

Meetings industry: the dark horse of the Polish economy



The meetings industry could become a driving force behind the Polish economy in the coming years, according to the attendees of the international Warsaw Economic Hub conference that took place in the Polish capital in December.

First held in 2008, the annual Warsaw Economic Hub conference is organized by The Warsaw Voice together with The New York Times. The event aims to showcase the international potential of the Polish economy, and the ninth conference in the series, held Dec. 16 last year, focused on the meetings industry.

Juliusz Kłosowski, the program director of the Warsaw Economic Hub conference project, told the attendees that—together with a group of experts, business leaders and officials from the Polish government and EU institutions—the hosts of the event sought to give an accurate assessment of Poland’s position among the economies of Europe and the world. We also examined the prospects that open before Poland,” Kłosowski said. “ The key question is what makes the Polish economy special and what our focus should be in the future as we plan further growth.”

According to Jerzy Kwieciński, Secretary of State at the Development Ministry, Poland’s tourism industry, including business tourism, has a lot more to offer than it might seem at present. “ What we do today is definitely not enough, Kwieciński said during a panel discussion focusing on a development program for the Polish economy. We have to prioritize those segments of the tourism market that present a higher added value. They certainly include business tourism and the meetings industry.”

Prof. Jadwiga Berbeka, an expert from the Cracow University of Economics, used the phrase “invisible exports” to describe tourism. Exports are a key driver of GDP growth,” she said during a panel discussion held as part of the conference’s Poland Meetings Destination section.

According to Berbeka, the meetings industry in Poland has huge growth potential. “Rather than just a dark horse, it is a stallion that could pull the chariot of the economy if given the right conditions to do so,” Berbeka commented.

Globally, the meetings industry gives jobs to millions of people. In Britain’s highly diversified and well-developed economy, the industry accounts for 2.9 percent of the GDP, 3.4 percent of all jobs and over 3 percent of the country’s tax revenues. The figures in Canada are 1.5 percent of the GDP and 2 percent of the labor market, while in Denmark they are 1 percent and 1.4 percent respectively. This clearly shows that the meetings industry is a key sector in developed economies, experts say.

Ways to ensure favorable conditions for the meetings industry were discussed by Dawid Lasek, an undersecretary of state at the Polish Ministry of Sports and Tourism. Lasek told the conference that tourism, including business tourism, is part of the government’s comprehensive development strategy for the country. This is important because creating the right legal

environment for tourism and the meetings industry is not only the job for the sports and tourism ministry, Lasek said. He outlined a concept for the inclusion of the meetings industry in what is known as the House of Polish Tourist Territorial Brands, a project seen as a vital tool in promoting what Poland has to offer in terms of tourism.

In a nutshell, a territorial brand is a professional tourism service package marketed regionally and made up of specific tourism products, according to Lasek. The meetings industry should play a key role as a major product marketed as part of such brands. It would serve as a natural backup for brands through personal recommendations from participants of meetings, conferences and conventions held at regional convention and exhibition centers across Poland.

Managers of such venues who came to the Warsaw conference spoke fondly about such word-of-mouth advertising and quoted numerous examples of benefits that they said their convention and exhibition centers brought to different regions. Most such venues have not been around for very long, but even this short time has been long enough to prove they are efficient beyond expectations, conference participants argued.

Beata Maly-Kaczorowska, vice-president of Expo Mazury, an exhibition center in Poland's northeast, said her company was contributing its "regional tourism product" to the Mazuria region's common brand. In this way the region's recognition as a popular vacation destination extends far beyond the Mazuria Lake District, Maly-Kaczorowska said.

Kamil Szymański from G2A Arena Podkarpackie, an exhibition and conference center that opened last June in southeastern Poland, spoke about efforts to carry out government plans at the regional level.

Rafał Dudziński from the Lublin Conference Center in eastern Poland, meanwhile, said that his center's services were based on the Lublin region's "smart specializations," including its economic, academic and meetings-related assets.

The Warsaw Economic Hub conference and the accompanying Poland Meetings Destination discussion produced some specific conclusions about the potential of the Polish meetings industry. The plenary panel discussion attended by Kwieciński and Lasek highlighted the need to ensure a better legal environment for the meetings sector.

Participants also agreed that a large new convention center is needed in Warsaw to boost its role as a major meetings destination in Europe. In another discussion, the sports and tourism ministry's Lasek encouraged the conference organizers and meetings industry professionals to work closely with him to help work out better conditions for the industry to operate in. He also declared a readiness to hold a meeting to further discuss these issues sometime this year.

Source: The Warsaw Voice