

The Emotional Attachment to Places Gained by Organizing of Events with Culinary and Heritage Promotion Content

Marica Mazurek

University of Žilina, Slovakia

Abstract : The emotional attachment to tourism destinations can be fulfilled via attitudes, attributes of the place, sophisticated management and management of brand attributes, for example natural environment, history, culture, heritage and service quality in tourism destinations. Two of important components of comparative advantage are history and culture. Cultural products could be provided in the framework of different culinary specialties and proposed by organizing of events in order to boost competitiveness. Especially organizing of traditional events could increase multiplication effect in a particular city. Organizing of events can boost visitation, familiarity and place branding strategies of cities. The article will explore how these components have been used in marketing strategy of Banská Bystrica, Slovakia (Radvanský Jarmok – Radvan Market) now and in the past. Originality of this research could be proved by using the authentic examples from a former mining city in Slovakia.

The exploratory method of research and a case study have been used, especially based on the studied materials (secondary research) by collecting of historical material; however also a primary research has been applied (personal experiences, empirical approach, collecting of pictures and evaluation of secondary statistical materials). The purpose of research is to explore how cultural events with heritage and culinary content could be useful for destination competitiveness growth and the findings might be a valuable tool for a statement that competitiveness is strongly based on local factors. A case study of Banská Bystrica will be an example of this statement.

Key words: Events with culinary and heritage promotion, competitiveness of destinations, place branding, multiplication effect

Introduction

Competitiveness in tourism destinations has interested researchers and academics (Heath & Wall, 1992; Kozak & Rimmington, 1999; Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Buhalis, 2000; Crouch & Ritchie, 2003; Hassan, 2000; Bordas, 1994, etc.) and it tends to be very closely related to the process of use of comparative advantage by the application of competitive advantage tools, for instance history and culture, culinary products and the heritage of a destination in favour of its better prosperity and popularity. One of the tools of competitive advantage for this goal could be marketing, branding and especially organizing of events with culinary content, for instance historical fairs and markets.

Pritchard and Morgan (1996) suggest that a successful brand builds an emotional link between product and consumer and that “mood marketing” is a useful method of destination branding; where brand saliency is created through

the development of emotional relationship with the consumer through highly choreographed and focused communication campaigns.” Emotional attachment to the tourism destinations can be fulfilled via attitudes, attributes of the place, especially through the sophisticated management of the tourism system in a place (place branding and management) and management of brand attributes, for example natural environment, history, culture, heritage as well as services offered in tourism destinations.

Meaning of a brand is embedded in the imagery or image building from more intangible components. The use of brands by different people evokes different meaning for various social groups based on demographic and psychographic factors. Image and brand associations, consisting of attributes, benefits, and brand attitudes, are basic concepts of a model. The character of attributes influences the brand imagery creation, i.e., the tangible attributes as scenery, history, heritage, which could be easily captured in customers’ memories. The intangible attributes are, for instance, the atmosphere of the place, character of the environment, services, and quality of infrastructure.

Tourism destinations are becoming among the largest brands, and their complexity means a challenge for marketers and planners. Buhalis (2000, p. 3) noted that “tourists perceive the destination as a brand comprising a collection of suppliers and services ...and consume it as a comprehensive experience during the visit.” A separation of experience from the physical components and attributes is not suitable for successful branding and marketing processes in a destination. Experiences are an excellent tool to improve competitiveness, branding and creation of the interesting tourism product, which might be deeply attached to the customer’s decision making process in favour of choosing the same destination again (loyalty growth). This could be achieved through the implementation of the successful place branding strategies.

The “mobilization of ideas, knowledge and expectations” and technologies, which can be used also in branding, as for instance experience economy concepts, has been discussed for instance by Pine and Gilmore (1999). Diffusion and transformation of knowledge is crucial. Knowledge (tacit and codified) as well as cultural knowledge (history, traditions, heritage) have incremental impact on innovation and the quality of experiences. Experiences influence dramatically visitors and their perception of a place. The image and reputation of a place have an incremental influence on the popularity of a place. Anholt (2007) admitted a correlation between the positive experience of visiting a country and positive feelings about its products, government, culture, and its people. Deeper understanding of place brands in tourism destinations and reputation might be helpful for competitiveness.

