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Abstract

Although much scholarly attention has been devoted to the issue of destination branding, a series of central issues still need to be discussed further. The paper is predominantly conceptual and aims to critically examine the concept of destination branding and clarify some of the central issues herein. In particularly, the paper discusses the issues of Destination Management Organizations and 'control' over destination branding efforts; residents as a vital, albeit perhaps uncontrollable element of the destination brand; and the marketing mantra of 'one clear image'. Furthermore, the paper points to the unique problems of destination branding that originate from these three issues.

Destination Branding – A brilliant boulevard to bliss?

> There you are, dazing comfortably in a sun chair by the pool at a five-star resort. You are enjoying a chilled beer, the one with a royal crown on the green label while checking your messages on your Finnish cell. On the hotel's parasol protecting you from the burning sun, you spot the logo of a

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Scandinavian airline company and another logo – the one with a camel - covers the ashtray. You take of your sunglasses with the distinctive double C because, soon, you will go swimming in the pool; showing how well your new swimsuit with a C and a K on it fits you after the Momentum program helped you lose 5 pounds. Perhaps the guy in the D&G shorts will notice …

Brands are ubiquitous, stamping the world all around us. They are unavoidable, overtly and covertly seeking to demarcate quality from mediocrity in an era of heavy consumerism. In other words, brands attempt to provide guidelines to standards and quality in a world overloaded by a myriad of exchangeable goods and services (Scherhag, 2003). As Anholt (2003: 2) states: "Selling products with well-known names, rather than bulk commodities or generic goods, has long been a smart business to be in".

But what about your holiday destination? Sun, sea, sand, culture, friendly people and an exotic atmosphere. There is no mistaking, you must be in… Cyprus? Or maybe Greece? No, Turkey… or Spain? In fact, you could be anywhere, even in Australia. To quote Tourism Australia (2006): Where the bloody hell are you?

Today, all leading destinations seem to offer excellent accommodation and unique attractions, and every country claims unique culture and heritage (Morgan et al., 2002). A superb service and top-quality facilities are no longer differentiators of tourism destinations (Morgan et al., 2002) and in an atempt to stand out from the crowd, more and more destinations introduce branding strategies (Therkelsen, 2007: 215). New destinations seem to quickly develop as brands, whereas established destinations re-brand themselves (Therkelsen, 2007). Across the world and across television and computer screens, music-wrapped images of sand, sea and sunshine, snow-white ski slopes and sprawling green landscapes are tempting hopeful travelers with the promise of a perfect escape (Mendiratta, 2010: 1). For example, St. Moritz, the Swiss luxury resort, claims to be the 'top of the world' (Kur- und Verkehrsverein St. Moritz, 2010), New Zealand wants to convey the message that it is "100% pure" (Morgan et al., 2002, 2003, 2004), and the Caribbean island of Curacao even promises that tourists will experience the difference as soon as they set foot on the island (Curacao Tourist Board, 2010). Hence, there seems to be no danger that the eager tourist could mistake Curacao for Cyprus, Greece, Turkey, Spain or Australia.

Based on the preceding accounts, one might argue that an easily applicable solution to the problem of differentiation of destinations has been found! In the same manner as, for instance, the chocolate company with the purple cow on the wrapping ensures the consistent quality of its delicacy and has a tight grip on all marketing communication; a destination can control its delicious content as well as all promotional activities. Or can it? The aim of this paper is critically re-examine the concept of destination branding and attempt to add clarify to some of the issues involved. The paper predominantly discusses these issues at a conceptual level. However, as the focus is to explore the challenges of branding in a destination context at a mezo-level, this paper secondarily relies on desk research, which is supported by a content analysis of selected elements from the website YouTube. This particular approach was chosen for two reasons. First, podcasts have become a means for exchanging information about destinations among (potential) tourists and local residents (Munar, 2009). YouTube allows people and companies to upload and share video clips on the site and across the Internet through websites, mobile devices, blogs, and email (YouTube, 2010[a]). The site can thus be considered as an excellent source of the perceptions and attitudes that tourists and residents hold towards a destination. Secondly, content analysis was chosen, because it allows for systematic categorization of the images held by tourists and residents (Malhotra & Birks 2007). Tourism New Zealand's "100% pure" campaign was chosen as the unit of analysis, due to its status as a successful niche destination brand (Morgan et al., 2002, 2003, 2004). A search on YouTube revealed the existence of a series of three commercials, which were chosen, due to the connection between them. The content analysis was conducted following a methodology resembling that of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). First, to get an overview of the abstracts/papers, they were summarized in a table format divided into columns by author (tourist or resident) and nature of the comment (positive or negative). As the aim of the analysis was to let the data determine the outcome, the structure of the table was adapted during the course of the analysis (Carson et al., 2001). Each comment was inspected individually, and if considered relevant, the comment was added to a matrix. No alterations were made to the comments, in order not to distort meaning. If a comment was suitable for several categories it was mentioned in all of them. Furthermore, answers to previous posts were considered separately, because they could fall into a different category (e.g. different author group). Thus, the course of certain discussions (statements and subsequent replies) is not reflected in the matrix. A total of 3086 comments were investigated (YouTube, 2010[b,c,d]), in the period from 2 to 11 April, 2011. However, it should be mentioned that throughout the paper, the results of the content analysis are

