

ORIGINAL ARTICLE


Citation: Kiryluk, H., Glińska, E., & Barkun, Y. (2020). Benefits and barriers to cooperation in the process of building a place's brand: perspective of tourist region stakeholders in Poland. *Oeconomia Copernicana*, 11(2), 289–307. doi: 10.24136/oc.2020.012

Contact to corresponding author: h.kiryluk@pb.edu.pl; Faculty of Engineering Management, Białystok University of Technology; Wiejska 45A, 15-351 Białystok, Poland

Received: 14.01.2020; Revised: 21.04.2020; Accepted: 15.05.2020; Published online: 25.06.2020


Halina Kiryluk

Białystok University of Technology, Poland

 orcid.org/0000-0001-6137-4418


Ewa Glińska

Białystok University of Technology, Poland

 orcid.org/0000-0002-2121-0125

Yauheniya Barkun

Białystok University of Technology, Poland

 orcid.org/0000-0002-7338-8099

Benefits and barriers to cooperation in the process of building a place's brand: perspective of tourist region stakeholders in Poland

JEL Classification: M3; R58

Keywords: *place branding; tourism cooperation; stakeholders' collaboration*

Abstract

Research background: Cooperation within the public and the private sectors is one of the conditions for a tourist region to achieve a competitive advantage, and it is one of the most important aspect for building a regional tourist brand. Research studies often raise the issue of tourism cooperation; however, there are few papers undertaking this topic in the context of place branding. The issue of benefits and barriers of this type of cooperation seen from the perspective of the involved stakeholders is rarely the sole object of research and is often presented indirectly or implicitly.

Purpose of the article: The aim of the paper is to identify the benefits and barriers of cooperation seen by the local government and other representatives of regional tourism organization in the process of developing a regional brand.

Methods: To achieve the aim of the paper, the authors conducted a case study of a region, specifically Podlaskie Voivodship in Poland. This case study involved individual in-depth interviews

conducted among representatives of organizations — members of the Regional Tourism Organization.

Findings & Value added: The findings of this study contribute to a better understanding of cooperation between tourism entities in the process of regional place branding. The authors established a conceptual framework for systematization of benefits and barriers of cooperation as seen by regional stakeholders. The benefits were grouped into the following categories: economic, organizational, marketing and social; and the barriers included economic, organizational, socio-cultural and political determinants.

Introduction

The processes of growing competition between destinations and the rising complexity of the management of tourism destinations require the formation and development of cooperative relations between stakeholders (Costa & Lima, 2018). Cooperation within the public and private sectors is one of the conditions for a tourist region to achieve a competitive advantage (Czernek, 2013; Saito & Ruhanen, 2017). This type of cooperation is essential for building a regional tourist brand (Hanna & Rowley, 2011). The creation of a regional tourism brand and the related development of tourism economy requires the involvement and collaboration of different entities directly and indirectly involved in providing tourism movement (Morgan *et al.*, 2003).

The interaction between organizations is described by several economic theories, such as resource dependence theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), relational exchange theory (Donaldson & O'Toole, 2000) and transaction cost theory (Williamson, 1985). For the description of inter-organizational relations in the context of governance, the resource dependence theory is the most frequently used (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2016). It is based on the assumption of existing interdependencies between organizations, which is a consequence of availability of different resources, needed to achieve organizational goals.

In the European Union, specialized organizations are responsible for shaping the tourist image and supporting the development of tourist products which constitute a platform for public-private cooperation. They operate at three levels — national, regional and local. In Poland, a special role in creating a regional tourist brand is the one of Regional Tourist Organizations (ROTs) which enable cooperation of local government units with tourist enterprises, local tourist organizations, institutions and social organizations, being an example of Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) described in the literature (Pike & Page, 2014).

In the above context, the aim of the paper is to identify benefits and barriers of cooperation seen by the local government and other ROT represent-

atives in the process of developing a regional brand. To achieve this aim, the authors developed a case study of a region, specifically Podlaskie Voivodship in Poland. This case study involved individual in-depth interviews (IDI) which were conducted among representatives of organizations — members of the Podlaskie Regional Tourism Organization (PROT). The research was carried out in the period from June to November 2019.

Tourist cooperation has been the subject of numerous scientific analyses (i.e. Czernek; 2013; Czernek & Czakon, 2016; Fyall *et al.*, 2012; Saito & Ruhanen 2017) which have been performed within various contexts and trends (Czernek, 2013). However, there are few papers dealing with this subject in the context of place branding, which makes the author's work exceptional. The article also differs from the already existing ones due to the adopted perspective adopted — the researchers focus on the identification of benefits and barriers of tourist cooperation for various categories of stakeholders (regional authorities, non-profit organizations, entrepreneurs) who are equal partners of a DMO represented regionally by a given PROT. Moreover, the majority of studies on cooperation refer to areas with a highly developed tourism function. In this paper the authors focus on the area with a high, but underused, potential for development of this function (international rank of tourist values, including the UNESCO-listed site — Bialowieza Primeval Forest). The research findings will allow for a better understanding of the reasons why it has still not been possible to create an attractive offer and promote the region on a wider scale.