Competitiveness of tourism destinations raises the question of which factors might be crucial for improvement in order to be more competitive (Gilmore, 2002). Former rational and standardized approaches to marketing have shifted to a more emotional approach based on relational marketing, which is strongly influenced by the reputation of places, people, events, etc. In the process of

building this relationship, it is important to build a reputation through the implementation of a destination brand approach.

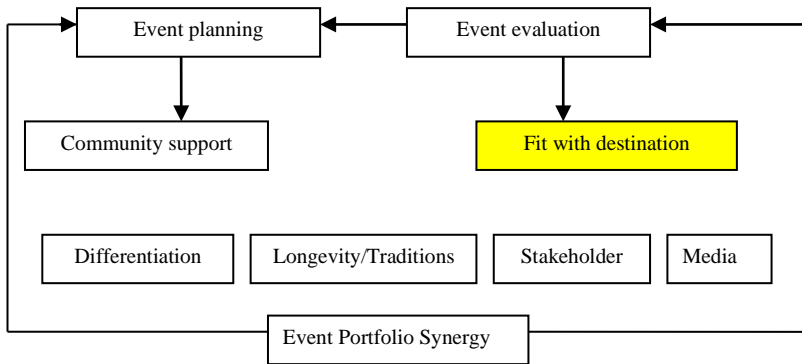
Several authors as Pyo, Mihalik & Uysal (1989) underlined a multidimensional character of motivation of tourists seeking an experience and the emotional attachment to tourism destinations. The emotional bonds and motivation are formed on a demand side; however, a tourism destination's desire is to create favourable conditions and to motivate and attract more visitors and strengthen competitive advantage through place branding.

Branding as a tool of competitive advantage is based on the principles of value-added effect for customers (demand side) and the equity creation (tourism destinations, supply side). Pike (2005) mentioned that the future of marketing is as a battle of brands. Branding simplifies the visitors' decisions, simplifies the process of segmentation and positioning. It could be understood in tourism destination branding concept as the activity, which means "bringing together two or more adjoining communities of similar natural and cultural compositions and attractions" (Cai, 2002, p. 734).

Tourism destinations are becoming among the largest brands, and their complexity means a challenge for marketers and planners. Buhalis (2000, p. 3) noted that "tourists perceive the destination as a brand comprising a collection of suppliers and services ... and consume it as a comprehensive experience during the visit." A separation of experience from the physical components and attributes is not suitable for successful branding and marketing processes in a destination. For this reason is important to keep strictly the authenticity principle and brand identity approach in the whole branding process. The same concerns appear also in place branding process, which is the incorporation of branding principles into the territorial marketing development strategies.

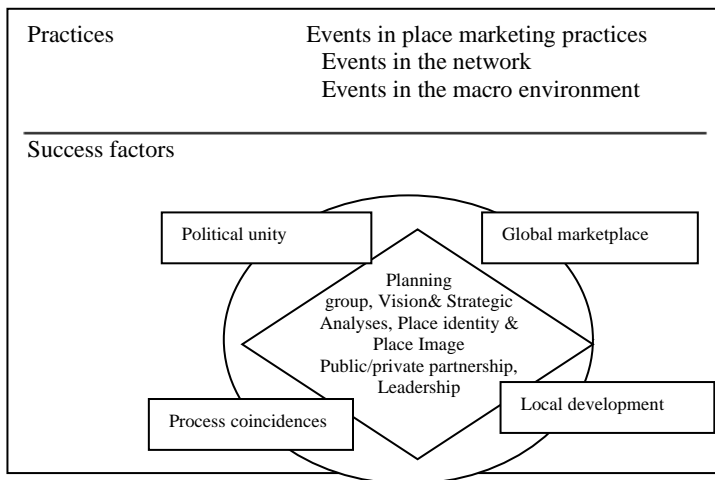
The authors Hubbard and Hall (1998) created a general model of management of cities (places) with a goal to improve a new image of a city (place). This model contains the following tasks for city management, which means a stronger marketing and promotion, city development, support of the organizing of cultural activities in a city, organizing of mega events, cultural regeneration, and partnership creation.

