

## DESTINATION BRANDING IN THE BALTIC EUROPE

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**Summary.** The process of European integration contributes to creating new tourism destinations. The European Community initiative INTERREG has introduced three strands of co-operation over the borders: transnational, cross-border and interregional. Theoretically, each of these forms of co-operation creates new destinations. These overlap with traditional destinations such as a state, a region and a municipality. The authors are analyzing the case of the Baltic Europe that serves as exemplification of new and old destination branding.

**Key words:** branding, destination, Baltic, tourism, cooperation, euroregion

### INTRODUCTION

The overall objective of the article is to compare the conditions for branding of three traditional and three new destinations in the Baltic Europe. The authors prove the thesis that symbols of cultural heritage may and should determine the branding process of tourist reception areas. In marketing practice, however, universal and ecological motives are more often used.

The authors have been dealing with the issues of international co-operation for many years. In particular, they have been concentrating in their research on the Baltic Sea Region (BSR). As a result of rich experiences, the authors remain convinced that through intensifying activities in the transnational destination branding in the BSR and generating synergy effects of interregional and cross-border destinations may help the decision-makers in creating competitive tourist products in Poland and the Baltic Europe in the eve of the Polish Presidency in the EU.

The 2009 was the year of the Baltic Sea Region both in the Pomeranian Region and in Europe. In turn, the subsequent year 2010 witnesses the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Poland's mar-

riage to the sea. Scientific research related to maritime issues fits well into these jubilees and will be highlighted during the conference “The sea – ours and theirs” organized by the Gdynia Maritime University. Coastal cross-border regions, beside the border regions per se, are becoming more and more attractive destinations in the EU. To be recognized among competitive destinations, one has to stand out somehow. Clear, genuine, unambiguous and attractive to buyers image of the brand is most important to be successful in marketing activities. One should carry out research on and sometimes restore the area’s identity. The latter is indeed the source of perceiving a brand by receivers.

## TRADITIONAL AND NEW TOURISM DESTINATIONS

For many years, the issue of creating and promoting the areas of tourist reception have been the subject of interest of the world and Polish literature related to tourism management. The issue was of interest to researchers in Poland even in the times of centrally planned economy. [Kornak, Montygiert-Łoyba 1985]. In the free market economy, research on the tourist reception areas, in the context of global competition has been recognized as one of the priorities [Gołembski 2004]. In the economic literature, it was stressed that ‘tourism was not only a social-economic phenomenon, but also it had a spatial dimension [Kornak, Rapacz 2001]. The term of tourist reception area, understood as first of all ‘place to which tourist traffic is directed’ [Niezgoda 2006], has also become popular among economists. Because in the foreign literature the term “destination” was used, naturally it had been adopted by the Polish language too – in Polish ‘destynacja’). The word has entered the Polish language with the passing time. Despite the fact that according to language specialists its usage has been considered as ‘affected and mannerist’ [Miodek 2007], it should be appreciated that for years it has been used in Poland by many representatives of the tourist administration and industry.

Hence, a destination or a tourist reception area constitutes a component of a larger system that also covers the tourism generating area and tourist channels [Studzienicki 2006] (see Fig. 1).

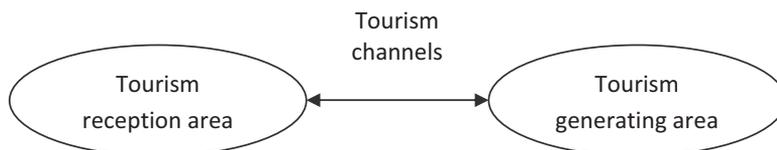


Fig. 1. Tourism system

Rys. 1. System turystyczny

Source: Own concept.

Źródło: Opracowanie własne.

According to the authors, one may distinguish 10 levels of tourism marketing [Studzienicki 2006]. Potentially, each level generates a destination. The ‘traditional’ destinations such as a state, a region and a municipality have been the subject of particular interest of many researchers, as these entities may generate ‘new destinations’ (see Fig. 2).

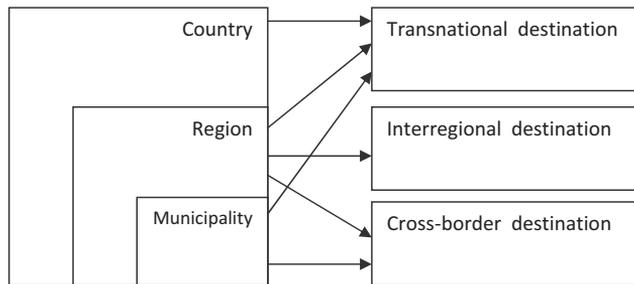


Fig. 2. Traditional and new destinations

Rys. 2. Tradycyjne i nowe destynacje

Source: Own concept.

