Characteristics of Destination Image: Visitors and Non-visitors´ Images of London

Dimitrios Stylidis & Barbora Cherifi

The Business School, Middlesex University London, UK

Abstract

- Purpose: This paper aims to explore the characteristics (i.e., complex, specific) of destination image as perceived by visitors and non-visitors to a tourist place.

- Design/methodology/approach: Overall, 42 semi-structured interviews were conducted with Czech and Greek visitors and non-visitors to London, UK. From the 21 interviews in each country, 11 conducted with visitors and 10 were with non-visitors to London.

- Findings: A number of characteristics of the image of London were identified that differed across visitors and non-visitors, irrespective of respondents' nationality, including specificity and complexity of image.

- Research limitations/implications: The characteristics of image of different types of destinations (i.e., rural, seaside resorts) need to be assessed in the future, as this study focused on a well-known urban destination.

- Practical implications: The study provides support for effective and innovative solutions to place marketing and branding of tourist destinations. For example, greater complexity and more specific images should be used to attract the repeating visitors market.

- Originality/value: The paper's originality lies in providing a better understanding of the characteristics of destination image, as perceived by visitors and non-visitors to a tourist place.

Keywords: Destination image, Characteristics of image, Visitors vs. non-visitors image, Destination marketing, London

Introduction

There is a broad agreement in the marketing literature that understanding peoples' images of places is a critical part of the place marketing and image making process (Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2009; Kavaratzis and Hatch, 2013; Warnaby, 2009). Within the tourism marketing context, destination image has been one of the most investigated topics (Assaker, Vinzi and O'Connor, 2011; Stepchenkova and Li, 2014; Stylidis, Shani and Belhassen, 2017; Stylos, Vassiliadis, Bellou and Andronikidis, 2016) due to the dominant belief that a positive image enhances peoples' likelihood to visit a destination and positively affects their experience and level of satisfaction during visitation (Chi and Qu, 2008; Lin, Morais, Kerstetter and Hou, 2007; Stylidis, Belhassen and Shani, 2015). It has further been recognized that destinations which invest in a wrong image are likely to 'lose' their competitive position in the future (Avraham, 2004). A plethora of studies have explored the content of destination image by assessing visitors' and/or potential visitors' perceptions of place-specific attributes such as scenery, attractions, climate, and friendliness of the locals (Iordanova and Stylidis, 2017; Gkritzali, Gritzalis and Stavrou, 2017; Stepchenkova and Li, 2014). However, very few studies have focused on understanding the characteristics (i.e., dynamic, complex) of destination image (see Cherifi, Smith, Maitland and Stevenson, 2014; Gallarza, Saura and Garcia, 2002) and even fewer have explored whether potential differences exist in the way these characteristics are perceived by visitors and non-visitors of a tourist destination. An in-depth understanding of the image characteristics consumers possess is needed for successful destination marketing and branding.

This paper aims to contribute to tourism marketing scholarship and practice by providing a better understanding of the characteristics of destination image as perceived by visitors and non-visitors to a tourist place. Results are based on 42 semi-structured interviews conducted with Czech and Greek visitors and non-visitors to London, UK. Data were analysed thematically, recognizing patterns and thematic matrices that identified key issues. The findings of this study are of value to destination marketers who must carefully assess the image of a place developed by both its visitors and non-visitors (potential customers), along with the characteristics of this concept, to prepare an integrative marketing communications plan that is effective and innovative (Elliot, Papadopoulos and Kim, 2011). This study also manages to respond to recent calls for a better understanding of the city destination image and branding process (Ashworth, Kavaratzis and Warnaby, 2015; Hankinson, 2015), especially as the characteristics of image are an inseparable element of place branding.

Literature Review

Destination image is commonly defined as the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination (Kotler, Haider and Rein, 1993). Tourism researchers widely agree that image has three distinctly different components: cognitive, affective and conative (e.g., Pike and Ryan, 2004). The cognitive image component refers to individual's knowledge and evaluation of the destination attributes (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Pike and Ryan, 2004). The affective image component denotes peoples' feelings formed toward a destination (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Beerli and Martin, 2004). Lastly, the conative component represents behaviour, that is, intentions to visit/revisit a destination (Chen and Tsai, 2007; Chi and Qu, 2008). Given their importance, all three components of image (cognitive, affective, and conative) should be understood to effectively plan the positioning strategy of a tourist destination.

There are several reasons explaining why places should manage their image and brand, including the need to attract tourists, investors and new residents (Kotler and Gertner, 2002). Destination image as such has become core to place branding, which refers to 'the development of a consistent element mix to identify and distinguish *place* through positive image building' (Cai, 2002, p.722). Similar to product brands, destination image is critical in making places desirable for prospective visitors (Papadimitriou, Apostolopoulou and Kaplanidou, 2015). Establishing a city as a tourist destination and developing a successful place brand in a highly competitive environment is a challenging and demanding activity (Hosany, Ekinci and Uysal, 2006). To improve the competitiveness of a place and increase visitors' loyalty, an in depth understanding of the process of destination image formation and its characteristics is needed (Qu, Kim and Im, 2011).

