64th AIEST Conference 2014

24 - 28 August 2014 – Plzen, Czech Republic

Practitioners' council

25 August 2014

„Potentials and limits of destination branding"

Branding can hardly be separated from the dynamics in the wider tourism system (see Ryan, 2002). It is strongly connected to product development and service design as well as to the strategic coordination of actors in a destination (i.e. destination governance). Without any doubt, destination branding is a highly complex task due to the many stakeholders concerned and the limited hierarchical control. Moreover, destination branding is subject to internal and external change especially to political, technological and social transformations.

The impact of new communication technologies on the tourism system has been extensive and is continuing to alter established balances. Amongst others, different platforms of social media have increased transparency and availability of information for guests. These developments are not without consequences for destination branding and require proactive engagement.

Therefore, the aim of the session is to give a fresh stimulus to research and to discuss destination branding in relation to the different dynamic elements of the tourism system and to new developments in digital communication. Amongst others, the following questions will be considered:

1) What is the role of branding in a communication system that is strongly influenced by direct peer-to-peer contacts?

   a. What is its role in a world of increased complexity? What is the relation of a brand to reality?
   b. What should a brand deliver to customers? What do customers expect from brands? What should brands communicate? What is the role of stereotypes and clichés in branding compared to newly emerging themes?
   c. How can the expected roles of branding be efficiently and effectively fulfilled?
   d. How can branding be connected to product development and service delivery as well as to destination experiences? What means experiencing a brand in the context of tourism, how can a destination brand live?
   e. How can brands become emotionally appealing? How can an emotional link with tourists be created?

    f.   How can brands contribute to create travel communities? How can brands create affection, loyalty and identity among guests (and residents)? How can destination brands develop into lifestyle statements and become indicators of group membership?

2) What is the role of a destination brand in the context of autonomous branding of the diverse destination stakeholders? How can a composite brand relate to these sub-brands? How should an effective brand architecture look like?

    a.   What are the consequences of positioning and external differentiation for internal dynamics in destinations? What is the consequence of communicating clichés for the internal dynamics in destinations?
    b.   How can the brand building process be governed? Does it need to be a top-down process? Who should be involved and who should be responsible?
    c.   What is the connection to quality criteria and standardization?
    d.   On which level should destination branding be organized? What are the respective roles of the national, regional and local or city levels?
    e.   What is its relationship to other (territorial) brands and to place marketing in general?
    f.   What is the role of branding in the internal communication and in destination governance? Might branding be a means of governance? Is there something like a governance *through* branding?
    g.   Under what conditions can brands provide a common framework?
    h.   To what extent, branding is a political issue? What can be constructive, what destructive roles of politics in destination branding?

3) How can and should destination branding be kept dynamic?

    a.   How is it possible to keep branding consistent over time while appearing fresh and contemporary? What characterizes timeless brands? To which type of changes should branding adapt and how fast should this adaptation occur?
    b.   Might brands follow a life cycle and thus require repeated rejuvenation and re-building? What are the challenges in the different phases of brand development?

Structure of the council:

Short statements of practitioners:

Petra Stolba, CEO Austria Tourism, Vienna (Austria), and Chair of AIEST Practitioners' Council
Martina Fundaro, Representation North America, Prague Convention Bureau
Nico Mulder, Marketing Manager, Amsterdam Marketing
Martin Plachy, President, European Spas Association
Harald Zulauf, General Manager, Media Consulta, Berlin and Cologne

Harald Pechlaner, European Academy Bozen-Bolzano (Italy) and Catholic University of Eichstätt/Ingolstadt (Germany)