The research conducted for the purpose of the article is of exploratory nature. Its findings will be used in the formulation of a research hypothesis with regard to the determinants of effective cooperation of regional tourism economy entities for building the region's brand.

The paper is structured in the following way. We start with a review of literature in the field of place branding with particular emphasis on stakeholder cooperation in this process, then we describe the research method and research results. The article ends with discussion and conclusions.

Literature review

Place branding and participative approach to this concept

Place branding is growing in popularity, both as a research area and a practice used by local governments (Kavaratzis & Hatch 2013). As a local government practice, place branding is currently often implemented as a governance strategy for creating better environmental, social, and economic

conditions (Ma *et al.*, 2019). Due to the fact that people, capital, and knowledge are increasingly less related to the location, the development of places as brands helps to foster an environment capable of attracting target groups (Konecnik Ruzzier & de Chernatony 2013). The development of a place brand refers to the implementation of appropriate marketing strategies that allow places to differ from their competition through appropriate positioning of their resources (Kaplan *et al.*, 2010).

The definitions of a brand and place branding originate from the literature on marketing of tourist destinations (Cai, 2002). According to the most frequently cited definition, a place brand is a “network of associations within the minds of customers which is based on visual, verbal, and behavioural expression of a place embodied through goals, communication, values, and general culture of the place’s stakeholders and its overall design” (Zenker & Braun, 2010). The concept of branding covers intentional activities with an aim to change or improve the current image of the place (Baker, 2012, p. 18).

Place brands communicate selected functional, physical and emotional attributes, thus giving it specific meaning. This results in the creation of associations adding particular psychological and emotional connotations (Kavaratzis, 2008). The aim of place branding is attracting residents, companies, tourists or investors to a place (Braun, 2011).

The importance of tourism as an element of creating a regional brand is growing, and tourists and visitors are framing the most important target markets (Kirylyuk & Glińska, 2015). Place branding as a management practice involves stakeholders representing both the public and private sector (Klijn *et al.*, 2012). The necessity of including a larger number of local stakeholders is treated as an element distinguishing place branding from the processes of branding other objects (Hanna & Rowley, 2011).

Aitken and Campelo (2011), Houghton and Stevens (2011), Merrilees *et al.* (2012), Stubbs and Warnaby (2015) are enumerated among the authors arguing that the engagement of stakeholders is fundamentally important in the process of building a place brand. The place branding process should be organized in a participatory manner, where local stakeholders are involved in the development of brand elements and values which are its foundations (Eshuis *et al.*, 2014). This approach focuses on the idea of co-creating a brand which means that it is not formed through traditional communication but co-developed by a team representing different organizations (Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). The trend is consistent with one of the streams described in contemporary marketing literature indicating that customers and other stakeholders co-create brand identities (Voyer *et al.*, 2017). This is the effect of changing the paradigm in marketing thinking — from trans-

actional to relational, focused on forming long-term relationships with groups of stakeholders of a given organization (Hankinson, 2004). According to Kavaratzis and Hatch (2013), place branding should be understood as a multidialogue between stakeholders since brands are built from the “raw material” of identity, while identity emerges as a result of the exchange between the interested parties and all the things they share. The role of a local government is to facilitate this dialogue.

The creation of a place brand is a widely discussed issue in subject-related literature as a concept that supports territorial growth and development. Academics and practitioners agree that place branding brings benefits and they recognize the need for further development of the concept (Kerr & Balakrishnan, 2012). However, the acceptance of the participatory approach of this idea, expressed as the cooperation of local stakeholders in the process of place branding leading to greater success of branding projects, is important (Klijn *et al.*, 2012).

Cooperation in a tourist region for building the place brand

A destination, also a tourist region, can be defined as a group of actors linked by mutual relationships with specific rules, where the activity of each actor influences those of the others so that common objectives must be defined and attained in a coordinated way (Manente & Minghetti, 2006, p. 23). Freeman (1984, p. 46) described these actors as stakeholders, defined as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives”. The challenge is how various interests, perspectives and behaviors of stakeholders may be best linked to capture the destination’s collaborative potential to the full (Fyall *et al.*, 2012).

Hence, there appears a need to consider the concept of cooperation in a tourism region (Czernek, 2013) or stakeholder collaboration in a destination (Saito & Ruhanen, 2017). Both terms are defined as forms of voluntary joint actions where autonomous stakeholders engage in an interactive process, using shared rules, norms and structures, to act and decide on issues related to tourism development in the region (Wood & Gray, 1991, p. 146; Czernek, 2013; Saito & Ruhanen, 2017). As a tourism destination encompasses multiple, interdependent stakeholders often having different views on tourism development, it is useful to consider collaboration aimed at managing tourism-related issues at the destination level (Jamal & Getz, 1995; Saito & Ruhanen 2017).