A plethora of studies have dealt with the formation of destination image in the past (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Gallarza et al., 2002; Gartner, 1993). Among them, the study of Gallarza et al. (2002) is unique in its contribution to understanding the characteristics of destination image. In their model, developed based on an extensive review of previous studies and methodologies used, Gallarza et al. (2002) conceptualized destination image having four features: complex, multiple, relativistic and dynamic. Complexity results from the number of image components, multiplicity is evident from the variety of items used in its measurement, relativistic draws from the subjective nature of image and finally dynamic relates to the idea that image is not static but changes over time (over several years) and

space (distance from the destination). Despite its contribution, Gallarza et al. (2002) model lacks empirical verification and fails to explain how image is modified once people actually experience a destination, clearly differentiating between visitors and non-visitors of a tourist place.

Previous research has highlighted the need for dividing the image formation process into different stages (Clawson and Knetsch, 1966; Tasci, Gartner and Cavusgil, 2007). The first stage includes peoples' images of a place that have not yet been visited (non-visitors' image). In the second stage, image develops as a result of visitation, whereas the image developed at the third stage is the one after the experience is over. Beerli and Martin's model (2004) is useful in this regard as it considers level of experience among other factors (i.e., information sources) in image formation. A number of studies, in particular, have investigated the effect direct experience has on destination image by juxtaposing visitors' and non-visitors' images of tourist destinations (Beerli and Martin, 2004; Kim and Morrison, 2005; Phillips and Jang, 2010) or explored this relationship by comparing the pre-trip and post-trip images of the same tourist sample (Kim and Morrsion, 2005; Smith, Li, Pan, Witte & Doherty, 2015, Tasci, 2006; Vogt and Andereck, 2003).

In line with a stream of researchers, the image of visitors tends to be more positive than that of non-visitors (Fakeye and Crompton, 1991; Konecnik and Ruzzier, 2006; Smith et al., 2015). Vogt and Andereck (2003), for example, compared pre-trip and in-situ images of Arizona and found that the cognitive image changes during the course of a vacation but the affective image remained rather constant. As such direct experience appears to produce a more positive modified image (Richards, 2001), attributed to increased levels of knowledge and a perceptual change that takes place after direct observation/experience of a destination. Apart from that, visitation often leads to greater involvement and place attachment (Gross and Brown, 2008), with visitors developing feelings of connection to settings they have visited (George and George, 2004). Previous experience is also known in the consumer literature to further positively influence choice, risk, information search, and level of confidence in decision making, among others (Kim et al., 2008; Murray and Schlacter, 1990; Park and Lessig, 1981). Overall, evaluation of the experience at the destination appears to influence destination image and to further modify it (Bigne, Sanchez & Sanz, 2005; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Stylidis et al., 2015).

Apart from its dynamic nature, it is further recognized in the literature that destination image can be characterized by complexity and multiplicity (Di Vittorio, 2007; Gallarza et al., 2002). This is evident on the nature and number of components (cognitive, affective and conative) and attributes used to measure image, suggesting not only its complexity but also a lack of consensus on its measurement. Destination attributes used in previous studies typically cover a) generic/commonly applied attributes including the natural environment and climate, attractions, activities, accessibility, friendliness of the locals and culture (Bigne et al., 2005; Chen and Tsai, 2007; Chi and Qu, 2008), but also more place-specific characteristics because image greatly hinges upon the nature of the tourist destination under consideration (Beerli and Martin, 2004; Chen, Lin, and Petrick, 2013). As a result of image complexity and multiplicity, findings are "hard to compare and generalizations are few, as the conceptualization, and operationalization of the construct has been problematic" (Deslandes, Goldsmith, Bonn and Joseph, 2006, p. 144).

Other studies have reported that peoples' images can be vague (Cherifi et al., 2014; Hughes and Allen, 2008), since ''most country images are stereotypes, extreme simplifications of the reality that are not necessarily accurate. They might be dated, based on … impressions rather than on facts, but nonetheless pervasive" (Kotler and Gertner, 2002, p.42), denoting the relativistic nature of image. For example, Cherifi et al. (2014) found that the destination image of non-visitors to London although vague, was highly persistent. The application of the concept of schema, often linked to destination image (see Kim and Chen, 2016), can be used to explain the persistent nature of image. A schema is a mental structure people use to organize and simplify their knowledge of the world. People have schemas about other people, devices, food, and in fact almost everything (Kelley, 1972; Markus, 1977). In this case people have mental structures of destinations that assist them in deciding which places to visit. These schemas are quite often shaped by stereotypes. As Anholt (2009, p.6) argues *we all seem to need these comforting stereotypes that enable us to put countries and cities in convenient pigeon-holes, and will only abandon them if they really have no other choice.* Even in cases where the reality experienced during visitation is different, in line with the confirmation bias theory, people often actively seek things which confirm their decision/hypothesis (Klayman and Ha, 1987; Snyder and Cantor, 1979).

Despite a wider recognition that destination image can be dynamic and complex, relativistic and multiple, it becomes evident from the above review of the literature that only limited

research has been conducted on the characteristics of destination image, with the majority of previous studies focusing on actual visitors of tourist destinations. Hardly any research can be found on the characteristics of image as perceived by non-visitors or based on a comparison of the two samples (visitors and non-visitors), a gap that this study aims to fill in. Such knowledge will contribute to the theoretical advancement of image and assist in the management and marketing of tourist destinations.

Research Methodology

The vast majority of studies on destination image have adopted a structured approach and focused on capturing/evaluating visitors' image of a given destination using a predetermined set of attributes (Beerli and Martin 2004; Tkaczynski, Rundle-Thiele and Cretchley, 2015). The same approach has been practised also when measuring and contrasting non-visitors images of tourist destinations with those of visitors (Kim and Morrison, 2005; Phillips and Jang, 2010; Vogt and Andereck, 2003). Yet, this approach relies on an a priori selection of the relevant attributes comprising destination image by the researcher, without allowing respondents the opportunity to indicate the attributes that shape their image of a given destination (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991).