One of the possible innovative approaches, which could be applied by organizing of common events in places (cities, other territories), are specific strategies, which were described by Jago (2003) in his specific model of planning and events evaluation (Scheme 1).



Scheme 1: Model of planning and evaluation of the influence of organized events in marketing of territories and the creation of brand identity of territory, Jago et al, 2003, p. 7.

By organizing of such events is necessary to respect the values of territories, support a co-operation of the public and private sectors and to take into account the economic contribution and multiplication effect of the organized events. Crucial is a process of building of brand identity and improvement of image of a territory, creating of social networks, supporting of the additional financing of new events, creating of new employment opportunities and many more multiplication effects. Organizing of events as one form of marketing promotion has been discussed also by Reinisto who classified several success factors in territorial marketing (Scheme 2).



Scheme 2: Framework of the Focal Study. Success Factors in Place Marketing, Reinisto, 2001.

In order to improve the image and define the existing brand identity properly, Kapferer (2004) mentioned four important sources to include: the brand's products, brand characters and symbols, geographical and historical roots, and brand essence. We will focus on historical roots and especially cultural traditions and products based on it, which were important for the image creation and attraction of visitors to the specific place.

Creation of brand image and brand identity requires a consistent and systematic approach and may last for years to establish brand image and name recognition and develop strong awareness of a destination product (Morgan, Pritchard & Piggot, 2003). One of such a product could be the organizing of annual markets in some specific place, which is rooted in the historical context and based on traditions. This kind of event or a product offered through event tend to be crucial for image building of a specific place and for the emotional attachment of different groups of people to that specific place, for instance inhabitants, visitors, and entrepreneurs. This attachment and positive feelings could lead to loyal and patriotic behaviour, which might be important for branding of the particular place.

Success could be, in some cases, not only trend and novelty; it could be a loyalty to the traditional values and attributes implied in new marketing strategies and branding.

Destination loyalty, unfortunately, has been not studied very often. Several authors underline the importance of loyalty in branding, which influences the repetition of visitation (e.g. Opperman, 2000; Gitelson & Crompton, 1984).

One possibility of strengthening brands is brand leveraging and brand extension process. Building strong brands and brand extensions for instance through events, new tourism products and services might benefit the core brand equity of a destination. Process of brand leveraging and extension is extremely important in tourism destinations because it could influence the image and fulfilment of brand promises. Favourable brand associations with the brand improve the brand perception and brand equity, which enables in tourism destinations to increase the visitation and the amount of income (multiplication effect). Brand leveraging and brand extension concepts tend to strengthen brand equity, brand value, reputation of destination. The core brand of visitors is able to create strong attachment to the brand. Various academics underline the importance of research on tourism brand extension and innovation management, especially with the focus on the development of innovative destination strategies (e.g. Buhalis, 2000; Hankinson, 2005).

The emotional attachment and creation of image as well as the improvement of the process of branding of a specific destination (e.g. town or city) could be improved by specific factors, for instance how community is involved in the support of organizing such events. Jago (2003) mentioned that "local people perceive themselves as an essential part of the event and are interested in the event, their support will carry a positive effect on the way that visitors perceive the event and the destination." For this reason, not only management of such an event, product offer, promotion, but people are crucial for success and emotional

attachment. In this moment could be strongly seen the influence of the principle of co-creation in product offer in a territory, where the product (an event) has been co-created with local people or entrepreneurs and through this process is built a stronger tie to the specific event, which might be culturally or historically important. By organizing of such event is important to mention a cultural fit and longevity and tradition of the event (Jago, 2004), which might be explained as the longevity of at least 5- years in order to be sustainable.

