MASTER THESIS

A research on the perception of destination Bulgaria by Danes: towards building new image and brand association

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ABSTRACT

The image of a destination plays a crucial role for the tourism development of the place and is a highly important determinant to be selected by tourists. It is therefore a great issue if a country is perceived improperly by tourists. The purpose of this thesis is to explore the image of destination Bulgaria among Danes. Due to a gap in the literature, the paper suggests an overall framework for image reconstructing and re-branding practices. To do so, this study ensures a profound understanding on the concept of destination image and influential factors, tourist behavior, as well as destination branding and the role of the local destination management in a destination branding context. To collect data, an online survey among 31 Danish participants was conducted. Besides, a fieldwork was undertaken, in order to interview tourism scholars from Bulgarian academic institutions, as well as to meet in person experts, charged with the management of destination Bulgaria. The findings of the thesis indicated an existing narrowed perception of the country by Danish people, whilst the efforts of the destination managers aim to inform about multiple exceptional tourism resources in Bulgaria. The practical implications of this paper will be useful as a basis for future researchers in image reconstruction and destination re-branding contexts, and it could serve as a ground for eventual re-branding initiatives by the local destination management.

Acknowledgement

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of appendixes

Appendix 1: Pilot study results
Appendix 2: Transcription Associate Professor Toncheva
Appendix 3: Transcription Associate Professor Dogramadzhieva
Appendix 4: Answers Associate Professor Velikova
Appendix 5: Answers Associate Professor Vodenska
Appendix 5.1: Answers Associate Professor Vodenska (BG)
Appendix 6: Answers Albena Metodieva, Bulgarian Ministry of Tourism
Appendix 7: Survey results
Appendix 8: National Strategy for Developing Brand Bulgaria 2008-2011
Appendix 9: Annual Programme for National Advertisement 2016
Appendix 9.1: Annual Programme for National Advertisement 2017
Appendix 10: Interview Guide Professors
Appendix 11: Interview Guide Bulgarian Ministry of Tourism

List of figures

Figure 1: A General Framework of Destination Image Formation (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999)
Figure 2: Major Influences on Individual Travel Behaviour (Moutinho, 1987)
Figure 3: An overall framework of re-branding process (self-made)
Figure 4: Consecutive stages of knowledge construction (self-made)
Figure 5: Sequence of re-branding initiative of re-branding initiative (Self-made, based on Figure 3.)
Figure 6: The national logo of destination Bulgaria

1. Introduction

The dynamic growth of the tourism industry worldwide over the past two decades has been widely discussed among the literature (Burns & Novelli, 2008; Cardenas-Garcia et al., 2013; Kozak & Kozak, 2015). Tourism development in the recent years has been studied from various angles and perspectives: from desert to tourist hot-spot; change of common tourist practices; introducing innovations to stay competitive; tool for national economic growth; etc. This global trend implies a rapid life-cycle and aging of common tourism products, which leads to substitution of basic practices with alternatives with either small or significant concept change (Kozak & Kozak, 2015). Therefore, there appeared a need for a destination to develop its unique tourism resources (Qu et al., 2011), as the traveler's' preferences evolved too (Borzyszkowski, 2014). Given this pattern in the tourism industry, ever fewer people seek to spend their holidays in the traditional package tours, such as summer or ski vacations. However, less developed countries still tend to offer tourism opportunities in a traditional and even basic way, and although not a magic tool to contribute to the national welfare, tourism industry is a proper instrument for progress (Cardenas-Garcia et al., 2013).

Tourism business in Bulgaria plays ever more important role as an economical engine and witnesses a significant growth over the past decade. This dynamic development of the Bulgarian tourism industry has been reported in a number of recent researches that indicates the quantitative results of the progress (Yaneva, 2009; Yaneva et al., 2013; Ministry of Tourism, 2010-2016 reports). Yet, the Bulgarian tourism product still seems to appear in its traditional shape. The advertising campaigns by the Bulgarian DMO promote multiple attractions with reference to history, culture, ethnic, flora and fauna, ski, sea, etc. (Bulgariatravel.org), trying to develop the country's opportunities in each of these tourism domains. However, the country's image differs from the desired one and still the overwhelming majority of international tourists tend to choose summer holidays in Bulgaria (Grigorova & Racheva, 2012). This trend gave rise to a number of researches, aimed to indicate the current vision of Bulgaria on the European Tourism Market (Yaneva et al., 2013) and changing the image of the country (Anastasova, L., 2015).

The roles, the functions and the mission of a Destination Management Organization (DMO) of a region has been widely discussed among scholars (Niu et al., 2015; Magaš, 2010; Holesinska, 2013; Dwyer et al., 2017; Bhandari et al., 2015;) and generally agreed, that the existence of a DMO is highly important for country's development as a tourist destination. In order to manage the constant development in the tourism sector, an understanding of related conditions and factors is needed (Magaš, 2010). BulgariaTravel is the official is the

official DMO of Bulgaria and it has been established to serve the tourism sector and promote the country to attract potential visitors. However, the status of the Bulgarian DMO is rather specific. Behind the name BulgariaTravel stay teams of experts in the field, who are representatives by the Bulgarian Ministry of Tourism. Thus, the Ministry controls the destination management initiatives, that are undertaken by BulgariaTravel. Although ran by the government, the professionals have the strategic and managing functions, and are engaged with country's prosperity as a destination. Despite the number of attempts to promote the country in a different angle, such as cultural heritage, historical background, nature (Bulgariatravel.org; BulgariaTravel @ YouTube), the focus still remains on the Black Sea summer holidays that the country offer. Comparative reports by the Ministry of Tourism indicate in the period 2015-2016 reveal, that summer vacations indicate a significant growth by 18,3% in the number of incoming foreign tourists (Statistics, Ministry of Tourism). However, destination Bulgaria seems to have an unpleasant image on the European Tourism Market. It is argued, that Bulgaria is often addressed to 'cheap prices' and 'questionable quality' among Europeans (Grigorova & Racheva, 2012).

