

ITU World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Forum 2021

High-Level Policy SESSION 6: Digital Economy and Trade/ Financing for Development and role of ICT

Wednesday 24 March 2021

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The National Brand as the Enabling Force for the Digital Transformation - Proposals for Exploiting ICT for the Development of Digital Economy

For me the enabling force for deploying successful digital transformation strategies in Greece, as in any other country, is using our 'brand' as a tool to do so. Using one's 'brand' as a transformation tool is not new, actually it is the standard practice, we just haven't properly registered it as such (a tool) when we communicate national scale transformation efforts. Please notice how the telecom companies have been undergoing a continuous digital transforming during the last decade, and think about if that would be possible without utilizing their strong brands and logos.

The 'brand' of Greece is a mixture with cultural, historic, well-being and maritime components, deeply depending on tourism as a communication tool. The extent of this dependency manifests itself on the fact that tourism too, is broadly considered to be part of our 'brand'.

"Covid-19" had a profound impact on tourism. Our GDP shrunk by almost 10%, but I believe that this approach is underestimating the damage, and that the impact of the pandemic on our 'brand' (and means to successfully undergo a digital transformation) is much bigger. Bigger than numbers prove for 2020 and predict for 2021.

Can a 10% shrinkage of the Greek economy be an underestimation? Unfortunately, I believe it can. This is because the 10% of our economy that was negatively affected also affects in many ways the 90% that appears not to be (affected). The 'damage-control' is also optimistic because it is only considering our income losses on the basis of 12-months results, overlooking the difficulties caused by the pandemic in communicating our brand and the 'accumulation-oriented' logic on which the value of a brand is constantly developing. The impact estimations are wrong because they try to specify a qualitative target with quantitative criteria.

Last summer we missed the opportunity to communicate our brand to about 27 million people and this cannot be recovered. 27 million people will have less accumulated exposure to the 'Greek Brand'. For as long the Covid-19 pandemic continues, our national 'brand' will be gradually losing part of its value.

By no means, the 'Greek Brand' and all that represents will somehow be lost, because it is strongly linked with universal, timeless values. However modern economies ask for volume and that can only be achieved through communicating our Brand *at scale* and *en masse* to people of all socioeconomic backgrounds.

So how can we use our 'brand' as a digital transformation tool, within the pandemic environment?

[1] Cultural informatics applications should be our priority. Virtual and real time visits to museums and archaeological sites should be redefined as well as city tours and sightseeing. Gamification of wondering around a city needs to be seriously considered as a tool to support people flow timing, to avoid congestion.

Furthermore, promoting access to cultural events should be a target too. Only few years ago in Athens we enjoyed every year almost 1500 dramatic performances in about 130 theatres. Athens was one of the most theatrically productive cities in the world, and maybe only second to London in Europe, depending on the criteria used for the comparison. We should work on sharing our theatrical product, especially now that theatres need to remain closed because of the Pandemic. We need to work on high quality internet connectivity for the theatres and music scenes of Greece, to make their content accessible, at high definition, in every corner of the world.

[2] Hybridization of our hospitality product to include the current trend of digital nomadism. With global economy being digitally transformed the borders among remote work, freelance and digital nomadism will continuously blur, and eventually completely disappear, leaving a common, dynamic workforce tank that will mix working and travelling in a completely new and unique way.

Greece scores high on the Democracy Index of EIU (Economist Intelligence Unit) as well as on policies related to the protection of the environment, while it's been historically acceptive to cultural diversity. These qualitative characteristics can make Greece an attractive destination for digital nomads.

We need to work towards proposing practical solutions in that direction. High quality internet connectivity is the necessary but not the sufficient condition for addressing the opportunity. We need to ensure that we can offer digital nomads short-term medical coverage with competitive/realistic costs, address taxation matters in a simple, transparent and fair manner, and work out friction from residence permits issues.

[3] Rebuilding our shipbuilding industry. Greece is Europe's global shipping powerhouse (according to Lloyd's list) and one of the cornerstones of the global economy through facilitating international trade.

The operation of modern ships can easily be seen as a big-data problem and the kind of automation that goes into shipping during the last decade clearly points towards a drone-ship future. Greece should not miss the chance to become a pioneer in building drone ships. Our 'Brand' can support us in doing so. In the same way that autonomous and electric cars change the status quo in automotive industry the same I believe will happen in maritime in a few years to come.

[4] We need to continue working on Digital Governance. We made significant progress during the pandemic (e.g. introduction of electronic medicine prescription), we need to keep the pace and continue addressing even bigger challenges such as remote working, education, and healthcare, securing online identification, protecting ICT infrastructure, making our networks more resilient.

The list is long, but this last part, the network and ICT related, is the part that we as the Telecommunications and Post Commission, are trying to contribute to this national scale effort. There is a lot to be done and it is 'just' hard work that is needed in order to successfully get Greece through the 'Covid-19' crisis.