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# Role of tourist destination development in building its brand image: A conceptual model



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## ABSTRACT

Tourism is truly an international/global industry. Tourism is vital to the economy of a country and sustainable tourism development requires an understanding of the complex interrelationships and interactions among a multitude of environmental factors and interdisciplinary forces that play a critical role in tourism development. While overall the field of tourism has been abundantly researched, there are certain areas where there is a paucity of research, namely, competition analysis, branding and positioning. Our research contributes to this extremely important but relatively less researched subject. Specifically, we study the relationship between destination development and its brand image. We develop a conceptual model which identifies various constructs, processes and linkages involved in the relationship between destination development and its brand image. We propose that the brand image has three components corresponding to the three stages of consumption/travel, namely, pre-travel, during travel, and post-travel. In developing this model we draw upon the interdisciplinary nature of tourism and discuss a variety of influences, such as, economic, social, cultural, political and psychological factors.

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## El papel del desarrollo del destino turístico en la construcción de su imagen de marca: un modelo conceptual

### RESUMEN

El turismo es un sector internacional/global. Es esencial para la economía de un país, y la sostenibilidad de su desarrollo demanda la comprensión de las complejas interrelaciones e interacciones que se producen entre la multitud de factores ambientales y fuerzas interdisciplinarias que desempeñan una misión fundamental en el desarrollo de esta industria. Aunque en general la cuestión del turismo se ha investigado abundantemente, existen ciertas áreas que no han sido convenientemente estudiadas, tales como el análisis de la competencia, la gestión de marcas y el posicionamiento. Nuestro análisis contribuye a esta cuestión extremadamente importante, pero relativamente menos estudiada. En concreto, estudiamos la relación entre el desarrollo del destino y su imagen de marca. Desarrollamos un modelo conceptual que identifica diversos constructos, procesos y contextos implicados en la relación entre el desarrollo del destino y su imagen de marca. Nuestra propuesta es que la imagen de marca tiene tres componentes que se corresponden con las tres etapas del consumo/viaje; es decir, el previaje, el viaje en sí mismo,

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y el postviaje. En el desarrollo de este modelo recurrimos a la naturaleza interdisciplinaria del turismo, y tratamos una serie de influencias tales como los factores económicos, sociales, culturales, políticos y psicológicos.

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## 1. Introduction

Tourism is an international/global industry that captures the complex interaction of a variety of environmental factors. Tourism development draws upon a multitude of disciplines and subject areas such as anthropology, business, communication, cultural, economics, geography, history, hospitality, politics, psychology, retailing, sociology, and transportation etc. The international and interdisciplinary nature of the field of tourism is well recognized by academics, professionals and policy makers. A testimony to this is the publication *Tourism: An International and Interdisciplinary Journal*, the first issue of which was published as early as 1953 in Zagreb, Croatia. The journal *Tourism* has been published in English language since 2000.

Vrdoljak-Salamon and Corak (2012) carried out a content analysis of the research articles published in the journal *Tourism* for the period 2000–2011. The authors note that there were 20 special issues of this journal during 2000–2011. However in their content analysis, the articles from the special issues were not included in order to assess the trends in the field independent of special issues. A total of 165 articles (excluding articles in special issues) were classified by the authors in 9 categories. It should be noted that an article could be listed in multiple categories depending upon its scope and coverage. The analysis of the authors reveals the following 9 subject areas (number of articles under each subject area): tourism theory, research, education, and human resources (35), tourism and economy (72), tourism and market (62), tourism and society (56), tourism and space (41), tourism policy and organization (19), registration and forecasting in tourism (8), types of tourism (84), and miscellaneous (6). This content analysis covered contributions from 51 different countries on the six continents (excluding Antarctica). The above analysis indicates that the journal and the field of tourism are truly international and interdisciplinary.

The tourism industry, which benefits transportation, accommodation, catering, entertainment, and retailing sectors, has been blooming in the past few decades. Tourism has been a critical factor in the economic development strategy of many countries (Lea, 1988) and tourist destinations. In recent years, tourism has been one of the most important and consistent growth industries worldwide, and is currently held to be one of the major service industries (Bansal & Eiselt, 2004; Zang et al., 2004). It is well recognized that tourism carries advantages for any country or destination and it should be utilized as an instrument for development at the particular destinations especially which are rich in terms of their tourist attractions (Wanill, 2001; Bodlender, Jefferson, Jenkins, & Lickorish). A tourist destination is then simply described as a “geographical location to which a person is travelling” (Metelka, 1990). Buhalis (2000) broadens this definition by stating that the geographical location “is understood by its visitors as a unique entity, with a political and legislative framework for tourism marketing and planning”. Lynch and Tinsley (2001) state that most studies tend to look at the tourist destination as a “system containing a number of components such as attractions, accommodation, transport, and other services and infrastructure”. Each of these components is “dependent upon other parts for success in attracting, servicing, and satisfying the tourist” (Mill & Morrison, 1985) According to Laws (1995) a destination’s primary resources comprise its climate, ecology, traditions and architecture. Its secondary resources are then those developments brought in

especial for tourists, such as catering, accommodation, transport and activities. In their study of 10 European countries, Manrai and Manrai (1993) identified three broad dimensions differentiating the tourism potential of these 10 countries. These were “necessities”, “attractions” and “environment”.

