



Can association methods reveal the effects of internal branding on tourism destination stakeholders?

Olivia Wagner and Mike Peters

*Department of Strategic Management, Marketing and Tourism,
Innsbruck University School of Management, Innsbruck, Austria*

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to employ the collage technique, an unstructured qualitative association instrument, with respect to place branding initiatives and to uncover internal stakeholders' perceptions of the region or destination.

Design/methodology/approach – The first part presents a general framework of brand and destination branding in the field of tourism research. The empirical study was carried out in selected Alpine tourism destinations. In the first stage the authors identified the main representatives of stakeholders in two Austrian tourism destinations. In the second, the collage technique was used to obtain stakeholders' perceptions of the tourism destination brand.

Findings – The findings reveal that different internal stakeholders trace different perceptions of tourism places and illustrate the importance of using the collage as a technique to explore the various identities of a place.

Research limitations/implications – It is argued that internal destination stakeholders do not share the same brand perception of the destination brand and they do not share a common identity, which is communicated through the destination management organisations (DMOs). However, more research is needed to support these findings as the study is limited by its sample size and focus on the Alpine region of Tyrol, Austria.

Practical implications – The results suggest that DMOs should establish better identities within their destination. In particular, they must consider that the collage is a very important technique in communicating the desired brand identity to internal destination stakeholders.

Originality/value – This paper seeks to clarify the effectiveness of the collage method as a tool to measure stakeholders' identities of selected tourism destinations. The paper demonstrates the importance of employing different association methods (word or picture) in recognizing stakeholders' knowledge and opinions of destinations as a primary step in analyzing stakeholders' brand identity perception.

Keywords Tourism, Brands, Stakeholder analysis, Austria

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

During the last decade, place branding has been a key area of academic interest (Anholt, 2003; Morgan *et al.*, 2004), with a focal point on defining brands and creating images (Baloglu and Brindberg, 1997; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999) in the minds of all stakeholders (Aaker, 2000; de Cherantony and Segal-Horn, 2003a; 2003b; Esch, 2004).

The authors would like to express their thanks to Ms Christina Pranter for her support in collecting relevant data for this study.



Just recently academic research termed “internal branding” has become apparent (Aurand *et al.*, 2005; Ind, 2003; Mitchell, 2002; Jacobs, 2003; Tosti and Stotz, 2001; Vallaster and de Chernatony, 2006). Internal branding is about implementing business strategy or brand value to enhance the corporate brand identity to all stakeholders (de Chernatony, 1999). Nevertheless, there is still a lack of research on internal branding within tourism or tourism destinations. In addition, most of the place branding literature reflects the external attitude and has been directed towards external stakeholders or customers (Park and Petrick, 2006).

This study attempts to reveal internal stakeholders’ perceptions of two selected destinations by applying the collage technique, a qualitative exploratory method (Ryan, 2000; Prebensen, 2007). The collage technique includes picture associations (pictures from the destination will be used as a source for associations) as well as word associations. The words taken from marketing campaigns of the destinations will be used as a bias for association. Moreover, the purpose of the study is to employ this qualitative unstructured method with respect to place branding initiatives and to uncover internal stakeholders’ perceptions of the region or place (Ryan and Cave, 2005). The findings reveal that different internal stakeholders trace different perceptions of tourism places and illustrate the importance of using this technique to explore the various identities of a place or a region (Prebensen, 2007).

The paper is structured as follows: the next section presents a general framework of branding and destination branding in the field of tourism research. The literature review derives the research question and the following section presents the empirical study: the authors identify the main representatives of stakeholders (15 individuals) in two Austrian tourism destinations that display strong brand names and symbols. Finally, implications for tourism destination managers and recommendations for future research conclude the paper.

Theoretical background

Branding and destination branding literature

The most significant branding studies in the marketing literature were proposed by Aaker (1991; 1995; 2000), Kapferer (1992; 1999; 2001; 2004) as well as Keller (1993; 1998; 2001; 2003). General studies were focused on classifying brand identity, brand building as well as managing and measuring brand equity. One of the widely used definitions of brands refers to Kotler (1991) who defines brands as names, terms, signs, symbols or designs, which intend to identify goods and services to one seller or a group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of the competitor (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004). Moreover, the most important function of a brand is to protect the trademark owners from imitation. This particular aspect is very often a common starting point for academic papers associated with brands, branding and brand management (Aurand *et al.*, 2005; Kerr, 2006; Rooney, 1995). On the one hand, closely related to the definition from the American Marketing Association, is its conceptualization as a bundle of assets physically not existing. On the other hand, brand value cannot clearly be determined unless it becomes the subject of a specific business transaction (Seetharaman *et al.*, 2001). Moreover, according to King (1973; quoted in Aaker, 1995) a greater extent of market success is delivered by the brand rather than by a product. In this context, it is noted that a competitor can copy a product; a brand is unique; and whilst a product can be easily outdated, a successful brand is timeless

(Aaker, 1995; Wagner *et al.*, 2008). These statements underline that a product, whether tangible or intangible, is just a generic term, whereas a brand represents more or less the names, logos or symbols (Okoroafo, 1989). A main reason for the continuous increased interest in branding and the late recognition of a brand's importance of being a valuable asset has been the power of the concept of brand equity (Aaker, 1995). This concept refers to the added value a brand provides to a product. According to Aaker (1995) brand equity can be grouped into five dimensions: brand loyalty, name awareness, perceived quality, brand association and brand assets.

The term brand identity, as proposed by Aaker (2000) and Kapferer (2004), opened the horizon for a new type of research. It represents what an organization stands for (Aaker, 2000). Brand identity needs to "jingle" with customers. It differentiates the brand from its competitors and signifies what the organization will and can do over a period (Wagner *et al.*, 2008). In general, and especially in tourism research a variety of interpretations of the image construct can be found (Mayo, 1973; Hunter, 1975; Gartner, 1987; Gartner, 1989; Echtner and Ritchie, 1993). Authors argue that the image plays a particular role in the branding process (Coshall, 2000; Hankinson, 2004; 2005). However, as long as the image of a place is positive, a destination brand can additionally strengthen the image.