To address this deficit, a qualitative approach was used in line with the exploratory nature of the research (Finn Elliott-White and Walton, 2000). London was selected as the setting of this study, recognized as an established tourism destination, a global capital with a supra-national role, featuring connections with many different cultures. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with purposively selected residents of the Czech Republic and Greece. These countries were purposively selected as they share similar characteristics in terms of population size (10.16 million vs. 10.77 million respectively), economy and cost of living (Countries' National Statistics, 2016), and number of visitors to London (1.375 million vs. 1.289 million) (London Data, 2017). Despite these similarities, socio-demographic differences among the two countries include the degree of urbanization (73% in Czech Republic Vs. 78% in Greece) and history of peoples' mobilities with key centres of the Greek diaspora today being New York, Chicago, London, Munich, Stuttgart, Melbourne, Sydney and Toronto, whereas main diaspora centres for people with a Czech origin being Vienna, Paris, London, Melbourne and USA. Greece and the Czech Republic also differ culturally, including differences in language and key religious affiliation (i.e., 92% are Christian Orthodox in Greece, 86% are undeclared or atheist in the Czech Republic) (World Atlas,

2017). Selection of two different samples was important to provide in-depth insights into the characteristics of the image concept and cross-validate the findings. In essence, the rationale for choosing two countries is that this approach minimizes social and cultural bias in looking at the characteristics of destination image of a given destination, as it has been evidenced in the past (Iordanova and Stylidis, 2017).The semi-structured interviews were designed around key themes developed by the researchers such as previous experience, knowledge, feelings, information sources used and future behaviour. Topics of discussion included, for example, questions about perception of place (i.e., *what images or characteristics come to your mind when you think of London as a tourist destination*), questions about cognition (i.e., *What do you know about London as a place to visit for holidays*), affection/feelings (i.e., *How do feel about London as a place to visit*) and behaviour (i.e., *do you plan to visit London in the next 5 years*). The questions were as flexible as possible to encourage respondents to communicate their knowledge, beliefs, and feelings without been constrained (Fielding and Thomas, 2008). Follow up questions were also used to build rapport, allowing respondents to expand their answers and clarify issues (O'Reilly, 2005). The research instrument went through rigorous testing procedures including a pilot study that took place before the fieldwork in July 2015. The pilot study was undertaken separately for both the Greek and the Czech sample (with 2 participants each). Only a few trivial phrasing issues were identified and corrected in the final interview guide.

A combination of convenience and snowball sampling was used to gather interview participants from both countries. Interviews were initiated with conveniently identified key informants on each country, and then additional people suggested by the key informants were invited for an interview. Only adults (over the age of 18) were included in the sample and interviews were conducted till data saturation was reached (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The research was conducted simultaneously in the two countries between July and August 2015, by one researcher in each country who fluently spoke the native language (Czech and Greek). In total, 42 semi-structured interviews were conducted comprising 21 interviews from the Czech Republic and 21 interviews from Greece. From the 21 interviews in each country, 11 were with visitors and 10 were with non-visitors to London. A good representation of all age groups was achieved in the dataset obtained by both researchers, as efforts were made to interview participants of various combinations of age and gender. Among the Czech sample, 33% were aged 18-35 years old, 29% were 35-55 years old and 38% were 56 year or older. In the Greek sample, 38% were reported aged 18-35 years old, 29% were aged 36-55 years and

finally 33% were those over 56 years old. The vast majority of visitors have visited London only once. For the purposes of this study those who have been to London one or more times were included in the same category, although it is acknowledged that further research could make a distinction between people who have visited a destination once and those who visited it multiple times. Each interview was digitally recorded, transcribed verbatim, and then translated into English retroactively from Greek and Czech by the researchers themselves to ensure that their idiomatic meanings were the same (Brislin, 1976). Interviews lasted on average 30 minutes with longer ones usually taking place with visitors. All participants had to sign in a consent form prior conducting the interview, pseudonyms were used in the analysis and non-relevant details were modified (i.e., family members' names) to ensure interviewees' anonymity (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Following thematic analysis, data were analysed manually recognizing patterns and thematic matrices that identified key issues (Boyatzis, 1998), reflecting the subjectivities of perceptions/images held by participants. In particular, the following stages of thematic analysis were used: familiarization, identification of a thematic framework, indexing, charting, mapping and interpretation (Brunt, 1997). The paper will now move to merge theoretical understandings with the findings derived from the interviews.

Findings

The key characteristics of destination image identified in this study and further discussed below include: dynamic, relativistic (vague/specific) and complex/multiple.

Dynamic

Previous models on destination image formation have already highlighted that image constantly evolves before, during and after a trip (Beerli and Martin, 2004; Clawson and Knetch, 1966). The dynamic nature of image appeared to be prominent also in this study, irrespective of respondents' nationality. Images were reported to evolve from abstract ones commonly held by non-visitors such as "*I know that it has a nice museum with figures made of wax*" (interviewee 1) to more specific ones possessed by visitors who were able to name the places visited: "*The Big Ben, the London Tower, commercial streets like Oxford street, museums, like the National Gallery, British Museum, Madam Thyssaud, large parks like Hyde Park, and the typical symbols of London: the two-store buses, the taxis, the underground, the typical uniforms of the policeman, the parliament*" (interviewee 3). A change in the image of London as a result of visitation was further evidenced in many visitors'

reflectional accounts: "*Before the visit I imagined it to be a beautiful place, but could not predict how beautiful it is!*" (interviewee 9) and "*It [visitation] improved some aspects of my image. I was surprised by the politeness of the people and the food, the international cuisine ... especially their politeness and the level of service*" (interviewee 8).

