

Destination branding through culture and heritage tourism - dissertation example

[Art & Culture](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Destination branding through culture and heritage tourism

Methodology: While searching for effective strategies to boost up the cultural and heritage destination image of a country –in this paper, Bulgaria has been taken as a case study, the researcher had to face with several questions. In a fairly saturated tourism market of Europe it was quite a glaring challenge to identify the prospecting and promising features of a destination brand of Bulgaria for cultural and heritage tourism. At the same time, it was imperative for the researcher to differentiate the cultural and heritage tourism in Bulgaria from other countries in Europe, as it was felt that the emphasis on the cultural individuality of Bulgaria would contribute to the effective destination branding of the country's tourism sector in the excessively competitive tourism market of Europe. In the evaluation of destination branding in Bulgarian context, the researcher was concerned primarily with the qualitative approach to the research topic. The qualitative methodology was supposed to be the best strategy for this study, as the research topic itself is subjective and theory based. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) defines qualitative research in the following manner, “ Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter.....qualitative researchers study things.... attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them”. As in the paradigm of the present study, the individual's perception of culture and heritage through the paraphernalia of desination branding emerges as one of the crucial factors, the qualitative method was supposed to be the best method. As in this regard, Peter Wood (2006) says, “ The qualitative researcher seeks to discover the meanings

that participants attach to their behaviour, how they interpret situations, and what their perspectives are on particular issues”. Indeed the logic for choosing the qualitative methodology itself lies in the nature of the research topic. The researcher chose the qualitative method, because the following characteristics of the present research are supposed to be the best for a qualitative one:

- a. Subjectivity of the research topic and Descriptive focus
- b. Theory-based interpretation of the participants’ behavior
- c. The researcher’s attempt to reach some new theoretical conclusion
- d. One of the objectives of research: to know how people perceive (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Creswell, 1994)

Ontology of Destination Branding:

Though in the contemporary literature, the term ‘ destination branding’ has been approached from different perspectives, the definitions of ‘ destination branding’ are obviously stitched together with a common thread. This commonality necessarily requires the identification of unique properties - whether they are cultural, natural or others- a place and its differentiation from others in order to contribute to the individualization of the place, (Morgan et al, 2002; Hsu & Cai, 2009; McCool et al, 2009). In fact, ‘ Destination branding’ is a recent concept in tourism research and refers to the holistic reputation that a tourism destination has achieved (McCool, 2009: 134). According to Kerr (2006: 277), a “ destination brand” is essentially related to some names, symbols, images, and other unique features that assist the individuals to identify and, at the same time, differentiate a location from others. These tools of destination branding can

imprint certain impressions in the individual's mind. But Kotler et al (1993) define ' destination branding from a broader perspective. He develops place-marketing strategies and applies it in a broader context of country as brand product. He attempts to show the scopes of branding the nation within the tourism marketing strategies. As the concept of a nation is closely related to a geographical area, Kotler's (1993) concept of place marketing is to be perceived as place branding.

However, for Saraneimi (2009: 30), the destination image formation is the process of interaction between the desired image of the supply side and the perceive image of the demand side. According to her even if there is not effort to build up a destination image, the consumers are supposed to create an image of a place on their own. This image formation is purely based on the customers' personal beliefs and the information that they receive passively.

Source: Saraneimi, 2009: 30

Such personally developed images of places are dominated by the uncertainty of the customers' mind and cultural concerns play a passive role in this projection of image (Morgan et al, 2002; Hsu & Cai, 2009). As it lacks the trust of the individuals, its appeal to the individuals of a different society is very limited. However, the branded image is just the opposite of the personally formed image. A branded image is often considered the representative that appears as an inducer in the individuals' mind (Hsu & Cai, 2009: 3-4). The characteristics of the brand image are as following:

Figure: Hsu & Cai, 2009: 2

According to Kotler (1993), a country's cultural heritage, key tourism

attractions and an image of a particular country, formed by the media, cannot be excluded from an effective marketing strategy. Thus, the process of destination branding is inherent into the tourism development strategies of a particular region. (McCool et al, 2009: 136). However, Sharma is more likely to scrutinize the concept of destination branding from the demand of a targeted market, as he says, “ Destination branding is a process that can be likened to generically destination image marketing requiring the development of a destination image that is well positioned in relation to the needs and wants of a target market” (1998: 168). Cai (2002: 722) also considers geographic features of a place as the essential component of the destination branding. In this regard Wagner and Peters (2008: 55) refers to Cai,

“ destination branding [is] consistent element mix to identify and distinguish it through positive image building unlike typical goods and services; the name...is typically fixed by the actual geographic name of the place.... Thus, it represents the tangible and intangible attributes of a geographic location” (Wagner & Peters, 2008: 55).

