

## CITY IMAGE – AS TOURISM DESTINATION

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### ABSTRACT

*Tourism is a competitive industry, even on a global scale. If access to a destination or attraction is too complicated, time consuming, expensive or not providing adequate capacity, even the most spectacular attraction will remain a secret to most tourists, as they will prefer competitive alternatives” (Smiths, 2003). And to continue this, it is considered that „that cultural differences and uniqueness are important if one wants cultural products to become a commercial success” (Lindenberg, 2004). When cultural tourists are looking to experiment or to improve their knowledge, the question is: “Which are the best strategies and practices to market that experience and knowledge for the cultural tourists” (Kantanen, 2005).*

*This paper will be dedicated to presenting city tourist destinations, their marketing and market positioning, also to analyze the way in which potential customers’ perception is built and how the process can be influenced, and to analyze the way the tourist product is assembled.*

*Key words: City, Tourism destination, Competitive advantage*

### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND ON MARKETING A CITY AS TOURISM DESTINATION

Destination advertising campaigns are typically evaluated by conversion studies or by advertising tracking studies. The conversion study model follows a sequential flow over time that leads from the production of advertisements to visitor awareness, positive image development, inquiry/fulfilment, motivation and conversion” (Siegel and Ziff- Levine, 1990; McWilliams and Crompton, 1997: 127 in Kantanen, 2005). The advertising tracking model describes changes in the levels of awareness of the destination and its image in the target markets, before and after those markets have been exposed to an advertising campaign” (McWilliams and Crompton, 1997: 129 in Kantanen, 2005).

City,s cultural attractions cover a wide range of cultural events, art exhibitions, museums, and buildings with cultural heritage” (Kantanen, 2005). Marketing in tourism can be described as both science and art, or a complex interplay of the two. Developing the right marketing channels; the right contacts; understanding how the tourism distribution and promotion systems work in the regional and national context; taking a unique approach; and persistence. Attaining the mix right in the context of a regional destination and maintaining flexibility in the approach will most certainly drive performance” (Smiths, 2003).

Marketing and advertising a certain geographical area (in our case a city) are essential for informing and convincing potential tourists to visit that area. A complet tourist plan must contain both a marketing component (Stanculescu, 2004). As target group orientation is considered a prerequisite for good market communication, it is essential for tourism destinations to be aware of the frame of reference within which their promotional efforts are interpreted. A central part of this are cultural images – that is images which exist in the target group in relation to a given culture outside and a priori to tourism promotion – and to consider how the promotional effort goes down with the a priori understanding seems a necessary exercise for any marketer” (Therkelsen, 2003).

Tourism basically entails a search for that which is extraordinary (Urry, 1990) compared to one’s everyday life and environment. Hence contrasts would seem to materialize between the orientations of the supply side and the demand side in a tourism context. This line of reasoning is sustained by Viken & Jacobsen (1997), who hold that culture specific experiences are a necessary contrast to our standardized everyday life” (Therkelsen, 2003).The political, economic and cultural existence of places outside the tourism context means that tourism destinations have a more comprehensive meaning potential than most other consumer products, and meanings which are closely tied up with the present and historical relations between the country of origin of the tourist and that of the destination” (Therkelsen, 2003). Faced with

