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Tourism promotion system in Poland in the context of selected National Strategic Documents

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abstract

Background: The term “nation branding” was first coined by Simon Anholt in the 1990s and refers to applying marketing strategies to individual countries. It aims to create a distinct self-image and international reputation that most effectively serves a nation’s interests. Today, in many countries it makes a part of the carefully designed national policy, with clear objectives and an evaluation system. Various types of rankings are used to position the nation brand on a global scale. They also show which elements influence the perception of a country the most. Tourism, which belongs to a six-element approach by Simon Anholt, is one of them.

Material and methods: Selected official strategic documents at the national level served as the major source of information for the qualitative analysis. The paper covers the documents published between 2013 and 2020. The study of organizational structures and competences has been based on acts and relevant websites of respective bodies.

Results: The article presents an approach to the brand and image building process at the national level in Poland in the framework of strategic documents. According to the documents, a range of activities, tactics and dedicated projects in the areas of culture, economy and tourism should strengthen the country’s position. Tourism, comparing to other areas, has a well-structured system of promotion and serves as Poland’s brand-building tool.

Conclusions: The analysis of the key national strategic documents confirms the importance and economic benefits of a country’s international reputation. It presents a scope of targeted activities in three major areas: economy, culture and tourism. However, the level of details and the scale of projects significantly vary between documents. It may imply that operational decisions, including a choice of tactics, tools and evaluation system, are passed to the lower level. Tourism promotion is well-structured within a three-level system. Although it needs some amendments, which are voiced by some stakeholders, it still serves its purpose. The key, and we dare say, the only players are the Polish Tourism Organization and Regional and Local Tourist Organizations. A more structured approach to nation branding should become a priority. The documents express a need for integrated management of the entire process. But the number of entities engaged in promotion, both overall and in tourism, remains high and the communication channels complex. The branding process as part of the national policy requires reorganisation at all levels starting from the top.

Key words: Nation branding, tourism strategic documents, country’s image, Poland, Polish Tourism Organisation.

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INTRODUCTION

The term “nation branding” was first coined by Simon Anholt in the 1990s. It refers to applying marketing strategies to individual countries. Using informal language, we can say that a brand stands for a good name and reputation of what we offer to recipients [1: p. 9]. But Beckwith points out that a brand attracts people and convinces them that the product has some features that it may actually lack [2: p. 113]. This also applies to nation branding, including tourism promotion. We focus on national branding as a process of building and managing the image and reputation of a country at an international level, because they are desired as tools that help to achieve a strategic advantage in a country’s development [3: p. 23].

As Simon Anholt contends, tourism promotion is among important elements of the factors influencing the nation brand. The other elements are branded export, people, internal and foreign policy, culture and heritage, as well as foreign investments. According to Świątecki, the tourist brand identity is “a bundle of signals sent by it or a holistic and comprehensive communication that the brand sends to the market to be perceived by recipients in the way intended by its creators. A distinctive, i.e., visible and attractive identity is one that presents the values with which the brand’s customers are ready to identify and recognize as their own” [4: p. 30]. It can thus be stated that identity is created in the space of the sender, through the measures of influence, i.e., tools of promotion, so as to reach recipients and become an image. That is why, the image is the sum of subjective experiences that are freely interpreted by each recipient. Such an approach is supported by several authors. Martin Kozak and Marica Mazurek perceive the image as a mixture of knowledge, feelings, notions, opinions, ideas, expectations, and impressions related to a defined subject [5: p. 25]. According to Jacek Kall, the brand image is created as a synthesis of all signals emitted by the brand, and it grasps the way in which the brand is imagined by recipients [6]. Bartłomiej Walas defines it as a set of recognizable functional, material, and non-material, as well as psychological values, allowing to meet consumer expectations [7: p. 9]. Barich and Kotler consider the image as a sum of beliefs, attitudes, impressions demonstrated or held by individuals or groups of people with reference to a given object, while their impressions may be either true or false, real, or imaginary [8]. The terms appearing in the above-cited definitions, i.e., feeling, image, opinion, idea, expectation, attitude, suggest volatility and changeability as a feature of the image. Barich and Kotler complicate the situation even further claiming that the image created by the recipient can simply be false. Therefore, it seems necessary to undertake actions to make the image more unambiguous, consolidated in the recipient’s awareness, and preferably permanently ingrained in his or her memory.