The current paper investigates the destination image of Bulgaria among Danish travelers. Due to the lack of studies on the topic, there has been conducted a pilot study among Danish participants, designed to elicit basic initial idea about the associations Danes make with Bulgaria and to guide the current paper, The research shows the associations that Danish people do with the country and indicates, that all participants address Bulgaria with three main keywords: Sunny Beach; summer/sun vacation; cheap alcohol; (see appendices). At the same time, the pilot study revealed unawareness of any other tourism resources in Bulgaria, which gives an idea, that the indications above are the only references they make with the country. Considering the goals that the destination management had sat to achieve (Appendix 8), the pilot study reveals a mismatch between what is aimed and what is achieved (Appendix 1). These preliminary findings triggered the problematic question about the actual and the expected image of the country. Therefore, the ultimate purpose of this paper is to achieve the goals set in the beginning and finally to serve as a background for future researches in the area.

1.1. Insufficient research in the area

Although destination image is a common area for researchers' academic works (Hunt, 1971; Gartner, 1993; Gilmore, 2002; Gallarza et al., 2002; Tasci & Gartner, 2007; Choi et al., 2011), there seem to be a deficiency of studies on destination Bulgaria and its image, and it still remains barely researched. Most of the available

literature on the topic is only limited to non-academic literature and online articles, which can not be considered as objective and are often impacted by one's affective evaluation and personal opinion. There are however a few works existing on how is Bulgaria perceived among foreigners. Yaneva et al. (2013) investigate the image of tourist destination Bulgaria on the European tourism market and argue, that there is a significant distinction between the perceptions of tourists who actually visited the country and those, whose imaginary was built upon various information sources. In other words, the pre- and post-understanding of destination Bulgaria differ considerably (Yaneva et al., 2013). These findings drove the idea, that the efforts made to construct the country's image seem to be misunderstood. Therefore, this thesis investigates how Danish people perceive destination Bulgaria and tries to serve as a contributor for eventual national image reconstructing practices.

1.2. Motivation

The researcher's motivation is greatly important to be explained as to clarify the initial driving incentives that lead the researcher. The Bulgarian tourism has always been a point of arrival to my interests, considering my academic background in the field. The national tourism resources of the country were the main focus of my earlier bachelor studies, where much awareness was raised in deep about the way these can be used as a tourism source. Moreover, a main driving force to attempt this study is my personal attachment, which evokes the desire to make contribution for any further tries of constructing a better destination image in the future.

As one living in Denmark for almost two years, I noticed this general trend among Danes, that makes them link Bulgaria to mainly Sunny Beach. This frightening pattern induced a great concern about the vision of my country of origin on an international level. Being a master student in Denmark, the interest to investigate the local tourism market is rooted in the desire to understand the model that this nation follow in order to achieve significant development in the industry. Besides, along with the lack of investigations in the area, a great motivating role played my desire to contribute for developing the Bulgarian tourism industry and attempt introducing a new product. These are the motives that drove my ideas to a master thesis research.

2. Problem formulation

The importance of a good destination image in the context of tourist travel intentions has been widely discussed and agreed by academics (Hunt, 1975; Gallarza, et al, 2002; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Other authors, such as Beerli & Martin (2004) focused on factors that influence the process of destination image formation and tried to develop an exemplary pattern of the process. However, there seems to be a lack of researches to provide a solid conceptualization on either wrongly appreciated image or destination image reconstruction. *"A research problem is a problem or issue that leads to the need for a study"* (Creswell, 2014:149). In order to underline the need and the purpose of the paper, an existing problem to examine must be identified. Therefore this section aims to demonstrate the problematic dimensions stemming from improper perception of a tourist destination and the applicability of re-constructing its image.

According to the statistics, provided by the Bulgarian Ministry of Tourism, the overall majority of international tourists, who visited Bulgaria in 2015 and 2016 (respectively by 24% and 20%), have found the destination attractive for the summer holiday opportunities it offers (Appendix 9, 9.1). Moreover, the data indicates, that Scandinavian travelers in particular are also attracted primarily by 'sea vacation' (Appendix 9:11). Yet, a review of the preliminary conducted pilot study indicated, that the country is mostly appreciated for its cheap opportunities for summer vacations (Appendix 1). In this way, the associations that have been discovered - Sunny Beach, cheap prices, alcohol appear to serve as the visit card of destination Bulgaria among Danish travelers. These findings show the message delivered to Danish tourists and the image that Bulgaria acquires. Information sources are the main factor that contributes to the tourists' perception of a destination (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004). This trend apparently lead to an incorrect understanding of the country's tourism opportunities, and results in falsely branded national resources. The good image of a destination has been argued as an important factor for the development of a region (Hunt, 1971) and a crucial instrument to position the place as a considerable choice among other destinations (Gartner, 1993; Hsu et al., 2009). The existence of different resources in Bulgaria, that would attract visitors, have been an object of discussion in various local studies (Stankova, 2010; Yaneva, 2009) and compiled in the national advertising video of the country (BulgariaTravel @ YouTube.com). However, the resources alone are insufficient and unable to make a place competitive (Rinaldi & Cavicchi, 2014). It has been argued, that the local DMO takes responsibility for building a good image of the country (Magaš, 2010; Bhandari, et al., 2015; Niu, et al., 2016; Dwyer, et al., 2017). These facts evoked the idea, that changing the current image of destination Bulgaria is urgent. In that sense, the main goal of this paper is to discover the perception of

Bulgaria that Danish people have and to identify the gaps in the current branding practices of the local DMO. Ultimately, this paper is aimed to serve as a piece of suggestion to the local destination managers for eventual initiatives of changing the image and the national brand of the country. In this respect, answering the following research question is where this study heads to:

What is the way destination Bulgaria is perceived among Danes and how could this image and brand association be changed?

After the initial pilot research (Appendix 1), intended to direct this paper, there appears to be an issue with the interpretation of destination Bulgaria by the Danes. In order to confirm the incorrect perception, a thorough research among larger scope of audience will be conducted. The responses help to prove and identify the concrete problem, and make possible to generate ideas for a potential re-branding strategy. Despite the number of attempts to brand the country in the desired way, the message that the Bulgarian DMO sends still fails to reach the Danish tourists. Therefore this paper tries to examine the issue of not-delivered branding information and to provide suggestions for prospective national branding practices.

