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IMAGE AND COMMUNICATION OF POLISH NATIONAL PARKS

Abstract

This paper contains the analysis and evaluation of image and social communications in national parks in Poland. It is based on the results of research conducted by 'Starcom MediaVest Group "on behalf of the Tatra National Park. The purpose of intentional communication activity is to increase trust in activities undertaken by the institution to improve public perception and acceptance. This paper summarizes the communicative picture and image of national parks in Poland. It is an attempt to assess whether image-building and communication activities vital to the goods and services market are also needed for national parks.

Key words: image, communication, national park

1. Introduction

National Parks in Poland are located in regions of the most valuable natural environments . Currently, there are 23 national parks, that cover an area of 316 748 hectares (approx. 1%) of the country. The smallest park is Ojcow National Park near Krakow - 2146 ha, the largest is Biebrzanski National Park, located in the Biebrza Valley area in the province of Podlasie - 59 223 ha.

National parks were established to protect wildlife. The protected areas are guardian to all our natural resources and the specific characteristic of each region's landscape values. Eight national parks in Poland have been acknowledged as being some of the world's most important biospheric reserves (Babiogorski, Bialowieski, Bieszczadzki, Kampinoski, Karkonoski, Poleski, Slowinski, Tatranski), while seven belong to the Ramsar Convention, which protects wetlands vital to preserving birdlife: Biebrzanski, Narwianski, Karkonoski, Poleski "Ujscie Warty", Slowinski and Wigierski.

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Parks are open to visitors. The parks contain 3,243 km of hiking trails and 129 educational paths. Moreover, almost all of national parks operate nature museums or educational centers. Parks also conduct their own publishing activities. The number of visitors visiting Polish national parks annually is about 11 million. [6]

The aim of this paper is to present research results concerning the image and communicativeness of Polish national parks and an attempt to assess whether the image-building and communication activities vital to goods and services market, are also necessary for national parks.

“Starcom MediaVest Group” ,on behalf of the Tatra National Park, during the period 28.02.-03.07.2012 conducted a survey to learn how Poles feel about Polish national parks. The research was based on a sample size N = 2400 from all over the country, with the questionnaire being available online - CAWI (name is an abbreviation for Internet interview) supported by RTS (Real Time Sampling) technique, with emissions of invitations on popular websites. Invitations to participate were screened for users on websites reaching over 70% of Polish Internet users in total. The sample was selected as a random-quota. Surveys were gathered by Interaktywny Instytut Badan Rynkowych (Interactive Market Research Institute). The respondents were Internet users aged 20-49 having completed at least a secondary education and who are planning a vacation or even a short weekend trip within the next 2 years.

The structure of the sample reflected the structure of the target group for gender, age, education and size of residence. The results were analyzed with regard to the following data; gender, age, education, size of residence, and variables related to lifestyle and computer /web competence based on results from the IPSOS survey, February - April 2011.

69% of all respondents planned to holiday within Poland, 65% of which indicated a strong willingness to visit a national park. Moreover, the study shows that national parks are more interesting tourist destinations for the elderly as indicated by - 74% in the 35-49 age range, as well as -68% of those with higher education.

Information on interesting places with nature reserves is found directly from the Internet - 50% of respondents from websites dedicated to the subject, 42% from forums, blogs and social networks. Women are more likely to explore travel websites and travel portals, while men surf through more concrete sites.

Poles spontaneously mention the Tatra National park (52%) and the Bialowieski National Park (50%) as being the best-known among their countrymen. The least-known are Drawiński and Ujście Warty - both were mentioned only by 1% of those surveyed. National parks in general are a common subject of conversation in Poland. The survey shows that only 2% of respondents were not familiar with any national parks in Poland.