Hence, the topic of brand building, caring for and creating a positive image becomes the subject of discussions, analyses, and studies not only at the level of individual products, but also countries. This trend is reinforced by various types of rankings, which are used to position the nation’s brand on a global scale, e.g., as indicators of achieving objectives, but also constitute a communication tool in itself. When adopting a sports measure, it should be assumed that building a brand and working on a positive image require systemic, consistent and coherent action at the national level and in each of the areas indicated as key for the implementation of the adopted assumptions. Such solutions should be reflected in the main strategic documents and institutional arrangements.

Our aim is to verify the strategy and the key players in building and managing Poland’s brand. We focus on tourism promotion as it may be a driver underpinning the country’s position in the global market.

SELECTED STATE STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS

“Strategy for Responsible Development” for the period up to 2020 (including the perspective up to 2030) – Resolution No. 8 of the Council of Ministers of February 14, 2017.

This Strategy, adopted by the Council of Ministers on February 14, 2017, is currently considered the main document setting the directions for the country’s development and it provides a point of departure for the development or update of other strategic documents. The time horizon for the strategy especially in the operational dimension has already ended. However, the fact that it sets a development perspective for the period up to 2030 means that it can still be regarded as binding.

In the introduction, the Strategy is defined as “a key document of the Polish State in the field of medium- and long-term economic policy” [9: p. 1]. At the same time, it constitutes “the main national development strategy” [9: p. 46] and serves as a basis for “defining a new system of strategic documents” [9: p.46].

“The main objective of the “Strategy for Responsible Development” is to create conditions for increasing incomes of the Polish citizens with increasing cohesion in the social, economic, environmental and territorial dimension” [9: p. 49]. The document also defines the following specific objectives:

- sustainable economic growth increasingly driven by knowledge, data and organisational excellence;
- socially sensitive and territorially sustainable development;
- effective state and economic institutions contributing to growth as well as social and economic inclusion.

The term “Poland” brand appears in the strategy document only in the area related to foreign expansion. The “Strategy for Responsible Development” sets out the assumptions underlying the programming of these activities as follows:

“In this area, it will be crucial to use the synergy of activities of individual institutions involved in the economic promotion of Poland to build a coherent image of our country abroad. Considering the superior role of the “Poland” brand, all promotional and marketing projects undertaken at various levels of government and self-government administration and by subordinate institutions will be implemented on the basis of the most important principles of communication, under one common mark of the “Poland” brand. (..). This will contribute to building a positive image of Poland in the world and to increasing the competitiveness of Polish products on foreign markets” [9: p. 140].

A reference to one common mark of the “Poland” brand in the above quotation is noteworthy here as it may suggest that such a mark will be created. However, on analysing the activities planned within this direction [9: p. 141], it is difficult to find an indication of how, when and by whom the said mark or common rules defining its use will be developed and implemented.

The “Strategy for Responsible Development” also defined three main projects, including one in the field of tourism:

- system of promoting the economy;
- development of the House of Polish Tourist Territorial Brands together with the tourism policy coordination system;
- integrated system of promoting Polish culture abroad.

The document also indicated 12 sectors of the economy that have image potential and should be promoted and used in communicating the “Poland” brand. In the area of tourism, they include the sector of pro-health services along with medical tourism. The promotion program

for all key industries is carried out under the project "Promotion of Polish economy based on Polish brands - Polish Economy Brand". The promotion of pro-health tourism has been entrusted to the Polish Tourism Organisation, and the project is implemented in cooperation with the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development.

A strategic project dedicated to tourism here is the "Development of the House of Polish Tourist Territorial Brands" project together with the system for coordinating the tourism policy. The project is aimed at creating systemic and comprehensive legal, organisational, financial and tool solutions in the field of integration, coordination, commercialization and internationalization of Polish tourist brands based on the cultural and natural potential of the country [9:p. 142].

"Polish Foreign Policy Strategy 2017-2021"

This document relates to the area of shaping the international image of Poland and supporting activities promoting, among others, Polish economy and tourism. Unfortunately, it fails to define a system of goals, tools, and criteria or indications for units responsible for or cooperating in the implementation of specific measures. The context of tourism appears in the priority named: Economic Expansion-"actions to attract more foreign tourists by promoting innovative tourism products".

"Productivity Strategy 2030" - draft, version of September 29, 2020.

Following the assumptions stipulated in the "Strategy for Responsible Development", this document is to update the currently implemented "Dynamic Poland 2020 - Strategy for Innovative and Efficient Economy."