The answer of the research question will contribute to the Bulgarian tourism in more than one way: first and most importantly, it would raise awareness for an existing issue with the destination image of Bulgaria; secondly, it might serve as a piece of advice to the local destination managers for constructing a new image and destination brand of Bulgaria; then, it would bring a number of beneficial results for the local tourism business - developing new tourism sub-sectors, thus offering diversity of products and so attracting more visitors, which will inevitably benefit the national economy; not the least, it would also benefit the Danish travelers, as new vision of a country is accordingly followed by rediscovering a new destination, new sights, new attractions, which would come along with new knowledge too.

2.1. Structure of the thesis

A total of 6 chapters form the overall structure of this thesis. At first, the introductory part presents the general background of the Bulgarian tourism product, as well as the organization of the local destination management. Chapter 2 formulates the research problem of the paper that led to the need of the study. After introducing to the field and presenting the problematic aspects, the third chapter of literature review comes next. It was decided so, due to the complexity of the matter under investigation. The destination image has a compound nature and comprises of multiple components, which evoked a necessary understanding of the

field. At the end of the chapter, a framework of image reconstruction and re-branding practices is produced. Then, the methodological choices are exposed in chapter 4, where initially the philosophical paradigm is presented, followed by the particular design of this research. The chapter proceeds with discussion and arguments on the particular methodological approach and ends up with defining the analytical strategy, ethical considerations and limitations throughout the research process. The analysis of the gathered data and the discussion over it through the lens of the literature takes place in chapter 5. Finally, chapter 6 summarizes the findings of the study and comes up with conclusions.

3.   Literature review

This section provides an overview of the available literature sources that will serve as a basis for this research. Presented are theoretical suggestions on different components, that the destination image is built upon, which also establishes the structure of the analysis. At the end, combining the exposed knowledge, a conceptual framework is designed. Thus, it is attempted to fulfill the existing gap in the literature within the context of re-building image and destination re-branding. The elements and the sequence of the framework create the structure for the analysis.

3.1.   Destination Image

The image of a destination has become one of the hegemonic fields for tourism researches (Gallarza et al., 2002; Hosany et al., 2006; Kladou & Mavragani, 2015) and its high importance has been widely discussed by a number of researchers (Gartner, 1993; Gallarza et al., 2002; Choi et al., 2011). Hunt (1971:6) investigates the image as a factor in tourism and defines the state image as *"the impressions that a person or persons hold about a state in which they do not reside"*. Another early definition of destination image is provided one of the pioneers in studying destination image - Crompton (1979), who argues, that *"An image may be defined as a sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination"* (Crompton, 1979:18). Hunt (1971) further underlines the role of the destination image for its tourism sector and sees the importance of having a good image from the angle of development. The author argues, that tourism is perhaps the quickest and the least difficult way among all available, through which a region can be developed. Hereby it is underlined the significant value of the tourism industry for the national growth of a country. Therefore, an improper destination image would result in an incorrect implementation of country's potential progress.

Furthermore, along with the global development trend in the tourism sector, the images of destinations develop in similarity and gradually idealize to metamorphose into a remarkable destination. Thus, although different places, destinations generally have comparable characteristics and a similar set of facilities that they offer (Yaneva et al., 2013; Qu et al., 2011). Accordingly, the similarity among though different tourist destinations brings much of a competition among them. Therefore, this trend triggers the need for the destination image to not only provide luxury accommodation and beautiful view, but it forced the necessity of unique and extraordinary features that a place offers, in order to be chosen as a final decision (Qu et al., 2011). In other words, not only what a destination supplies has developed, but also tourists' preferences have evolved in similarity, having influence on their decision making (Borzyszkowski, 2014).

The process of selection of a destination by tourists has been examined by a number of tourism scholars (Gartner, 1993; Choi et al., 2011; Smallman & Moore, 2010; Hsu et al., 2009) who agreed that it is a complex concept, which includes a number of influential factors, both internal and external (see 3.2 Tourist behavior; 3.3 Tourist motivation; 3.3.1 Push and Pull factors). Building upon Goodall's (1991) insights, Gartner (1993) highlights the important relation between the destination image and the destination selection by tourists, and therefore concludes that *"an image of the destination exists in the mind(s) of the decision makers… and only those destinations with a strong image… remain viable for selection"* (Gartner, 1993:193). He argues further, that the image of a destination is to be considered as the determinant that "pulls" the attention of the decision makers. According to Choi et al., 2011 in most of the cases a tourist chose the destination, which possesses the best image and therefore influencing tourists' perception of the place is highly important. Hence, in order to influence the decision making process of the tourists, a favorable destination image must be first built. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the components of which a destination image is formed (Gartner 1993; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Qu et al., 2011).

3.1.1. Destination image formation and influential factors

The image of a destination is a complex matter and it consists of many different elements that influence the way it is constructed (Hosany et al., 2006). As it was earlier argued, a good destination image has a significant impact on the process of tourist behavior and decision making (Gartner, 1993), and due to its importance tourism researchers attempted to identify the factors that define and enhance the image of a destination (Tasci & Gartner, 2007). Therefore it seems vital to study the destination image in order to develop a place in a tourism perspective. However, before approaching tourists' destination selection, it is first needed to grasp the initial stage of the process of image formation (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). According to Brokaw

(1990:32) *"Before image can be used to influence behavior, it is important to understand what influences image"* (in Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). In this respect, ahead is provided a deconstruction of the destination image agents.

Tourism scholars on the topic generally agree, that the destination image is mainly influenced by two major factors - (1) Personal factors, that have to do with the background (social and psychological) and the characteristics of the subject (destination image perceiver); and (2) Stimulus factors are those *"that stem from the external stimulus and physical object as well as previous experience"* (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Thereby the authors provided an exemplary model of destination image formation (Figure 1), including factors of influence. The image below is employed to provide an illustrative view of the influencing factors and thus to gain better understanding on the theory.