Źródło: Opracowanie własne.

First symptoms justifying such usage of branding in the Polish context is connected with the Bureau of Brand Managers of Polish Tourism Products created in 1997 [Boruszczak 1998]. The EU's EDEN (European Destinations of Excellence) Programme has significantly contributed to popularizing the term 'destination'.

## BRANDING THE BALTIC EUROPE

According to the concept developed by Simon Anholt a brand is a spirit of an organization, a common goal which connects an organization, a place, a company and the reputation which results from corporate behaviour or the very product or the very experience by people with the product or a service. This may mean that the brand is not connected solely and explicitly with the conscious act of its creation. The brand attracts people and convinces them that a given product possesses concrete features that it in reality may lack. "In any busy market place there is room on global stage for brands which play by slightly different rules, there is room for niche brands which compete primarily on cultural excellence rather than on economic muscle" [Anholt 2006].

The Baltic Region has gone through extremes during the last three years. The region that has enormously benefited from the EU membership, both in terms of trade as well as investment flow, has been wrong-footed as the global crisis fully struck in the second half of 2008. Already sliding into recession following several years of neck-breaking growth, the global crisis has severely aggravated the landing of the Baltic tigers in 2008 and 2009. [Cities for... 2010]. In terms of tourism, Europe in general is a very stable tourist destination compared to other large regions in the world, reveal the Commission's analyses of the European tourism sector. However, 2009 saw the worst economic recession since 1930 and, although in some parts of Europe and the world started to register growth in the second quarter, it remains fragile. So was the year for the travel and tourism industry. According to Tourism Economics forecast for 2010, no strong rebound is expected. Nevertheless, the WTO experts prognosticate a positive outcome for the BSR when it comes to tourism development against other European regions. The 'Baltic Europe' is treading the path to become the most popular transnational destination area in the world. The

economic recession in 2008–2009 has been strongly associated with an overall European fashion to take holidays at home or in neighbouring countries. Surprisingly people have not been travelling less often and less far, but they have been spending less, “taking shorter trips and trading down”, we read in the report. They have been searching the Internet for discounts or making last-minute reservations. Even local travel has been curtailed.

The tourism industry usually stands out among major industries in creating new jobs, resisting economic downturns, and providing a major source of jobs, including women and youth. Of particular importance to communities both large and small, is the fact that small businesses dominate the tourist/travel industry. Tourism as a diversification industry has many advantages over the traditional type. Cities are a normal and natural destination for visitors as are scenic outdoor recreation areas. Tourism is growing and probably continues to do so not only because income and leisure time are more plentiful, but because tourism is largely unexploited in the BSR. Tourism is clean and therefore attractive to businessmen and residents alike. However, developing a tourist industry has other, less tangible economic benefits for communities. A very important one is visibility. Many communities suffer (unreasonably) from a bad reputation, due to their geographical location, climate, or perceived attributes. One of the most important is community pride. Visitors, when meeting a proud resident, are likely to be shown more hospitality and have a better time. The visitor will stay longer and spend more money, and will ‘spread the word’ about ‘a great place to visit’. It should be remembered that much of what attracts visitors also attracts industry. New businesses, as ones relocating, seek a popular and pleasant place to do their work as well as profit from a growing tourist trade. Tourism industry has a main problem that is seasonality of tourist traffic. Paradoxically, post-season tourist product together with increasing interest and need for services such as spa and wellness are becoming a chance for Baltic cities’ business and administrations.

The potential cultural benefits from tourism though less obvious than economic benefits, may be equally significant. A carefully planned, well-organized tourist business can benefit the resident through exposure to a variety of ideas, people, languages, and other cultural traits. It can add to the richness of the resident’s experience by stimulating an interest in an area’s history through restoration and preservation of historical sights. Travel distances and time are negative factors in the decisions of potential tourism customers, in both domestic and international markets, for several reasons. Many people consider the psychological and physical effort that is required to make a trip or journey. They consider the economic cost of travelling. Consumers want to reduce travel time, either by using more rapid transportation, or by going to nearby places. While travel time and distance are negative factors for potential visitors, the power of an area’s tourist attractions may be a counteracting positive factor. Negative time and positive attraction factors determine what potential customers choose to see and where they choose to go. A place that offers a large variety of interesting attractions has more pull at an equal distance compared to a place that offers only one or a few relatively low interest attractions. Another rule of thumb is that a place offering many attractions pulls people from a greater distance than a place offering few attractions. Many factors have to be considered in overcoming barriers. Finally, product quality and innovation are important factors to avoid the decline of destinations. But since a tourist usually takes a decision in favour of the destination that offers to meet a bundle of wishes (accommodation, events, activities) the competitiveness