Kotler (2002a), Ashworth and Voogd (1990), Reinisto (2001), Hankinson (2001, 2004) were supporting the idea of a strong place marketing and place branding due to the goal to achieve stronger customer's emotional attachment to tourism destinations and places generally.

Place is being discovered in many realms of scholarly and professional practice. This is happening, not in the sense of the discovery of new locales, sites, or environments, but of a growing appreciation of the importance of the interrelationships of values, beliefs, experiences, social and political history, natural environment, economic and political practices, rituals, and traditions of a geographically-defined region or community. "(Smith, 2015).

Sense of place is a function of the culture of the place or of a visitor's perception of that culture (Smith, 2015). Successful tourism is not simply a matter of having better transportation and hotels, but adding a particular national flavour in keeping with traditional ways of life and projecting a favourable image and one way of promotion of a place are historical markets with traditions, crafts, culinary products, food tasting and heritage promotion generally. One of such products in tourism marketing strategies could be traditional markets with food tasting, culinary products promotion (culinary tourism) as well as wine tasting and traditional culture, music (music and culinary festivals). These events are important tools for the competitiveness support and serve stronger emotional attachment of visitors.

For this reason, our goal was to explore how cultural events with heritage and culinary content could be useful for destination competitiveness growth and a city Banská Bystrica offers a good example of this statement especially due its history and activities in the past and also in the contemporary period of time.

Methods

The exploratory method of research and a case study approach have been used, especially based on the studied materials (secondary research) by collecting of historical material; however also a primary research has been used (personal experiences, empirical approach, collecting of pictures and evaluation of secondary statistical materials). The purpose of our research is to explore how cultural events with heritage and culinary content could be useful for destination competitiveness growth and the findings might be a valuable tool for a statement that competitiveness is strongly based on local factors.

Case study BanskaBystrica

BanskaBystrica, a town situated in Central Slovakia, which is familiar for its history of Radvansky market as a tourist and formerly market attraction, was granted the town privileges in 1255 by the King Belo the IVth. The town was familiar for its rich sources of copper and the entrepreneurs of Thurzo-Fugger mining company from this town were familiar in the whole Europe. The changing names of this town from Nova Villa Bystriciensis, Bystricia, Neosollium, Neusohl, Bistricz, Besterztercebánya, BanskáBystrica were given to the town in dependance on the historical circumstances. In Middle Ages in the end of the 13th century the city was populated by Germans and for this reason it started to use the German name Neusohl. In 1494 was created the company Ungarisher Handel also known as Der NeusohlerKupferhandel (NeusohlCoppermarkt), which belonged to the biggest and most modern mining companies in that period of time.

The town was later in the 20th century an important centre of uprising against fascism (Slovak National Uprising). BanskaBystrica belongs to the most beautiful towns in Slovakia and is still very popular tourism destination for visitors. The town is surrounded by splendid mountains and is protected against winds. The contemporary number of citizens living in this town is 90 thousand inhabitants. In 2017 the town was designated a title of the European city of sport due to its sport activities, good sport facilities and especially the origin of several excellent sportsmen born and living in this town, for instance Marek Hamsik, a soccer champions. BanskaBystrica is also familiar in tourism activities and belongs to the attractive tourism destinations visited annually by tourists.

The town representatives started to recognize the importance of events organizing and supported in the co-operation with the private sector to the organizing of several events and festivals in this town. Some of the events were based on long term traditions and have a historical background. These types of events belong to the cultural heritage of the town of BanskaBystrica. The existence of these events through centuries created also deeper ties of different towns and regions in Slovakia to this town.

History of Radvanskyjarmok (Radvanmarkt)

History of Radvanskyjarmok (Radvan market) started in the 17th century and the first Radvansky market took place in September 8th, 1657. Radvan was a village close to the town BanskaBystrica and later became a part of BanskaBystrica. First written evidence about the Radvansky market is from 1655 when the Austrian-Hungarian king Leopold II. Habsburg granted the privileges to organize it in Radvan. Radvan was familiar for organizing of several different markets in autumn or spring period, but the most important was Radvansky market organized in fall, traditionally from 8th to 10th of September. In the 19th century the importance of this market gained the international level similar to the markets in Leipzig (Germany), Novgorod (Russia), Kiacht (the boundary between Russia and Mongolia).