PERSONAL FACTORS	DESTINATION IMAGE	STIMULUS FACTORS

• Psychological
   • Values
   • Motivations
   • Personality
 • Social
   • Age
   • Education
   • Marital Status
   • Others
	• Perceptual/Cognitive
	 • Affective
	 • Global
		• Information Sources
		   • Amount
		   • Type
		 • Previous Experience
		 • Distribution
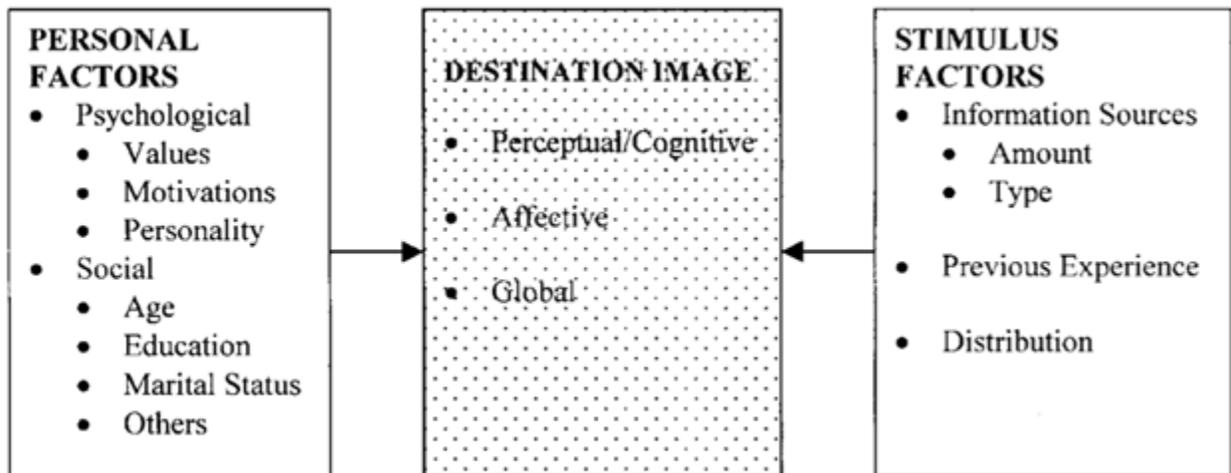
Figure 1: A General Framework of Destination Image Formation (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999)

a)   The personal factors

The personal factors represent the characteristics of the individual, who perceive and appretiate the destination image. These factors also have an impact of the destination image, as the way an individual understands, interpret and evaluates the information sources directly depends on his personal beliefs and attitude toward the place. Finally, the personal agents result in influence the tourists' motivation to travel (Beerli & Martin, 2004). This evaluation of personal needs and motives has been defined by Gartner (1993) as 'push' determinants - internal stimuli that result in an intention to travel.

b)　　The stimulus factors

These agents represent external stimuli, that influence the tourist decision making, such as various promotional materials. The information sources are usually controlled by the destination marketers (Tasci & Gartner, 2007; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999) and their purpose is to operate as a pull sources - those factors that present the destination image in an attractive way. Thus, in order to understand the image formation process it is crucial to elaborate on the 'pull' power of a place (Gartner, 1993). The model above (Figure 1) maintains the idea, that the major component of external influence are the sources of information that an individual gains an idea from about the destination. Tasci & Gartner (2007) argued, that information sources are a cardinal external factor, as they play the role to create a notion of the destination to the tourists. Therefore, there is a need that the destination marketers first understand the factors of destination image formation, and due to the positive effect of various information sources, the destination management must find ways to expose tourists to a variety of sources of information (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999).

In his earlier article, Gartner (1993) provides a deep look into the various information sources, which may be generally divided in two groups - before and after the actual experience (Beerli & Martin, 2004). Considering the ultimate goal - image re-building, the agents, classified as before-experience, are picked as relevant and explained ahead. These factors are classified as: (a) Overt induced - standard advertising practices in the mediascope, initiated by institutions in charge; (b) Covert induced - using a celebrity as a spokesperson to attract attention of audiences and to basically serve the information instead of the institution in charge; (c) Autonomous - raising awareness through taking advantage of the scope of the mass-media, news, articles, rubrics, reports, movies etc.; (d) Organic - friends and relatives recommendations, word of mouth; and (e) actual visitation; (Gartner, 1993; Beerli & Martin, 2004). These suggestions will later serve as inspiration for creating a destination image reconstruction plan.

Consequently, the personal factors frame the individual's personality and how these internal characteristics may affect the appreciation of the external stimulus factors. Hence, the combination of both internal and external components constructs the tourists' perception and evaluation of the destination (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Beerli & Martin (2004) claim, that stimulus factors, together with other factors, such as former experience, attachment and other personal factors, the destination finally settles among other possible choices to travel.

In order to explore the perception and evaluation of certain destination it is highly important to understand how the meaning is formed and study all components. Therefore, this paper apply the knowledge on destination image evaluation as to explore individual's' appraisal of a place. Due to the main purpose of the paper it is felt crucial to study destination image, its evaluation and components, in order to understand the pattern of destination image formation. Ultimately, this knowledge will serve as a tool to establish suggestions on destination re-branding practices.

3.1.2. Toward overall image: measuring destination

In order to understand the components that a destination image comprises of, an evaluation of the factors of impact is critical. It is further argued, that evaluating the image properly would bring benefits to the destination, and as claimed by Reilly, 1990 (in Baloglu & McCleary, 2001:3), a precise measurement of the destination image is highly important to exert effective development. Therefore, this paper tries to examine the ways in which a destination image might be measured. Basing upon a number of tourism scholars (Baloglu, 1996; Baloglu & Mangaloglu, 2001; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Hosany et al., 2006; Mackay & Fesenmaier, 2000; Stern & Krakover, 1993; Uysal et al., 2000; Pike, 2009), Qu et al. (2011) argue that the image of a destination may be evaluated by two general methods - cognitive and affective. The former is related to the beliefs or knowledge about the object, and the latter refers to personal attitude (feelings, emotions, attachments) to the object (Qu et al., 2011). Then, as a result of both cognitive and affective evaluations, the overall image of the destination is constructed (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999).