More than half of the respondents have visited a national park in the past two years, while 80% made repeat visits. Among those national parks visited in the last two years, the most popular is the Tatra National Park (27%), while the least popular are Magurski, Drawiński, Poleski and Ujście Warty (1%). Active holidaymakers also pointed to the Tatra National Park (TPN) - 40%. Subsequently the second in this category and lagging far behind is Ojcow National Park (18%). The study also found that parks situated in the mountains, are more frequently visited. More than half of respondents (59%) previously planned a stay in a national park. Every third person had visited a park without prior planning. Most are one-day stays (53%) and weekends (17%). Summer vacation (53%) is the most popular time to visit a national park.

The reason for visiting the national parks is active recreation and nature itself. The exception are people who have children. Their motivation to travel to national parks is passive recreation. People with higher education more often declare their desire for active leisure in the park. With age, a growing number of respondents chooses passive recreation in parks. Respondents with secondary education aged 20-24 often decide to go to a national park to explore and observe nature.

Starcom MediaVest Group, on behalf of the Tatra National Park, used a surveying technique known as "DESK RESEARCH" to evaluate "How do they see us?". Research using the Internet and syndicated media research as a data source were utilized to analyze communicativeness within national parks. As part of this analysis the visual identification of national parks was examined as well as access to information on their websites, publishing and the use of mass media.

2. The image of national parks in Poland

The image of a national park is a picture formed in the mind of a person. It's a set of features, ideas, values and associations that people attribute to a park after having a direct or indirect contact with it; as is, for example, with local governments, residents of neighbour towns, businesses working with the park, as well as tourists. The image is therefore constructed in mind of interested people, through a network of associations. It consists of beliefs, mass media communication, including advertising and personal experiences. [Matysik 2009, p. 10-11].

The image of a national park is a reflection of its identity, and thus a set of stimuli and symbols by which it is recognized and assimilated. The concepts of image and identity are not synonymous, because identity is understood as a complex, self-image that the operator intends to pass around, a kind of self-image. Identity consists of three components: attitude and behavior of

members of the organization and corporate identity (logo, symbols, slogans, etc.). Identity is therefore a desirable way of perceiving the organization, which is created by the attitudes, behavior and visual elements. Image is the real identity in the minds of consumers. Image is what people think about the organization, while identity is the set of stimulus and symbols through which it is identified and recognized. An important feature of image is its dynamic character. It may be subject to transformations due to various experiences, views and beliefs. This means that image may be modulated. [Szwajca 2009, p. 21]

In view of the above definition of image and identity, it is clear that regardless of the intended actions in creating an image or, as is often in the case of national parks, their absence, every organization has an image.

2.1. The expectations of society towards national parks

Results of this study suggest that national parks are most associated with nature, claimed 39% of responses, animals - 24%, forest, trees, green - 21%, silence, peace - 19%. Interestingly enough 1% of the respondents associate national parks with dirt and crowds while only 4% with rest and relaxation. However, associations with nature tend to dominate in general. According to respondents, national parks should have a particularly beautiful and unspoilt nature (19%), trails (15%), clear road signs along trails (12%), tranquility, peace (12%), and a rich flora and fauna (9%). According to respondents national parks should be clean and well maintained - 12%. Only 1% of the respondents replied that they have no interest in visiting national parks.

Those surveyed believe that the most important feature of a national park in relation to touristic infrastructures are observation points (72%), hiking routes and educational trails (85%). Research shows that tourists in national parks want attractive entrance fees (51%), and a special price for families (27%). The Nature Protection Act of 16 April 2004 (Journal of Law 2004, No. 92, position 880), article. 12 section 5 clearly indicates that the charge for a single entrance to the park can not exceed 6 PLN indexed by the projected average price index of consumer goods and services in general, adopted in the Budget. Some national parks, for example, Wolinski, Ojcowski eliminated the fees for access to their land. Respondents in the study found that least important to them is the possibility of visiting the national park as a package tour with a guide (20%), organized activities for children (22%) and the possibility of visiting a nature museum on park land. (6%).

2.2. Perception of national parks

The study identified perceived images of each of the 23 national parks in Poland within the following categories:

- the most beautiful national park in Poland,
- offers many attractions for children,
- UNESCOs reserve,
- attractive to tourists,
- offers a variety of activities,
- affordable,
- ideal for a quiet holiday with "nature"
- Good to go with your family,
- Good for a short weekend trip,
- requires special protection of the State
- there is a conflict between nature conservation and human intervention.