Several researchers have conducted studies on the relationship between tourism planning and development, visitor satisfaction, host perception (Tang, 2008) and psychology of tourist experience (Larsen, 2007). Tourism is regarded as an important and consistent growth industry in the service sector worldwide (Bansal & Eiselt, 2004; Zang et al., 2004). Destination marketing and management is one of the major concerns of any country or any region or destination in any part of the world. The nature of the destination, resources available, hosts, the visitor’s behavior and experiences and management of tourism resources optimally are extremely important research topics today.

Under the tourism and market category identified by Vrdoljak-Salamon and Corak (2012), a total of 62 articles were included. The main focus seems to be on destination (21 articles) followed by tourist demand (16 articles). The other subject areas under this category (and number of articles) include marketing in tourism (8), market research (7), tourism and prices (4), competitiveness (4), and tourist expenditure (2). Destination is the product which the stakeholders in the tourism industry try to market to their customers, namely tourists. Considering the global economy we live in today, the competition for tourist expenditures is fierce and tourism marketers resort to a variety of marketing mix strategies including destination (product) development, pricing, promotion and distribution including access to the destination and information about it. Tourism marketers have to compete against companies worldwide who are also trying to attract the tourists to visit their respective destination product. The study of tourism competition is thus an extremely important subject. Yet this particular subject area has received relatively less attention from the researchers as is evident from the above analysis of research on various topics under the tourism and market category.

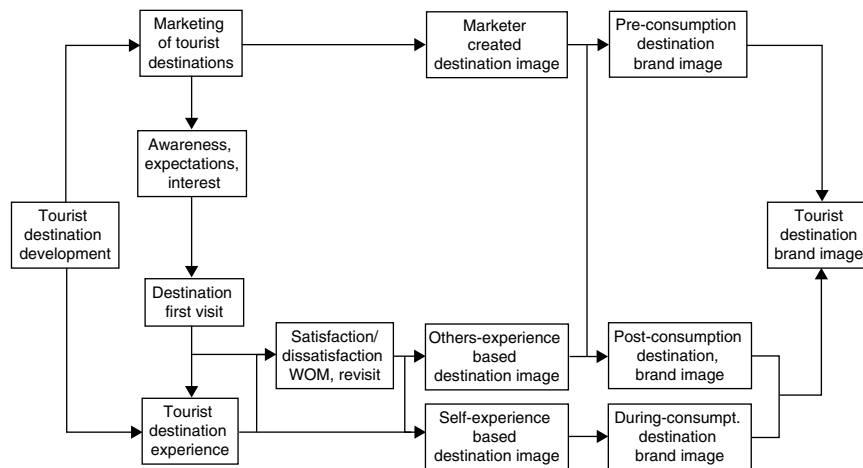
Our research deals with this important yet relatively less researched subject of tourism competitiveness. Specifically we study the role the destination development plays in building a brand image for the destination which is a critical tool for establishing competitive advantage.

The objective of our research is to review the literature and develop a conceptual model capturing key constructs, linkages and processes involved in the relationship between tourist destination development and the brand image of the tourist destination. The conceptual model is given in Figure 1 and discussed below.

## 2. Tourist destination development and brand image

### 2.1. Tourist destination development

The development of a destination can be characterized by the phases it goes through (Laws, 1995). In the ‘pre-tourism phase’ there are two sub-phases. In the first sub-phase, the destination is visited and experienced mainly for the purpose of visiting friends and relatives, or for business. In the second sub-phase, the destination developers and the local residents or community members proactively begin to study tourists’ behavior in order to attract the tourists for a repeat visit, not just for visiting friends and



**Figure 1.** Tourist destination development. Elaborated by the authors.

relatives or for businesses but also for the attractions the destination offers. Traditional dress codes, social relationships, working patterns, styles of eating and accommodations change to offer the tourists “memorable experience” of the particular destination. The ‘tourism management phase’ comes out as a result of these changes. The destination developers and marketers try to anticipate the needs and desires of the tourists and accordingly come up with tourism products and services to satisfy these needs. Furthermore, local government faces an increasing and changing resident population as tourism potential of the destination attracts managers and employees for the newly created job opportunities. This arrival of new residents leads to alterations in the original tourist-community relationship and may cause frictions with the local job-seeking people. This overall change in the nature of the destination may signify that it will attract different types of visitors at the different development phases (Laws, 1995).