Gartner (1993) in turn suggests three interrelated components of destination image formation, which he evaluated as determining product predisposition. Considering the author's suggestions, as well as other scholars' insights, below are presented shortly the image components, to help understanding the way the overall image is constructed:

● *The cognitive image component* - As well referred to as *perceptual* (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999) or *perceptive* (Beerli & Martin, 2004), the cognitive image component is explained as *"the sum of beliefs and attitudes of an object leading to some internally accepted picture of its attitudes"* (Gartner, 1993:193). The author further argue, that the cognitive image is directly influenced and formed by external stimulus information, delivered by outer senders. The perceptual image of a destination is based on different individual's personal knowledge about the place and its attributes/possessions (Beerli & Martin, 2004) and their perception is based on their personal intellectuality (Scott, 1965 in Gartner, 1993:193). Hence, it may

be argued that the cognitive destination image perception is to a large extent influenced by the access to information that an individual has, i.e. in what way a notion of a place has been built through efforts for making the tourist audience aware about the concrete destination. In that sense, the idea that a tourist acquires for a destination rests on its physical characteristics - the set of tangible tourist attractions (beaches, nature, mountains). Therefore, it is greatly important to pay attention on what information gets served to the audience, in order to construct a proper destination image.

● *The affective image component* - The affective image component has to do with people's feelings and emotions, and attitude and attachment toward the object (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Various scholars on the topic (Anand, Holbrook and Stephens 1988; Holbrook 1978; Russel and Pratt 1980; Stern and Krakover 1993, in Beerli and Martin 2004) agree, that the cognitive and the affective components are interrelated, and the former operates as a starting point for the latter, in order to finally establish the overall image. In addition, Beerli & Martin (2004) agree on the strong interrelation between the element of feelings and emotions, and the tourists' motivation to travel. In this respect, the affective component influences both people's tourism motives and the process of selecting a destination. Thus the affective image component plays an important role when the selection of a place to travel begins (Gartner, 1993).

● *The conative image component* - The conative image component is the stage of influenced behavior by the former two components, and is the actual moment of action. After the cognitive and the affective evaluation, the traveler finally gets to a decision and the specific destination is selected among all choices. The particular choice of the tourist, made in the conative evaluation, is directly related to those images designed in the cognitive and evaluated in the affective stage (Gartner, 1993).

Thus, the overall image of a destination is formed as a combination of perceptive agents, based on awareness, knowledge, beliefs, information; and emotional components, such as personal feelings, attitudes and attachments to the particular place (Stern & Krakover, 1993; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Qu et al., 2011). This study's main goal is to operate as a tool to alter the perception of destination Bulgaria. Therefore, the cognitive component is felt relevant to study for the purpose of this paper, as it results directly in building a perception of the place and the ultimate choice, made by the traveler (Gartner, 1993).

The good image: Having determined the agents and important factors, influencing the destination image formation, both external and internal, it is tried to process and summarize the insights presented above. Thus it may be reasonably concluded what a good destination image would be.

Since it is argued, that the overall image of a destination is generally designed after the tourist evaluated the place in both affective and cognitive way (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999), and that the final goal is to settle among other choices (Gartner, 1993; Hsu et al., 2009), consequently a proper destination image is supposed to be assessed well in both evaluation stages, and finally to end up as a considerable travel decision. Hence, a good image may be argued as not the one that provides the most attractive and at the same time common features (beaches, mountains, facilities), but that which recognized all agents of impact and adapt its attributes in accordance. Therefore, the paper ahead serves a review of academic understanding on tourist behavior and motivation.

3.2.   Tourist behavior

Studying the behavior of individuals in general means to study what do people do and most importantly - why do they do it (Pearce, 2005). Belch (1998) argued, that the consumer behavior is a process when an individual or a group of people seek to satisfy their personal needs and desires, and in order to do that they apply searching for products, they select, purchase, use and evaluate what they have consumed (Belch, 1998; Moutinho, 1987). In the context of tourism, the travel intentions of a person is a complicated subject to study, as it includes answering questions related to one's perception, feelings, what does he think and personal attitudes (Pearce, 2005). Hence, the behavior of a tourist is strongly related to his activities, decisions and choices. In that sense, the relation between the way a person behaves and the selection of destinations he makes has been an object of discussion for various tourism scholars (Hsu et al., 2009; Pearce, 2005; Hansen, 2005; Smallman & Moore, 2010; Wong & Yeh, 2009). Researchers on the topic generally agree, that tourists' decision is a complex matter, drawn upon a number of factors, such as psychological, sociological and anthropological (Pearce, 2005). It has been argued that *"Visit intention is an important outcome variable because it has been shown to be substantially correlated with travel behavior"* (Noh, 2007 referred to in Choi et al., 2011:193). Furthermore, building on Crompton's (1977) view, Choi et al. (2011) break down the procedure of choosing a destination into two main phases - (1) whether or not to travel and (2) where to travel. So the first to have influence on the final decision seem to be those forces, that triggers the need and initial intention of escaping the routine. Thereafter, recognizing the need to travel at all becomes more specific and grows into process of particular preferences, where it is decided on a concrete destination. Choi et al. (2011) further argue, that the main driving force for the second phase "where to travel" is the cognitive evaluation of the place. As noted above, the cognitive evaluations are reflections of the exposure to various information sources, which at the end build perception of the place. In other words, in the second stage of

destination selection process, the main agent of influence is the image of the particular destination. Therefore, maintaining a good image of a place is an intangible factor that plays a crucial role in influencing tourist' behaviour, consequently his choice of a destination (Gartner, 1993; Hsu et al., 2009).