The traditions of handcraft and local agricultural products were popular for this market similarly as for the other markets in the world; however, each country, region or a town had a typical flavour, image or products. These are the roots of place branding and especially the identity of a place creation. Local people and the visitors from neighbour regions or towns as well as from abroad started to get used to the flavour of market.

The traditional products became typical for the specific region or a town. These are beginnings of the emotional attachment to the place built through the organizing of events of different character. Most popular became such events as Radvansky market because of the fulfilment of everyday needs for living sources – sale of groceries, local products, and special meals. The second reason of the popularity of such events was a sale of local craft products, sale of agricultural products and needs for agricultural activities, livestock, animals (especially in the past). Similar markets still exist everywhere in the world, but they are not identical and especially the local products and the atmosphere create a unique atmosphere.



Source: www.obnova.sk



Since 2005 Radvansky market belongs to the UNESCO cultural heritage sites as well as some other products typical not only for BanskáBystrica and Radvansky market, but also for Slovakia generally, for instance a fabric for typical Slovak clothes of women in the past – modrotlac (blue fabric).



Every year in the fall visit Radvansky market more than 330 domestic and 30 international craftsmen especially from such countries as Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Romania. They offer products as for instance pottery, soap products, leather belts, jewellery, national costumes, culinary products as for instance honey, local meals, healthy food products, delicatessen, furniture made from wood and natural materials, spices, etc. Typical for the culinary tasting are local meals as for instance langos, home baked bread, barbecued meat, local pancake filled with goose liver, pancakes with different toppings as garlic, poppy seed, nuts and a cake called trdelnik or pampuluch with sheep cheese or bacon and sausage.

These culinary products are served with special local drinks like beer (locally produced or imported). The most famous for the culinary experience of the market are not only the above mentioned delicious meals, but also so called „burciak“, which is a very young wine with a high concentration of vitamin B and an excellent regeneration abilities for a human body. Producers from wineries in Slovakia, especially from the southern part of country bordering with Hungary, offer white and red burciak wine for sale. The visitors could try in small cups or

buy wine in a bottle. Excellent culinary environment and products are enhanced by listening to the local national music and by watching the local or international folklore dancing groups.

Fascinating is the atmosphere of craftsmen demonstrating to the visitors how they produce local products, for instance wooden furniture, pottery, jewellery, etc. People can participate in the process of production and try to make own products. This is a typical example of co-creation approach.

In the past people were dressed in the national costumes. Nowadays, children can also participate in different activities with their parents, which is important for family life and happiness. Radvansky market has become a place of local heritage promotion and community life strengthening. In the past, in the 18th and 19th century the market served as a place of mutual bargain of livestock, agricultural products and craft products. Some of these activities remained, but some disappeared due to a new social and economic changes and especially a life style of local people.



Conclusions

The popularity of local markets with traditional products and food or other culinary products, crafts and cultural heritage atmosphere are becoming more popular among people. Market trends indicate that tourists are no longer just eating to satisfy hunger but to learn and experience local culture through local ethnic food (Smith & Xiao, 2008). Cultural tourism is becoming more popular especially in the countries with growing number of seniors who are a right segment for it. It brings a combination of culinary experiences, tasting, wellness, but also learning new things, education, and storytelling and also spending free time wisely and together with peers, family members and friends. This could be also similar among younger age groups, even very young generation, and families with children. However, the older generation is growing enormously in this period of time and in different parts of the world and their desire to live happier and longer life could be one of the reasons why they wish to participate at such cultural events and are emotionally attached to the markets with local food and culture. The older or more popular an event is, the more people feel that they should visit and be part of local spirit. The older generation started to influence also the younger people who start to feel more attached to the specific place. Heritage is a cultural value, which cannot be copied or transferred somewhere else (similar like a tacit knowledge). Even immigrants who bring it to the other countries of their residence, cannot transfer it fully, but can bring many parts of it in a form of food, habits, language, and crafts; however, some items are not transferable, for instance local historical buildings, countryside, atmosphere, etc. despite of the attempt of some countries to try it. This is what a local traditional market with a historical background offers and this was also our attempt to discuss and bring at least some picture of it.