What needs more clarification and profile is the existing confusion between the concept of brand identity and image. In the tourism destination context, a brand can be considered as representing an identity for the destination stakeholder (producer) and the image for the tourist (consumer). Brand identity characterizes the self-image and desired image of the market, whereas the brand image signifies the actual image detained by the (potential) tourists (Pike, 2002). The destination brand identity refers to what a brand stands for, how it creates meaning, and what makes it unique.

Place branding has emerged as a newer field of research (Morgan *et al.*, 2004), although the research area has been apparently covered under synonymous destination image studies. This topic has been a subject of investigation for more than 30 years (Pike, 2002). Moreover, the literature on place marketing has been published in diverse academic areas. Academics and practitioners agree that destinations can be branded in the same way as products and services (Anholt, 2003; Cai, 2002; Morgan *et al.*, 2004; Tasci and Kozak, 2006; Wagner *et al.*, 2008). Destinations are places that attract tourists or visitors for a temporary stay. It can be argued that until today destinations are not taking advantage of their brand potential (Wagner *et al.*, 2008). However, destination branding presents a significant challenge for place marketers (Morgan *et al.*, 2004). The development of a brand name, logo or symbol can offer the place a competitive edge. To ensure these benefits the destination management needs to carefully plan the creation of their brand (Wagner *et al.*, 2008). Due to the unique characteristics of a tourism destination, place branding can be interpreted as a complex marketing and management task; hence it should represent a great range of tangible and intangible attributes of a geographic location and the value of diverse destination stakeholders (Tasci and Kozak, 2006). Yet, destination brands evidently differ from regular product brands.

The notion of branding has just recently started to expand into the tourism industry and apparently became a topic of examination in the late 1990s (Pike, 2002; Tasci and Kozak, 2006). According to Kerr (2006, p. 277) a destination brand has been defined as a:

[...] name, symbol, logo, word or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates the destination; furthermore it conveys the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; it also serves to consolidate and reinforce the recollection of pleasurable memories of destination experience.

Another most recognized definition of destination branding is presented by Cai (2002, p. 722) who claims destination branding is:

[...] selecting a consistent element mix to identify and distinguish it through positive image building; unlike typical goods and services, the name of a destination brand is relatively fixed by the actual geographic name of the place.

Over the years, further definitions of destination branding have been developed by a number of authors (Blain *et al.*, 2005; Gnoth, 1998; Morgan *et al.*, 2004), leading to a greater complexity in the destination branding literature.

In the tourism destination context, six benefits of branding have been identified by Clarke (2000):

- (1) tourism is typically high involvement, branding helps to reduce the choice;
- (2) branding helps in reducing the impact of intangibility;
- (3) branding conveys consistence across multiple outlets and through time;
- (4) branding can reduce the risk factors attached to decision-making about holidays;
- (5) branding facilitates precise segmentation; and
- (6) branding helps to provide a focus for the integration of producer efforts, helping people to work towards the same outcome.

Stakeholders' perceived identities of destinations

The concept of identity can be used in various settings and situations (Simoes *et al.*, 2005). Expressions like identity card, identity crisis, group identity, social identity and cultural identity (Kapferer, 1999), have recently become commonplace. According to Kapferer (2004, p. 96) having an identity means "being your true self, driven by a personal goal that is both different from others' and resident to change".

During the last decade, much attention in the marketing and tourism literature has been devoted to the concept of brand identity (de Chernatony, 1999; Ind, 2001; Kapferer, 1998). However, some researchers do not accept a common definition but basically share a common perspective, namely that brand identity development is a theoretical concept best understood from the supply-side perspective (Konecnik and Go, 2007). A very simple and clear explanation of the term brand identity is provided by Kapferer (1999). He refers to the significance of the supply-side perspective. "before knowing how we are perceived, we must know who we are" (Kapferer, 1999, p. 71).

In doing so, tourism traditionally is managed by a variety of stakeholders along the tourism value chain (Bieger, 2008). As a logical consequence to the delineation, the tourist destination, should concentrate on both – supply side/demand side – perspectives. A tourism destination can be defined as a geographic competitive region, which attempts to create value for guests. It is based on a bundle of services and products created by a variety of different businesses. Moreover, the key role of destination management organization is to brand the place as a tourism destination

and to apply brand strategy, accompanying marketing techniques and disciplines to the economic, social, political and cultural development of places (Kerr, 2006). Nevertheless, the remaining question is how tourism research can investigate, measure and demonstrate the effects of destination branding strategies on internal destination stakeholders. Referring to the literature, stakeholders can be classified into a group of primary and a group of secondary stakeholders. According to the literature primary stakeholders show a high level of interactivity and are vital for the survival of a destination. Secondary stakeholder are not directly involved in the development of a destination but have to be claimed as important hidden assets of a destination which are affected by the destination and may affect the destination occasionally (Clarkson, 1995; Merrilees *et al.*, 2005). The number of destination stakeholders is manifold and so the stakeholder net is a complex system as individuals can be found in different groups of stakeholders (Sautter and Leisen, 1999). For instance, destination stakeholders are hotel owners/entrepreneurs, cable car and tour operators, external stakeholders, landowners, banks as well as secondary support services, permanent residents', employees' and other interest groups (Flagestad, 2002). In such a context, brand identity can serve as a general relational network, which shows historical, national or cultural relationships to acquire a prevalent view (Olins, 2002). To underpin the previous definition, the role of identity as a supply-side concept involves the decision-making power of stakeholders. Konecnik and Go (2007, p. 179) define the role of identity as "having a dual purpose in analyzing brands from the inside on the one hand, and on the other to subsequently calculate the brand equity that involves the accumulated sum of the value consumers attached to particular brands, as well as their confidence in and loyalty to a brand".