Moutinho (1987) suggests an illustrative model of factors influencing one's travel behavior (Fig. 2), which is employed in this paper in order to illustrate the influential forces in the tourist behavior concept. The author takes in consideration many factors, both external and internal, that influence the final decision on where to travel. These determinants in fact have descriptive role for individual's behavior and ultimately end up in the final choice of 'where to travel' (Moutinho, 1987). Although it might be considered aged and outdated, this veteran model manages to combine and present all internal and external factors, that first influence the motivation of an individual, and then collegiates the influential sources for reaching the final travel decision. Therefore, in order to clarify and understand the cycle of the tourist behavior, it is felt urgent to present the illustration below, which indicates an interlinkage between traveler's environment, internality and selection of destination:
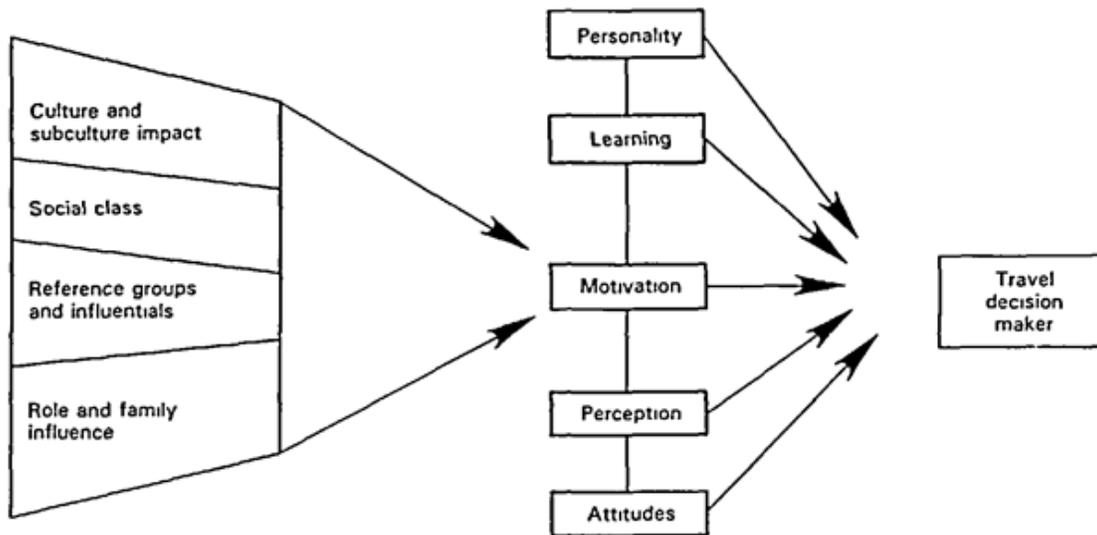

Figure 2: Major Influences on Individual Travel Behaviour (Moutinho, 1987)

To a large extent, selection of a destination is depending on factors that are outer for the traveler and even he/she has a limited control over them. These external impacts one is subjected to are featured as:

1) Cultural background - *"values, ideas, attitudes and meaningful symbols, as well as artifacts elaborated in a society"* (Moutinho, 1987:7)

2) Social class - refers to living standards of an individual

3) Reference groups - belonging to a particular group of the society; mainly influenced by the family

4) Family influences - refers to direct impact the family values and traditions have on the decision

The social factors, displayed above, possess a complex nature and have a great impact on person's travel decision, although one is most often unable to realize their influence (Moutinho, 1987). However, these determinants do not appear in the scope of interest of this research. The internal factors that influence the decisions of travelers are to be discussed. Ahead the paper focuses on motivation as a main internal factor influencing individual's choice why and where to travel (Belch, 1998; Pearce, 2005).

3.3. Tourist motivation or why do people travel

Among literature on the topic tourist motivation has been linked to reasons and purposes for individuals to travel (McCabe, 2000; Lundberg, 1972), their choice of destination (Hsu et al., 2009) or examination of techniques to measure travellers' motives (Fodness, 1994). After that, tourist's motives to travel have been thoroughly discussed and established as the basis of tourists' behavior (Caber & Albayrak, 2016).

In an earlier article from 1972, Lundberg poses the general question "why do people travel?" considering it as in the very basis of travelling motivations of tourists. The author furthermore explains the problematic character of the answers to this question, dividing the reasons in two directions. First, as a prerequisite to the lack of coherent response to the problem, he defines the variability of cultural background among individuals. And second, Lundberg argues that tourism motivations might be a due to travelers' subconscious needs, that are unavailable even for himself to understand (Lundberg, 1972:107 cited in Gnoth, 1997:189). In similarity, Moutinho (1987) claimed, that there are internal and external agents that influence first one's behavior and thence his selection of a destination. A number of tourism scholars discussed the variety of factors that affect individual's motivation and thus his final choice (Smallman et al., 2012; Hsu et al., 2009; Wong & Yeh, 2009). However, considering the goal of this paper it is only taken into account those determinants, that are related to the destination image. Since it was argued, that most of the times even the individual himself does not comprehend the external driving forces (see Fig. 2) of his motivation (Moutinho, 1987), this paper focuses on the internal factors influencing tourist's behavior. And although the variety of possible impacts on motivation, they can be generally narrowed down to the statement that "The most likely is that people will seek for a balance between consistency and harmony" (Moutinho, 1987:17). So, while the external motivations are

generic and hard to determine, the internal factors of motivation have more specific nature. The latter is framed by personally experienced images, mediascope influences (Moutinho, 1978) and peer to peer feedback and recommendations (Lee, 1997; Kim & Morrison, 2005 in Choi et al., 2011). Therefore, the current paper intends to discover those two general questions surrounding one's destination choice - why to travel and where to travel (Pearce, 2005): (1) what triggers Danes' motivation to travel, as well as how then their motivation to travel drives them to a choice of a destination.

3.3.1. Push and pull factors

The theoretical suggestions of push and pull factors in tourism motivation has been an object of discussion for various authors (Crompton, 1979; Gnoth, 1997; Dann, 1981), who generally accepted its concept (Uysal & Jurowski, 1994). Gnoth, (1997) argued, that the factors that influence tourists' motivation and expectation are stimulated by either inner or outer impacts. Similarly, Uysal & Jurowski (1994) classifies the push factors as 'intrinsic', internal motivators to travel in general, and the pull factors they referred to as those stimulators that still influence the tourists' decision, but are situated in the surrounding environment. It is further suggested, that push factors may generally be summarized with escaping the daily routine (such as escape, rest, social contacts), while the pull are those objects of attractiveness, both tangible and intangible, that a destination possesses (e.g. natural resources, beaches, facilities; or immaterial wealth - cultural attractions) (Uysal & Jurowski, 1994). These insights resemble what has been earlier in the paper referred to as suggested by Crompton (1977) and then built upon in Choi et al. (2011). Hence, the push factors help the individual to answer the question from the first phase of destination choosing process - whether to travel or not; and the push factors have influence on the second phase - where to travel (see 3.2 Tourist behavior). This particular sequence was also agreed by Gnoth (1997), who suggested, that push factors is the internally realized need of escaping in general, and is the first force to trigger travel intentions. This stage appears on a personal level and therefore it is very complex and individual for each person. The pull factors in turn are generally defined as those features of the destination that attracts tourist's attention after decision to travel is taken, i.e. the destination image. Then, considering what has been suggested by Gnoth (1997), it can be noticed, that proposed are not only factors that put effect on the process of motivation formation. He rather argued a certain sequence that the entire process follow, which show us that first the push factors, i.e. realizing the need to travel, appear, then the pull factors come in turn to supply the individuals' earlier realized needs.