The document assumes the following:

"The process of internationalizing Polish enterprises requires undertaking activities promoting the Polish economy brand as well as individual key industries. A positive image of the country is of particular importance for achieving the goals related to foreign expansion of Polish enterprises. On the one hand, it increases the importance and credibility of Poland internationally, and on the other, it strengthens the competitive position of Polish entrepreneurs and their brands. (...) Innovative and high-quality products from Poland enhance the general perception of the Polish economy, while consistent strengthening of the positive brand image of the Polish economy has a positive effect on the perception of Polish brands of products / enterprises, thus facilitating and reducing the costs of enterprises' promotional activities" [10: p. 147].

The "Productivity Strategy 2030" indicates the instruments serving the achievement of the set objectives. It proposes the following:

- educational and information support for entrepreneurs in the field of internationalization "(...) modern channels and forms of promotion and promotional activities abroad by means of online advertising, e-mailing and other forms of online distribution of marketing and promotional messages, SEM/SEO activities, advertising via search engines, auction and purchasing platforms, B2B, B2C and B2G marketplaces, social networks, blogging, running a channel on streaming platforms in a foreign language (e.g. YouTube), including similar activities carried out via the mobile channel" [10: p. 143];
- promotion and introduction of innovative products and services to the global market - marketing of Polish innovations;
- fairs and exhibitions - large events promoting the Polish economy brand, including organisation of national stands, public appearances in the formula of a partner country and participation in EXPO exhibitions and the accompanying economic programs;
- strengthening the competitiveness of Polish tourism through the strategic project "Polish Tourist Brands" and promotion tools tailored to individual markets, paying attention to the importance of the Internet as a high-reach medium.

“Dynamic Poland 2020 – Strategy for Innovative and Efficient Economy- Resolution No. 7 of the Council of Ministers of January 15, 2013.

The document is still binding, and it will be succeeded by the above-discussed “Productivity Strategy 2030”. It is worth noticing that it strongly emphasizes the aspect of support from public administration and diplomacy in the area of building economic relations and promoting the industry and enterprises through:

- activating public administration and diplomacy activities in selected markets considered as priorities,
- ensuring political support for Polish enterprises by implementing systemic planning of visits at the government level with the participation of the business environment representatives [11].

Other activities have been included in the draft of a new document of a similar character, namely:

- strengthening as well as institutional and financial support for economic cooperation with the Polish diaspora,
- harmonizing activities in the area of promoting the economy with promotional activities in the field of culture, tourism and sport.

“Efficient State 2020 Strategy” - resolution No. 17 of the Council of Ministers of February 2, 2013.

The “Efficient State 2020 Strategy” is an important document from the point of view of management and development as well as promotion of the nation brand. It approaches this issue through:

- strengthening the international position of the state,
- improving the system of promoting Poland.

The planned activities are meant to contribute to “increasing the effectiveness of foreign policy coordination and promoting the country internationally” [12: p.52], and they focus on:

- improving the coordination of the government’s promotion system,
- strengthening the role and the coordinating function of the Council for the Promotion of Poland,
- improving cooperation with relevant ministries and government executive institutions, such as the Adam Mickiewicz Institute, Polish Tourism Organisation,
- developing government information portals promoting Poland abroad, e.g., www.poland.gov.pl, www.culture.pl,
- building synergy between promotional activities undertaken at the government administration level and promotional activities of local government units [12: p. 62].

The key provision here is the one concerning the necessity to develop “a long-term policy containing an action plan (a strategic document), specifying the most important tasks, projects and process along with clearly defined medium-term goals of promoting Poland in a properly defined period of time and designated geographical areas” [12, p. 62]. The “Efficient State 2020 Strategy” also indicates the need to increase expenditure on activities in the field of public diplomacy, promotion through culture, economic promotion, and tourist promotion.

“Efficient and Modern State 2030 Strategy” - draft of September 29, 2020.

This document is intended to update the above-described “Efficient State 2020 Strategy”. In the draft of the new document, the area of promotion has been included in the item: “Strengthening the positive image of Poland”. The “Efficient and Modern State 2030 Strategy” indicates that the process of building a positive image of the country requires the following: consistency of the message, coordination of activities, appropriate communication

tools and the participation of public and non-governmental institutions. Therefore, it is necessary to develop and implement measures for the long-term promotion of Poland [13: p. 134]. The new document shifts the emphasis to a different direction and does not refer to the solutions developed in the previous strategy.