In order to have a better understanding of the concept of identity it should be mentioned that discussion has evolved around the subject of organizational identity within organization theory, whereas the marketing literature has focused on corporate identity (Hatch and Schultz, 1997). According to Konecnik and Go (2007, p. 179) brand identity has multiple roles and specifies what the brand aspires to stand for, for example:

- It is a set of associations that the brand strategist seeks to create and maintain.
- It represents a vision of how a particular brand should be perceived by its target audience.
- Upon its projection, the brand identity should help establish a relationship between a particular brand and its clientele by generating a value proposition potentially either involving benefits or providing credibility, which endorses the brand in question.

Aaker (1995, p. 86) distinguishes two parts in the brand identity structure: the core identity and an extended identity. Kapferer (1999; 2004) has developed the first conceptual model regarding brand identity building. The "brand identity prism" consists of six identity facets: physique, personality, relationship, culture, reflection and self-image. These six facets form a brand identity. Later, several authors have adapted Kapferer's brand identity prism (de Chernatony, 1999).

It is relevant to create the brand identity inside the destination because primary active stakeholders represent an important stakeholder group (Joachimsthaler, 2002; Jones, 2005). According to Simoes *et al.* (2005) companies could gain a greater

competitive advantage by managing their identities effectively in order to have favorable corporate images in the minds of all stakeholders. Karaosmanoglu and Melewar (2006) mentioned in their work that research in the corporate identity management field emphasizes that diverse stakeholders like employees or investors have a risk in building corporate identity.

This paper explore stakeholders' perceptions of their destination by applying a relatively unknown explorative method, the collage method, which includes two different associations, word associations and picture associations. Furthermore, the study also critically discusses this method to derive its advantages and disadvantages in the field of tourism or brand research.

Empirical study

The method

Tourism scholars remind us of the absence of qualitative research in the field of branding (Prebensen, 2007). The general lack of investigation and identification of stakeholder's identity motivated the authors to contribute new knowledge to this specific topic. In most cases, studies on destination branding are based on structured methods such as Likert scales or semantic differential scales. Many studies concentrate on image (Baloglu and Brindberg, 1997; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Hatch and Schultz, 1997; Tasci and Kozak, 2006), indicating that the tourist has some kind of image about a destination. Most often, the image studies are performed on site (Hankinson, 2005). It has to be mentioned, that this research in particular is based upon one source of literature – the tourist's images of a distant destination (Prebensen, 2007). The author evaluates diverse explorative techniques as tools to identify tourists' image perceptions.

The collage as a technique is synonymous with free association. This technique is generally used in psychology and was devised by Freud (1911). It includes diverse explorative techniques as tools to identify stakeholders' identity perceptions of a place. Moreover, the collage method is an unstructured qualitative technique employed to acquire new knowledge concerning brand identity. These techniques were employed to acquire new knowledge about image attributions. In surveys, unstructured and semi-structured techniques were employed to assess new knowledge concerning brand identity attributes. The advantage of using qualitative techniques is to comprehend more aspects of tourist's image of a destination (Cave *et al.*, 2003). Moreover, it is expected to better comprise true images among stakeholders of a specific place and further, to exclude irrelevant constructs regarding the place of investigation. As such the respondent can choose between several real images and discuss only those pictures which are relevant in the informant's mind. Prebensen (2007, p. 750) noticed in her work, "unstructured and explorative techniques via open-ended questions can be used successfully in destination image measurement along with quantitative techniques for further testing of statistical aspects of the content". In sum, the picture association and the word association manifest the collage as a technique (Prebensen, 2007). It can be argued, that this collage technique helps to identify important dimensions of places.

The study concentrated on logos, slogans and images of the two destinations under investigation: Ischgl and Serfaus-Fiss-Ladis, which are located in Tyrol, Austria. The interviews were carried out in the destinations. Moreover, both destinations registered

rising numbers of overnight stays and have changed their image concerning their target groups. Due to the nature of the association research, a collage method was seen as an appropriate methodology. Besides, words and picture associations, the free association represented the most important information sources. The target groups of the interviews were permanent residents who had at least some knowledge of the brand identity and image of the destination.

It was expected to find active primary stakeholders who had different associations about the place. The respondents were clustered into different types of stakeholders, primarily active and passive stakeholders of a tourism destination. Besides, the destination management organizations (DMOs) several other stakeholders were also responsible for the creation of the destination's brand identity. For instance, ski and cable car operators, hotels and private room owners/entrepreneurs, transport businesses, permanent residents as well as museum managers and souvenir shop owners were interviewed.

Fifteen unstructured interviews were carried out in September and October 2008. Eight interviews took place in Ischgl and seven in Serfaus-Fiss-Ladis. Two-thirds of all interviewees were male and one-third female. Although the number of stakeholders is relatively small, it represents a sound pilot sample to employ this new technique. The idea was to explore whether different stakeholders have various destination brand identity perceptions. The technique should help to illustrate these different interpretations of the destination brand. Pictures, logos and slogans were based on discussions, numerous magazines, and the destinations' homepages. In terms of content, the collage-supported interview consisted of the following parts. In part one, respondents were asked to evaluate (via storytelling and collage) the perceived brand identity of their destination. The second part highlighted the desired brand identity of the individual group of stakeholders. Part three posed logos and slogans about the respondents' perspectives of the destination marketing. Finally, the stakeholders were asked to evaluate the collage method.

In general, this paper demonstrates the importance of employing different association methods in recognizing stakeholders' knowledge and opinions of destinations as a primary step in analyzing stakeholders' brand identity perception. The study's research design is informed by the theoretical background of the discussion of the destination in terms of brand identity. The main purpose of this study is accomplished through the methodological design, a design based on visual research that combines word as well as picture association. This visual research is built from visual field notes, to a pilot study to a qualitative study of stakeholders' perceptions about the destination brand identity.