Additionally, image seemed to be open to an ongoing process of change and modification in subsequent visits, facilitated by deeper, more detailed experiences with the place: "*In the second or third time of visit I prefer to understand how people live there, to become a citizen of London for a week, to explore their everyday life, to visit places that only locals visit*" (interviewee 3). This finding appears to contradict Fakeye and Compton's (1991) work which reported that visitors' image remains rather stable after the first visit. Multiplicity and different layers of image were also apparent in the dataset as interviewees imagined, described, or experienced very different aspects of the city and/or places within the city. For example, as interviewee 21 pointed out, there is a lot to be discovered in London: "*it is a nice place. London has a lot of sights, so in every new visit one could choose something else*".

Relativistic: Vague-Specific

The relativistic element of image was evident in peoples' responses, with notable differences reported between visitors and non-visitors to London. Images of those who have never visited London were found to be vague with most individuals being aware of this fact. For example, interviewees 6 and 9 respectively argued that "*my image is not very clear; it would only be confirmed after visitation*" and "*I can't say that my image is clear.*" This finding is in line with previous research conducted by Hughes and Allen (2008) and Cherifi et al. (2014), which also found that non-visitors' images of tourist destinations tend to be vague. Given the absence of a concrete image, non-visitors often based their perceptions on stereotypes, serving as simplifications of reality (Kotler and Gertner, 2002). For example, non-visitors 7 and 9 respectively accounted: "*Big Ben... in some areas, I do not know ... City, Soho, Oxford.. I think.. Thames*" and "*I think it attracts youth tourists, and it is out of control the situation with drugs. The climate is very heavy and rainy.*" In contrast, the image that Czech and Greek visitors hold of London was found to be specific and to go beyond common stereotypical representations (Di Vittorio, 2007; Fakeye and Compton, 1991). For example, interviewee 2 was able to assert that: "*It is a very interesting tourist destination, because it combines a number of attractions: there is a historic centre, a plethora of museums, parks, entertainment, musicals, interesting churches*" and interviewee 8 further agued "*Great distances between*

9

places, and high prices. It is expensive: to stay, to dine out, to commute, to drink coffee." Real memories as opposed to imagined ones include more data, details, associations and tend to be more logical (Johnson, Hashtroudi and Lindsay, 1993). Further analysing this characteristic of image, it can be argued that the level of vagueness could range from inaccurate to accurate. On the one hand, there were non-visitor participants who knew about a specific attraction in London but were not able to name it (vague but accurate image) like interviewee 22: "*I do not know exactly where, but there is a place which has an incredible view, you can see the whole London [meaning London Eye]*" and interviewee 28 "*Notting Hill, is it in London? Hmm…*" On the other hand, some peoples' images were found to be vague and inaccurate as in the case of interviewee 25, who thought that the tower of Canterbury is located in London. Accuracy can, therefore, be a sub-dimension of vagueness, with this finding having significant implications for the management and marketing of tourist destinations as further discussed below.

Complexity/Multiplicity

Czech and Greek non-visitors were reported focusing more on iconic features of the city and had quite simplistic, stereotypical images of London. For example, interviewee 4 reproduced stereotypes about the English weather: "*It is humidity as well, the weather... The people, from what I hear are different from us, and the weather, fog, humidity.*" Others, like interviewee 22, referred to London's iconic attractions: "*I am aware of Buckingham Palace. Big Ben, Thames River… That's it!*" Similarly, other non-visitors reported images including the black cabs, the red phone booths, policemen's' uniform, River Thames and London Bridge. Although iconic attractions may not necessarily attract the largest number of visitors, they assist in increasing the total influx of tourists to a destination (Weidenfeld, 2010). Most non-visitors acknowledged that their image is simple and incomplete: "*totally incomplete…I do not have any image*" (interviewee 10). This simplistic image was attributed by some to a lack of direct experience with the destination: "*of course, without experience we base our image only on mediated sources*" (interviewee 7). Others further pointed to the information sources used, for example: "*mainly friends who have visited London and from the news and media*" (interviewee 11). Lastly, some non-visitors (i.e., interviewee 31) attributed their simplistic image to a lack of interest in visiting London: "*I have no image…Nothing... I was never interested in it. There are some other places that I have spent time searching about, but never for that one.*"

Unlike non-visitors, visitors to London generally moved beyond naming iconic attractions, possessing multiple images: *"It [London] has many places to visit including Madam Tussaud museum, London Eye, well-known neighbourhoods like Soho and Camden Town, shopping opportunities and entertainment. London Eye and London Bridge are very typical of London… and Big Ben. And it has a specific colour. There are many people, different cultures, nationalities, etc., it is destination that provides everything"* (interviewee 41). Visitors also exhibited complex images and were able to differentiate images according to the season. For example, interviewee 14 mentioned: *"It depends when and how you visit it; there are some things that can be visited at any time and there are things that can be visited only occasionally. Amongst the things that can be visited at any time is, for example, the British Museum, as well as the theatres."* Similarly, although non-visitors were unable to express any concrete feelings about London, visitors have established an affective component, such as interviewee 1: "*I like it, of course, I like, but ... I was not so much moved by something. I believe that it is a capital city that is not so 'welcome', perhaps it does not fit to my idiosyncrasy."*