of destinations can only be maintained or improved when the respective stakeholders are networking and the adequate public infrastructure is provided. Promoting the region's image should be an integral part of the EU Strategy for the BSR. Efficient cooperation between state and local government administrations, academics and public sector will surely result in producing an effective marketing strategy. The latter could cover such targets as: allocating foreign investments, increase in trade flows, promoting cultural and scientific initiatives, or developing new tourism offers. As the Strategy is to be implemented based on an Action Plan, its success will depend on the effective implementation of individual actions. Numerous activities aiming at improving the BSR branding have been put forward on the table. Among them are: drawing up an inventory of social and expert research performed in all the BSR states in order to determine a vision of cooperation and communication areas; commissioning a qualitative on-line study among public sector experts using methods applied (e.g. by the European Business Test Panel) to define actions that should be initiated as part of territorial branding; identifying limitations and shortcomings of individual concepts for the region's branding (based on the FGI qualitative studies); identifying potential barriers which might appear at the stage of branding promotion (e.g. SWOT analysis); visualizing the brand (a common logo, slogan, monitoring of the effects through brand image study); developing the campaign theme; organizing mass cultural, social and sport events or festivals that would serve as a catalyst of region's promotional actions; creating a Baltic Sea portal as an interactive communication instrument (to support the existing European Commission information services) to popularize the existing EU initiatives and actions for the benefit of the region. Additionally, routes with new destinations, attractive offers from ferry lines, and a fascinating varied world of new culinary experiences could be put on table. The region's identity could be promoted through its own media channel or books. N.B. A recently published book entitled 'Crossing perspectives – Baltic Sea Region' deserves a mention as it is a good example of idea promoting.

## **CULTURE AND HERITAGE BASED BRAND**

Region branding is a process of creating and implementing in recipients' awareness of a brand the philosophy representing a specific product, idea and in this case here – the region of Europe through the use of a visual message (logo, flag, symbol), a verbal and semantic one (a catchword, slogan, thought), a sound message (a tune, anthem) or their combination in the context unambiguously associated with marketing. Branding of the Baltic Sea Region seems to be of a very complex nature. The region itself is shaped by a great diversity of cultures, languages, traditions, history and levels of the pace and economic development. Its identity has not been identified as a common platform for region branding and communication. Never before there has been any global or political need to create such a platform. On the contrary, those differences have been the reason and ground for many conflicts and disputes among the states of the region.

The EU strategy for the region has been based on the region branding concept rooted in common identity. Whether the BSR brand should be created in relation to the European system of values and ideas, which are shared by all the states in the region, in relation to areas bringing together states in the region (here in the scope of material culture those

include: architecture or design) or on the basis of the planned priorities of the EU Strategy for the BSR still remains unclear. It seems that the emerging brand should be based on common elements, indicating their shared sources, and not merely common interests. It is also worthwhile considering an option of developing the BSR brand as opposed to the Mediterranean region.

Another question to verify is whether the feeling of the BSR's identity exists at all. Does Homo Balticus promoted by the UBC really exist? Culture and heritage are the region's greatest assets and these should lie at the core of the region's brand. It seems the BSR promoting could focus on such positive aspects as: lack of conflicts, competitiveness and attractiveness, positive growth rate and enormous tourism potential. As the Swedish presidency in the EU has done a lot for tourism, a synergy of actions by governments and local governments seems a must. Poland and Denmark in their upcoming presidencies will have to take the lead in continuing activities promoting the BSR.

### TRADITIONAL AND NEW DESTINATIONS IN THE BSR

The BSR's uniqueness lies in its genuine in the world explosion of initiatives to promote and brand this transnational destination [Studzienicki, Kurjata 2007] (see Table 1).