Due to the complex character of destinations, developing a place brand requires special marketing solutions. In order to combine the voices of all stakeholders, destinations worldwide have introduced DMOs to facilitate

collaboration between various components operating within them (Pike, 2004; Fyall *et al.*, 2012). Destination branding activities are generally performed by DMOs along with other entities connected with tourism and regional development (Johann, 2014).

Ideally, place branding enhances the optimisation of tourism outcomes, fosters the access to necessary resources and facilitates the achievement of strategic objectives for all stakeholders (Kozak & Buhalis, 2019; Saito & Ruhanen, 2017; Buhalis, 2000). To achieve this, diverse interest groups must interact to build a regional partnership (Pilving *et al.*, 2019).

In place branding, the following stakeholders can be enumerated: the government; government departments with links to tourism; international, national, regional and local tourism organizations; tourism developers and entrepreneurs, tourism industry operators; investors (both local and international); non-tourism business practitioners; media and opinion leaders; service industries; and the community including local community groups, indigenous people's groups and local residents (Saito & Ruhanen 2017; García *et al.*, 2012). A multi-stakeholder collaboration aimed at developing a tourism destination and creating a regional brand is constantly evolving and depends on external circumstances as well as the maturity of relations between its members (Pilving *et al.*, 2019). Trust-building is essential for a successful collaboration; however, it is a time-consuming process and requires the long-term orientation as well as the involvement of significant resources (Pilving *et al.*, 2019; Webster, 1992). As Beritelli (2011) highlights, information and mutual communication between the entities are among important resources. The intensity of communication and the ease of obtaining necessary information promote trust and understanding as well as provide a strong foundation for cooperation.

Subject literature indicates that collaboration between organizations brings such benefits as: the reduction of the cost of marketing activities (Mendonça *et al.*, 2015); sharing the resources, skills and knowledge, risks, responsibilities and rewards (Bititci *et al.*, 2004); and having access to experiences and business opportunities of others (Zach & Racherla, 2011). According to Costa and Lima (2018), the expected benefits of cooperation in the tourism region include: mutual knowledge, access to more agents in the sector, access to greater knowledge, business and sales, working towards excellence, enabling the creation of programmes with thematic products — 'packages', an added value to business and to the improvement of services provided to customers, increased success and added value, greater visibility, greater publicity, lower costs and greater complementarity of activities.

There are numerous factors that hinder the stakeholder collaboration process: different and competing interests of stakeholders, various viewpoints, complex relationships and interdependence with other stakeholders, different communication styles and networks (Saito & Ruhanen, 2017). In Poland, one of the constraints in the establishment of a long-term partnership between stakeholders is a relatively short history of democracy and, consequently, short-term experience of such collaboration and a low level of trust (Pilving *et al.*, 2019; Czernek, 2013; Czernek *et al.*, 2017).

Research method

The subject case study is based on Podlaskie Voivodship in Poland. Literature analysis demonstrates that researchers base case studies on the most popular tourism regions. However, an investigation into less attractive regions, such as Podlaskie, can open a different perspective and contribute to a better understanding of territorial marketing mechanisms. Moreover, Podlaskie Voivodship has a large, still unused tourist potential, and the creation of a regional brand as a result of effective cooperation of many regional stakeholders can boost the development of tourism economy. This is confirmed by research in the field of tourism development in Podlaskie Voivodship (Borkowska-Niszczota, 2015; Panfiluk, 2017; Kiryluk, 2016; Szpilko, 2015).

A case study is defined as an empirical inquiry into the contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context where the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used (Yin, 1984). According to Paton and Appelbaum (2003), case studies represent an important research path in organisational science, not only as a method of generating hypotheses for quantitative studies, but for generating and testing theory.

Typically, case studies combine data-collection methods; hence, the verification of the assumptions adopted within the research is based on the results of IDIs conducted among the representatives of selected economic tourist entities that cooperate within a given PROT (representatives of PROT authorities, local government, non-profit organizations, science and business).

The authors selected an individual in-depth interview (IDI) as a research method since 1) it is used when the problem requires more profound knowledge of research participants; 2) it is used in studies dealing with difficult-to-reach people; 3) it is used when there is a need to acquire not only an assessment of a given phenomenon but also to understand the pro-

cess of its generation and requires a free and open expression of the opinion; 4) it creates an intimate atmosphere (Bryman & Bell, 2007; McDaniel & Gates, 2010).

In total, six interviews (each lasting 60 to 90 minutes) were conducted, covering representatives of higher managerial positions in organizations — members of the PROT. The research process started in June and ended in November 2019.