The interviewer prepared the following supporting material:

- *A selection of pictures* representing: après ski (3), summer landscape (6), winter landscape (7), snow and fun (2), family in the snow (3), sports (10), wellness (1), golf (1), the brand of rich prosecco (1), bus (1), cab (2), hotel (1), gastronomy (1), crafts (1), souvenir shop (1), children's day-care (1), ski school (1), cable car (2), icon (1).
- *A selection of brand logos*: Ötztal-Sölden (1), Ischgl (2), St Anton-Arlberg (1), St Moritz (1), Olympia Region-Seefeld (1), Serfaus-Fiss-Ladis (1), Kitzbühel (1), Tirol (1), Innsbruck (1), Zillertal Arena (1), Stubai (1), Alpin Resort-Kühtai (1).

- *A selection of slogans*: top of the mountain (1), top of the world (1), Relax. If you can. . . (1), slogans in German from other destinations (9).
- *A selection of drawings and illustrations*: email (1), telephone (1), team meeting (2), two people shaking hands (1), one person (1), smiley (3).

Several pictures from the destinations were employed as the basis for the picture association. The interviewees were able to select different pictures/associations, which express various emotions, images, identity, corporation or communication. On the other hand, several logos and slogans were used as the passion for the word association. Logos of different competing destinations, e.g. Ischgl, Kitzbühel or Serfaus-Fiss-Ladis and slogans from destinations such as “Top of the World” (St. Moritz), “Top of the mountain” or “relax. If you can . . .” (Ischgl) were presented to the interviewees and they were asked to choose those slogans which best describe the destination or which they associate with the destination.

Findings

The main results are presented in Table I. A certain number of associations were mentioned by a majority of stakeholders (see often used pictures) while other associations only appear once (see rarely used pictures). Table I summarizes the associations expressed in certain pictures for the following questions:

- (1) The interviewees were asked to select a poster background in a certain color (e.g. green, red, blue, yellow, white, brown, orange). In the following part of the interview the interviewees used this poster to create the collage with certain picture cards, logos or slogans.
- (2) The interviewer asked what emotions respondents associate with their destination.
- (3) Interviewees were asked which image the destination transfers to external stakeholders (e.g. tourists).
- (4) Respondents indicated the main persons involved in the brand creation process of their destination. A number of pictures were provided for selection (e.g. illustrations indicating single persons, team spirit, industry specific pictures such as cable way and transport operators, politicians in the region, DMOs, hotel entrepreneurs, ski schools, souvenir shops, residents, craftsmen, etc.).
- (5) They were asked which communication patterns they use in the destination (e.g. email, face-to-face).

The following paragraphs cover the most important findings relating to the collage as a research technique. It focuses on the associations but concentrates not only on Table I. The paragraphs also illustrate respondents' word associations. First, the interviewee was asked to pick a color (red, green, blue, brown, white, orange or yellow) as a background for the collage. Further, the informants explained why they chose the various colors as the basis for their collage, indicating “red because of the logo and the power within the destination marketing (Ischgl)” or “yellow because of the logo and the sun” (Serfaus-Fiss-Ladis).

Next, they were given several pictures related to specific aspects of the destination. They were asked to choose pictures that best describe the brand identity of the destination.

Table I.
Summary of findings

| | Often used picture | Ischgl Rarely used picture | Often used picture | Serfaus-Fiss-Ladis Rarely used picture |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| Background color | | | | |
| Interviewees used a certain poster color | Red (6) ...because of the logo, spirit, aggressive advertisement. | Green (1) ...because of the beautiful landscape | Yellow (4) ...because of the sun, logo. | Red (1) ...because it is the color of the skiing instructor's outfit. |
| Emotion | Winter pictures: skiing and après ski (7); Summer pictures: hiking (4), mountain biking (5); wellness (3), Paris Hilton, rich prosecco (6) because of Günther Aloys, party, high society, individual no mass product; Family pictures: family sitting in the snow (2); ... because Ischgl should be more family-oriented | Snowboarder and golf court (1); Sunshine winter picture (0) | Blue (2) ...because of the logo Winter pictures: sunshine winter picture (8); snowboarder (4); Summer pictures: sport in general, mountain biking (5), hiking (6); Summer relaxation: young people holding their feet up to the sun and the cable car in the background (6); wellness (3); woman in spa area | Orange (1) ...because of the hecticness Après ski (3) ... because Serfaus-Fiss-Ladis has to focus on other younger segments |
| (What do you associate with the destination?) | | | | |
| Image | Winter pictures: skiing and après ski (7); Party locations: discotheque (7) and après ski huts (6) ... because Ischgl is a party destination | Ironbike (3); Summer pictures: family hiking, landscape; mountain biking; ... because most tourists associate the winter with Ischgl school; | Family and winter: skiing with the family (8); "Marmot" (mascot of the Ski school) (6) ... because it stands for fun in the snow; kids-orientated ski | Après ski (3) ... because Serfaus-Fiss-Ladis has to focus on other younger segments |
| (Which image has the tourist about the destination?) | | | Summer sports: hiking, golf and biking (7) | |

(continued)

| | Often used picture | Ischgl Rarely used picture | Often used picture | Serfaus-Fiss-Ladis Rarely used picture |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| Identity | DMO members (7); Cable car operator, Hotels (3); Tirol Werbung (Tyrol Tourism Board) (1) The cable car, hotel, gastronomy, transport and the DMO logo picture appeared in all collages (7); The ski school (4); craft (2); | Cards indicating a single person | ... because Serfaus-Fiss-Ladis represents freedom, but golf is just a positive side-effect (7) DMO and cable car operators (6); Tirol Werbung (Tyrol Tourism Board) and Ski school (1 each); Hotels (1) | Cards indicating a single person |
| Co-operation | Some informants completed the collage with hand written notes: clubs (1), township (1), executive (1) and bakery (1) | | Four informants chose all pictures | Every picture was taken |
| <i>(With whom do you co-operate within the destination?)</i> | | | ...because they co-operate with all of them | |
| Communication | E-mail, telephone or face to face (7) ... because the internal communication between the stakeholders works well | All together at one table (3) ... because the internal communication does not work well | Two informants are co-operating indirectly with the TVB, ski school, township and hotels One informant has a co-operation with the TVB, crafts, cable car and transport operators E-mail, telephone or face to face (8) ...because the internal communication between the stakeholders works very well | All together at one table (2) ... because the internal communication does not work well |

Note: The main findings shown in the table have been extracted from different collages created by different stakeholders

Table I.