included to exemplify and problematize key conceptual points and thus, deliberately, the paper does not seek to offer a full account of all the findings of this analysis. Instead, selected results are included as no more but illustrative examples of the concepts and issues discussed.

What is Destination Branding Anyway?

Considering the competitiveness of the tourism sector as well as the positive effects of (traditional) branding, it makes sense to attempt to brand destinations (Blichfeldt, 2005), and several researchers have made an effort to define branding in a destination context. Cai (2002: 722), for example, defines destination branding as follows:

> Selecting a consistent element mix to identify and distinguish it through positive image building. A brand element comes in the form of a name, term, logo, sign, design, symbol, slogan, package, or a combination of these, of which the name is the first and foremost reference.

Cai thus (2002) points out that for destinations, the brand name is often fixed, which suggests that the use of slogans and symbols is utilized to infuse the name of the destination with associated benefits (Daye, 2010). Moreover, Cai (2002) seems to focus on the tangible elements of the branding process, indicating that these are the basis for building a positive image. However, according to Schmitt and Simonsen (1997), the use of a design to attract attention is often mistaken for branding. It is based on an over resilience on the visual elements as the differentiating device, rather than the development of genuine competitive advantage. What differentiates product and destination brands from generic products and services is the presence of both functional and emotional values (Schmitt & Simonsen, 1997, Morgan et al., 2002). This is also evident in Blain et al.'s (2005) definition of destination branding, which is based on the earlier work of Aaker (1991), Richie and Richie (1998) and Berthon et al. (1999: 337):

The set of marketing activities that (1) support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that readily identifies and differentiates a destination; that (2) consistently convey the expectation of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; that (3) serve to consolidate and reinforce the emotional connection between the visitor and the destination; and that (4) reduce consumer search costs and perceived risk.

Collectively, these activities serve to create destination image that positively influences consumer destination choice.

According to Day (2005) and Henderson (2007), this is conceivably the most comprehensive definition of destination branding. The definition addresses the traditional branding concepts mentioned above: the functional attributes of the brand, the promise of added value as well as the emotional relationship between the visitor (consumer) and the destination (the brand). Furthermore, the definition draws on the concept of experiences marketing and destination image, suggesting that image building is a central element in destination branding, as it influences destination choice (Blain et al., 2005). Destination branding should thus not only be confined to positive image building based on visual statements, but should also create an emotional relationship between the destination and potential visitors (Morgan et al., 2002: 340. Hence, destination branding includes three main elements: identity, image and positioning.

In order to create a unique and appealing brand, Pike (2004) and Therkelsen (2007) argue that it is essential to define the brand identity (sometimes referred to as personality) of the destination, meaning identifying the core values and attributes that best represent the destination. Morgan et al. (2002) concur, suggesting that defining the destination's brand identity helps establish a relationship between the brand and the customer. In this regard, Konecnik and Go (2008: 179) suggest that brand identity has multiple roles: It is both a unique set of associations that marketers seek to create and maintain, and a representation of the image that the destination should project to targeted visitors (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000; Konecnik and Go, 2008). The arguments put forward by these authors appear to be based on Kapferer's (1998: 71) premise that "before knowing how we are perceived, we must know who we are", indicating that the destination, rather than the consumer, should define both its brand and content (Konecnik & Go, 2008). Yet, when people go on holiday, they do not only consume a product from one supplier, they consume a bundle of products and services as a whole (Morgan et al., 2003; Smith, 1994). This means that many different suppliers participate in creating the total tourism experience, e.g. accommodation and catering establishments, tourist attractions, entertainment and cultural venues as well as the natural environment (Blichfeldt, 2005; Buhalis, 1999; Morgan et al., 2002, 2003). Consequently, horizontal cooperation is needed, meaning that a range of agencies and public/private companies need to cooperate in the task of defining the brand identity (Morgan et al., 2003). As there is no clear