According to the guidelines in the literature, it was assumed that the selection of a qualitative research sample is understood as a method for gathering carefully selected “cases” which make up the body of empirical examples facilitating the most fruitful analysis of the phenomenon under consideration (intentional selection) (Flick, 2007). Using the guidance of Flick (2007) and on account of the study’s subject, it was assumed that the quality of sample selection will involve ensuring essential group diversity as well as its “suitability”.

As a research tool, the authors implemented an interview scenario which referred to the central issues of the article. The aim of the paper required that respondents should express free and unrestrained opinions and that was only possible by asking open-ended questions that did not force particular responses. The questions were edited so that the empirical material collected through them allowed for obtaining a perspective of different groups of stakeholders (public, private and social sectors) as well as answers to the following research questions: 1) What benefits do they see in the cooperation within the regional tourist organization for building the region brand? 2) What barriers, in their opinion, hinder the cooperation for building the region brand?

The interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed typically for data gathered in a qualitative manner. The analysis covered the arrangement of data accumulated during the study and its interpretation. The research process occurred in the following sequence: data sorting, data reduction (coding), final interpretative analysis and formulation of conclusions (Gibbs, 2018). Open coding or coding without prior conceptualization was used during data analysis. The intention was to define the subject issues instead of imposing interpretation of events based on a previously formulated theory (Gibbs, 2018).

Results and discussion

An important condition for initiating and developing cooperation in tourism regions is an awareness of the benefits that can be derived from such coop-

eration. The main benefits of institutional cooperation for building the regional tourist brand, perceived by PROT members, were divided into four categories:

1. economic:
 - combining sources of financing (private, public and social),
 - greater efficiency of the funds spent,
 - facilitating access to external financing,
2. organizational:
 - greater flexibility and speed of action, short decision-making time resulting from the lack of bureaucratic procedures,
 - cooperation on a partnership basis, without hierarchical dependencies,
 - cooperation with the National Tourism Organization and its foreign centres,
3. marketing:
 - coherent promotion of tourism in the region,
 - access to PROT resources (databases on regional tourist products, professional studies, knowledge and experience of specialists, using the image of the organization that is recognized on the market),
 - greater range of impact on recipients than in the case of actions taken by individual entities, in particular local governments,
 - mutual understanding of the needs and expectations of various entities of the regional tourism economy, exchange of information,
 - marketing support for tourist entrepreneurs,
4. social:
 - gradually gaining trust in the organization and cooperation,
 - developing education and raising awareness of the advantages of cooperation,
 - generating the new ideas.

The awareness that *“together we will do more than alone”* and *“to every partnership there are benefits”* is expressed by the representatives of all the interviewed organizations. However, when identifying the main benefits of cooperation, their perception varies slightly. Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the most perceived benefit of cooperation is primarily financial, i.e. accumulation of capital from various sources (public, private and social) and the possibility to jointly focus it on coherent regional promotion. This allows for increasing the effectiveness of the spent funds. This is particularly emphasized by the representative of the local government:

“The biggest benefit of the PROT is that you can do things together using two or three different funding sources. On the other hand, PROT is a body where e.g. an entrepreneur, local government and a social organization can do something specific in a short period of time out of the cash register of these three”.

The economic perspective of perceiving the main benefits of cooperation is quite common, as confirmed by the research of Czernek (2013) and Mendonça *et al.* (2015).

The local government and the board of ROT representatives underlined greater freedom of action (in the legal sense) of this type of organizations and the speed of decision-making as main benefits. Compared to the local governments in Poland, there are no bureaucratic procedures which significantly lengthen the decision-making process. A regional organization is a sort of implementation of the idea of public-private partnership and social participation. It has a more flexible formula, allowing for acting quickly and reacting to dynamic changes on the market.

From the perspective of non-profit organizations, the main benefits are seen outside the economic sphere. It is a synergy of activities and the possibility to integrate entities (having different, sometimes conflicting, interests) around a common idea with which they will identify themselves. It is also an opportunity to co-create new ideas and promotional initiatives. One representative of a non-profit organization strongly emphasized this aspect in the following statement:

“The diversity of thoughts, ideas, the diversity of goals should help to build a common base with which everyone will identify themselves. Everyone can contribute their original ideas and implement them on their own, but the benefit is that there is this common flow of ideas between entities, between partners – there is something coherent, there is a chance to build something in such a group that will connect its members”.

Joint activities for the creation of attractive, integrated tourist products do not exclude emphasizing the distinctiveness of the offer of individual entities. It is primarily about the complementarity of these measures and appropriate targeting. Therefore, tourist enterprises should not perceive themselves in terms of competition, but as cooperating partners. Tourists greatly value the attractiveness of the region’s tourist offer and the possibility to use a wide range of services, depending on individual preferences.