For instance, the interviewees were asked to describe what the destination stands for while being shown pictures from a family sitting in the snow, the mountains, a man riding a bike, young people stretching their feet to the sky, a rest on the mountain, a woman relaxing, etc. All respondents agree that Ischgl, for example, represents a winter destination, therefore they chose quite a lot of winter pictures. Thus, several interviewees located après ski and party pics on the collage. In contrast, Serfaus-Fiss-Ladis represents more a family and kids-oriented destination. Finally, the collage shows that the majority of destination stakeholders associate the winter with the selected destinations. Therefore, it is obvious that the destination is seen mainly as a winter destination (including pictures such as a person snowboarding or skiing, the mascot of the ski school, and, in some cases, the pictures of après ski attractions) rather than a summer destination.

Furthermore, the respondents included their personal opinion about the existing destination logo (e.g. does the logo represent the destination). The majority of stakeholders deem the logo as representative for their destination. For example, the logo of Ischgl reflects athletics and has a high recognizing value. However, stakeholders from Serfaus-Fiss-Ladis think that their logo mirrors the core values of the three villages contributing the destination (Serfaus-Fiss-Ladis) in combination with summer activities. Stakeholders from both destinations mentioned that the DMOs as well as cable car operators are responsible for the design of the respective logos. Finally, the majority of stakeholders feel they are excluded and not asked to actively participate in logo creation or other branding activities.

In reference to the vision of the destination brand, the opinions of the respondents differ strongly. For instance, some stakeholders in Ischgl (3) think that Ischgl has undergone a strategic tourism development process with the aim to become a party-oriented destination for young people. Other stakeholders (2) think that Ischgl has accidentally become the “Ballerman of the Alps”. It was also mentioned that Ischgl should concentrate more on summer tourists and families. One stakeholder argued that Ischgl should be branded as a “holiday destination” instead of a “skiing destination”. Some respondents from Serfaus-Fiss-Ladis mentioned that the destination is well-known as a family destination, which is what the destination stakeholders wanted. Just one respondent argued that the family segment is overstrained.

The findings reveal some differences concerning the destination brand identity, e.g. four out of seven interviewees from Ischgl believe that a corporate identity is perused, whereas the other three indicate that there is no corporate identity at all. The majority of stakeholders agreed that the destination identity of Ischgl is dominated by the “party and après ski” activities. Furthermore, the interviewees were invited to choose logos and slogans to complete the collage. They should have selected those slogans which ideally describe the destination’s brand identity. The majority of interviewees decided to complete the collage with the actual slogan from the destination. They mentioned that this slogan best points out what the destination stands for or desires to transfer to external stakeholders.

Next to the picture association the stakeholders were also invited to mention words or phrases they associated with their destinations. On one hand, stakeholders from Serfaus-Fiss-Ladis indicated associations such as “kids”, “family”, “sun”, “high sunshine duration”, “tourism”, “mountains”, “tourists”, “innovative” and “forward looking”. On the other hand, stakeholders from Ischgl came up with word associations

such as “skiing”, “party”, “après ski”, “hotel”, “cable car”, “mountains”, “winter sport”, “solidarity” and “hospitality”.

During the entire interview, the informants were asked certain structured and opened questions. They were asked to put a collage while telling stories about the destination. It was expected by the interviewer that the informant answers these questions by using pictures, slogans or logos. Moreover, they were asked to clarify why they decided to select the respective picture cards, logos or slogans.

Discussion and implications

This research aimed to clarify the effectiveness of the collage method as a tool to measure stakeholders’ identities of selected tourism destinations. The findings show that different associations reveal different identities of the destination brand amongst internal stakeholders. The results support the relevance of using more than one association to build a representative collage. It is important to use several forms of association to explore the complex perceived identity of a destination or place. Further, this study illustrates the consequence of the appliance of the collage method. The technique might be advantageous because it acknowledges the differences or similarities of perceived identities of different internal destination stakeholders. Previous destination image studies show that different unstructured methods reveal various results in terms of image associations (Prebensen, 2007, p. 755). It is also argued that images of a place have several aspects expressed by informants (Prebensen, 2007). The findings from the collage as a method visualize the variety of identities stakeholders perceive from their destination.

The findings also show that some destination stakeholders have negative associations about the destination. They neither share the same brand perception of the brand nor the identity which is communicated through the destination management organization. This can be interpreted by the fact that they have negative information for other internal or external stakeholders. This indicates that communication regarding identity formation might be important. In specifying brand identity amongst stakeholders, the collage as a technique seems to be valuable. In addition, the findings indicate problem areas which can motivate destination managers to improve branding and communication strategies.

The aim of the paper was to reveal whether the collage method is useful to assess perceived brand identities within tourism destination. To build a corporate destination brand identity it is necessary to understand the various existing perceptions of destination stakeholders of the place or destination. Particularly, relevant finding of this brand identity investigation flow from the stakeholder and managerial perspective. The findings opened up some acceptable and welcome opportunities for future investigations into stakeholders’ destination brand identities. The following discussion is focused on the implementation of the collage as a technique in practice.