“Social Capital Development Strategy (Cooperation, Culture, Creativity) 2030” - Resolution No. 155 of the Council of Ministers of October 27, 2020.

This document contains a reference to the promotion of tourism, or more precisely, to the use of cultural tourism as a tool for popularizing culture. It is the first document that diagnoses the current image of Poland based on research, the nation branding theory, and international rankings such as: Nation Brands, Country Brand Index. It emphasizes that “Poland is a country without a clear, coherent and attractive image abroad compared to other countries” [14: p. 45].

The following actions are to be undertaken in response to this accurate diagnosis:

- strengthening the role of culture in building identity and shaping civic attitudes,
- strengthening the promotion of Polish culture abroad,
- developing an integrated system of promoting Poland abroad.

An analysis of the above-presented strategic documents sketches the benefits and importance of a strong nation brand and emphasizes the need to conduct activities focused on building a positive image of the country. The proposed solutions and measures differ in their level of detail, ranging from very general, such as the system of promoting the economy, to very specific, for example, development of a particular portal. As regards general guidelines, they can be understood as shifting organisational decisions and selecting tools and methods of monitoring the achievement of goals to the operational level. Unfortunately, tourism promotion is treated only marginally. Assuming that tourism promotion is part of economic promotion, it should be cross-sectionally included in the “Strategy for Responsible Development” and in the “Productivity Strategy for 2030”, and not in just a single strategic project. The documents also mention the Polish Tourism Organisation and the need for enhancing its cooperation with other institutions, which is carried out in practice without any strategic guidelines. Promotional activities with respect to this area are merely signalled.

ORGANISATIONAL COMPETENCES AND SOLUTIONS

The analysis of strategic documents must necessarily be completed with an overview of organisational solutions. The “Strategy for Responsible Development” as the overarching document is a tool for managing the main development processes in the country. The competent ministers are entrusted with conducting the policy in the field of foreign affairs, economy, or culture. The structure and names of ministries have recently undergone very dynamic changes. It suffices to mention the Ministry of Economy, which was transformed to the Ministry of Economic Development, and then to the Ministry of Economic Development, Labour and Technology, or the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, which expanded its competences and today it is the Ministry of Culture, National Heritage and Sport. Therefore, a review of the competences in individual areas was based on the act on administration branches.

Pursuant to the Act on Branches of Government Administration, Art. 32, section 1, point 3, 6, 7, of September 4, 1997, the foreign affairs chapter includes, among others:

- coordination of the foreign policy of the Republic of Poland;
- shaping the international image of the Republic of Poland;
- public and cultural diplomacy, as well as supporting activities promoting the Polish economy, culture, language, tourism, technology, and science are carried out by other chapters [15].

The competences of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs include public and cultural diplomacy and supporting promotional activities in other areas. One of the tools of public diplomacy, according to information published on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “is broadly understood culture which provides an interesting account of the country, its tradition and history as well as modern times. Culture as a tool of communication helps societies get to know and understand one other. Polish Institutes play the role of Poland’s special emissaries. They act towards building bilateral relations and shaping the image of our country abroad” [16].

The provisions of the Act on Branches of Government Administration of September 4, 1997, impose the obligation to promote culture abroad on the minister competent for foreign affairs. Art. 14 section 1 of the said act does not contain a provision directly stating the involvement of the minister responsible for culture and national heritage in promotion abroad. However, such promotion is impossible without cultural heritage which remains within the competences of the Ministry of Culture, National Heritage and Sport. That is why, there is a need for a very close cooperation between both ministries and their subordinate institutions.

The economy chapter, in accordance with the Act on Branches of Government Administration, Art. 9.1 covers the economy-related issues, including the competitiveness of the economy, economic cooperation with foreign countries, conformity assessment, measures and hallmarks, industrial property, innovation, economic activity, including entrepreneurship and industry, state purchasing policy, promotion of the Polish economy in the country and abroad, and cooperation with economic self-government organisations. The tasks of the minister responsible for economy include:

- formulating the assumptions for economic cooperation with foreign countries,
- promoting the economy, including supporting the development of Polish exports and foreign investments, as well as supporting the inflow of foreign direct investments [15].

As regards tourism, it is necessary to consider the entire ecosystem of management that combines the activities of central administration, local government, entrepreneurs and social organisations, including economic self-government institutions. The multiplicity and complexity of relations between individual stakeholders is presented in Figure 1.