growing global competition where destinations are becoming highly substitutable, destination marketing organisations (DMOs) are in a constant battle to attract travelers” (Pike and Ryan, 2004 in Ekinci, 2006). As places seek to become distinctive, destination personality is viewed as a viable metaphor for understanding tourists’ perceptions of places and for crafting a unique destination identity” (Caprara in Ekinci, 2006). A tourist destination may be viewed as an amalgam of individual products and experiences that combine to form the total experience of the area visited (Murphy in Ekinci, 2006). Past research has demonstrated that destination image has both cognitive and affective components (Kotler in Ekinci, 2006). Although destination image has been acknowledged to consist of both affective and cognitive components. Past research has also shown a direct connection between a destination’s image and the trend of tourists recommending it through word of mouth” (Ekinci, 2006), and also a direct connection between the destination’s image and tourists expectations (Middleton, 2001). A study by Ekinci (2006) demonstrated it’s vital to create and observe a destination’s personality in order to position and differentiate it on the tourist market. This can be done through a whole set of marketing techniques including publicity and imagining (Ekinci, 2006). Very often, mature destinations rest on past laurels, forgetting that the reexamination of their marketing and communication strategies and the willingness to implement change are their last hope in an increasing global market, where world-wide competition brings challenges everyday” (Minghetti, 2001). In the same way, emerging destinations need to identify target markets and create a unique brand platform to enter competition. In addition to that, the gain of a global competitive advantage also requires the development of local partnerships...which allow destinations and SMEs to gain greater market power on intermediaries and other external actors” (Minghetti, 2001). To ensure competitive advantage, every destination has to offer its potential tourists a certain degree of attraction and a tourist experience superior to other alternative destinations (Dwyer, 2003). Perspectives from various disciplines reveal that competitiveness is a multi-faceted concept. We can regard the notion of competitiveness as associated with three major groups of thought. These are:

1. Comparative advantage and/or price competitiveness perspective (Bellak, 1993; Cartwright, 1993; Durand & Giorno, 1987; Fagerberg, 1988; Fakiolas, 1985; Hilke & Nelson, 1988; Hodgetts, 1993; Porter, 1990; Rugman, 1991; Rugman & D’Cruz, 1993).
2. A strategy and management perspective (Day & Wensley, 1988; D’Cruz & Rugman, 1993; Ghoshal & Kim, 1986; Grant, 1991; Kogut, 1985; Mahmoud et al., 1992; Mahoney & Pandian, 1992; Mathur, 1992; Parsons, 1983; Peters, 1988; Porter, 1985, 1990, 1999; Porter & Millar, 1985; Powell, 1992a, 1992b; Yip, 1989).
3. A historical and socio-cultural perspective (Aaker, 1989; Franke et al., 1991; Hofstede, 1980, 1983; Hofstede & Bond, 1988; Kennedy, 1987; Porter et al., 2001)” (Dwyer, 2003)

From a macro perspective, competitiveness is a national concern and the ultimate goal is to improve the real income of the community. On this perspective, competitiveness is a very broad construct encompassing all social, cultural, and economic variables affecting the performance of a nation in international markets” (Dwyer, 2003). The discussion of competitiveness in the general literature has tended to stress competitive advantage (resulting from value-added activities by firms and organisations), while de-emphasising comparative advantage as a source of international competitiveness. For a tourism destination, comparative advantage would relate to inherited or endowed resources such as climate, scenery, flora, fauna, etc., while competitive advantage would relate to such created items as the tourism infrastructure (hotels, attractions, transport network), festivals and events, the quality of management, skills of workers, government policy and so on” (Dwyer, 2003)

## **CITY DESTINATION’S IMAGE AND BRAND IMAGE**

“In terms of tourism destination branding, provenance is even more critical because countries pre-exist any identities crafted for them by marketers and neither their advertisers nor consumers can have objective views of them” (Morgan & Pritchard, 2001, p. 281 in Therkelsen, 2001). Informing tourists before and after they reach a destination is considered a marketing component. In a new tourist destination, it’s important to create and transmit an adequate image of that area, based on the primary attractions, the facilities and the available services. The image has to be as close to reality as possible, so that tourists won’t be disappointed but carefully so that they don’t get a wrong idea either (Stanculescu, 2004). All products which are decoded and taken into the consumer’s world gain a cultural existence and identity” (Kragh, 1996, p. 6, own translation in Therkelsen, 2001), and sometimes components can be common to