This paper has concentrated on the brand identity perception of internal destination stakeholders, unlike other studies of the image of a destination (Echtner and Ritchie, 1993; Goodrich, 1978; Hosany *et al.*, 2006). Nevertheless, the findings show that different unstructured associations reveal different outcomes in terms of the perceived destination brand identity. In comparison to previous studies, this study focuses on the collage as a technique. The challenge lies in choosing and modifying the identities to promote a strong destination brand image. Therefore, it is necessary to look at the

construct from inside. Thus, this study starts by identifying the destination stakeholders' identity before asking the tourists or potential tourist about their destination image. The data brought up some differences regarding identities among informants from different stakeholder groups. However, the similarities found in the study amongst various stakeholder groups regarding the destination brand identity indicate the potential for destinations to brand or re-brand their destination with the aim to motivate internal stakeholder groups.

The work by Prebensen (2007) categorized her findings concerning the tourists' images of a distant destination in three categories:

- (1) attributes versus holistic;
- (2) functional versus psychological; and
- (3) common versus unique.

First, the author figured out that the picture association results in a more attribute type of image than the other two techniques. Moreover, the collage method revealed more holistic types, but in sum the paper reveals that different techniques give different types of holistic and attribute types of images. Second, the findings show that the picture association seems to expose both functional as well as psychological characteristics, whereas the word association reveals more functional types of characteristics and the collage as technique shows more psychological characteristics. Finally, Prebensen's (2007) findings also varied in terms of revealing common versus unique types of images. The collage method revealed more unique types of characteristics than the other two techniques. Finally, she mentioned that various techniques help to identify various associations which are an important dimension for researchers such as Echtner and Ritchie (1991) and Prebensen (2007). The collage method was used in combination with in-depth interviews. Moreover, Prebensen (2007) analyzed tourists with different cultural backgrounds (different nationalities) and knowledge about the destinations (previously visited the destination and other types of information). In her study, she revealed that different techniques trace different images amongst different customers. She also highlighted the importance of using more than one technique to explore the various identities and images of a country. Furthermore, her findings support the suggestion to employ the word association, picture association and collage together in a method mix approach. In our research we concentrate just on the mix approach, which includes the word as well as the collage method.

Based on the theoretical background of the stakeholders' destination brand identities, this paper proposes a new and unique method to identify the desired and perceived destination brand identity amongst internal destination stakeholders. The collage as a technique offers several advantages. First, it is a qualitative research method. It seeks answers to several questions, collects evidence and produces findings that were determined in advanced. The strengths of the collage method include flexible ways to perform data collection (e.g. the interviewees can decide which picture they think represents the identity of the destination). It provides an holistic view of the phenomena under investigation (Bogdan and Tylor, 1975; Patton, 1980). Hence, this technique allows individuals to create their own collage using pictures, words or slogans. The interviewees can build and interpret the collage with their own words and favorite images. Moreover, the interviewer is an integral part of the investigation but stands in the background. This type of investigation allows researchers to collect the

primary data in a very flexible and unstructured way that allows the emergence of new information and interpretation of destination brand identity competence (Matveev, 2002). The strength of this research method is also the interaction with the research subjects in their own working place and, in most cases, in their own language, because the picture is the most valuable asset for the researcher. Additionally, the subject's own workplace can also be a weakness because the respondent can be influenced unintentionally by the local background, for example, the destination posters or pictures, the mountains around, the entire association about the destination. This is a definitive research gap and therefore, further studies are necessary. Besides, the collage as a qualitative method obtains a more realistic feeling of the destination that cannot be experienced in the statistical or numerical data used in quantitative research (Matveev, 2002). In sum the collage method has the ability to provide complex textual and picture descriptions of how individuals experience a given issue of research.

The weaknesses of the collage include first of all the illustration of different conclusions based on the same pictures, slogans or logos. The method shows that different stakeholders have different associations about the same information. The collage as a technique obtains a more realistic feeling of the destination. It shows difficulties in explaining the difference in quality and quantity of information obtained from different destination stakeholders an arriving at different, non-consistent conclusions. Usually, it depends on the personal characteristics of the researcher. This method required a high level of experience from the researcher to obtain the targeted information from the interviewees. When conducting the collage, the investigator seeks to gain a total or complete picture. In this context, the collage as a technique is imperfect. Too much information is lost or disappears. This can be avoided by gathering other techniques. The combination of the collage method in combination with other types of interviews would offer a more complete picture of the investigation. The collage as method is unique but there is still a lack of consistency and reliability because the interviewer can easily employ different types of associations. Hence, the research subject can decide to tell some particular stories about the destination (e.g. emotions, ways of communication or co-operation) and ignore others (e.g. negative associations concerning identity).

For further research it would be important to combine this method with other research methods. The three most common qualitative methods are participation observation, in-depth interviews and focus groups. Each method is particularly suited to being combined with the collage as a technique. Moreover, the collage as method could be used to generate several types of data such as audio recordings or videos and a transcription of the collage. The key differences between this technique and other qualitative methods such as the methods discussed by McKay and Couldwell (2004) and Hunter and Suh (2007) are first of all, that in this case the participants have finally a colorful visual collage with pictures, slogans and logos, in front of themselves. Then, the analytical objectives of this type of research are to describe pictures, slogans and logos, to describe variables, to describe and explain relationships (e.g. with other stakeholders), to describe personal or individual experiences within the destination. Therefore, the question format is open-ended and the data format is textual (e.g. because of the collage, audio- or videotapes). Finally, the general framework of this collage method is to explore the phenomenon and to use semi-structured methods to maintain the technique.