However, the creation of high-quality integrated tourist products, their commercialization and promotion as well as the creation of a well-known regional tourist brand requires coordinated activities. The ROT, as an entity bringing together representatives of local government units, tourist enterprises and various business environment institutions on equal rights, is per-

ceived as an entity that provides such coordination. Moreover, for such an organization with specific financial resources, knowledge, information and experience it is easier to create an image and reach the recipients with this message, both on the domestic and foreign market. As one of the business representatives points out, “*individual entities within the tourism industry are not able to effectively promote the region as they have neither sufficient budget nor organizational capacity to do that. They can do it by creating a group and cooperating with local government units as well as PROT-type tourist organizations*”.

All stakeholders emphasize marketing benefits related to greater effectiveness of promotion and a range of PROT’s impact. However, in their statements only two of them referred directly to the benefits related to the regional tourist brand. It was presented in the following way:

“A brand is an advertisement, so we should all promote ourselves under this brand umbrella... Acting under such an umbrella of this developed brand and being there, we can do much more than individually”.

In literature, the benefits of having a regional brand are clearly seen (Kerr & Balakrishnan, 2012). It may be quite unexpected that the stakeholders do not observe too much of its impact on the growth of innovation of the economy in the region. Although they clearly indicate that cooperation fosters the exchange of knowledge, information and experience between entities, they do not directly refer to innovation. Only the representative of science and non-profit organizations provided a direct connection:

“There are benefits to every cooperation... because even if these are bureaucratic structures, new ideas can always be born and we learn from each other, we are still learning from each other, so this is important”.

Another benefit of cooperation is the increase of knowledge and awareness of the entities in this area. The research has shown that, on the regional scale, the awareness of benefits to cooperation under the PROT and the created brand is not common, and it is dominated by an individual perspective. This is confirmed in the words of a representative of the management board of this organization:

“On the occasion of joining such organizations as ROTs or LOTs, the first question is <what will I get out of it, but only me — individually?>”.

It can be considered that the interest of entities in the cooperation would be greater if the awareness of the possible benefits were raised. Such a research perspective — the expected benefits of cooperation — is shown in the Costa and Lima (2018) research.

The findings of the subject studies indicated that the statements of the interviewed members of the PROT were more focused on barriers. The

main perceived barriers to cooperation for building the region's brand were divided into four categories:

1. economic:
 - the organization's low budget, in relation to increasing expenditure,
 - the need to pay a membership fee,
 - low level of development of the tourist function of the region,
2. organizational:
 - high turnover of the PROT members,
 - duplication of efforts and promotional activities by PROT and local governments,
 - high fragmentation and diversity of entities in the region, divergence of objectives and interests,
 - lack of integration of the tourism industry in the region, fragmentation of promotional activities,
 - poor engagement of the members of the organization in promotional activities and mutual exchange of information on the subject,
 - limited activities of local and regional authorities due to legal procedures,
3. socio-cultural:
 - poor involvement of citizens in social activities,
 - low awareness of the benefits of cooperation,
 - lack of conviction that partnership-based cooperation can bring real benefits,
 - too high expectations of direct benefits and promotion of single offers,
 - communication barrier,
 - lack of trust towards partners,
 - perceiving other actors as competitors,
4. political:
 - unfavourable policy of local authorities focused mainly on internal promotion and winning the electorate, lack of understanding of the need for external promotion activities,
 - political climate in the country oriented towards the migration issue, growing distrust of visitors.

In analysing the statements of the representatives of particular groups of entities, it can be noticed that each stakeholder indicates the above all socio-cultural barriers related to awareness as significant barriers to partnership-based cooperation in the region.

From the perspective of a business representative, the main barrier to the development of partnership-based cooperation in the region is: "*lack of*

conviction that group cooperation can provide real benefits for all participants of this cooperation. Individual entities of the tourism industry strive to promote their own services/facilities and focus primarily on attracting customers <for themselves>”. On a local scale, the perception of a group of tourist enterprises is sometimes dominated by the fear of other entities as competitors rather than partners. Recently, however, one can notice a change in the way of thinking about the value of stakeholder cooperation, which is influenced by the policy of the European Union as it rewards stakeholder cooperation when applying for EU subsidies.

The lack of awareness of the benefits perceived by entrepreneurs results in their low involvement in partnership-based cooperation in the region. This is confirmed by the statement:

“As far as entrepreneurs are concerned, we have to inform what the PROT is. With such a low interest it does poorly because there are few entities operating in this tourism. I have an impression that this is our Polish, regional feature — <I prefer do it alone>”.

There are numerous reasons for the poor involvement of tourism companies. In addition to the lack of perceived effects of cooperation, a weak development of the tourist function in the region can be mentioned. These links were pointed out by a representative of the local government: *“If the region lived out of tourism, entrepreneurs would be more willing to associate with the local government”.* The problem of poor involvement in cooperation concerns not only private sector entities, but also the public sector — especially local governments.