A number of studies have explored the effect direct experience has on destination image complexity and multiplicity comparing tourists' pre-trip and post-trip images (Kim and Morrison, 2005; Smith et al., 2015, Tasci, 2006; Vogt and Andereck, 2003). Findings here are in line with the studies of Vogt and Andereck (2003) and Vogt and Stewart (1998), which revealed how image evolves during the course of a vacation moving from simplistic stereotypes into more complex, multi-layered images. Similarly, Smith et al. (2015) examined Canadian students' images of Peru during five different time frames and found that the cognitive image post-trip improves and surpasses the pre-trip one. Some visitors' attributed their complex images to the variety of information sources used before the trip, including *"many friends, a lot of movies filmed in London, and a lot of research in the internet short before visiting"* (interviewee 5). Despite possessing a complex image, Czech and Greek visitors acknowledged this being incomplete as a result of the size of the city: "*it is huge and has so many things to do. It is the size and the variety of things that it offers... it is not the same as when you visit smaller cities like Prague, for example*" (interviewee 40). Some others mentioned that they only possess a complete image of the areas they have visited "*The city is huge, I have not visited all the places... but I have a clear and complete image of the centre of the city...*" (interviewee 38). It was thus evident from the findings that visitors hold multiple, complex images of London, resulting from exposure to a variety of

sources of information and personal experiences, whereas images of non-visitors seem rather basic and uni-dimensional in many cases.

Confidence

The previously discussed characteristics of image appeared to influence to a great extent people's level of confidence in their own images of London. Lack of direct experience with the destination, vague and simplistic images lead non-visitors - like interviewee 10 - to assert that their image is "*probably impartial, probably inaccurate.*" This issue was further raised by interviewee 26 who stated that "*It is how I imagine it. It is completely subjective ... my image of London might not even be realistic or true.*" Visitors to London, on the other hand, exhibited greater levels of confidence. Interviewee 11, for instance, stated "*My image is quite realistic as I know a lot of people living there*" and similarly, interviewee 16 argued "*I believe that my images are real.*" This finding corroborates previous research on consumer behaviour that experience positively affects information search and level of confidence in decision making (Kim et al., 2008; Park and Lessig, 1981). Level of confidence is particularly important in tourism, as destination image is known to influence peoples' decision making, on-site experience and post-purchase behaviour (Al-Kwifi, 2015).

Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this study was to unpack the characteristics of image as perceived by visitors and non-visitors of a tourist destination. To achieve this aim, Greek and Czech visitors' and non-visitors' images of London were explored using 42 in-depth qualitative interviews. As the findings revealed, the two groups' images differ, irrespective of nationality, on a number of characteristics including dynamic, relativistic (vagueness-specific) and complexity/ multiplicity. First, images of visitors and non-visitors to London were found to be relativistic, differing with respect to their level of specificity/vagueness. Vagueness was a typical characteristic of non-visitors' image with people who have never been to London often holding inaccurate and unreal images, whilst the images held by visitors were more specific. It was further reported that non-visitors images could range from vague and accurate to vague and inaccurate. Second, it was evident that images of non-visitors are relatively simplistic as they often appear to possess limited mental associations of London, mainly reproducing key stereotypes, whilst those of visitors were highly complex. Lastly, the dynamic nature of image was recognized, constantly evolving as a result of actual visitation and extending

beyond the visit itself. All these characteristics appear to influence to a certain extent peoples' level of confidence in their own images of London.

The characteristics of image identified here are visually presented on three continua (see Figure 1). The first continuum distinguishes destination image between a vague one that non-visitors often have from the more specific one of visitors. This dichotomization is in line with past research which found that visitors were reported having more specific images than the non-visitors (Fakeye and Crompton, 1991; Tasci, 2006). The second continuum divides people on the grounds of the level of complexity and multiplicity of their images. Non-visitors usually have simplistic representations, whereas visitors possess more complex images of a destination like London. The last continuum reflects the dynamic nature of image, one that constantly evolves not only as a result of direct experience with the destination but also on the number of subsequent visits, level of familiarity with the place and size of the destination (Baloglu, 2001; Fakeye and Crompton, 1991). While Figure 1 clusters the characteristics of destination image into distinct dimensions, they are collectively imperative for explaining this latent construct and could often intertwine. A non-visitor for example who has increased interest in a destination or might have been influenced by visual media including TV drama series, documentaries and movies (Kim, 2012; Pan and Tsang, 2014; Terzidou, Stylidis and Terzidis, 2017) could also develop a more complex and specific image of a destination. Although not directly studied, it is also suggested here that the level of confidence one exhibits in his own image could be the outcome of the other characteristics. Non-visitors with vague and simplistic images will typically exhibit lower levels of confidence in their own images, whereas visitors with complex images will tend to be highly confident on the way they perceive a certain destination. For example, interviewee 6 was insecure of whether or not his image is accurate: *"There will be perhaps smog and traffic, the underground must have its specific smell too."*