Paradigm:

In recent research literature, the concept of “ destination branding” has been approached from different perspectives but its definition from a social perspective appears to be more holistic than others are. The social definition of destination branding necessarily focuses on man as an instrument in the social environment and it considers the relationship between man and his relationship as the outcome of many individuals’ efforts. Therefore, the social definition considers the culture as a group of individuals’ perception (Guba &

Lincoln, 1994). As the social constructivist definition considers that society and culture are constructed reality of human mind based on experiences, it can change under certain circumstances. Indeed such conceptions of culture and its relationship with individual are derived from the approach of social constructivism to reality. It asserts that reality is intangible and a product of human mind. (McMahon, 1997) The social constructivist trend in destination branding explores the relationship between man and his surroundings i. e. perception of culture, places and countries. Indeed according to the social constructivists, the society including other phenomena such as culture, heritage and other geographical features is a constantly changing product of what the individuals perceive. This constructivist trend affirms that a destination image is a set of beliefs and perceptions of the destination's social properties such as culture, heritage, and geographical features etc, that are perceived by the individuals from their socio-cultural perspective (Kovacs and Spens, 2005; McMahon, 1997).

Another implication of the definition of destination branding from the social constructivist approach is that it emphasizes the importance of the role of an individual's culture in the perception of another culture that is apparently alien to him. Therefore, branding strategy, according to the constructivist approach, needs to take the demands of the targeted customers into concerns. Social constructivism as the paradigm of present research appears to be the most suitable due to its all-embracing approach to individual, society and culture that are closely related to the research topic of this paper. The constructivist paradigm is shown in the following diagram:

Case Studies and the Empirical and Theoretical Aspect of the Research

Topic:

The paradigm of the qualitative research in this paper deals with both the empirical and theoretical aspects of the research topic. As the researcher takes the country Bulgaria with reference to Croatia for the case study of this research, the investigation assumes two aspects: theoretical and empirical. For empirical study, the research primarily pivots on secondary sources such as Bulgarian and Croatian Government publications, SAT activities and publications, peer reviewed articles, research articles, internet database, etc. In fact, drawing references to Croatia provides the researcher with the scopes to support the reflection of the research and the proposition for new strategies. While studying the Bulgarian case, the primary focuses were on the current strategies of Bulgarian state agency, its strengths and weaknesses, the prospects of destination branding in Bulgarian context and its promise of the fulfillment of the theoretical criteria of destination branding. Hence, the procedure of the research appears to be much of an ‘abductive’ research, as it is shown in the following figure:

Figure: Abductive Research Process, (Kovacs and Spens, 2005: 139)

Sound theoretical knowledge was retrieved from the peer-reviewed articles and research papers. While reviewing the destination-branding literature, the researcher attempted to focus into the origin of the concept and its evolution criteria. The knowledge of the origin of the “concept of destination branding” was helpful for the researcher to perceive the continuum of its development and its terminal phase in current destination branding research.

Comparative Research Approach: Bulgaria and Croatia

A comparative case study research approach formed an essential part of the present study. It contributed to the retrieval of the points of strength and weakness of the tourism sector in Bulgaria. Hence, a holistic assessment of the tourism sector in Bulgaria and its comparison with Croatian context were manipulated as premise of the propositions of new strategies to boost up the tourism sector of Bulgaria. In fact, the comparative research in this paper was stretched up to the broader context of Europe. Being a European country and a member of European Union, Bulgarian tourism sector needed to be compared with other European countries in European tourism market. Bulgaria is also popular for a destination of spa tourism along with other countries like Slovenia and Georgia. It was evident that Bulgarian tourism sector suffered several fluctuations concerning the arrival of tourists after the year 1990. Previously, the Bulgarian authority attempted to promote Bulgaria as a Coastal destination through tourism offices that they have set-up in New York called Balkan-tourist, to promote vacations to the Black sea. Private companies in tourism have enhanced their itineraries to accommodate the needs of tourists to Eastern Europe. (Kiplinger, 1966: 22) However, after gaining the membership of the EU, they increasingly attempted to opt for the scope of cultural and heritage tourism. Bulgaria also attracts many visitors for its vibrant folk culture and festivals, which include the fire dancing festival in the Black sea off coast and the mask dancing festival at Coukeri that takes place every New Year from three days. (The Report Bulgaria 2008: 99)