All the interviewed indicated a low level of trust to potential partners as one of the main barriers to cooperation. This trust can be considered both on the level of individual trust (to specific people) and trust to institutions. A low level of trust results in problems in mutual communication, knowledge and experience exchange. The problem of information exchange and mutual communication between tourist destination entities is highlighted by Beritelli (2011).

In the analysed region, the research has shown that there is a lack of integration of tourism economy entities around common ideas and values connected with shaping the regional tourist brand. This results in a large dispersion of promotional activities and sometimes their duplication. The lack of coordinated promotional activities wastes the potential benefits from cooperation. One of the reasons for the lack of integration of regional tourism economy entities is an insufficient number of direct meetings. This stems, inter alia, from the fact that in recent years there has been a significant change in the forms of promotion (e.g. moving from tourism fairs to Internet promotion). A large fragmentation of entities in the region, diver-

gence of objectives and interests of individual partners also translates into different expectations as to the directions and forms of promotion in the region, which may give rise to different conflict situations.

The problem of lack of trust may result, as Czernek (2013) states, from certain features of Polish national culture, insufficient social capital and a low level of development of civil society in Poland, especially the lack of tradition of cooperation in local communities and positive experiences of this cooperation. The barrier of mistrust is particularly evident between public and private sector entities. In Poland, the formula of public-private partnership has not been very popular. Local authorities are afraid of closer cooperation with business for fear of being accused of corruption. At the same time, trust-building is essential for successful collaboration, however, it is a time-consuming process and requires a long-term orientation, the involvement of capital and management as resources (Pilving *et al.*, 2019; Webster, 1992).

Another important barrier is connected with financing. First of all, it is the low budget of the PROT which limits the possibilities for promotional activities. Secondly, it is a necessity for entities to pay membership fees, which discourages potential members, especially local governments.

From the perspective of non-profit organizations, one of the significant barriers hindering the creation of a coherent regional tourist brand, recognisable on domestic and foreign markets, is the unfavourable policy of local governments. Some local governments are more focused on other forms of activity than tourism, or their tasks in the field of promotion are mainly focused on internal communication — with inhabitants. They organize, for example, individual initiatives, in terms of short-term interests and raise residents' willingness in order to win the electorate.

The representative of non-profit organizations as well draw attention to the Polish policy on the issue of immigrants, which from the perspective of tourism development may be a significant threat (increases distrust of visitors).

Conclusions

As the formation and development of cooperative relations between stakeholders is essential for the success of a destination, the identification of the benefits and barriers to the cooperation of tourism economy entities is a significant research challenge. The authors established a conceptual framework for the systematization of benefits and barriers of cooperation as seen by regional stakeholders. The benefits were grouped into the following

categories: economic, organizational, marketing and social. In turn, the barriers included determinants: economic, organizational, socio-cultural and political. The results of this study contribute to a better understanding of cooperation between tourist entities in a region with large but unused tourist potential.

The research has shown that in regions with an underdeveloped tourist function, the awareness of benefits from the cooperation of entities for creating a regional tourist brand is not high. Low awareness of benefits, and at the same time, perceiving them from the perspective of individual interests, is one of the main barriers which causes poor involvement in cooperation. On the other hand, awareness of barriers to cooperation among the participants is high. Particular attention is paid to the lack of integration of tourist entities in the region, large fragmentation of promotional activities, lack of a common idea related to the tourist brand of the region and problems in mutual communication between entities.

The analysis of research results allowed the authors to formulate the following hypothesis:

The conditions for initiating and developing cooperation among regional tourist entities are raising the awareness of benefits associated with the regional tourist brand and partnership-based cooperation as well as increasing the level of trust (both towards individuals and institutions).

The complexity and multidimensionality of the issues of cooperation for the creation of the regional tourist brand form a convenient platform for further scientific analyses. As a suggested direction of further research, the issue of trust should be indicated, and within it: the analysis of factors determining trust at the individual and institutional level, the formulation of trust measurement scales, the examination of the existing level of trust, the impact of trust on the development of partnership-based cooperation in tourism.

Breaking down barriers to cooperation in practice requires, first of all, many educational activities aimed at raising the awareness of stakeholders about the benefits of having a coherent regional tourist brand (which are noticeable only after some time). It will also allow for the integration of entities, which will create conditions for creating synergic situations and strengthening the effects of cooperation.

The universal value of the research is the deepening the knowledge on the identification and classification of determinants of tourism cooperation in the regions. Choosing a regional tourist organization for research as one of the categories of organizations that function in many countries around the world as destination marketing organizations (DMOs) allows making international comparisons.

The research has certain limitations. The first limitation concerns the implementation of qualitative research, which is more exploratory than conclusive. The second refers to a small number of conducted interviews; however, the sample includes representatives of all categories of stakeholders associated with a regional tourism organization.

