

# The measurement of destination image tourism essay



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The image of a place is an important aspect of the tourist decision-making process and it is most likely to affect their choice of holiday destination Baloglu and McCleary, 1999. There is a wide range of academic studies that are focused on the link between destination image and destination selection process (Mayo 1973; Hunt 1975; Milman and Pizam 1995). The study of destination image dates back to the 1970s, when Hunt (1971) looked at the concept for the first time. Since then many more studies focused on the definition of destination image, however there is no consensus over it "... image is one of those terms that will not go away ... a term with vague and shifting meanings" (Pearce, 1988: 162). Gallarza et al. (2002) studied the concept of destination image and produced a list that summarises definitions by key tourism authors (see Table 1). The image of a destination is often related to individual's perceptions of a place and what the tourist experience may be like and it " consists, therefore, of the subjective interpretation of reality made by the tourist" (Bigne et al., 2001: 607). The destination image does not really exist, as it is the mental projection of the destination's identity and it is not a single concept, but a set of interpretations (Govers and Go, 2009). According to Echtner and Ritchie (2003: 43), destination image is " not only the perceptions of individual destination attributes but also the holistic impression made by the destination".

There are two perspectives by which destination image can be reviewed - the managerial perspective (supply side) and the potential visitor perspective (demand side) (Kelly and Nankervis, 2001). Appropriate management actions when shaping the destination image are key to how tourists will perceive that image; therefore understanding of the evolution of

a destination is important. Butler's (1980) well-known concept of the tourism area life cycle (TALC) provides a clear framework to how a destination develops over time. It incorporates six sequential stages of: exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation and decline or rejuvenation (see Table 2). The model provides information about the destination progression, levels of investments and the types of tourists it appeals to (Davidson and Maitland, 1997). Each stage of the model is linked to changes in the scale of facilities provided at a destination and to what extent the provision of these facilities is by local or external providers. Defining at what stage is a particular destination is hard, but is essential for its management. In reality, defining the life-cycle stage of a destination requires a mixture of observation, estimation and basic market intelligence; a survey of tourists' perceptions of a particular destination often can provide information about their attitudes towards tourism growth (Kelly and Nankervis, 2001). Clear understanding of destination's life-cycle stage can help destination planners to slow down or speed up its development process.

TALC outlines a clear relationship between the various types of tourists and the nature of destination they visit (Davidson and Maitland, 1997). At first, destination is discovered by adventurous tourists, then it is visited by mass tourists and finally it becomes commercialised. This idea has been adopted by Plog's (1973) classification of tourists, dividing them from ' allocentrics' to ' midcentrics' to ' psycocentrics'. He suggests that a destination would appeal to different types of tourists at different points in time, as ' allocentrics' are more likely to discover new destinations and move on by the time ' psycocentrics' adopt them. The appeal of a destination is also affected

by the mind image tourists have of that place. According to Gartner (1993: 193) the perceived mind image of a destination is formed by “ distinctly different but hierarchically interrelated components: cognitive, affective and [according to some] conative”. Beerli and Martin (2004) suggest that the following factors affect the perceived destination image a tourist holds of a place: motivations (affective image component); travel experience (cognitive and affective); socio-demographic and personal characteristics (cognitive and affective). Many academics conclude that destination image is affected by two types of factors: stimulus and personal and these are combined to form the framework of destination image formation (see Table 3). Reynolds (1965: 69) argues that the destination image formation is based upon set of impressions gained from a “ flood of information”. It is often formed by information gathered from various information sources such as: opinions of friends/relatives; publications in newspapers, magazines, travel brochures; any other type of promotional material. Individual’s image of a destination is likely to develop overtime and Gunn (1994) indentified the three key stages of the image formation process: the organic image (based on information from non-tourism sources such as mass media); the induced image (based on tourism sources such as travel brochures); and the experiential image (based on tourist experiences during a visit). However, movement from one stage to another involves a gradual transition.

Reynolds (1965: 70) argues that often “ image is used as equivalent to reputation”, therefore the right expectations must be raised by a destination. However, the more different tourist’s culture is from the culture of the host communities, the more challenging is to meet these expectations. Different

people would have different perceived images and these are often related to stereotypes of nations, which are not necessarily accurate, as they may be based on exceptions and impressions rather than on patterns and facts (Morgan et al., 2004). According to MacKay and Fesenmaier (2000) perceived images are based on cultural background, as people with different national cultures would have different values and beliefs. In general all types of tourists associate positive destination image with varied and attractive natural beauty and good climate and although crowding is a sign of destination popularity, overcrowded destinations are avoided by many tourists. As suggested by Ross (1994) the three key factors when developing a destination image are the scenery, climate, geography, congestion. Other destination attributes perceived as key for destination image formulation are: safety; history; cultural diversity; famous citizens; and the esteem of visiting a place (Kelly and Nankervis, 2001). " Every place on earth possesses its own peculiar characteristics, both as a result of natural physical forces, and acts of man" (Gunn, 1994: 27). Consequently, the scope and scale of supply provision and the degree to which the natural environment has been altered by human activity influence on the perceptions of destination attributes.

### **2. 3 Measurement of destination image**

The creation and development of a destination image is a complex process and consequently the measurement of the image is also that compound. Echtner and Ritchie (1991, 1993, 2003) have developed a two dimensional means to measure destination image: open ended questionnaires (to measure holistic attributes) and an attribute-based eight factor scale to

measure image performance. However, “ very few studies use qualitative methods as the main techniques. Among all collection procedures, the seven-point Likert Scale is the most commonly used” (Gallarza et al., 2002: 67). On the other hand Bigne et al. (2001: 611) argue that “ the sum of the attributes scores is not an adequate measurement of the overall image”. As a result many recent studies look at more pluralistic approaches to measure destination image.