Synchronic and Diachronic Comparison Research

While reviewing the Bulgarian tourism sector in comparison with other

countries, the researcher used both synchronic and diachronic parameters of assessment. In the diachronic research, the study focused on the landmarks of the growth of the Bulgarian tourism sectors. Necessarily the fluctuations of the rise of the industry and their causes were explored in order to trace the changes trends, along the course of history, in cultural tourism, spa tourism, sport tourism, ecotourism etc in tourism sectors of Bulgaria as well as other EU countries. In the synchronic analysis, the Bulgarian tourism sector was compared with other countries in a period. In order to avoid the generalization and other circumferential difficulties, the growth of the tourism was divided into two periods: pre EU-membership and post-EU member of Bulgaria. The structure of the synchronic and diachronic comparison research is as following:

Potential for Cultural Tourism Strategy on a National Level

Sincere efforts are being made by the Bulgarian government i. e. they will be holding a cultural and conventional tourism in Bulgaria. The Bulgarian Tourism and convention Bureau are trying to promote Bulgaria as a destination for Companies from all over Europe to hold their business meetings and conferences as a location that not only has a rich cultural heritage but also has a great nightlife along with being economically affordable (Oxford Business Group, 2008: 102).

Annie Kay (2007) states that are specialists in Cultural tourism that would gladly show tourists the real Bulgaria for a certain price and you will be experience colorful village markets participate in their cultural performances

and sample local dishes.

The Cultural Tourism Package includes-

1. Archaeological tours to excavations sites visits to museums that hold unique artifacts
2. Trips to caves that have Neolithic and Bronze age artifacts, walks and hikes to local holy places (Greenway, 2002: 47)
3. Bulgaria's nine monuments that are a part of UNESCO's world heritage list are an important attraction for Culture tourism, there are also several monasteries, churches, stone and wooden houses from the Ottoman period that make for an ideal tourism package.
4. Ethnic mosaics belonging to the various ethnic groups of Bulgaria could also be a part of the tourism package offered to visitors. (Kay , 2007: 31)

Participants:

In order to interpret the raw perception of individual about culture and heritage of Bulgaria, the researcher interviewed some people who underwent the definition of 'tourist' from both Bulgaria and Croatia. About 170 participants were interviewed face to face or on telephone. The ethical issues of interview, such as privacy, confidentiality, etc were strictly maintained. The questionnaire was designed to retrieve the core perceptions of the participants of their own culture and other cultures. Therefore, the questions were not prepared earlier. Rather the participants were interviewed in a form of discussion in the questions on the researchers' part were made maintaining relevancy to the context of discussion, but any gross deviation from the research topic was carefully handled. The age range of the participants was 20 to 70 years. The sexes of the participant were

randomly chosen.

Research Design:

It is remarkable that the research on the branding of Bulgaria as a cultural and heritage tourism destination is bilateral. It is bilateral in the sense that there is the conception of destination branding at one end of this relationship and on the other hand, there is the concept of a cultural property of a country on the other end. In this bilateral relationship between these two subjective concepts, the researcher's role was to reflect on the research question by extracting the reconciliatory features shared by the two.

However, in the reflections were made on theoretical basis. Therefore, the emergent research design of the research appears to be in the following manner:

In this bilateral research for newer and effective strategies to brand the country as a tourism destination, necessarily each later involves the following steps, as they are mentioned in the following flow chart:

When compared to other European countries in the context of tourist arrivals, Bulgaria is found to lag behind Croatia Slovenia and other countries. It is important that the ministry of Culture provide every support they can which includes investment in repairing cultural sand heritage to training tour operators for the culture tourism program. Bulgaria must also consider private and public partnership if they want benefit from the various strategies of promotion that the Bulgarian Government is employing in order to increase revenue generated via tourism (Greenway, 2002: 24). Newly Proposed Tourism Strategy by the Ministry of Culture: Bulgaria has over 40 thousand ethnographic historical and archeological sites. The Government of