This enabled a clear picture of the differences in the perception of a particular Brand Name or national park as opposed to the competition. The purpose of Brand Name is to achieve a desired competitive position, and therefore it becomes a very important marketing tool used to identify the product with the positive, desirable qualities in the market. A Brand Name identity is a unique and unambiguous identification based on the sum of associations that it brings. It carries with it the promise of benefits that consumers will receive and guarantees their complete satisfaction. For a comprehensive image of the unit consists of several dimensions: economic, tourism, sports, settlement, cultural factors, etc. These are factors which have either direct influence, limited influence or no influence at all. The image is inherently neither good nor bad, but rather right or wrong for the organization. This is because of, as already mentioned, the subjective image in the mind of the recipient, which is formed by his efforts, experience, ideas and observations, and overall experience from which he assesses his surrounding reality. [Piątkowska 2010, p. 13-16]

As the author mentioned earlier, national parks do not build up their Brand Name with any intentional plan. This does not change the fact that they have a Brand Name which has its own associations. Certainly, each of the national parks have an image and the respondents were questioned about it. Among the more prominent parks in terms of the various categories, a certain summarization can be made. For a family visit and for a short weekend trip, the Ojcow National Park is the place to go. The Bieszczadzki National Park stands out strongly as the ideal park for a quiet holiday in the countryside but does not offer many attractions for children and is not good for a short weekend trip. Tourist movement does not cause conflicts generally. The Bialowieski National Park is most

frequently acknowledged by respondents as the place to go to visit a UNESCOs reserve. Respondents also agree that it requires special protection of the State. In the opinion of respondents, this park does not have many attractions for spending time in an active way, nor is it good for a short weekend trip, although it is recognized as one of the most beautiful national parks in Poland. Respondents decided that an attractive tourist destination and good for a short weekend trip with the family ,although not ideal for a quiet holiday in the countryside, is the Gor Stolowych National Park. In terms of attractiveness negatively rated is "Bory Tucholskie", Drawiński and Biebrzański National Park. Drawiński and "Bory Tucholskie" national parks are, according to respondents, affordable and ideal for a holiday close to nature. The Biebrzański National Park requires special protection of the State and is recognized as a UNESCOs reserve. Even though Kampinoski National Park offers many activities for children and is recognized as a UNESCOs reserve, it was not considered as attractive to tourists. Respondents claim, that there is a big conflict between nature conservation and tourist activity. Roztoczański National Park is ideal for a quiet holiday in the countryside. Although affordable, it is not regarded as an attractive tourist destination.

Poleski National Park was found to be ideal for a quiet holiday close to nature, although, according to respondents, is unattractive to tourists. It does not offer many outdoor activities. There is no conflict between the conservation and tourist activity. Pieninski National Park and the Karkonoski National Park are not perfect for a quiet holiday close to nature, but offer many recreational options. There is a high level of conflict between nature conservation and tourism, according to respondents, in Wielkopolski National Park. It is also unattractive to tourists. Wigierski National Park is perfect for a quiet holiday in the countryside. It also offers many recreational options. But it is not good for a short weekend trip. The Tatra National Park was found to be an attractive tourist destination, but unattractive as far as prices are concerned. Respondents claimed that it is the most beautiful national park in Poland. They perceive a strong conflict between nature conservation and tourist movement. This is not a place just for a weekend stay close to nature, nor are the Slowinski and Swietokrzyski National Parks.

The Tatra National Park and Bialowieski National Park have been identified by the largest percentage of respondents-67% and 59% as being the most attractive in terms of contact with nature. The fewest number of people consider Magurski (27%) and Wielkopolski (24%) National Parks as attractive as both possess a the wealth of nature. TPN was also found as the most attractive in terms of tourism infrastructure (45%) and additional attractions such as museums, active recreation and organized trips (36%). Indicated to be the least attractive for the same reasons is Narwiański National Park (9%) and Magurski National Park (7%).