Table 1. Logotypes of the selected Baltic destinations  
Tabela 1. Logotypy wybranych destynacji bałtyckich

Destination	Examples	Promotional logotypes
Country	Poland – a logotype of the Polish Tourism Organization highlighting the assets, including the sea.	
Region	Pomerania – a logotype of the Pomeranian Regional Tourism Organization highlighting the assets, including the coast line of the Baltic in the region.	
Municipality	Szczecin – a new logotype of the city referring to its natural assets and a new development vision.	
Transnational destination	BSR – a logotype of the Union of the Baltic Cities presenting the outline of the Baltic against the wind rose.	
Interregional destination	The Baltic Palette – a logotype presenting flags of 6 countries, whose regions participated in the project.	
Cross-border destination	Euroregion Baltic – a logotype depicting a seagull.	

Source: Own concept.

Źródło: Opracowanie własne.

## THE STATE LEVEL

Poland as a state actively participates in the works of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS). The fundamental governmental document related to promotion and regional development has been the VASAB 2010 Programme. All the works on branding the Baltic Europe are in the first place carried out by the non-governmental organization – the Baltic Development Forum. A significant role in marketing and branding is played by international organizations representing territorial governments such as: Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC) (municipal membership), Baltic Sub-regional Sea States Cooperation (BSSSC) (regional membership). Most notably, the Baltic Tourism Commission (BTC) promotes the BSR as a tourist destination. A moment's reflection shows that it is the oldest non-governmental organization specializing in marketing the transnational destination in the world.

## THE REGIONAL LEVEL

The Pomeranian Region as a voivodeship is a region which uses its maritime character to create a unique and genuine brand and to gain over competitors. The key role is played by the voivodeship's authorities and the Pomeranian Tourist Organization. Taking into consideration the fact that analogously similar activities are taken by stakeholders of West Pomeranian Region, one could ask a question why not to return to the common marketing concept of promoting the Polish coast as a common destination [Travis 1994].

## THE MUNICIPAL LEVEL

On the municipal level, the city of Szczecin has developed a challenging brand. Both the concept of the Floating Gardens and phonetic transcription of the city's name break with the stereotype convention. According to the new vision, **Szczecin of the future is a Floating Garden**. What is more, the new vision of Szczecin is a revolution in the city development. Szczecin turns to water, ecology and plans to combine benefits of a metropolis and a comfortable place to live.

Cherishing a rather well-known West Pomeranian capital's centuries-old reputation for maritime trade, commerce and industry, and forced to function under the constantly changing economic situation and global conditions, the city started to seek its new identity. It seems it finally got on the track when launched a branding campaign – Szczecin 2050: A Floating Garden. The new logo of Szczecin, the city's name written in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) accompany this new development vision.

Floating Garden is a message Szczecin sends to the world. It tells about the openness of the city, its cross-border facilities and vision. It emphasises city's multi-cultural and multi-language diversity.

The Floating Garden vision determines all activities in the urban functions. In particular, it reflects the city's investment projects that should follow the idea of an environmentally friendly and modern city. One of the first investments expected to emerge on the

Oder River include Lasztownia, Kepa Parnicka, Grodzka, Green, Bielawa, Venice and Jaskolcza Isles. The city plans to build a modern district in a part of this area. The new vision will spread to other investments – city infrastructure, public transport, stadium and a philharmonic orchestra house. Renovation of the railway station, building of a convention centre, the Olympic swimming pool, aqua park, a modern football stadium, marinas on Dabie Lake shores and a ring road are on the list of priority investment projects in the city. On top of that, the new brand leads to converting the city into a strong academic centre, contributing to making the Baltic Sea Region as "the smartest region in the world". Besides, Szczecin boasts an active cultural scene – the city is ready to vie for designation as a European Union 'Capital of Culture' in the year 2016.

This innovative long-term management strategy, complemented by the new city image identification system introduced in Szczecin will translate the city's efforts into the city's viable and vibrant brand as "a new Baltic Neopolis", built up by numerous variables working together. It is thought to be the city's road map from today into the future (see Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. The city vision – Szczecin 2050: A Floating Garden Project

Rys. 3. Wizja miasta – Szczecin 2050. Projekt „Floating Garden”

Source: Szczecin City Council.

Źródło: Urząd Miasta Szczecin.

## NEW DESTINATIONS

### Euroregion Baltic and the Pomeranian Region

Border regions have always played a crucial role in the process of European integration. "Cross-border partnerships are very important for local communities" [Schaeuble 2005] Euroregion Baltic, as a maritime cross-border region was created in 1998 with the aim of 'lobbying joint interests of all areas against central governments' [Gorzalak 1998]. Despite implementing numerous projects and tourist initiatives, the area has yet failed to create its own brand, and it seems that it is not a priority for its stakeholders to promote the region as a destination. The situation in the Pomeranian Region is quite the opposite. The Greater Polish-German Pomeranian Region could be a model area creating own brand rooted in many a century identity.