distribution channel for tourism products (Gnoth, 2002), a fundamental problem arises as regards who is to define the core of the destination brand. While traditional brands have obvious cores, the core of destination brands is much less clear (Blichfeldt, 2005; Morgan et al., 2004), which may frustrate cooperation and coordination and may inhibit a clear and authentic definition of the destination's identity (Henderson, 2007). Hence, the task of establishing a coherent and clear brand identity seems more challenging in a tourism destination context than in product-oriented companies (Murphy et al. 2007).

As suggested previously, destination image is a critical factor when branding a destination (Henderson, 2007). This is due to the very nature of the purchase decision in relation to tourism products. Tourists may have little direct experience with the destination prior to their visit, and due to the intangible nature of tourism products, it is not possible to try or test it before making a purchase decision (Ryan & Gu, 2008). To the tourist, the image of the destination, therefore, affects perceptions, attitudes and destination choice (Cooper & Hall, 2008; Lee et al., 2002; Woodside & Lysonski, 1989; Pearce, 1982). In addition, Ryan & Gu (2008: 387) argue that images are strategic and tactical weapons in the competitive battle between destinations. According to Papadopoulos and Heslop (2002) every destination has an image. Whether good, bad or indifferent, literature suggests that the image of a destination must be identified and either changed or exploited (e.g. Henderson, 2007; Therkelsen, 2007; Ryan & Gu, 2008). The concept of destination image is multi-dimensional, and it is common to see destination image, either from a consumer perspective as an organic or perceived image or from the producer's side as a projected or induced image (Bramwell and Rawding, 1996; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991). Gunn (1988) suggests that organic/perceived images are formed through the media and other non-tourism specific information sources. The organic/perceived image evolves into an induced/projected image, when the consumer is influenced by promotional activities. Cooper and Hall (2008) suggest that the inseparable nature of the production and consumption process of tourism means that actual visitation leads to a modified image. This indicates that destination image is not generated entirely by marketing efforts. In fact, it has been suggested that destination image is highly subjective and thus relies less on marketing communication than traditional brands do (Cooper & Hall, 2008; Daye, 2010; Blichfeldt, 2005; Henderson, 2007; Tasci & Kozak, 2006). This suggests that although destinations seek to change or exploit destination images, it is not guaranteed that consumers will be positively influenced by these marketing efforts (Naidoo et al., 2009). Elaborating on the role of image in destination branding, Cai (2002: 722) argues that "image

formation is not branding, albeit the former constitutes the core of the latter. Image building is one step closer, but there still remains a critical missing link: the brand identity. To advance destination image studies to the level of branding, this link needs to be established". The concept of destination branding thus extends beyond the generic level of image management, to the idea of building a specific and distinct image based on the destination brand identity (Daye, 2010). In summary, a destination brand is created, based on and subtracted from the identity of the destination (Ren, 2008), whereas destination image is a key determinant of brand equity (Tasci & Kozak, 2006). Destination brand image and destination brand identity are hence closely interrelated concepts (Tasci & Kozac, 2006). However, it might be suggested that destination identity is more important than image from a strategic point of view, as destination identity is the core of the brand (Cai, 2002; Kapferer, 1998; Konecnik & Go, 2008).

The positioning of a destination brand is the last 'step' towards the completion of destination branding (Lee et al., 2006; Pike, 2004, 2005; Plog, 2004; Therkelsen, 2007). Although destination image may not be generated entirely by marketing efforts, literature suggests that a competitive position for a destination brand in the marketplace can be developed by creating and transmitting a clear and favorable image to (potential) tourists (e.g. Blain et al., 2005; Cai, 2002; Henderson, 2007; Morgan et al., 2004, Therkelsen, 2007). According to Cai (2002), destinations that project a positive and clear image enjoy stronger market positioning than those without. When positioning a destination brand, Therkelsen (2007) suggests that a frame of reference with the competition is essential, because this ensures that the destination delivers a unique position in relation to its competitors. Furthermore, positioning must take into account the capability and resources of the destination to deliver the brand promise (Cooper & Hall, 2008: 227). This necessitates stakeholder collaboration (Ooi, 2004). However, those stakeholders who already have a strong brand may choose to pursue their own strategies as opposed to developing and promoting a destination brand (Therkelsen, 2007). Additionally, some stakeholders might choose not to collaborate, and transmit their own messages about the destination and what it offers, which may be in conflict with the destination brand (Ooi, 2004; Pike, 2004, 2005). This complexity is further increased by the fact that the players in the tourism sector may be involved in branding at several levels. Apart from their own branding strategies many tourism-related businesses may also engage in branding at city, regional and national levels (Therkelsen, 2007). There are hence many visions, missions, values, logos, slogans etc., which the individual destination need to take into