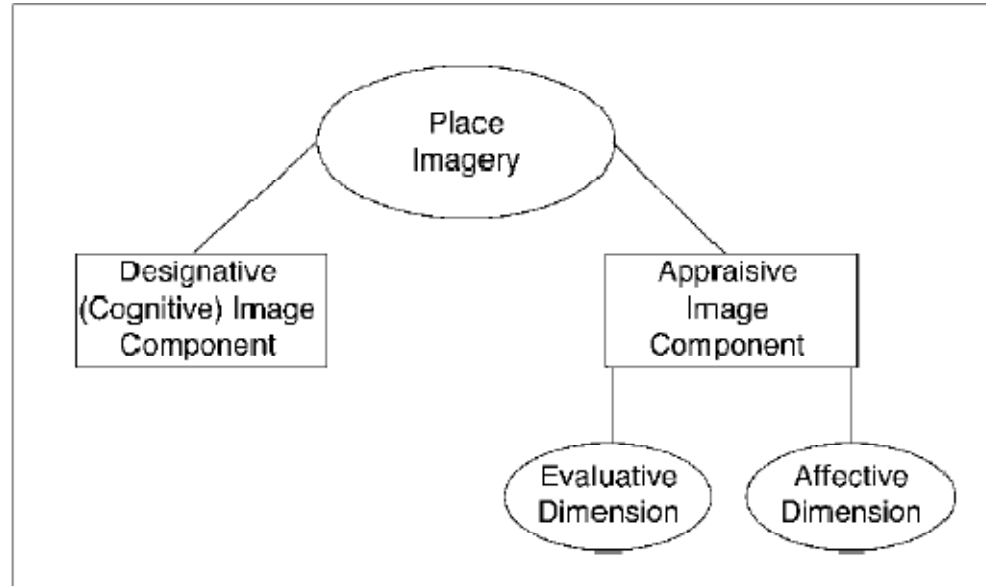
more than one culture. Beerli and Marti´n (2003) introduced nine dimensions with attributes determining the perceived tourist destination image, such as natural resources, general infrastructure, tourist infrastructure, tourist leisure and recreation, culture, history and art, political and economic factors, natural environment, social environment and the atmosphere of the place. All dimensions are also included in the cultural attraction” (Kantanen, 2005). The organic image of the attraction is based on non-commercial sources of information, such as news of the destination in the media, information received, and opinions of friends and relatives. The induced image is based on commercial sources of information, like different forms of advertising and information from travel agents and tour operators” (Kantanen, 2005).

City branding used to be associated with the flight from an industrial past (Holcomb, 1993; Bramwell and Rawding, 1996), but is now linked to enhancing the urban landscape with globally branded arts and entertainment destinations, encapsulated in the ‘fantasy city’ (Hannigan, 1998). As Hannigan (2003) suggests, a successful brand should be instantly recognisable, play on the desire for comfort and certainty and provide a point of identification for consumers in a crowded market-place” (Richards, 2004). Major events have become a particular valuable form of cultural currency, particularly in terms of their image effects. As Hall (1992, p. 14) notes: “it is apparent that major events can have the effect of a shaping an image of the host community or country, leading to its favourable perception as a potential travel destination”. This potential has been a reason for events being used as an image-enhancement tool, particularly for large cities” (Law, 1993; Holcomb, 1993; 1999; Sassen and Roost, 1999; Judd and Fainstein, 1999; Selby, 2003 in Richards, 2004). A major problem with such strategies is that their impacts are very hard to measure. This is particularly true in the case of the relatively nebulous area of city image. One of the major problems is the complexity of images; multifaceted, highly subjective and often aimed at different publics (Paddison, 1993 in Richards, 2004). Adopting Aaker’s terminology of brand personality, destination personality is defined as “the set of human characteristics associated with a destination”.

In the tourism literature, there has been a proliferation of destination image studies over the last three decades, but destination personality has been largely unexplored. Aaker realising this limitation and drawing on the Big Five Model of human personality, developed the brand personality scale (BPS) that consists of five generic dimensions: excitement, sincerity, competence, sophistication and ruggedness. Since then the brand personality dimensions have been applied to various settings across different cultures to gauge consumers’ symbolic consumption and their effects on behaviour (Aaker, Benet Martinez and Garolera, 2001 in Ekinici, 2006). Sincerity is represented by attributes such as down to earth, real, sincere and honest. Excitement is illustrated by traits such as daring, exciting, imaginative and contemporary. Competence is characterized by attributes such as intelligent, reliable, secure and confident. Sophistication is personified by attributes such as glamorous, upper class, good looking and charming. Finally, ruggedness is typified by traits such as tough, outdoorsy, masculine and western! (Ekinici, 2006). Faced with growing global competition where destinations are becoming highly substitutable, destinations are increasingly embracing branding initiatives such as the use of taglines and logos in order to attract visitors and expenditures to their respective destination (Blain, Levy and Ritchie, 2005 in Ekinici, 2006). As places seek to become distinctive, destination personality is viewed as a viable metaphor for understanding tourists’ perceptions of places and for crafting a unique identity (Caprara in Ekinici, 2006).