The present study contributes to the extant literature on tourist destination image on multiple grounds. First, given that a dearth of research on the characteristics of image has been noted in the tourism literature, the study expands our understanding of image formation by highlighting complexity/multiplicity, relativistic (vague-specific) and dynamic nature as destination image's core attributes, contributing to the on-going research on its conceptualization. The study thus builds on previous work (Gallarza et al., 2002), providing empirical verification of the characteristics of image. Secondly, whilst it has been previously

recognized that the destination image of non-visitors is different from that of visitors (Konecnik and Ruzzier, 2006; Tasci, 2006), where the difference lied in terms of the characteristics of image has been an area still under-researched. By juxtaposing samples of visitors and non-visitors this paper contributes to tourism theory providing a deeper understanding of such differences in image characteristics, taking into consideration the layers, multiplicity and dynamism of destination image. The study as such manages to respond to recent calls for additional research into the characteristics of destination images incorporating differences between visitors and non-visitors (Cherifi et al., 2014).

The study also has a number of practical implications for tourism practitioners, especially for destination management and marketing organisations. From the point of view of destination management, understanding tourists and potential visitors' images is critical for the success of a tourist destination. The findings of this study enable a greater understanding of the target market for a destination and could assist in effectively designing marketing campaigns that consider the characteristics of destination image. The differences in image characteristics reported between visitors and non-visitors indicate that a careful customization of the marketing efforts to these two groups should be pursued. For example, a greater complexity and more specific images should be used to attract the repeating visitors market, which commonly possesses a highly complex image of the destination. On the other hand, marketing tools aiming to non-visitors should focus on developing their simplistic and vague images into more concrete and attractive ones. Significant investment should be made targeting to inform non-visitors' vague and incorrect images, as this can prove crucial in decision making, following some of the steps proposed by Avraham (2004). Especially, enhancing non-visitors level of confidence in their images of a given destination is expected to lead to increased visitation. Further in regards to practical implications, as identified previously in the literature destination image influences also tourists' on-site experience and level of satisfaction during the visit. The image characteristics identified in this study could assist tourism practitioners in designing experiences provided at the destination, motivating tourists for example, to visit neighbourhoods in the suburbs of London, thereby increasing image complexity. Lastly, this research showed that visitation influences destination image at various levels, imputing richness, complexity and confidence in image, belittling the role of other factors (i.e., information sources) in image formation. This realization calls for additional investment in formulating pleasant and long-lasting tourist experiences, which will be translated into loyalty and repeat visitation.

This study has a number of limitations that can be addressed in future research; firstly, the study considered only one destination (London), examined from different perspectives (Czech and Greek). As such, the findings cannot be generalised to destinations other than London. Secondly, the dataset was translated from Greek and Czech to English and although every effort has been made, there inevitably might have been introduced some bias in data analysis. Thirdly, this study focused on a well-known urban destination; more work is needed in understanding the characteristics of image of different types of destination (i.e., rural, seaside resorts, small cities). Given that the study focused on the image of a large city (London), it is questionable if some of the characteristics identified here could be applied to smaller destinations; future research could address this question.

References:

Al-Kwifi, O.S. (2015), "The impact of destination images on tourists' decision making: A technological exploratory study using FMRI", *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology*, 6, 2, 174-194.

Anholt, S. (2009), *Places: Identity, Image and Reputation,* Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.

Ashworth, G., and Kavaratzis, M. (2009), "Beyond the logo: Brand management for cities", *Journal of Brand Management*, 16, 8, 520-531.

Ashworth, G. J., Kavaratzis, M., and Warnaby, G. (2015), The need to rethink place branding. In: Ashworth, G. J., Kavaratzis, M., and Warnaby, G. (2015), *Rethinking Place Branding*, 1-11, Springer International Publishing.

Assaker, G., Vinzi, V. E., and O'Connor, P. (2011), "Examining the effect of novelty seeking, satisfaction, and destination image on tourists' return pattern: A two factor, non-linear latent growth model", *Tourism Management*, 32, 4, 890-901.

Avraham, E. (2004), "Media Strategies for Improving an Unfavourable City Image", *Cities*, 21, 6, 471-479.

Baloglu, S., and McCleary, K. W. (1999), "A model of destination image formation", *Annals of Tourism Research*, 26, 4, 868 - 897.

Baloglu, S. (2001), "Image variations of Turkey by familiarity index: Informational and experiential dimensions", *Tourism Management*, 22, 2, 127-133.

Beerli, A. and Martín, J. D. (2004), "Factors influencing destination image", *Annals of Tourism Research*, 31, 3, 657 - 681.

Boyatzis, R. (1998), *Transforming Qualitative Information: Thematic Analysis and Code Development*, London, Sage.

Braun, V., and Clarke, V. (2006), "Using thematic analysis in psychology", *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 2, 77 – 101.

Brislin, R.W. (1976), "Back-Translation for Cross-Cultural Research", *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 1, 3, 185-216

Brunt, P. (1997), *Market Research in Travel and Tourism,* London, Butterworth-Heinemann.

Cai, L.A. (2002), "Cooperative Branding for Rural Destinations", *Annals of Tourism Research*, 29, 720-742.

Chen, C. F., and Tsai, D. (2007), "How destination image and evaluative factors affect behavioral intentions?" *Tourism Management*, 28, 4, 1115-1122.

Chen, C.C., Lin, Y.H. and Petrick, J.F. (2013), "Social Biases of Destination Perceptions", *Journal of Travel Research*, 52, 2, 240-252.