consideration when positioning itself (Pike, 2004; Therkelsen, 2007). It can thus be concluded that destination branding is a process by which destinations seek to express their unique identity through a positive projected image that is clear and well positioned in relation to competitors. Furthermore, building an emotional relationship with potential tourists is what differentiates branding from other marketing efforts. Although there is general agreement among scholars that branding can be applied to tourism destinations (e.g. Anholt, 2002; Cai, 2002; Kotler & Gertner, 2002; Morgan et al., 2002, 2003, 2004; Olins, 2002; Scherhag, 2003), the conclusions of this section lead to the emergence of a vital question: Are DMOs (destination marketing organizations) in a position to control the brand and the branding process?

Out of Control DMOs?

According to Gehrisch (2005), DMOs serve as a coordinating entity, bringing together a diversity of stakeholders to attract visitors to the area. DMOs are therefore usually also responsible for the brand architecture of the destination, i.e. the way in which brands are organized, managed and promoted (Kerr, 2006). In this regard, Gehrisch (2005: 25) states that the function of DMOs in relation to branding is to create "a brand for the entire community", to get the destination "into the public's consciousness, creating a continuous awareness of and demand for the 'product'". To achieve this, Elliot and Papadopoulos (2008) as well as Seaton and Bennett (2001) argue that the basic principles of destination branding call for DMOs to cohesively manage all product and service elements, and to coordinate the complete marketing mix. Seaton and Bennett (2001: 367) further argue that "a successful brand emerges from the design of a homogeneous product, correctly priced, distributed and promoted to a defined target market." The elements of the marketing mix are unified by the brand such that the individual elements of the marketing mix (e.g. price) support the brand identity and brand image (Styles and Ambler, 1995). The marketing mix can thus be utilized to create brand value (Knox, 2004). In reality, however, DMOs have limited control over the total marketing mix (Elliot & Papadopoulos, 2008; Goldsmith, 1999; Prichard & Morgan, 1998; Ryan, 1991; Seaton & Bennett, 2001). The design and quality of the components of the cumulative tourism product, is a complex mix of diverse elements, including multiple stakeholders and other pre-determined factors, such as climate and infrastructure (Henderson, 2007; Morgan et al., 2004; Seaton & Bennett, 2001 Therkelsen, 2007). The prices of a destination is commonly set by individual tourism establishments (Elliot & Papadopoulos, 2008; Seaton & Bennett, 2001), and the distribution channel is created by the tourist; as the tourist travels, (s)he chooses the operators and services to be produced and consumed, and

thereby creates the channel (Gnoth, 2002). This suggests that the only marketing mix element that DMOs can attempt to control is promotion. Consequently, some scholars argue that destination branding has to rely almost entirely on promotion or publicity (e.g. Elliot & Papadopoulos, 2008; Henderson, 2000; Morgan et al., 2002, 2003, 2004; Seaton & Bennett, 2001). This is confirmed by Blain et al. (2005), who investigated how DMOs interpret and apply branding in their marketing efforts. The authors discovered that DMOs tend to equate the development of destination logos and associated slogans with the more comprehensive process of destination branding (Blain et al., 2005: 328). Although the results of the study might be reflective of a basic lack of awareness and sophistication among DMOs as regards destination branding, it may also indicate that the concept of (traditional) branding cannot easily be transferred to a tourism destination context.