Nearly 58% of respondents have visited one of the national parks in Poland in the past 2 years - 41% of them more than three times, while 15% only once. Respondents considered all the national parks worth visiting, but the Tatra (68%) and Bialowieski National Parks (59%), are pointed out the most frequently. The fewest number of people consider Wielkopolski (23%) and Drawenski National Parks (25%) worth a visit.

The study shows that Tatra National Park is perceived to have the best image. It is the best identified park of all national parks in Poland.

3. National Parks as message transmitters

Any information from transmitters are sent as messages. These messages may be in the form of graphical information, clothing, interior design, small architecture, text messages, mass media communications or other methods of interacting with customers. Messages influence the picture of the sender as is formed in the minds of consumers, and thus affect their image.

Today's public service managers and in this case national park directors should be aware of the role of communication in the management process and recognize the difference between general communication and effective communicating. A condition for the development and efficient management in public administration is a high level of efficient communication in society. It can be assumed that the more effective the communication, the better the reception will be of public services. Everyday, a scheme or regular plan for communicating ideas should be included on an ongoing basis as part of public service. Communication with the public produces different effects for participants of this process. [Folga, Tanski 2008, p. 102-103] These are the effects of: emotions - joy, anger, understanding, psychophysics - the struggle, persuasion and cognitive - a new look, increased knowledge, to formulate opinions. [Stankiewicz 1999, p. 56]

The Tatra National Park is the only one that holds a professionally developed corporate identity (CI) system. Other national parks' visual identification is inconsistent, often outdated, not really responding to current market trends. National parks carry out difficult, tasks issuing decisions relating to the protection of natural resources. Often decisions are made inconvenient for the various interest groups. For this reason the benefits of a well developed CI can be substantial and facilitate management, improve the aesthetic value, improve the atmosphere of trust through visible movement in terms of professionalization of services, increase employee satisfaction, motivation and a sense of belonging, increased efficiency in communication and standardization of certain activities. This as a whole assists in providing a coherent and consistent image of the park, distinguishing it in a broad sense from its competition (eg in the segment of leisure time activities).

In colloquial language, the logo and logo type are synonyms. However, the logo is a broader concept and can be composed of four parts:

- the logo - the name of the business presented in the form of letters in a particular style,
- signet - a graphic symbol of distinction,
- Brand Claim, tagline
- the background appearing under the above three elements. [Matysik op. cit, p. 11]



Figure 1. Logos of national parks in Poland. [Source: national park websites]

Colors of logos are varied, but dominated by earth tones, such as shades of brown and green. They also differ in motives that appear in the middle of the circle. They present plant or animal species specific to the park. Some parks also give the year of establishment (Magurski, Pieninski) or an abbreviation of its name (Roztoczanski). In addition, some parks that are located on the World List of Biospheric Reserves place a logo of MAB (Karkonoski, Białowieski, Babiogórski). Various fonts are used - not only the types vary but also their size and color. The dominant form of the national park's logo is framed around the ring with the name of the park. However, there are differences as in some parks, the ring is separated by a line (eg, Magurski, Biebrzanski), while in others it is partially separated (eg Poleski and Karkonoski), and in others there is no separation at all (eg Kampinoski and Ojcowski).

The logo of Gorczanski National Park is a transformed form of a circle while that of the Tatra National Park consists of a circle and the name of the park. The logo of the Pieninski National Park differs from the others in shape. Non-standardized logos may make it difficult for the public to associate the logo with the national park. National parks keep record of their own finances and management. However taking into consideration one overriding feature of all existing national parks; in other words, to protect unique natural resources in Poland, the parks should be treated as a coherent system collectively.

A lack of systematic solutions or graphic diversity and flexibility, is also reflected in the lack of joint visual identity for particular web pages of Polish national parks. They are designed according to different models. Website layout, logo and menu layout are incoherent. But there are elements that do connect them all. Most common are the tabs, such as: News, The Park, Nature Protection Plan, Tourism, Hiking, Education, Admission and Fees, Gallery, Links, Publishing and Research. There are many ways to navigate around the website. As the menu of each one is different, the web subpages differs too. Colors are not similar either. In most cases they do not correspond to the colors found in the national park logo. The only common theme, which appears on most websites is a shade of green, which refers to nature.