References

- Aitken, R., & Campelo, A. (2011). The four Rs of place branding. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 27(9/10). doi: 10.1080/0267257X.2011.560718.
- Baker, B. (2012). *Destination branding for small cities*. Portland: Creative Leap Book.
- Beritelli, P. (2011). Cooperation among prominent actors in a tourist destination. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 38. doi: 10.1016/j.annals.2010.11.015.
- Bititci, U. S., Martinez, V., Albores, P., & Parung, J. (2004). Creating and managing value in collaborative networks. *International Journal of Physical Distribution and Logistics Management*, 34(3-4). doi: 10.1108/09600030410533576.
- Borkowska-Niszczota, M. (2015). Tourism clusters in Eastern Poland - analysis of selected aspects of the operation. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Science*, 213. doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.11.511.
- Braun, E. (2011). Putting city branding into practice. *Journal of Brand Management*, 19. doi: 10.1057/bm.2011.55.
- Bryman, A., & Bell, E. (2007). *Business research methods*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Buhalis, D. (2000). Marketing the competitive destination of the future. *Tourism Management*, 21(1). doi: 10.1016/S0261-5177(99)00095-3.
- Cai, L. A. (2002). Cooperative branding for rural destinations. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 29(3). doi: 10.1016/S0160-7383(01)00080-9.
- Costa, T., & Lima, M. J. (2018). Cooperation in tourism and regional development. *Tourism & Management Studies*, 14(4). doi: 10.18089/tms.2018.14405.
- Czernek, K., & Czakon W. (2016). Trust-building processes in tourist cooperation: the case of a Polish region. *Tourism Management*, 52. doi: 10.1016/j.tourman.2015.07.009.
- Czernek, K. (2013). Determinants of cooperation in a tourist region. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 40. doi: 10.1016/j.annals.2012.09.003.
- Daniluk, A. (2016). Conditions of cooperation between enterprises and business environment institutions using the Podlasie region as an example. *Economics and Management*, 8(4). doi: 10.1515/emj-2016-0029.
- Donaldson, B., & O'Toole, T. (2002). *Strategic marketing relationships: from strategy to implementation*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.

- Eshuis, J., Klijn, E. H., & Braun, E. (2014). Place marketing and citizen participation: branding as strategy to address the emotional dimension of policy making? *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 80(1). doi: 10.1177/0020852313513872.
- Flick, U. (2007). *Designing qualitative research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Freeman, R. E. (1984). *Strategic management: a stakeholders approach*. Boston: Pitman.
- Fyall, A., Garrod, B., & Wang, Y. (2012). Destination collaboration: a critical review of theoretical approaches to a multi-dimensional phenomenon. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 1. doi: 10.1016/j.jdmm.2012.10.002.
- García, J. A., Gómez, M., & Molina, A. (2012). A destination-branding model: an empirical analysis based on stakeholders. *Tourism Management*, 33(3). doi: 10.1016/j.tourman.2011.07.006.
- Gibbs, G. R. (2018). *Analysing qualitative data*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Hankinson, G. (2004). Relational network brands: towards a conceptual model of place brands. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 10(2). doi: 10.1177/135676670401000202.
- Hanna, S., & Rowley, J. (2011). Towards a strategic place brand-management model. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 27. doi: 10.1080/02672571003683797.
- Houghton, J. P., & Stevens, A. (2011). City branding and stakeholder engagement. In K. Dinnie (Ed.). *City branding: theory and cases*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jamal, T., & Getz, D. (1995). Collaboration theory and community tourism planning. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 22(1). doi: 10.1016/0160-7383(94)00067-3.
- Johann, M. (2014). The image of Poland as a tourist destination. *European Journal of Tourism, Hospitality and Recreation*. Special Issue.
- Kaplan, M. D., Yurt, O., Guneri, B., & Kurtulus, K. (2010). Branding places: applying brand personality concept to cities. *European Journal of Marketing*, 44. doi: 10.1108/03090561011062844.
- Kavaratzis, M. (2008). From city marketing to city branding. An interdisciplinary analysis with reference to Amsterdam, Budapest and Athens. *PhD dissertation, Groningen University*. Retrieved from <http://dissertations.ub.rug.nl/faculties/rw/2008/m.kavaratzis/> (19.05.2019).
- Kavaratzis, M., & Hatch, M. J. (2013). The dynamics of place brands: an identity-based approach to place branding theory. *Marketing Theory*, 13(1). doi: 10.1177/1470593112467268.
- Kerr, G., & Balakrishnan, M. S. (2012). Challenges in managing place brands: the case of Sydney. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 8(1). doi: 10.1057/pb.2011.32.
- Kirylyuk, H., & Glińska, E. (2015). Creation and evaluation of the tourist image of a country - the example of Poland. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences* 213. doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.11.473.