Lack of control over the marketing mix can also affect the credibility of a destination image that has been projected for years, as exemplified by the case in New Zealand. In 1999 the country's tourism board (Pike, 2005; Tourism New Zealand – TNZ) went through an extensive branding process, conducting a large amount of research to define the identity of the destination, investigating organic images of the destination as well as the appropriate symbols and images to promote (Morgan et al., 2002, 2003, 2004). The result was the marketing campaign "100% Pure New Zealand". In 2009 the campaign celebrated its 10th anniversary in promoting the landscape, people, adventure and culture of the country (Morgan et al., 2002). However, the New Zealand brand has recently been criticized by a variety of stakeholders and experts for not being "100% pure" (e.g. nzherald, 24.03.2010; Tady, 2006; TVNZ, 2009). This is also emphasized in the comments posted in the image bank of YouTube (2010b,c,d), as a reaction to the promotional videos produced by TNZ):

> I've been to NZ and liked it but I still struggle over the notion of "100% Pure New Zealand". 75% of the rivers in Canterbury and Waikato are unfit for "contact recreation". That's hardly 100% PURE now is it??
>
> (Tourist)
>
> New Zealand's ok, but this "100% pure" propaganda is bullshit. It's a myth that has been propagated through the generations without anyone ever bothering to check whether it is actually true. Well, it isn't true, NZ is as polluted as anywhere else, but it sounds good so they keep saying it...
>
> (Potential tourist)

Mearns (2009) reproaches TNZ for projecting a fake image, and argues that the brand identity of the destination is ill-defined, due to practitioner's lack of knowledge on the branding process. This might not necessarily be the case. Although TNZ is being criticized for projecting an inauthentic image, the beauty of the country's natural environment is acknowledged. On this basis it can be argued that the limited control of the product element of the marketing mix, resulted in TNZ not being able to control and influence the development of the destination product. To sum up, DMOs seem to play an important role in organizing, managing and promoting a destination brand. Yet DMOs face a battle in coordinating and controlling the destination's marketing mix, which has profound effects on the development of a destination brand. Furthermore, the case of New Zealand suggests that lack of control of the marketing mix can damage the credibility of a destination image – even if it has been projected for years.

Residents – An Uncontrolled Commodity?
Ideally, branding a destination should act as a unifying force for the residents of the destination, aligning all of its people, celebrating its culture, spirit, identity and future aspirations (Mendiratta, 2010). Furthermore, residents who actively support and 'live the brand' (Anholt, 2002: 230), are said to reinforce the promoted brand identity, thereby positively influencing tourists' destination brand images. Thus a stronger and more authentic brand is created (Cai, 2002; Freire, 2009). Indeed, it seems that local residents are an integral part of the destination experience that the brand offers (Therkelsen, 2007). Morgan et al. (2002) emphasize that the friendliness of the local people is an entity which may capture the emotional brand values of a destination. Freire (2009) further argues that tourists use local people as a relevant factor when comparing different destinations. In other words, the residents of a destination represent a unique point of differentiation for DMOs. This is also evident when looking at destinations such as New Zealand (Morgan et al., 2002, 2003, 2004), Singapore (Henderson, 2007), Denmark (Ooi, 2004) and Wales (Prichard & Morgan, 1998). All these destinations have somehow incorporated the people aspect into their brand identities. Yet, if DMOs are to benefit from these positive effects, the residents first of all need to know about the brand values that have been identified. Secondly, DMOs should take into consideration that residents might also affect the brand negatively (Therkelsen, 2007). In this regard, Blichfeldt (2005) argues that the interactions between tourists and local residents are beyond DMOs' direct control and there is no reason why residents interacting with tourists should be expected to 'live the brand'. While Blichfeldt (2005) focuses on the interactions between tourists and residents at the destination, it

can be argued that the lack of control of residents can also negatively affect tourists' image of the destination prior to consumption, and thus counteract the positive associations that DMOs are attempting to create. Some residents may (consciously or unconsciously) damage the destination's image, for example through public debates in the media, initiating anti-branding campaigns and/or making parodies of advertising campaigns developed by DMOs (Jensen, 2005). A good example of this is the many 'spoofs' (i.e. parodies of official tourism commercials) that can be found on YouTube (2010[e]). Particularly, Tourism Australia's (TA) campaign "Where the Bloody Hell are You" has been the object of ridicule on the site (YouTube, 2010[f]). In this regard, the spoof made by Dan Ilic appears to have created controversy in the media. The video shows negative images of Australian life such as racism, drug abuse, child abuse and corruption. TA demanded the video removed, claiming that the music of the video was infringing their copyrights (The Sydney Morning Herald, 27.03.2006). However, in view of the potentially damaging effect on the destination's image, another possible motivation of TA could be that they wanted the spoof removed; it did not align with the image they were projecting. Hence, while many of these videos seem to be created in fun, they can be seen by DMOs as some sort of anti-branding campaign, potentially threatening the positive destination image, which they are attempting to project. This suggests that DMOs' lack of control over residents can potentially damage the image of a destination both prior to a potential visit and while the tourists are at the destination.