In 1977, Baud-Bovey and Lawson worked out a plan for tourism development which they called Products Analysis Sequence for Outdoor Leisure Procedure (Baud-Bovey & Lawson, 1998). Clarke and Godfrey (2000) also used a three-step scheme to follow for tourism development: first the marketers and developers have to find out what tourism resources are present in the destination, then the type of tourists they want to attract has to be identified and finally the marketers and developers have to decide how to reach the targeted tourists and achieve the desired result. Similarly, Goeldner, McIntosh, and Ritchie (2000) divided the process of tourism policy formulation in four phases: a definitional, an analytical, an operational and an implementation phase.

Sharpley (2002) described development as “the continuous and positive change in the economic, social, political and cultural dimensions of the human condition, guided by the principle of freedom of choice and limited by the capacity of the environment to sustain such change”. This description highlights the fact that when putting destination development into practice, one should acknowledge that development is a multidimensional concept. Consequently, destination developers should not only consider the economic aspects of tourism, but also attempt to match it with all other social, political and cultural dimensions.

Besides the beneficial effect on the economy, tourism also contributes to the further development of the destinations (Schlüter, 1998; Nagle, 1999). In order to become an attractive destination, the destination’s infrastructure and the tourism facilities need to be improved. In addition, investment and staff recruitment and training decisions are also critical for the development of a destination. Furthermore, tourism marketers and developers need to promote

their destination in order to create an image that attracts the targeted segments of visitors (Laws, 1995). Baloglu and McCleary (1999) found that the greater the variety of information sources used to advertise the destination, the more positive is the contribution to the shaped image. The same authors also point out that word-of-mouth recommendations are the primary source in forming the destination image; consequently, offering a satisfying experience to the tourist is of great importance.

## 2.2. Marketing of tourist destinations

Due to the globalization around the world the tourist destinations are also becoming highly competitive. The service providers and the destination marketers are keen to attract the tourists or visitors to their destinations and are participating in a variety of branding initiatives such as the use of taglines and logos in order to attract visitors to their respective destinations (Pike & Ryan, 2004; Blain, Levy, & Ritchie, 2005). As tourist destinations seek to become distinctive, a “Destination Personality” emerges. Destination Personality is viewed as a viable metaphor for understanding tourists’ perceptions and experiences of destinations and for building a unique destination identity (Caprara, Barbaranelli, & Guido, 2001; Crask & Henry, 1990; Morgan & Pritchard, 2002; Triplett, 1994).

## 2.3. Tourists’ destination experience

The concept of “tourist experience” has been studied in literature from a variety of different perspectives. These include: “consumption experience” (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Holbrook, 2000; Carù & Cova, 2003), “experiential marketing” (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Schmitt, 1999), and “cocreation experiences” (Pralhad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

The existing body of research has imparted knowledge to us on tourist or visitor behavior as well as the use of tourist experience as a marketing tool. A plethora of studies have been carried out by researchers to understand and define the meaning of “experience”. However, the concept lacks a common understanding and agreement since it is specific to a situation and setting. Experience defined as a “business approach” consists of attaching “memorable events” to economic offerings in order to “engage the consumer in a personal way” (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Schmitt (2008) defines experience as “private events that occur in response to some stimulation. In this regard, memorable events can be referred to as things created by businesses with anticipation to stimulate or “engage

consumer's emotions" (Le Bel & Cooke, 2008). This approach depicts the experience as a deliberate effort by businesses to increase the value of their offerings (Pine & Gilmore, 1998).

In tourism and hospitality industry, the construct of tourist experience has been typically approached by service providers, destination marketers and organization to design and create experiences for consumers in order to make their experience memorable and get their intention to revisit a particular destination. However, it has been argued that consumer's interaction with destination service providers' results in the co-creation of distinctive experiences (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). The earlier thinking was that service providers decide on the offerings for the market, but this has changed to include consumers' needs and desires. Tourism marketers now develop the products, services keeping in mind consumer satisfaction and build a unique brand image or identity differentiating their tourism products from competitors. In tourism industry, the destination can thus be viewed as a product. This approach is also considered as a way in which organizations and service providers marketing a destination bring to light "new sources of competitive advantage" (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

Visiting a particular tourist destination is typically motivated less by the elaborated physical characteristics of the site than by the powerful mental and emotional image or "pre-experience" the tourist has for the expected experience at the destination. Tourists flocked to the bridges of Madison County in rural Iowa to immerse, at least temporarily, in the romantic fantasy involving the film's two lovers more than to see the actual details of the bridge. In essence, what tourists primarily seek and consume at destinations is engaging experiences accompanied by the goods and/or service components of the destinations. Hence, entire tourist destinations are beginning to be positioned as "experiences" (Richards, 2001). Experience has served as a key construct in travel and tourism research as well as destination positioning. Central to McConnell's (1989) concept of tourist experience, is the tourist's quest for an authentic experience and tourism destinations are viewed as a means to stage the authenticity that cannot be found in the tourist's daily life. Searching for self identity as a tourist was an early classification criterion in the phenomenology of tourist experiences (Cohen, 1979).