Bulgaria are investing 22 million Euros for the development of tourism industry in particular the tourism sites and historic monuments. They will also be repairing infrastructure in particularly the roads and other means of transport. Culture tourism will also is a crucial part of the strategic plan and the Italian government will be giving Bulgaria financial support for the implementation. Niklova (2009)

According to BNR Radio Bulgaria, " Bulgaria has over 40 thousand ethnographic historical and archeological sites" (Nicklova, 2009). The Government of Bulgaria are investing 22 million Euros for the development of tourism industry in particular the tourism sites and historic monuments. They will also be repairing infrastructure in particularly the roads and other means of transport. Culture tourism will also is a crucial part of the strategic plan and the Italian government will be giving Bulgaria financial support for the implementation. (Niklova, 2009)

References

Cai, L. A. (2002), ' Cooperative branding for rural destinations', *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 29(3): 720-42.

Creswell, J. W. (1994). *Research design: Qualitative & quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Denzin, NK & Lincoln, YS. (1994). " Introduction: Entering the field of qualitative research." In NK Denzin and YS Lincoln (eds.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. pp. 1-18. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Greenway, P. (2002) *Bulgaria: Lonely Planet Guide*. Arizona: Lonely Planet Publication

- Guba, E. G. and Lincoln, Y. S. (1994) "Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research". In N. Denzin & Lincoln (Eds.). Handbook of Qualitative Research. CA: Sage
- Hsu, C. and Cai, A. L. (2009) 'Brand Knowledge, Trust and Loyalty – A Conceptual Model of Destination Branding', Hospitality & Tourism Management. Amherst: University of Massachusetts
- Kay, A. (2007) Bulgaria: The Bradt Travel Guide PP 31. 2nd ed. Netcong, NJ: A1 Books
- Kerr, G. (2006) "Destination Brand to Local Brand". Brand management. Vol. 13(4/5): 276-83
- Kiplinger, A. H, (1969) Kiplingers Personal Finance. Washington DC : The Kiplinger Washington Editors Inc, p. 22
- Kotler, P., Haider, D. H and Rein, I. (1993) Marketing Places: Attracting Investment, Industry and Tourism Industry to Cities, States and Nations. New York: Free press.
- Kovács, G. and Spens, K. M. (2005), "Abductive reasoning in logistics research", International Journal of Physical Distribution & Logistics Management, Vol. 35(2): 132-144,
- McCool, Stephen F., R and Neil, M. (2009) Tourism, Recreation and Sustainability: Linking Culture and the Environment . 2nd ed. Cambridge MA: CABI
- McMahon, M. (1997) Social Constructivism and the World Wide Web - A Paradigm for Learning", [Internet] available at <http://www.ascilite.org.au/conferences/perth97/papers/Mcmahon/Mcmahon.html> (Accessed 05/11/2009)

Morgan, N., Pritchard, A. and Pride, P. (2002) Destination Branding: Creating the Unique Destination Proposition : Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann .

Niklova , V. (2009) “ Bulgaria will be Divided in 13 Cultural and Historical Region.” [Internet] 06 Nov. 2009. Available at [http://www. bnr.](http://www.bnr.bg/sites/en/Lifestyle/MapOfBulgaria/Pages/161009Bulgaria_13_regions.aspx)

[bg/sites/en/Lifestyle/MapOfBulgaria/Pages/161009Bulgaria_13_regions. aspx](http://www.bnr.bg/sites/en/Lifestyle/MapOfBulgaria/Pages/161009Bulgaria_13_regions.aspx)
OECD Tourism Committee. (2009) The Impact of Culture on Tourism. France: OECD publishing. P. 9

Oxford Business Group. (2008) The Report Bulgaria 2008. Oxford: Oxford Business Group

Saraneimi, S. (2009) Destination Branding in a Country Context. A Case study of Finland in the British Market. Joensuu: University of Joensuu

Sharma, K. K .(1999) World Tourism Today. New Delhi: Sarup and Sons

Smith, M. K., 2009. Issues in Cultural Tourism Studies. London : Routledge

Wagner, O and Peters, M. (2008) “ Can association methods reveal the effects of internal branding on tourism destination stakeholders?” Journal of Place Management and Development, Vol. 2(1): 52 69. [Internet] Available at [www. emeraldinsight. com/1753-8335. htm](http://www.emeraldinsight.com/1753-8335.htm) (Accessed 09/11/2009)

Woods, P. (2006) Qualitative Research. Plymouth: University of Plymouth.