 from Lublin to Warsaw will improve communication in eastern Poland and will facilitate access to the capital. This is a great development opportunity for Rzeszów and the region. It is worth noting that Rzeszów is also accessible by air, thanks to the proximity of the international airport in Jasionka.

The results of the dynamic development of the city and its effective management are confirmed by the most important prizes awarded to the capital of Podkarpacie in recent years, including 1st place in 2015 in the ranking of attractive cities for business in the category of cities from 150,000 up to 300,000 (Forbes), in addition, Rzeszów was awarded the international certificate Best Places for Business and the flag of investment attractiveness by

the European Business Meeting [www.rzeszow.pl, access 23.10.2016]. In 2015, Rzeszów was included in the group of 12 cities from all over the world, which received such distinctions. Also according to the 2015 report by PwC [Report on Polish metropolises: Rzeszów 2015: 34], which concerned the development opportunities and challenges of Polish metropolises, with the average level of 100 for the 12 cities, Rzeszów's Investment Attractiveness Capital is 98.6. According to the data collected in the PwC report, Rzeszów is distinguished by a high dynamics of development compared to the other studied cities, and it also effectively uses EU funds to build conditions conducive to business development. Thanks to this, there is a relatively large number of innovative companies in the city and considerable investment potential. It is also worth recalling the Business Innovation Award granted in 2014 to the City of Rzeszów by the Program Board of the Innovation Forum and the editorial office of the economic magazine Polish Market.

Rzeszów is currently the most important center in the region in terms of the development of industry, trade, services, higher education and culture. The city is also an attractive tourist center. It has an interesting offer of relaxation, culture and entertainment as well as sport and recreation. The guests arriving here have access to a developed tourist infrastructure, including accommodation and catering facilities. In addition, there are tourist attractions in Rzeszów, as well as opportunities for spending free time and for active recreation. The analyzes confirm that business tourism is currently the dominant type of tourism in Rzeszów. The survey, conducted among the owners of the accommodation base in Rzeszów [Report on diagnostic tests of tourism development in Rzeszów 2014: 76-80], allowed to characterize the guests of these facilities. An interesting issue was the verification of the purpose of arrival to Rzeszów, which allowed to determine which type of tourism is currently dominant.

The results show that the main goals of coming to Rzeszów are business and commercial. Business tourists are nearly half of the total using the accommodation base of the city (46.6%). The remaining categories of tourists do not exceed 10%. The most important of them are tourists who come to Rzeszów for recreational, congress and conference purposes. Due to the fact that a large part of congresses and conferences organized in Rzeszów are closely related to the business sphere, this fact underlines the importance of business tourism.

Another application regarding the role of business tourism in Rzeszów concerns the specialization of accommodation facilities. 1/3 of the examined objects specialize in servicing a specific category of tourists, and 80% of them host business tourists. The issue of segmentation of tourist traffic in Rzeszów has also been included in tourist research conducted in connection with the development of the Update of the Rzeszów Brand Strategy and the Promotion Program of the City of Rzeszów for the years 2014-2020. These research also concerned the purpose of arriving in Rzeszów. Again, the largest group of respondents (34.2%) were business tourists who visited Rzeszów for business purposes [Update of the Rzeszów Brand Strategy and the City of Rzeszów Promotion Program for 2014-2020. Annex No. 1: Report on quantitative and qualitative research 2014: 35].

Summary

Based on the presented data, it can be concluded that the direction of image-related activities, according to the slogan "Rzeszów-Stolica Innowacji" adopted by the authorities of Rzeszów, is correct. It also fits into the context of the main strategic goals of the city's development and promotion aimed at increasing the competitiveness of the Rzeszów (and Podkarpacie) economy and implementation of innovative technological solutions. This is confirmed, among others the results of research carried out as part of the update of the Rzeszów Brand Strategy and the Rzeszów Promotion Program for 2014-2020 [Updated Strategy of the Rzeszów Brand and the Promotion Program of the City of Rzeszów for the

years 2014-2020. Annex No. 1: Report on quantitative and qualitative research 2014]. The general image of the city is positively perceived by the residents as well as external recipients, therefore the chosen direction should be maintained. It is necessary to position the "Rzeszów-Capital of Innovation" brand for the following years and intensify image-building activities based primarily on the use of the Aviation Valley and other innovative clusters, building the image of the city as a center of meetings industry but also in other selected areas, less accented, such as m. in .: Rzeszów - the center of business tourism and the distribution of tourist traffic. For this purpose, information about the existing business infrastructure (hotels, conference rooms, exhibition and congress center) should be strengthened and the innovative profile of the city should be popularized. It is worth paying attention to the unique atmosphere of Rzeszów and its uniqueness in emphasizing the city's brand and modern urban space, aesthetics, modernized infrastructure and constantly implemented innovative ideas.

Conclusions

- The chosen direction and undertaken actions bring the city closer to the image of the "Innovation Capital".
- The capital of Podkarpacie, with an extensive hotel, conference and congress base, international airport, A4 motorway and new attractions in the city, is prepared to promote the city as a center of meetings industry and distribution of tourist traffic throughout Podkarpacie (and even wider).
- A key area of tourism developed in Rzeszów should be the meetings industry (business tourism, MICE), which is connected with the dominating role of the city as a center for the development of aviation and entrepreneurship. This approach will allow for a better use of the hotel base, developed in Rzeszów in recent years.
- The business tourism offer is naturally combined with the optional offer of the entire region, which will result in the generation of proposals available to individual customers.
- Rzeszów can be a place of organization and distribution of weekend trips to eg. the Bieszczady area.

Literature

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