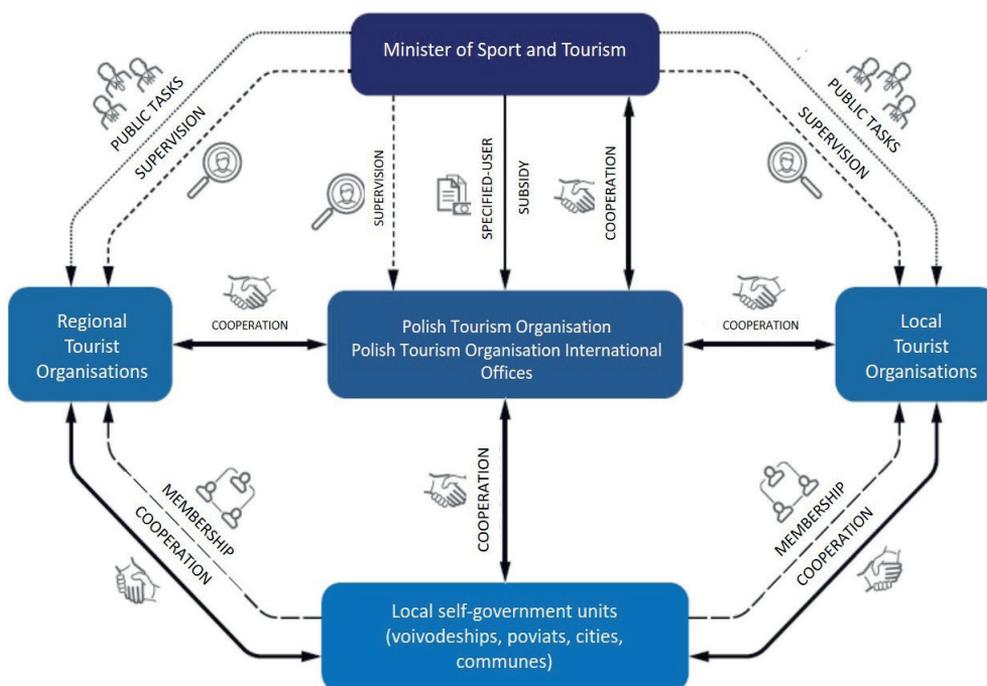


Fig. 1 The Polish tourism promotion system at home and abroad [17]

The above-mentioned Act on Branches of Government Administration does not specify the place of tourism in the complex system designed to serve the building of the “Poland” brand. Art. 27a of this act only states that the tourism chapter covers the matters of tourism development in the country and the mechanisms of regulating the tourism market. As a reminder, tourism has been briefly mentioned in the Foreign Affairs chapter. At the same time, the importance of tourism as a sector of the economy is increasingly emphasized, which leads to placing tourism within the competences of the Ministry of Economic Development, Labour and Technology, which is responsible for the implementation of the state’s economic policy. The scope of tasks in the field of tourism is provided in more detail on the Ministry’s website, in the section devoted to the Tourism Department. The document specifies such tasks as, among others: taking measures related to creating development and indicating directions for tourism promotion, developing, implementing, and monitoring tourism programs and exercising substantive supervision over the Polish Tourism Organisation [18], which was established to strengthen the promotion of Poland in the field of tourism at home and abroad.

The Polish Tourism Organisation is a state legal entity established by the Act of June 25, 1999 on the Polish Tourism Organisation, as amended, carrying out the following tasks:

1. promoting Poland as a country attractive for tourists,
2. ensuring the functioning and development of the Polish tourist information system in the country and in the world,
3. initiating, providing opinions, and supporting plans for the development and modernization of tourist infrastructure,
4. performing other tasks entrusted by the authorities and bodies referred to in section 2 points 1 and 2, on the terms specified in the contract concluded between these authorities and bodies and the Polish Tourism Organisation,
5. inspiring the creation of regional tourism organisations, covering with their scope of activity the area of one or more voivodeships, and local tourism organisations covering with their scope of activity the area of one or more local government units, as well as cooperation with them [19].

The Polish Tourism Organisation operates based on the *Poland’s Marketing Strategy in the Tourism Sector for the years 2012-2020* and annual action plans. Although the time horizon of the first of these documents has already ended, the development of a new one has been suspended due to the disruption in the tourism industry caused by the pandemic. That is why, it has been used for the purpose of reviewing the objectives. It is worth emphasizing the importance of this document as the only strategy at the level of government administration comprehensively covering activities promoting Poland on foreign markets.