#### 2.4. Destination brand image

The destination brand image is defined as the consumer's mental representation of the offering (Dobni & Zinjan, 1990) where symbolic meanings are associated with the specific features of a product (Padgett & Allen, 1997) or destination. With a clear and powerful brand image, destinations are able to position their products and directly appeal to the needs of their targeted customers (Aaker, 1991; Baloglu & Brindberg, 1997; Cai, 2002).

Destination brands generally generate sets of quality expectations or images of the destination that individuals usually desire prior to consumption (Metelka, 1981) and in either positive or negative word of mouth post consumption. Several studies have also focused on the brand image attributes of destinations (Embacher & Buttle, 1989; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Walmsley & Jenkins, 1993). Tourist destination brand image is a function of tourist image resulting from their own experience and destination image promoted by the marketers. The brand image is developed largely from marketing stimuli provided by formal marketing communication tools and development for the particular destination. The brand image is also influenced by informal promotional tools such as WOM (Berry & Parasuraman, 1991) and the consumers own experiences of the destination which they had after paying the visit and consuming the different services provided by the stakeholders (Berry & Seltman, 2007). These influences create mental

pictures or perceptions representing what tourists observe and feel/experience about the destination.

### 3. Conclusions and discussion

The above conceptual model depicts the interdisciplinary forces at play in the relationship between tourist destination development and its brand image. First of all tourist destination development is a function of natural and cultural resources the destination is endowed with, its history and heritage, as well as the political and legal system of the country, which could positively or negatively influence the development of a destination including the infrastructure. Tourism and economic development have reciprocity in their relationship, with each influencing the other overall favorably. This is not to say that all the consequences of tourism on economy are positive. Marzuki (2012) identifies various positive as well as negative economic impacts of tourism but overall concludes that the economic benefits of tourism are greater than its economic costs. An earlier study by Ritchie (1987) identifies positive as well as negative impacts of tourism on the cultural, economic, physical, political, psychological, and social dimensions. The point is that tourism has both positive and negative repercussions on a variety of areas. The question therefore is keeping in mind these multidisciplinary impacts of tourism, how can a marketer help increase the positive impacts and minimize the negative ones. Improving the sustainability of a tourism destination helps in making the tourists' experiences memorable and enhances tourist satisfaction along with improving the brand image of the tourist destination. The task of tourism marketers therefore is not simply to build a brand image to attract tourists but to improve the sustainability of tourism. Tourism marketing therefore needs to be carried out keeping in mind the long term consequences of tourism on various dimensions as identified in Ritchie (1987). This is not an easy task and requires an understanding of the processes and influences which are responsible for formation of the destination brand image.

In the Conceptual Model (Figure 1) developed in our research we identify three components of the Tourist destination brand image corresponding to the three stages of consumption. These are Pre-consumption stage, During-consumption stage, and Post-consumption stage. In the pre-consumption stage, the brand image results from the marketing communications promoting destination characteristics to the tourists by the tourism industry stakeholders as well as from the positive or negative word of mouth the tourists receive from other travelers. Social influences therefore are important in the pre-consumption stage in formation of the brand image along with the marketing communications. The during-consumption stage brand image is the result of tourists' own experiences which to start with are influenced by the destination characteristics during first visit and are modified taking into account the experiences of repeat visit(s). An understanding of the psychological processes involved in forming tourist perceptions of the destination is therefore very relevant for development of destination image. Marketing communications also create tourists' expectations which along with tourists' own experience of the destinations offerings in the during-consumption stage result in post-consumption responses like satisfaction/dissatisfaction, positive/negative word of mouth and intentions to revisit. As indicated earlier, these post-consumption responses influence other tourists' pre-consumption image through word of mouth and for the tourist who has just experienced a destination. Their post-consumption responses form the third component of the destination brand image.

Each of these three components of Tourist destination brand image is relevant for all the stakeholders in the tourism industry.



The tourism policy makers, destination organizations and service providers have to be set up such that they “seek to provide high-quality visitor experiences that are profitable to destination stakeholders while ensuring that the destination is not compromised in terms of its environmental, social, and cultural integrity” (Goeldner et al., 2000). The development of the tourist destinations should be carried out such that it creates a memorable tourist experience and a favorable brand image which in turn will result in positive word of mouth and repeat business for a particular tourist destination and at the same time improves the sustainability of tourist destination.

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