Originality/Value

Originality of this research is the authenticity of the material studied in Slovakia and an attempt to confirm how the events contribute to the brand identity forming, marketing strategies improvement and consequently influence the economy of local businesses and bring multiplication effect to the public budgets as well. However, this has not been explored in this study, but could be a subject of the following study dealing with the economic aspects and multiplication effect of organizing of local attractions and events. In this stage, our goal was to explore the importance of organizing of cultural events for the growth of loyalty and emotional attachment to the destination especially by evoking an emotional and experiential effect offered by culinary products and local heritage. This exploratory study could serve as the starting point for further research.

Implications for practice

In this specific example, which was used in the study, could be demonstrated the importance of history and culture for places, which could be for instance cities or regions or even villages. Branding of places enables to use place identity concept framed by these factors as culture and history and combine the human

managerial skills and creativity to boost the economy, competitiveness and visibility of a place. For Banská Bystrica was mining history and cultural diversification the starting point for organizing such event as Radvanský market. First of all, it was a necessity for the agricultural products exchange, which has been later changed to the more cultural and culinary experience with some traces of products exchange. For city leaders and planners in the contemporary period of time the best ideas and examples are originated in the historical roots and creativity of local managers, entrepreneurs, citizen groups involved in the city life and events, local patriots and storytellers. Marketers and marketing organizations of cities or towns should use this potential and co-create also with customers (members of these named groups as well as visitors) an attractive product, an event, which would become a legend. This is a case of Radvanský market, an authentic and typical event for a city of Banská Bystrica, which cannot be easily copied by the other cities not even in Slovakia, but worldwide. Each destination has own taste, history, culture and the atmosphere. This might be done by the application of place branding principles into destination management and development. Crucial in the place branding concept is the level of co-operation among the partners involved in the preparation of such events. Even for a city Banská Bystrica is a level of co-operation important. Additionally, there are crucial such factors as image, reputation building, promotion and media communication despite of our opinion that the best promotion is an excellent experience, satisfaction and feeling to come again.

References

- Anholt, S. 2007. *Competitive Identity: the new brandmanagementformations, cities and regions*. PalgraveMacmillan.
- Ashworth, G., J., Vooght, H. 1990. *Selling the City: Marketing Approaches in Public Sector Urban Planning*. London and New York: Belhaven Press, 1990.
- Buhalis, D. 2000. Marketing the competitive destination of the future, *Tourism management*, 21, 97-116.
- Bordas, E. 1994. Competitiveness of tourism destinations in long distance markets. *Revue de Tourisme*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 3-9.
- Cai, L. 2002. Cooperative branding for rural places, *Annals of Tourism Research*, 29(3), 720-742.
- Crouch, G.I., Ritchie, J.R.B. 2003. *The Competitive Destination: A Sustainable Tourism Perspective*, Cambridge: CABI Publishing. 272 s. ISBN 0 85199 664.
- Dwyer, L. & Kim, C. 2003. Destination competitiveness: determinants and indicators. *Current issues in Tourism*, 6(5), 369-414.
- Gilmore, F. 2002. Branding for Success. In *Destination Branding: Creating the Unique Destination Proposition*, edited by Morgan, Pritchard, Pride. Oxford: Butherworth-Heinemann.
- Gitelson, R. J. & Crompton, J. L. 1984. Insights into the repeat vacation phenomenon, *Annals of Tourism Research*, 11, 199-217.
- Go, F.; Govers, R. 2009. *Place Branding*. London: PalgraveMacMillan. ISBN 978-0-230-23073-6.
- Hankinson, G. 2001. Location branding: A study of twelve English cities. *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 9 (2), s. 127-142.
- Hankinson, G. 2004. Relational network brands: Towards a conceptual model of place brands. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 10, pp. 109-121.
- Hankinson, G. 2005. Destination brand images: a business tourism perspective, *Journal of Services Marketing*, 19, 24-32.
- Hassan, S. 2000. Determinants of market competitiveness in and environmentally sustainable tourism industry. *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 38, No. 3, 239-245.