Resources were considered to be available if they used the principle of three clicks, which states that each internaut should be able to reach each section and function of a website in a maximum of three steps. Certain elements exist that can be found on every or almost every website, such as a description of the natural resources located in the park and how to protect them against damage, rules for sightseeing and entrance fees, hiking routes and education trails. Other information (eg park infrastructure, accommodation, attractions of the region, cultural heritage, events, communications, tourism, guidance, maps, tourist information points) are only on certain pages of the national parks. That does not mean that there is no informative information at all.

Facebook is currently the best channel of interactive communication with Internet users. However, only five parks have their own fanpage on facebook.com., 13 parks exist in this social network for use of geolocation, 4 as a result of interest in the park, 2 have normal user profiles (Wigierski and Poleski).

SEM (Search Engine Marketing) is aimed at obtaining the best possible position on the web as a result of searching the Internet by typing in selected words / key phrase by the user. Google Insights for Search is a tool showing how to search for information in browsers. It allows you to search for new keywords, trends in the process of searching for products and services and allows you to keep track of popular keywords in different regions of Poland and the World. When searching for information about hiking trails, education trails and horse riding trails, national parks are among the first to pop up at google.com.,. The most popular search phrase related to "trails" is associated with the city of Zakopane - Tatras. Interest in the Bieszczady Mountains and the Karkonosze is growing. The phrase "national park" is repeated on an annual basis, with the peak in May, and a drop in August. Another period of increased interest is in November. Most popular searches are related to Ojcow National Park and phrases related to Bialowieski National Park.

National parks operate publishing houses. Information on printed publications can be found on the websites of 19 national parks. They can be classified into scientific and popular science. National parks have no coherent system to sell the publications. They are usually available at tourist information points and premises of national parks. Some parks offer the traditional mail order. Ordered items can be obtained after the payment to the bank account of the park and after sending an e - mail with order form filled out, or by bank transfer with the title of the publication written in as payment title. Individual parks (eg Tatra) sell publications via its own Internet shop.

This study analyzed the location of the logo and the use of color and font in 12 guides and books on wildlife and / or flora of national parks, which are available at the National Library in Warsaw. The logo is usually on the front cover. In some printed publications there are other references to the park such as an introduction written by the park director or usage of the phrase "our park", "our mountains" or emphasizing that the publication was issued to commemorate the establishment of the park. The most popular layout is black and white pages with single color or a color insert with photos and graphs. The guides or monographs individual chapters are color coded to help customers find needed information. They are written in plain language. Graphic design including the font used in printed publications is not unified.

Uniforms for employees of all national parks are the same. They differ only by the logo of the national park, which is located on the shoulder. A tourist

traveling to the various national parks should have no problem recognizing park staff. Article 104, section 19 of the 16 April 2004 Nature Protection Act (Journal of Law 2004, No. 92, position 880) specified designs for uniforms and uniform items.

Road signs along tourist routes in national parks are inconsistent. Some parks display their logo, others, abbreviated park name or PTTK, the branch responsible for marking. Welcome signs standing at the entrances to the various national parks do not have common elements. Some of them seem to be forgotten, others are unaesthetic. In the national parks of the United States welcome signs get the attention of every tourist, who invariably wants to take a picture. Their welcome signs differ from each other. Each is well maintained and has the National Park Service logo on it. The full name of the National Park printed in the same font and with the corresponding park logo would create a coherent image of the parks.

In the same way, markings on the entrance gates of national parks is not unified. A common feature would be to include some sign relating to traditions and local culture. However, each park marks its own entrance differently with, for example, the full name of the park or an abbreviation. Hence it would seem quite reasonable to create a visual identity system, composed of logos, colors and font. This would help to create a website layout and other promotional materials. Small architecture features and signs would benefit by improved clarity and attractiveness if a common theme for the whole system of national parks was created.