Returning to the residents support for the brand, it should be pointed out that the residents have their own experiences and perceptions of the history and antecedents of the place where they live, work and play (Cooper & Hall, 2006), and (at least some of) these perceptions might not be in line with the defined brand identity of the destination. This seems to have generated some critique as to DMO's apparent objectives of (re)defining destination identities (Henderson, 2000). In their discussion of urban tourism, Tyler et al. (1998: 233) note that "the imaging and reimaging turns the city into a commodity; a product competing with other products in the marketplace … a place to be consumed … with the tourist as consumer". Henderson (2000: 38) concurs, suggesting that "distorted and inauthentic images are presented, shaped to suit tourists and the tourism industry which imposes its demands and exploits places and people". Yet, it should also be acknowledged that the commercial goals and framing process of branding often prevent DMOs from telling the whole story (Ooi & Stöber, 2008), and the positioning of a clear and coherent destination image makes it virtually impossible for DMOs to satisfy all

stakeholders (Therkelsen, 2007). Nevertheless, the concern for commodification and distorted inauthentic images on the part of residents, was evident in the comments posted on YouTube (2010[b,c,d]), about the promotional videos produced by TNZ:

> To any tourist....you will be well advised to stay away from New Zealand. You will be robbed or murdered. It's a known fact!
>
> (Resident, video 3)

> beginning was great, then it turned all generic I mean honesty boxes??c'mon tourism nz surely you have seen the debacle on 60 Minutes about that! are you trying to aim at middle aged mid-high income euro tourists?? it didn't portray NZ's vibrant and youth culture at all....BORRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRING!
>
> (Resident, video 1)

> Without maori ppl in this ad the images could have been somewhere in canada...why isn't the vibrant Maori & Pacific culture & arts that is very unique to NZ promoted here? Because it makes the dominant population of nz look like squatters in maori land.
>
> (Resident, video 1)

As previously mentioned the core values of brand New Zealand is landscape, people, adventure and culture (Morgan et al., 2002, 2003, 2004). According to the quotes above these values neglect the history and culture of the country in relation to the Maori people, and do not portray the positive aspects of New Zealand as a contemporary society. Furthermore, there is an indication that promotional material about the country only portrays the positive aspects of the country, and is therefore not credible. These considerations reveal some of the commercial difficulties and ethical dilemmas of applying the branding concept to destinations. For DMOs, the primary challenge may lie in the fact that destinations are also societies, which are constantly evolving or contested and possess a history with several layers of meaning (Henderson, 2000). Capturing the depth of such a complex entity in a destination brand seems to be a critical challenge for a DMO.

Marketing – A key to success?

According to Therkelsen (2007), the success of any branding strategy ultimately depends on the consumers' understanding and reactions to marketing activities. However, as was indicated previously, consumers might not be positively influenced by these marketing efforts (Naidoo et al., 2009), indicating that DMOs cannot consistently convey the expectation of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination (Blain et al., 2005). Drawing on the premise that every destination has an image prior to any marketing efforts, the images and associations that already reside in the minds of consumers are crucial when consumers evaluate destinations (Blichfeldt, 2005; Therkelsen, 2007). In this regard, Gunn (1988) suggests that individuals who have never visited a destination will have some kind of information stored in memory, even though it may be incomplete or even 'wrong'. Moreover, Berry (2000) proposes three sources of brand meaning, (i.e. consumer's dominant perceptions/image of the brand): 1) A company's presented brand (the company's controlled communication of its identity), 2) external brand communications (e.g. word-of-mouth) and 3) the consumer's experience with the company. Berry (2000) further suggests that the consumer's experience with the company has a primary impact on brand meaning, whereas the company's presented brand and external brand communications only have secondary impacts. This means that consumers rely more on their own experiences than a company's marketing efforts. In a destination context, this implies that tourists who have experienced a destination are less receptive to the marketing efforts of DMOs compared to potential tourists. Yet, as regards tourists who have not visited a destination, it can be argued that external communication is more important than advertisements, as tourists view external brand communication, such as word-of-mouth (or YouTube), as more trustworthy than advertising (Kotler et al., 2010). Hence, tourists may generate brand images on the basis of a set of associations that are not part of the associations communicated by DMOs or they may neglect associations, upon the basis of which destination marketers communicate (Blichfeldt, 2005). This suggests that DMOs marketing efforts will only be influential if they align with external brand communications and the tourist's own experience. Consequently, communicating the destination's brand identity to consumers is more difficult for DMOs than for other marketers, as DMOs have to consider a multiplicity of already established images and associations, when branding the destination (Therkelsen, 2007; Kotler et al., 2010).