These findings seem to confirm some of the benefits explained by Clarke (2000). For instance, this method showed that branding in the tourism context helps to reduce choice. Moreover, it can be seen that branding helps stakeholders to work towards the same outcome. In this case, the collage as a technique is quite a representative tool to illustrate the findings mentioned above. But it also has to be mentioned that further research is important to create an holistic view of the branding benefits in correlation with the collage method. Since little research has been performed in the field of destination branding from the stakeholder perspective, more studies are needed. This study can be interpreted as a pilot study. It is suggested that future studies concentrate on specific issues within the context of destination brand identity. Further, contributions on how the collage technique can be used or linked to the destination brand and the stakeholders' identity are recommended.

References

- Aaker, D. (1991), "Managing Brand Equity: Capitalizing on the Value of a Brand Name", Free Press, New York, NY.
- Aaker, D. (1995), *Building Strong Brands*, Free Press, New York, NY.
- Aaker, D. (2000), *Brand Leadership*, Free Press, New York, NY.
- Anholt, S. (2003), "Branding places and nations", *Brands and Branding*, Profile Books, London, pp. 213-26.
- Aurand, T.W., Gorchels, L. and Bishop, T.R. (2005), "Human resource managements role in internal branding: an opportunity for cross-functional brand message synergy", *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, Vol. 14 No. 3, pp. 163-9.
- Backhaus, K. and Tikoo, S. (2004), "Conceptualizing and researching employer branding", *Career Development International*, Vol. 9 No. 5, pp. 501-17.
- Baloglu, S. and Brindberg, D. (1997), "Affective images of tourism destination", *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 35 No. 4, pp. 11-15.
- Baloglu, S. and McCleary, K. (1999), "A model of destination image formation", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 26 No. 4, pp. 868-97.
- Bieger, T. (2008), *Management von Destinationen*, Oldenbourg, München.
- Blain, C., Levy, S.E. and Ritchie, J.R.B. (2005), "Destination branding: insights and practices from destination management organizations", *Journal of Tourism Research*, Vol. 43 No. 4, pp. 328-38.
- Bogdan, R. and Tylor, S.J. (1975), *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods*, Random House, New York, NY.
- Cai, L.A. (2002), "Cooperative branding for rural destinations", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 29 No. 3, pp. 720-42.
- Cave, J., Rayan, C. and Panakera, C. (2003), "Residents' perceptions, migrant groups and culture as an attraction – the case of a proposed Pacific Island cultural centre in New Zealand", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 24 No. 2, pp. 371-85.
- Clarke, J. (2000), "Tourism brands: an exploratory study of the brands box model", *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, Vol. 6 No. 4, pp. 329-45.
- Clarkson, M. (1995), "A stakeholder framework for analyzing and evaluating corporate social performance", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 20 No. 1, pp. 92-117.
- Coshall, J.T. (2000), "Measurement of tourists' images: the repertory grid approach", *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 39 No. 1, pp. 85-9.

- de Chernatony, L. (1999), "Brand management through narrowing the gap between brand identity and brand reputation", *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 15 No. 13, pp. 157-80.
- de Chernatony, L. and Segal-Horn, S. (2003a), "Building a service brand: stages", *The Service Industry Journal*, Vol. 23 No. 3, pp. 1-21.
- de Chernatony, L. and Segal-Horn, S. (2003b), "The criteria for successful service brands", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 3 Nos 7/8, pp. 1095-118.
- Echtner, C.M. and Ritchie, J.R.B. (1991), "The meaning and measurement of destination image", *Journal of Tourism Studies*, Vol. 2 No. 2, pp. 2-12.
- Echtner, C.M. and Ritchie, J.R.B. (1993), "The measurement of destination image: an empirical assessment", *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 21 No. 4, pp. 3-13.
- Esch, E.R. (2004), *Moderne Markenführung: Grundlagen – Innovative Ansätze – Praktische Umsetzung*, Gabler, Wiesbaden.
- Flagestad, A. (2002), *Strategic Success and Organisational Structure in Winter Sports Destinations*, University of Bradford, Bradford.
- Freud, S. (1911), "Psychoanalytische Bemerkungen über einen autobiographisch beschriebenen Fall von Paranoia", *Gesammelte Werke*, Vol. 8, pp. 240-320.
- Gartner, W.C. (1989), "Tourism image: attribute measurement of state tourism products using multidimensional scaling techniques", *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 28 No. 2, pp. 16-21.
- Gartner, W.C. and Hunt, J.D. (1987), "An analysis of state image change over a twelve-year period (1971-1983)", *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 15-19.
- Gnoth, J. (1998), "Conference report: branding tourism destinations", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 25 No. 3, pp. 758-60.
- Goodrich, J.N. (1978), "A new approach to image analysis through multidimensional scaling", *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 16 No. 1, pp. 3-7.
- Hankinson, G. (2004), "The brand image of tourism destinations: a study of the saliency of organic images", *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, Vol. 3 No. 1, pp. 6-14.
- Hankinson, G. (2005), "Destination brand image: a business tourism perspective", *Journal of Service Marketing*, Vol. 19 No. 1, pp. 24-32.
- Hatch, M.J. and Schultz, M. (1997), "Relations between organizational culture, identity and image", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 31 Nos 5/6, pp. 356-65.
- Hosany, S., Ekinici, Y. and Uysal, M. (2006), "Destination image and destination personality: an application of branding theories to tourism places", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 59 No. 2, pp. 638-42.
- Hunter, J. (1975), "Image as a factor in tourism development", *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 13 No. 2, pp. 1-7.
- Hunter, W.C. and Suh, Y.K. (2007), "Multimethod research on destination image perception: Jeju standing stone", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 28 No. 1, pp. 130-9.
- Ind, N. (2001), *Living the Brand: How to Transfer Every Member of your Organization into a Brand Champion*, Kogan Page, London.
- Ind, N. (2003), "Inside out: how employees build value", *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 10 No. 6, pp. 393-402.
- Jacobs, R. (2003), "Turn employees into brand ambassadors", *ABA Bank Marketing*, April, pp. 23-6.
- Joachimsthaler, E. (2002), "Mitarbeiter: die vergessene Zielgruppe für Markenerfolge", *Absatzwirtschaft*, Vol. 11 No. 1, pp. 28-34.