## **THE BALTIC SEA REGION**

Initiated by the BTC, a networking and marketing organization, the activities aimed at creating the transnational destination (to promote the natural and sustainable development of travel and tourism within and to the BSR) were successful.

An efficient system of creating and promoting products was developed. The works on creating the brand became very advanced. The BDF decision-makers gave the task to Simon Anholt. This task is still to be completed. An important role in promoting the Baltic Europe was played by the Swedish Cultural Tourism Institute, which published during the Swedish Presidency a genuine book entitled 'Crossing perspectives'. The publication made the way for further activities in this field. Another international organization which joined in promoting the Baltic Europe is, among others, the Union of the Baltic Cities. This organisation despite its successful activities since 1991 is still relatively little known both among cities, decision-makers, and especially among the general public.

It should be noted that the Baltic Sea Region has an abundance of organizations representing various actors and interest groups. Sometimes their mandates and fields of action are overlapping, creating waste of resources or even confusion. Therefore, it is important to achieve better structures and methods of cooperation within the region and vis-à-vis other actors.

The UBC method of work is based on active networking, which provides numerous platforms for meetings between politicians, officials and specialists from cities. The UBC has the potential of becoming a major stakeholder in the process of implementing the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

From the beginning, the first and foremost task of the UBC has been to provide concrete support and advice for the member cities in their practical, day-to-day work. In times of strained economic and human resources, it is even more important to be relevant for member cities and their needs. Member cities of UBC offer a rich wealth of best practices and interesting solutions in all sectors of city work. The UBC's Commission on Tourism made branding one of its priorities. In particular, it works on developing the UBC Member City Marketing Guidelines with the aim to brand the whole organization (N.B. it would be interesting to see how UBC positions itself on the regional level) and the Baltic cities on the international forum. The fundamental idea behind the Guidelines is that the Baltic culture and heritage are the region's greatest assets and these should lie at the core of the whole region's brand.

### **The Baltic Palette Region**

The BPR was a project developed under the INTERREG IIC Initiative and it aimed at creating and promoting destinations. All in all, the project endeavoured to strengthen cooperation between the metropolitan areas surrounding Stockholm, Helsinki, Tallinn, Riga and St. Petersburg, and to develop a destination, which is "dynamic, sustainable, innovative and not hampered by borders". The 'Baltic Palette Region' wanted to be a globally competitive region within the EU. Despite enormous enthusiasm and numerous publications, the execution of the task partially failed. According to the authors the reason lied in the fact that "due to the climate the region countries are mainly short holiday

destinations”. The project may be, then, treated as an example of ‘the ups and downs of the interregional initiative’. The webpage launched for the project has the status of “under construction”//[www.balticpalette.com/](http://www.balticpalette.com/).

## CONCLUSIONS

A rich cultural heritage of the Baltic Europe is only partially reflected in brands and destinations’ logotypes. Very gladly, such maritime motives as ‘waves and water’ are more often used than historical ones such as Hansa or Vikings.

Taken the competition, it seems that a place brand is one of major tools in the marketing management of a destination. The evolution of international cooperation pays off in generating new destinations. The core of transnational and cross-border destinations is cultural heritage. By definition, new destinations should not compete with the old ones, but should produce synergy effects. Clearly, this process can be seen in the Baltic Europe. However, the plethora of initiatives and a lack of coordination hinder creating a strong brand and producing one clear message. The situation may be improving slowly with the implementation of the EU Strategy for the BSR.

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## **BRANDING DESTYNACJI W EUROPIE BAŁTYCKIEJ**

**Streszczenie.** Proces integracji europejskiej przyczynia się do kreacji nowych destynacji turystycznych. Inicjatywa wspólnotowa INTERREG wsparła trzy formy współpracy ponad granicami: transnarodową, transgraniczną i międzyregionalną. Teoretycznie każda z tych form współpracy generuje nowe destynacje. Obszary te nakładają się na destynacje tradycyjne, takie jak państwo, region, gmina. Autorzy analizują branding starych i nowych destynacji części Europy leżącej nad Bałtykiem.

**Key words:** branding, destynacja, Bałtyk, turystyka, współpraca, euroregion

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