Cherifi, B., Smith, A., Maitland, R., and Stevenson, N. (2014), "Destination images of non-visitors", *Annals of Tourism Research*, 49, 190-202.

Chi, C. G. Q., and Qu, H. (2008), "Examining the structural relationships of destination image, tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty: An integrated approach", *Tourism Management*, 29, 4, 624-636.

Clawson, M. and Knetsch, J. (1966), *Economics of outdoor recreation*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD.

Countries' National Statistics (2016), *Czech Republic vs. Greece*. Retrieved from http://www.nationmaster.com/country-info/compare/Czech-Republic/Greece on 07/04/2017.

Deslandes, D., Goldsmith, R. Bonn, M. and Joseph, S. (2006), "Measuring Destination Image: Do the Existing Scales Work?" *Tourism Review International*, 10, 141-153.

Di Vittorio, A. (2007). *Customer Relationship management and new processes of buying by tourist consumers*, Italy, Franco Angeli.

Echtner, C.M. and Ritchie, J.B.R. (1991), "The meaning and measurement of destination image", *Journal of Tourism Studies*, 2, 2, 2 - 12.

Elliot, S., Papadopoulos, N. and Kim, S. S. (2011), "An Integrative Model of Place Image: Exploring Relationships between Destination, Product, and Country Images", *Journal of Travel Research*, 50, 5, 520-534.

Fakeye, C.P. and Crompton, J. L. (1991), "Prospective, first-time and repeat visitors to the Lower Rio Grande Valley", *Journal of Travel Research* 30, 2, 10-16.

Fielding, N., and Thomas, H. (2008), "Qualitative interviewing", In: N. Gilbert (Ed.), *Researching social life (3rd ed.)*, pp. 245–265, London, Sage.

Finn, M., Elliott-White, M., Walton, M. (2000), *Tourism and leisure research methods: data collection, analysis and interpretation*, Harlow, Pearson Education Limited.

Gallarza, M. Saura, G., and García, H.C. (2002), "Destination image: Towards a Conceptual Framework", *Annals of Tourism Research*, 29, 1, 56-78.

Gartner, W. (1993), "Image Formation Process", *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, 2, 2/3, 191-215.

George, B. P., and George, B. P. (2004), "Past visit and the intention to revisit a destination: place attachment as the mediator and novelty seeking as the moderator", *The Journal of Tourism Studies*, 15, 2, 51–66.

Gkritzali A., Gritzalis D. and Stavrou V. (2017), "Is Xenios Zeus still alive? Destination image of Athens in the years of Recession", *Journal of Travel Research*, Available Online.

Gross, M., and Brown, G. (2008), "An empirical structural model of tourists and places: Progressing involvement and place attachment into tourism", *Tourism Management*, 29, 6, 1141-1151.

Hankinson, G. (2015), "Rethinking the place branding construct", In: G. Ashworth, M. Kavaratzis, and G. Warnaby, *Rethinking Place Branding (13-31)*, Springer International Publishing.

Hosany, S., Ekinci, Y., and Uysal, M. (2006), "Destination Image and Destination Personality: An Application of Branding Theories to Tourism Places", *Journal of Business Research*, 59, 638-642.

Hughes, H. L. and Allen, D. (2005), "Cultural tourism in Central and Eastern Europe: the views of induced image formation agents", *Tourism Management*, 26, 2, 173-183.

Humphrey, G. (1924), "The psychology of the gestalt", *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 15, 7, 401–412.

Iordanova, E. and Stylidis, D. (2017), "International and domestic tourists' "a priori" and "in situ" image differences and the impact of direct destination experience on destination image: The case of Linz, Austria", *Current Issues in Tourism*, Available Online.

Johnson, M. K., Hashtroudi, S. and Lindsay, D.S. (1993), "Source monitoring", *Psychological Bulletin*, 114, 3-28.

Kavaratzis, M. and Hatch, M.J. (2013), 'The Dynamics of Place Brands: An Identity-Based Approach to Place Branding Theory', *Marketing Theory*, 13, 2, 69–86.

Kim, S.S. and Morrison, A.M. (2005), "Change of images of South Korea among foreign tourists after the 2002 FIFA World Cup", *Tourism Management*, 26, 2, 233 - 247.

Kim, H. and Chen, J. S. (2016), "Destination image formation process: A holistic model", *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 22, 2, 154-166.

Kelley, H. H. (1972), "Attribution in social interaction", In E. E. Jones, D. E. Kanouse, H. H. Kelley, R. E. Nisbett, S. Valins and B. Weiner (eds.), *Attribution: Perceiving the causes of behavior (1-26)*, Morristown, NJ, General Learning Press.

Kim, S. (2012), "Audience involvement and film tourism experiences: Emotional places, emotional experiences", *Tourism Management*, 33, 387-396.

Klayman, J. and Ha, Y.W. (1987), "Confirmation, Disconfirmation, and Information in Hypothesis Testing", *Psychological Review*, 94, 211-228

Konecnik, M., and Ruzzier, M. (2006), "The Influence of Previous Visitation on Customer's Evaluation of a Tourism Destination", *Managing Global Transitions*, 4, 2, 145-165.

Kotler, P., Haider, D., and Rein, I. (1993), "There's no place like our place! The marketing of cities, regions, and nations", *The Futurist*, 27, 6, 14.

Kotler, P. and Gertner, D. (2002), "Country as brand, product, and beyond: A place marketing and brand management perspective", *Journal of Brand Management*, 9, 4-5, 249-261.