All in all, in the practical context of tourism the push factors forces the person to realize the need of breaking away the daily tasks. Once realized his intentions to travel, the tourist structures a specific imaginary of a place, which would meet his expectations and provide him with the necessary conditions. Thereat, the pull factors appear to catch tourist's attention and finally convince them to visit. The pull factors then might be addressed to the attractive attributes that the destination offers. Therefore it can be concluded, that it is crucial for a destination to establish considerable pull sources through which to catch tourist's attention, where building a proper destination image appears critical. Yet it must be noted, the pull factors are unlikely to meet the multiple different interests and preferences among different people. In this line, attention must be paid on the fact, that the destination management faces a great challenge to design its mixture of pull sources so, that they can be found attractive by multiple travelling motives (Kim & Lee, 2001).

3.4.   Branding

The relationship between destination image and destination branding has been an object of discussion by various authors (Garcia et al., 2012; Qu et al., 2011; Tasci & Kozak, 2006) who acknowledge the interrelation between the image and the brand of a place. In the today's dynamic environment and reported high growth in the tourism sector (Yaneva et al., 2013) the competitiveness between destinations raises in similarity, and the overall goal is to develop the place to a considerable destination choice. Therefore, tourists are offered a growing number of geographically different destinations, which however provide similar features, such as attractive accommodation, fascinating beaches, beautiful landscapes, etc. (Qu et al., 2011). Accordingly, the image of the destination choices appears similar within the understanding of a tourist. Hence, it becomes vital for a destination to develop its unique features, in order to differentiate from the other choices and stay competitive, and thus position as considerable tourist's decision (Morgan et al., 2002). In this respect, *"the concept of destination branding is critical for a destination to be identified and differentiated from alternatives in the mind of the target market"* (Qu et al., 2011:465).

Branding a destination is a recent phenomena (Blain et al., 2005) and is generally aimed to stand and maintain the tourism values of the particular place, in terms of various touristic features that the destination possesses, such as resources and attractions (Aaker, 1991 in Blain et al., 2005; Yaneva et al., 2013). Building upon Ritchie and Ritchie's (1998) work, Blain et al. (2005) provide a complex definition of the nature of a destination brand and argue, that it is *"a name, symbol, logo, word mark 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 the destination experience" (Blain et al., 2005:329). This definition sustains the idea that the functions of the brand do not end with the establishment of recognizable features; rather, it comprises of 'promises' made to the receiver (the tourist) for an unique experience. Thus, the destination brand draws specific imaginary in the mindset of a tourist and so guarantees to meet the expectations, although *"promise is not necessarily a guarantee"* (Blain et al., 2005:329). It is then a responsibility of the destination management to establish the brand so, that the tourist's anticipation and will be met. Therefore, later on the paper draws focus on the functions in the branding context that the local institution executes.

Scholars refer to country branding as an instrument for positioning and developing country's economic, political, and social conditions (Che-Ha et al., 2016). Considering the fact that 46 out of 100 world's largest economies are companies, not countries, Gilmore (2002) suggests, that academics and practitioners might think of country branding the same way, as they think of multinationals. Yet, although any branding practices are understood by means of economic and social improvement (Che-Ha et al., 2016; Pike & Page, 2014), place branding differs from the corporate branding due to the multiple entities that hold interests in the system (Kavaratzis, 2009; Sartori et al., 2012) and as Hankinson (2007) argued, the cooperation nature of the process (in Zavatarro & Adams, 2016). Place branding practices are theoretically and practically seen as a tool to combat the growing competition and to attract visitors, in order for a destination to stay competitive and to build a recognizable brand (Zenker & Jacobsen, 2015). In that sense, building a proper destination brand turns out to be a critical component to establish a successful destination model of a country. The successful pattern of country's national development through branding practices finds reflection and appears in real-life examples. Gilmore (2002) presents the case of Spain, in which he underlines the transformation of the country. In that sense this case is found related the the present research's objectives by means of the similar purpose – reconstruction of country's destination image. The main factor for success, Gilmore argues, rests in the true existence of the country's attributes, in terms of tourism features and predisposition, or advertisements. Hence, the possession of national tourism resources within the context of country branding is considered greatly important, in order to exert branding practices and to successfully evoke national tourism development.

However, it has been argued that *"resources alone are not enough to make a territory competitive"* (Rinaldi & Cavicchi, 2014:158). The authors further assert, that in order for a brand to achieve effectiveness, the stakeholder's engagement is vital. The success of place branding practices is proportional to the level of

cooperation between involved entities (Rinaldi & Cavicchi, 2014), where the centered actor is the local management organization (Magaš, 2010). Therefore, the paper ahead examines the nature and the crucial role of the local DMO in a destination branding context as a coordinating entity, as well as the the extent to which the destination managers may contribute to eventual destination image reconstruction and alter the brand of a country.

3.5.   The role of the DMO in branding a destination

A destination management organization (DMO) is a local network of stakeholders in the tourism industry, whose operation is based on cooperation practices (Holešinská, 2013) and the ultimate goal of this network is management and prosperity of the destination in the context of tourism (Magaš, 2010; Holešinská, 2013; Dwyer, 2017). However, the traditional roles of destination management organizations have been widened and are at present far broader. Thus the DMO has become an entity with large scope of operational functions (Bhandari et al., 2016).