- Jones, R. (2005), "Finding sources of brand value: developing a stakeholder model of brand equity", *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 13 No. 1, pp. 10-32.
- Kapferer, J.N. (1992), *Strategic Brand Management: New Approaches to Creating and Evaluating Brand Equity*, Kogan Page, London.
- Kapferer, J.N. (1998), *Strategic Brand Management: Creating and Sustaining Brand Equity Long Term*, 2nd ed., Kogan Page, London.
- Kapferer, J.N. (1999), *Strategic Brand Management*, Kogan Page, London.
- Kapferer, J.N. (2001), *Re-inventing the Brand*, Kogan Page, London.
- Kapferer, J.N. (2004), *The New Strategic Brand Management: Creating and Sustaining Brand Equity Long Term*, Kogan Page, London.
- Karaosmanoglu, E. and Melewar, T.C. (2006), "Corporate communication, identity and image: a research agenda", *Brand Management*, Vol. 14 Nos 1/2, pp. 196-206.
- Keller, K.L. (1993), "Conceptualizing, measuring and managing customer-based brand equity", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 57 No. 1, pp. 1-22.
- Keller, K.L. (1998), *Strategic Brand Management: Building, Measurement and Managing Brand Equity*, Prentice-Hall, Upper Saddle River, NJ.
- Keller, K.L. (2001), "Building customer-based brand equity: a blueprint for creating strong brands", working paper, Marketing Science Institute, Cambridge, MA.
- Keller, K.L. (2003), "Brand synthesis: the multidimensionality of brand knowledge", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 29 No. 1, pp. 595-600.
- Kerr, G. (2006), "From destination brand to local brand", *Brand Management*, Vol. 13 Nos 4/5, pp. 276-83.
- Konecnik, M. and Go, F. (2007), "Tourism destination brand identity: the case of Slovenia", *Brand Management*, Vol. 15 No. 3, pp. 177-89.
- Kotler, P. (1991), *Marketing Management: Analysis, Planning, Implementation, and Control*, Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, NJ.
- MacKay, K.J. and Couldwell, C.M. (2004), "Using visitor-employed photography to investigate destination image", *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 42 No. 3, pp. 390-6.
- Matveev, A.V. (2002), "The advantages of employing quantitative and qualitative methods in intercultural research: practical implications from the study of the perceptions of intercultural communication competence by American and Russian managers", *Bulletin of Russian Communication Association Theory of Communication and Applied Communication*, No. 1, pp. 59-67.
- Mayo, E.J. (1973), "Regional images and regional travel behaviour", *Proceedings of the 4th Annual Travel Research Association Conference, Fiji*, pp. 211-7.
- Merrilees, B., Getz, D. and O'Brien, D. (2005), "Marketing stakeholder analysis: branding the brisbane goodwill games", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 39 Nos 9/10, pp. 1060-77.
- Mitchell, C. (2002), "Selling the brand inside", *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 80 No. 1, pp. 99-105.
- Morgan, S.P., Pritchard, S. and Pride, R. (Eds) (2004), *Destination Branding: Creating the Unique Destination Proposition*, 2nd ed., Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford.
- Okoroafo, S. (1989), "Branding in tourism", in Witt, S.F. and Moutinho, L. (Eds), *Tourism Marketing and Management Handbook*, Prentice Hall, London, pp. 23-6.
- Olins, W. (2002), "Branding the nation – historical context", *Brand Management*, Vol. 9 Nos 4/5, pp. 241-8.

-
- Park, S.Y. and Petrick, J.F. (2006), "Destinations' perspectives of branding", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 33 No. 1, pp. 262-5.
- Patton, M.Q. (1980), *Qualitative Evaluation Methods*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Pike, S. (2002), "Destination image analysis - a review of 142 papers from 1973 to 2000", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 23 No. 5, pp. 541-9.
- Prebensen, N.K. (2007), "Exploring tourists' image of a distant destination", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 28 No. 3, pp. 747-54.
- Rooney, J.A. (1995), "Branding: a trend for today and tomorrow", *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, Vol. 4 No. 4, pp. 48-55.
- Ryan, C. (2000), "Tourist experience, phenomenographic analysis, post-positivism and neutral network software", *International Journal of Tourism Research*, Vol. 2 No. 2, pp. 119-31.
- Ryan, C. and Cave, J. (2005), "Structuring destination image: a qualitative approach", *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 44 No. 2, pp. 143-50.
- Sautter, E.T. and Leisen, B. (1999), "Managing stakeholders – a tourism planning model", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 312-28.
- Seetharaman, A., Bin Mohd Nazir, Z.A. and Gunalan, S. (2001), "A conceptual study on brand valuation", *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, Vol. 10 No. 4, pp. 243-56.
- Simoës, C., Dibb, S. and Fisk, R. (2005), "Managing corporate identity: an internal perspective", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 33 No. 2, pp. 153-68.
- Tasci, A.D.A. and Kozak, M. (2006), "Destination brands vs destination image: do we know what we mean?", *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, Vol. 12 No. 4, pp. 299-317.
- Tosti, D.T. and Stotz, R. (2001), "Brand: building your brand from the inside out", *Marketing Management*, Vol. 10 No. 2, pp. 28-33.
- Vallaster, C. and de Chernatony, L. (2006), "Internal brand building and structuration: the role of leadership", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 40 Nos 7/8, pp. 761-84.
- Wagner, O., Peters, M. and Schuckert, M. (2008), "Internal branding in tourism destinations: the need for future research", *Proceedings of the 4th World Conference for Graduate Research in Tourism, Hospitality and Leisure*, pp. 470-86.

Corresponding author

Olivia Wagner can be contacted at: olivia.wagner@ujbk.ac.at