- Heath, E. & Wall, G. Marketing Tourism Destinations: A Strategic Planning Approach. In Marzano, G. (Eds.) *Relevance of Power in the Collaborative Process of Destination Branding. 11th Annual Conference on Graduate Education and Graduate Student Research in Hospitality and Tourism*, 5-7 January, 2006, Seattle, the U.S.
- Hubbard, P. & Hall, T. 1998. *The Entrepreneurial City: Geographies of Politics, Regime and Representation* Hard cover. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.
- Jago, L.K., Chalip, I, Brown, G., Mules, T. & Ali, S. 2003. Building events into destination branding insights from experts, *Event Management*, 8, 3-14.
- Jago, L.K. & Hansen C. 2004. The Challenge of retaining personnel in major sport event organizations. *Event Management* 9 (1/2), 39-49.
- Kapferer, J. N. 2004. *The new strategic brand management. creating and sustaining brand equity long term*. London: Kogan Page.
- Kotler, P., Gertner, R. 2002. Country as brand, product and beyond: A place marketing and brand management perspective. *Journal of Brand Management*, April, 9(4/5).
- Kozak, M. & Rimmington, M. 1999. Measuring destination competitiveness: theoretical considerations and empirical findings, *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 18(3): 173-183.
- Morgan, N.L, Pritchard, A. & Piggot, R. Destination Branding and the Role of the Stakeholders: The Case of New Zealand. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 9, 285.
- Opperman, M. 2000. Tourism destination loyalty, *Journal of Travel Research*, 39(1), 78-84.
- Pike, S. 2005. Tourism destination branding complexity, *Journal of Product Brand Management*, 14(4), 258-259.
- Pine, B.J.; Gilmore, J. H. 1999. *The Experience Economy: Work in Theatre and Every Business a Stage: Goods and Services are no longer enough*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press. ISBN 978-159 391456.
- Pritchard, A., Morgan, N. J. 1996. Selling the Celtic arc to the USA: a comparative analysis of the destination brochure images used in the marketing of Ireland, Scotland and Wales, *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 2(4), 346-365.
- Pyo, S., Mihalik, B.J. & Uysal, M. 1989. Attraction attributes and motivations. A canonical correlation analysis. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 16, pp. 277-282.
- Reinisto, S. K. 2001. *Lisensiaatintutkimus: Kaupungin kehittämisen merkittuotteena. Lahden ja Helsingin tapauksia tutkimukset. Licentiate Study: City Branding – Case Studies Lahti and Helsinki*. Helsinki University of Technology, Espoo.
- Smith, S. L. J., & Xiao, H. G. 2008. Culinary Tourism Supply Chains: A Preliminary Examination. *Journal of Travel Research*, 46, 289-299.
- Smith, S. L.J. 2015. *Tourism Recreation Research*. Vol. 40, Issue 2, 220-233. www.obnova.sk (retrieved 15.5. 2019)

About the Author- Marica Mazurek, is a full-time Assistant Professor at the University of Žilina, Slovakia, Europe. She spent four years of her postgraduate studies at the University of Waterloo, Canada from 2006-2010 and participated in the Visitor Professorship program at Brock University, Ontario, Canada in 2004. Her research interest is Destination Marketing and Branding, Competitiveness of Destinations, Innovations, Cultural Tourism, and Partnerships in Tourism. She is actively engaged in the international projects with the partners from Europe and Asia and is the active participant of ATMC conferences and the founding member of the European and Asian Association of Tourism Studies (EATSA), which organizes international conferences each year in Europe or in Asia.