Over the past 2 years (January 2010-January 2012) 3 out of 23 national parks were advertised in Polish newspapers and magazines. Bialowieski National Park ran an advertisement in *Newsweek Polska*, while Karkonoski and “Gor Stołowych” in *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Mass media advertisement spending of the last two parks are estimated at few thousand PLN. Bialowieski Park ran an advertising campaign worth tens of thousand PLN. Each of the advertisements promoted only that particular park and its values with no reference to the idea of promoting all our national parks as places worth visiting.

National Parks cooperate with companies within their CSR activities. Among those who based their activities on corporate social responsibility commitment to protecting natural resources in Polish national parks, were: Bank Pekao SA, Żubr brand (Campania Piwowarska S.A.), Tetra Pak.Sp. z o. o., Milka brand (Kraft Foods Polska S.A.) and Nowy Styl Sp. z o.o.. CSR activities has supported the conservation of nature in eight of the 23 national parks, such as the Bialowieski, Tatrzański, Bieszczadzki, Ojcowski, “Gor Stołowych”, Wielkopolski, Kampinoski and Magurski. They differed in scope and concept of involvement of the company. ^[1]

¹ Summary made by the author of the paper based on the information available on the websites of national parks and the Responsible Business Forum: www.fob.pl.

National parks do not benefit from nationwide media, although they could use their communication potential. There were three advertisements of national parks in the last 2 years and all were published in newspapers or magazines. They occasionally use public relations. Certainly it is possible to widen the PR activity. On the various web portals articles on national parks are published, which may be due to the use of media relations activities. National parks could also pay more attention to optimizing communication activities such as SEM, the positioning of websites and interactive communication on fanpages or in response to comments and questions left on their websites. Above all, they should focus on the graphics and unification of visual identification, and improving the functionality of websites. It will help to access easier to the necessary information.

4. Conclusions

Communication may have different goals. Crucial to the parks, regardless of existing legislation, should be informing the public in an accessible and understandable way about why it was established, and, despite of sometimes significant limitations, how important a role they play in the community. In fact they become the motor of development for the region, about which residents seem to forget. It is important to gain public approval for their activities. Approval can be obtained only by understanding the actions taken by the management of national parks, such as active forms of nature conservation, or in the passive form of preventing deterioration. Incomprehensible to tourists can be forest management. Sometimes a visitor is outraged that the parks are cutting down trees, sometimes over large areas and selling the wood. A park should explain the reason of such decision and that by acting in this way it protects the wildlife. Deadwood rotting in national parks is often called by visiting tourists a "waste". Deadwood plays a key role in maintaining the forest's health and life-cycle. What is more- without sufficient amounts of deadwood the biodiversity of European forests will keep declining. People should be informed clearly what the role of such wood is in ecosystems. Many such examples could be cited. It is also worth it to consider promoting less popular national parks, and thus giving some relief to the most popular, such as Tatrzański, which has almost 3 million visitors a year.

National parks communicate with the people, so it affects their image. Rarely, however, are these activities subordinate to the strategy of creating their image in society and even more rarely are designed to increase sales. Letting visitors into parks for the sake of tourism with the aim of benefitting financially simultaneously, is both the old and the new reality: Old, because parks have always been accessible, and new as a result of changes in the

financing of national parks. Many of them will have to rethink their tourism policy in order to gain better profits. Since 1st January 2012, parks have become legal entities and are allowed to collect all revenue for the purpose of their activities. This is known to be beneficial for large, enterprising national parks while others will have to learn the business. The enterprising side of Polish parks is limited by the fact that parks were originally established to protect unique natural resources. Therefore, - to develop rules to increase benefits from tourism without compromising the overriding objective of parks – conservation of the natural environment, may not be easy. Tourists, as studies show, know rather little about the majority of parks. So parks are likely to increase their interest in advertising. Effective communication help to form a positive image of national parks, which in turn leads to public acceptance of their activities and a greater interest in their resources. This, in turn, may translate into increased revenues.

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