- Kirylyuk, H. (2016). Forest resources as a basis to creation of an integrated tourist product of an area on the example of Białowieża forest. *Journal Economics and Environment*, 4.
- Klijn, E. H., & Koppenjan, J. F. M. (2016). Governance networks in the public sector. Oxon: Routledge.
- Klijn, E., Eshuis, J., & Braun, E. (2012). Stakeholder involvement on the effectiveness of place branding. *Public Management Review*, 14(4). doi: 10.1080/14719037.2011.649972.
- Konecnik Ruzzier, M., & de Chernatony, L. (2013). Developing and applying a place brand identity model: the case of Slovenia. *Journal of Business Research*, 66. doi: 10.1016/j.jbusres.2012.05.023.
- Kozak, M., & Buhalis, D. (2019). Cross-border tourism destination marketing: prerequisites and critical success factors. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 14. doi: 10.1016/j.jdmm.2019.100392.
- Ma, W., Schraven, D., de Bruijne, M., de Jong, M., & Lu, H. (2019). Tracing the origins of place branding research: a bibliometric study of concepts in use (1980–2018). *Sustainability*, 11. doi: 10.3390/su11112999.
- Manente, M., & Minghetti, V. (2006). Destination management organizations and actors. In D. Buhalis & C. Costa (Ed.). *Tourism business frontiers: consumers, products and industry*. Oxford: Elsevier ButterworthHeinemann.
- McDaniel, C., & Gates, R. (2010). *Marketing research*. NJ: John Wiley and Son.
- Mendonça, V., Varajão, J., & Oliveira, P. (2015). Cooperation networks in the tourism sector: multiplication of business opportunities. *Procedia Computer Science*, 64. doi: 10.1016/j.procs.2015.08.552.
- Merrilees, B., Miller, D., & Herington, C. (2012). Multiple stakeholders and multiple city brand meanings. *European Journal of Marketing*, 46(7/8). doi: 10.1108/03090561211230188.
- Morgan, N. J., Pritchard, A., & Piggott, R. (2003). Destination branding and the role of the stakeholders: the case of New Zealand. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 9(3). doi: 10.1177/135676670300900307.
- Panfiluk, E. (2017). Elements of touristic attractiveness of the forest areas: study based on the Białowieża forest micro-region. *Building Resilient Society: Book of Proceedings*.
- Pfeffer, J., & Salancik, G. (1978). *The external control of organizations: a resource dependence perspective*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Pike, S. (2004). *Destination marketing organizations*. Oxford: Elsevier.
- Pike, S., & Page, S. (2014). Destination marketing organizations and destination marketing: a narrative analysis of the literature. *Tourism Management*, 41. doi: 10.1016/j.tourman.2013.09.009.
- Pilving, T., Kull, T., Suškevičs, M., & Viira, A.H. (2019). The tourism partnership life cycle in Estonia: striving towards sustainable multisectoral rural tourism collaboration. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 31. doi: 10.1016/j.tmp.2019.05.001.

- Saito, H., & Ruhanen, L. (2017). Power in tourism stakeholder collaborations: power types and power holders. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 31. doi: 10.1016/j.jhtm.2017.01.001.
- Stubbs J., & Warnaby G. (2015). Rethinking place branding from a practice perspective: working with stakeholders In M. Kavaratzis, G. Warnaby, G. J. Ashworth (Eds.). *Rethinking place branding. Comprehensive brand development for cities and regions*. London: Springer.
- Szpilko, D. (2015). The future of tourism development in the Podlaskie Voivodeship. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 213. doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.11.514.
- Voyer, B. G., Kastanakis, M. N., & Rhode, A. K. (2017). Co-creating stakeholder and brand identities: a cross-cultural consumer perspective. *Journal of Business Research*, 70. doi: 10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.07.010.
- Webster, F. E. (1992). The changing role of marketing in the organization. *Journal of Marketing*, 56(4). doi: 10.2307/1251983.
- Williamson, O. (1985). *The economic institutions of capitalism*. New York: Free Press.
- Wood, D., & Gray, B. (1991). Toward a comprehensive theory of collaboration. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Sciences*, 27(2). doi: 10.1177/0021886391272001.
- Yin, R. K. (1984). *Case study research - design and methods*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.
- Zach, F., & Racherla, P. (2011). Assessing the value of collaborations in tourism networks: a case study of Elkhart County, Indiana. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 28(1). doi: 10.1080/10548408.2011.535446.
- Zenker, S., & Braun, E. (2010). Towards an integrated approach for place brand management. In *Proceedings of the 50th European Regional Science Association Congress*, Jönköping, Sweden, 19–23. Retrieved from <http://www-sre.wu.ac.at/ersa/ersaconfs/ersa10/ERSA2010finalpaper181.pdf> (1.08.2019).