The strategic objective defined in the strategy is “Improving Poland’s competitive position on the international tourism market”, and the operational objectives include:

- “meeting the information demand in the field of tourism”,
- “marketing support for the development of the tourist product”,
- “increasing the reach of communicating information and promotion messages about Poland’s attractiveness as a tourist destination”.

Promotional activities are carried out through:

- promotion on foreign markets,
- information and promotion via the Internet.

Act on the Polish Tourism Organisation is also commonly referred to as the Act on the system of promoting Polish tourism, as it established regional and local tourist organisations (ROTs and LOTs). The Act was legally obliged to “inspire the creation of regional tourist

organisations covering with their scope of activity the area of one or more voivodeships, and local tourist organisations covering the area of one or more local self-government units, as well as cooperating with them” [19]. Based on this act, these organisations may include such members as local self-government units, economic self-government, entrepreneurs, associations, and natural persons. Although the role of the Act on the Polish Tourism Organisation was to inspire and support the formation of regional and local tourist organisations, their supervision is exercised by the minister competent for tourism and may be delegated by that minister to the competent voivodes. According to the act, the tasks of ROTs and LOTs include:

1. promoting tourism in the area of their competence,
2. supporting the functioning and development of tourist information,
3. initiating, giving opinions and supporting plans for the development and modernization of tourist infrastructure,
4. cooperating with the Polish Tourism Organisation.

The Polish Tourism Organisation describes in more detail the most important tasks of ROTs on its website. These include:

1. coordinating promotional activities in the voivodeship,
2. creating a regional tourist information system - in order to provide comprehensive information about the voivodeship based on local tourist information points as well as incorporating the tourist information system into national solutions,
3. promoting the tourist values of the region at home and abroad,
4. stimulating the creation and development of the tourist product in the region (ensuring a high-quality tourist product capable of withstanding international competition),
5. initiating, giving opinions and supporting plans for the development and modernization of tourist infrastructure,
6. inspiring and helping to create Local Tourism Organisations in the region,
7. vocational training for the tourism sector,
8. conducting research and marketing analysis in the field of tourism [20].

Currently, there are 16 Regional Tourism Organisations, and the scope of their activities corresponds to the administrative division of Poland at the voivodeship level. There are also 124 Local Tourism Organisations all over the country.

It should be noted that is difficult to develop this sector without active involvement of local self-government units, entrepreneurs, and the social sector. Ideally, Regional Tourism Organisations were planned to become a platform bringing together all these entities and at the same time providing a tool for coordinating and implementing regional policy in the field of tourism, including promotion. It was assumed that Marshall Offices and other local government units should become members of ROTs. Pursuant to Art. 14 section 1 point 11 of the Act of June 5, 1998 on the voivodeship self-government, tourism belongs to the domain of the voivodeship self-government. One of the elements of the development policy pursued by the voivodeship self-government is the promotion of the voivodeship's values and development opportunities (Art. 11 section 2 point 8 of the above-mentioned Act) [21]. The act of establishing the regional tourist organisations was meant to facilitate the implementation of the tourism policy by taking over, with the consent of all stakeholders, part of the competences of Marshall Offices. Based on the adopted provisions, regional and local tourist organisations were registered in all voivodships. This allowed for the introduction of a systemic solution in the field of tourism management.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the main guidance documents sketches the benefits and importance of a strong nation brand and emphasizes the need to conduct activities focused on building a positive image of the country. However, the proposed solutions and measures differ in their level of detail, ranging from very general, such as the system of promoting the economy, to very specific, for example, the development of a particular portal. As regards general guidelines, they can be understood as shifting organisational decisions, selection of tools and methods of monitoring the achievement of goals to the operational level.

Promotion of tourism, despite its various shortcomings and suggestions of necessary changes, is assumed to be a coherent three-tier organisational concept, however, implemented only at the level of the Polish Tourism Organisation and Regional or Local Tourism Organisations structures.

All provisions concerning the obligation of establishing cooperation between local government units in the area of their operation should be considered as advantageous, as they indicate the integrative role of ROTs and LOTs. This cooperation is confirmed by the fact that all Marshall Offices are members of regional tourist organisations operating in a given area. Poviats and communes also constitute a significant group among ROT members.

The main conclusion to be drawn from this analysis relates to the urgent need to sort out the principles of cooperation among numerous entities responsible for activities related to promotion of tourism, especially, among the ministers of the government of the Republic of Poland and their subordinate units.

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