If all tourists hold images and have associations in relation to a particular destination, it can be suggested that there are as many images as there are

people (Ren & Blichfeldt, 2008). To investigate this further, the reactions to the "100% Pure New Zealand" campaign posted by potential and actual tourists on YouTube (2010b,c,d) were content analyzed. The analysis revealed 23 different images of New Zealand as a tourism destination based on 167 comments: Beautiful/amazing (39%), expensive (2.4%), proud country (0.6%), isolated (3.6%), cold climate (0.6%), boring (6.6%), hopeless (0.6%), unfriendly/negative image of the people (6.0%), shameful history (6.0%), diverse (4.2%), cultural (0.6%), poor (4.2%), racist (1.2%), high quality of life (0.6%), nice people (0.6%), not crowded (0.6%), polluted (6.0%), high crime rate (4.2%), overrun by Asians (0.6%) and ignorant (0.6%). Furthermore 2.6% reported having negative experiences in the country while 10% indicated a desire to visit, and 3% wanted to move to the country. It is important to allude that the intention of this content analysis is not to analyze the positive or negative images people hold towards New Zealand. The noteworthy point that emerges from the analysis is that TNZ identified four core values of the destination (landscape, people, adventure and culture) and projected one clear image of being "100% pure", and yet, even the relatively small number of people included in our analysis hold a wide variety of images towards the destination. On this basis it can be assumed that if a larger number of people were investigated, even more images would emerge. Considering this together with the fact that today's tourists are said to be experienced travellers (Ren & Blichfeldt, 2008), one might question the argument that DMOs should project one clear image. In this regard, Ren and Blichfeldt (2008) argue that "it may be mistaken to presume that any given tourist always prefers to be confronted with simplified images and unique selling propositions". Henceforth, promoting multiple images – or identities – could potentially more accurately reflect the various representations of a destination found with locals and tourists alike (Ren & Blichfeldt, 2008: 25). Thus, a branding strategy based on multiple images might enable the creation of more dynamic, heterogeneous and inclusive destination brand.

Conclusion

Ambitious claims are made about the benefits of destination branding (Henderson, 2007), and many destinations introduce branding strategies in their quest to increase market shares and profitability. However, branding in a destination context is not without challenges. Literature on destination branding draws heavily on concepts and theories developed for product branding, assuming that destinations can be managed and controlled in the same way as tangible products. Drawing on the arguments put forward in this paper, this represents several causes for concern. First, and arguably most

significantly, destinations are far more multidimensional than consumer goods, as they consist of a myriad of stakeholders, who also constitute the product. Branding in a destination context therefore requires coordination and control of the destination's marketing mix and cooperation among all stakeholders. In reality, however, none of the first three P's (i.e. product, price and distribution) are under the control of the DMO. Particularly, lack of control of the destination product has severe consequences for the management of a destination brand, as both residents and stakeholders might disseminate messages that conflict with the brand. Secondly, due to the lack of control over product, price and distribution, DMOs are forced to rely predominantly on promotional activities to create positive and unique associations to the brand. However, as all destinations have an image prior to any marketing efforts, and due to the importance of external communication and personal experiences, these promotional activities will only be influential if they align with already established images and associations. Hence, marketing only seems to play a confirmatory role in relation to positive image building. In this regard, it should be mentioned that tourists may hold a variety of different images towards the destination, even though DMOs only project one clear image, which provides the basis for challenging the assumption that DMOs' should only project *one clear* image. In conclusion, branding in a tourism destination context seems to be a complex task, which is at best difficult and at worst impossible. Ultimately, the question is whether or not it is too simplistic to apply traditional branding practices to destinations (Blichfeldt, 2005). The authors therefore encourage researchers to further investigate this topic, bearing in mind that perhaps the complex nature of destinations may call for an entirely different approach to branding.

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