Brand personality influences consumer preferences, and although it’s considered a metaphor used for understanding customers’ perceptions about brands, there is selection of literature concerning destination personality and their image. For some authors brand image is a wider term which also includes its personality. Others consider them similar and reflecting the customers’ perception about brands (Ekinici, 2006). On the conceptual side, many theorised notions of place imagery (most notably from behavioural geography, for example, Pocock and Hudson, 1978; Golledge and Stimson, 1997; Nasar, 1998), have distinguished between ‘designative’ and ‘appraisive’ components of the image. The ‘designative’ or informational aspect is related to the categorisation of cognitive elements of the environment. The ‘appraisive’ aspect is concerned with feelings, values and meanings, or what is ‘felt’ about a place. The appraisive component can itself be demarcated into two different components (Pocock and Hudson, 1978; Wilson, 2002)

- The evaluative (concerned with the expression of an opinion) (see Nasar, 1998; Walmsley and Young, 1998).
- The affective (concerned with the specification of a preference) (Gartner, 1993; Dann, 1996). (Richards, 2004)” (Richards, 2004).



**Figure 1.** Components of place image.

(Richards, 2004)

In order to be successful, the message has to play a significant part in advertising. It needs to communicate what has to be known in order to make a decision regarding a trip (Stanciulescu, 2004).

### **CITY AS TOURIST PRODUCT – PACKAGE CONTENT**

The way in which managers respond to customer’s requests and needs and put together tourist products, are considered crucial decisions. These decisions influence not only profit and operations but also the firm’s long term strategy, including its investment policy and human resource management (Middleton, 2001). For the tourist, the product covers the whole set of the experiences “from the moment he leaves home until he returns” (Middleton, 2001:122). So the product isn’t represented by the plain seat or the hotel bed, but a whole amalgam of elements, or by a package composed by tangible and intangible elements. The package is perceived as an experienced available for a certain price. And it’s five main categories are:

1. the environment and the attractions available at the destination
2. services and facilities available at the destination
3. ease of access
4. destination image
5. the price to pay.

The first category mainly motivates the tourist option influences the potential customers’ motivation. It consists of natural attractions, built attractions, cultural attractions and the social attractions (e.g. way of life and local habits, language and social interactions) (Middleton, 2001). The second category, represented by the services and facilities available at the destination allow tourists to check-in and enjoy the attractions. In this category we can include: accommodation, restaurants, local transport (taxis, busses, bike rentals and other facilities), services and infrastructure for practicing certain sports (skiing schools, navigation, golf clubs, stadiums), shops, tourist agencies, beauty saloons and spa’s (Middleton, 2001). Ease of access determines in most cases the cost and speed for a tourist to reach a certain destination. In this third category

we include: general infrastructure (roads, parking places, airports, train stations, ports and aqueducts), transport equipment (size, speed and offer), operational factors (operated routes, service frequency, tariffs), government regulation for transport (Middleton, 2001). The fourth category refers to the image and attitude tourists have concerning a tourist destination. Such factors are not necessarily connected with the previous tourist experience or any other objective arguments, but these factors are considered very powerful motivators in the tourism industry. Each destination has an image, but most times this is based on passed events, and it doesn't regard the present. This is why, it is considered a very important destination marketing objective to sustain, demolish, or build images which influence potential customers' perception and expectations (Middleton, 2001). The last category is the price a client has to pay. This determines which products and services will be chosen, but it is also influenced by other factors including: season, wanted services, and from an international products' perspective, influencing factors are also exchange rates and transport method (Middleton, 2001).

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