Kvale, S. and Brinkmann, S. (2009), *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*, London, Sage.

Lin, C. H., Morais, D. B., Kerstetter, D. L., and Hou, J. S. (2007), "Examining the role of cognitive and affective image in predicting choice across natural, developed, and theme-park destinations", *Journal of Travel Research*, 46, 2, 183-194.

London Data (2017). https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/number-international-visitors-london/resource/1eecf4ab-2636-4ebc-aaa7-f92517a3ed15 accessed on 06/04/2017.

Markus, H. (1977), "Self-schemata and processing information about the self", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 35, 63-78.

Murray, K.B., and Schlacter, J.L. (1990), "The Impact of Services versus Goods on Consumers' Assessment of Perceived Risk and Variability", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 18, 1, 51-65.

O'Reilly, K. (2005), *Ethnographic methods,* London, Routledge.

Pan, S., and Tsang, N. (2014), "Inducible or not—A telltale from two movies", *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*, 31, 3, 397–416.

Papadimitriou, D., Apostolopoulou, A., and Kaplanidou, K. (2015), "Destination Personality, Affective Image, and Behavioral Intentions in Domestic Urban Tourism", *Journal of Travel Research*, 54, 3, 302-315.

Park, C. W., and Lessing, V. P. (1981), "Familiarity and its impact on consumer decision biases and heuristics", *Journal of Consumer Research*, 8, 2, 223–230.

Phillips, W.J., and Jang, S. (2010), "Destination image differences between visitors and non-visitors: a case of New York City", *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 12, 5, 642-645.

Pike, S., and Ryan, C. (2004), "Destination positioning analysis through a comparison of cognitive, affective, and conative perceptions", *Journal of Travel Research*, 42, 4, 333-342.

Qu, H., Kim, L. H., and Im, H. H. (2011), "A model of destination branding: Integrating the concepts of the branding and destination image", *Tourism Management*, 32, 3, 465-476.

Quintal, V., Phau, I. and Polczynski, A. (2014), "Destination brand image of Western Australia's South-West region: Perceptions of local versus international tourists", *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 20, 1, 41-54.

Richards, G. (2001), "Marketing China overseas: The role of theme parks and tourist attractions", *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 8, 1, 28-38.

Smith, W., Li, X., Pan, B., Witte, M. and Doherty, S. (2015), "Tracking destination image across the trip experience with smartphone technology", *Tourism Management*, 48, 113-122.

Snyder, M. and Cantor, N. (1979), "Testing Hypotheses about Other People: The Use of Historical Knowledge", *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 15, 330-342.

Stepchenkova, S., and Li, X. R. (2014), "Destination image: Do top-of-mind associations say it all?", *Annals of Tourism Research*, 45, 46-62.

Stylidis, D., Belhassen, Y. and Shani A. (2015), "Destination image, on-site experience and behavioural intentions: path analytic validation of a marketing model on domestic tourists", *Current Issues in Tourism*, 1-18.

Stylidis, D., Shani, A., and Belhassen, Y. (2017), "Testing an integrated destination image model across residents and tourists", *Tourism Management, 58*, 184-195.

Stylos, N., Vassiliadis, C. A., Bellou, V. and Andronikidis, A. (2016), "Destination images, holistic images and personal normative beliefs: Predictors of intention to revisit a destination", *Tourism Management*, *53*, 40-60.

Tasci, A.D.A (2006), "Visit impact on destination image", *Tourism Analysis*, 11, 297-309.

Tasci, A.D.A., Gartner, W., and Cavusgil, S. (2007, "Conceptualization and operationalization of Destination image", *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*, 31, 194-223.

Terzidou, M., Stylidis, D., and Terzidis, K. (2017), "The role of visual media in religious tourists' destination image, choice and on-site experience: The case of Tinos, Greece", *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, Available Online.

Tkaczynski, A., Rundle-Thiele, S. R. and Cretchley, J. (2015), "A vacationer-driven approach to understand destination image: A Leixmancer study", *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 21, 12, 151-162.

Vogt, C. A., and Andereck, K. L. (2003), "Destination perceptions across a vacation", *Journal of Travel Research*, 41, 4, 348-354.

Vogt, C.A., and Stewart S.I. (1998), "Affective and Cognitive Effects of Information Use over the Course of a Vacation", *Journal of Leisure Research*, 30, 4, 498-520.

Warnaby, G. (2009), "Towards a service-dominant place marketing logic", *Marketing Theory*, 9, 4, 403-423.

Weidenfeld, A. (2010), "Iconicity and 'flagshipness' of tourist attractions", *Annals of Tourism Research*, 37, 3, 851–854.

World Atlas (2017). http://www.worldatlas.com/articles/religious-beliefs-in-greece.html accessed on 1/9/2017

Yacout, O.M. and Hefny, L. I. (2015), "Use of Hofstede's cultural dimensions, demographics, and information sources as antecedents to cognitive and affective destination image for Egypt", *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 21, 1, 37-52.
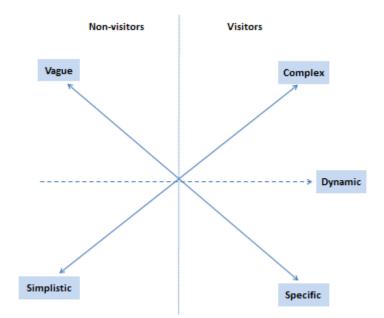
Figure 1. The characteristics of destination image