Initially, the acronym 'DMO' stood for 'Destination Marketing Organization', but is nowadays understood also as 'Destination Management Organization' (Gretzel et al., 2006), which in turn implies a complex scope of activities and responsibilities, including destination branding (Pike, 2004; 2005). Accordingly, destination branding is an integral part of the DMO's practices and its main goal is creating a distinctive product, which gives a lead of the particular destination among other possible choices (Pike, 2005 in Garcia et al., 2012). In order to provide understanding on the roles of a DMO and then try to assume how would these roles serve to the objectives of this study, ahead is provided a summary of the common DMO's goals and functions. Beyond promotional practices, the challenges that the DMO meets along its operational work have been defined by Magaš (2010) in various aspects: (1) Socio-cultural aspect - accent on cultural diversity toward development; (2) Technological development - implication of recent technological growth (online networks) for communication with the targeted market; (3) Integral planning - building strategies for plan implementation. The existence of DMOs has been witnessed for many years, but recently a growing number of institutions are being established (Pike, 2004), as the need of destination competition has gotten fiercer and the scope of choices has become larger than ever (Qu et al., 2011). In order to differentiate a particular destination in an environment of similar features and attributes, and severe competition, the development of unique characteristics is crucial (Morgan et al., 2002) and applying the concept of destination branding is vital to distinguish the place from alternatives (Qu et al., 2011). Therefore, since it is argued that *"ultimately, the role*

of a DMO must be to enhance the long term competitiveness of the destination" (Pike, 2004:39) and that the application of destination branding is critical in a high competitive setting (Blain et al., 2005; Garcia et al., 2012; Campelo et al., 2014), the management entity is the existing body to take measures and set the destination on top of the list of possible choices.

However, the local DMO faces a number of challenges, due to the widened range of responsibilities, caused by the transition from destination marketing to destination management organization (Gretzel et al., 2006. The local institution in charge undertakes a number of managing operations to develop the destination (Pike, 2005 in Garcia, et al., 2012), such as place branding, information providing and promotional practices. Thus the the local DMO stays in the center of a complex system of stakeholders (Wang, 2008 in Zavatarro & Adams, 2016) and the destination managers became liable for *"creating sense of a place, because people can develop affective ties to a destination"* (Zavatarro & Adams, 2016:672). In this respect, it is important to understand the strategic branding activities of the local managers, aimed to build a brand of the place. Therefore, the current paper focuses primarily on the Bulgarian national DMO as an executive entity, which represent the pivot of the entire network of stakeholders and attempts to understand their current branding practices. Finally, the paper suggests an overall framework for the management of destination Bulgaria, which is purposed to rebuild the image and the national brand of the country.

Zavatarro & Adams (2016) identify 3 main challenges met by the destination management organization: lack of experience, manager's uncertainty about the content and the audience of the campaign, and challenges concerning political factors, such as insufficient support and low budget. Besides, the state category of a DMO is quasi-autonomous, which suggests close interaction with both the government and the private sector (Moe, 2001 in Zavatarro & Adams, 2016). This would mean, that the legal status of the local DMO implies collaboration between these entities from both the public and the private sector, and poses another great challenge to the destination managers to meet all demands it is charged to deal with.

Although the role of the DMOs in governing destinations has been examined by various scholars (Blain et al., 2005; Pike, 2005; Garcia et al., 2012; Magaš, 2010; Niu et al., 2015; Dwyer et al., 2017) and a number of them focused particularly on branding practices (Pike, 2004; Blain et al., 2005; Garcia et al., 2012; Campelo, 2014) an insufficient attention seem to have been paid to the DMO's activities in a destination re-branding setup. Therefore, the following subsection aims to summarize the theoretical framework on destination image, tourist behavior and branding and ultimately benefit the gap within the literature on destination re-branding.

3.6.   Place re-branding: toward conceptual framework

The current subsection combines the knowledge on destination image, tourist motivation and behavior and DMO's branding practices exposed above, in order to create a theoretical framework for destination re-branding. The main purpose of the model is to structure particular procedure and to eventually serve as an applicable instrument for prospective destination image and country brand reconstructions. Furthermore, the theoretical framework will later be adopted as a mechanism to analyze the collected material.

The severe competition for tourists' attention between destinations over the past decade, as discussed in various contemporary tourism researches, has strengthened the requirements of 'the perfect destination' that will at the end settle among tourists' final decisions. Since it has been argued, that in order for a place to stay competitive in this current fierce challenge among destinations, *"unique image of a destination needs to be regarded as an important brand association to influence the image of a destination brand"* (Qu et al., 2011:466), this research adopts as a rule, that the place-branding practices must be only aimed towards creating a unique image through putting accent on the exceptional attributes of the destination. Consequently, a potential re-branding practices have to be regarded as efforts to prevent or remodel the existing branding strategy and make the remarkable features of the destination prominent to the tourist audience. In this sense, the local entity is the one in charge to create a preliminary plan for achieving the goals and successfully re-brand the destination, where the ultimate outcome would is positioning the destination within the list of choices (Morgan et al., 2002).

To brand a destination, the sender of the branding information (i.e. the destination marketers; DMO) first of all needs to identify those characteristics of the particular place, that distinguish the destination and help it excel amongst the rest. Then, the consumers (i.e. tourists) build their perceptions of the destination upon what has been projected by the marketers. Finally, the receiver (i.e. the tourist) evaluates the information in both affective and cognitive way (see 3.1.2) and starts making positive brand associations. Thus the consumer begins to have positive attitude toward the destination and recognizes it among alternatives (Qu et al., 2011). This paper tries to adapt the statements above to a concrete scenario, where a destination changes its image, due to failure misunderstood unique tourism features.

Considering the gap in the literature for destination re-branding, it is attempted to bring new knowledge, combining the existing insights among the literature, exposed above. However, this paper argues that within a re-branding strategy there should be an additional initial element of action, which helps discover the current

image of the destination. This addition is felt vital for potential re-branding practices, as it defines those brand associations, which forced the need of re-branding. As there is a lack in the literature of a concrete action plan, which would benefit future academics and practitioners as a guiding tool for their re-branding intentions, Figure 3 suggests a framework of the re-branding procedure, that this paper sustains.
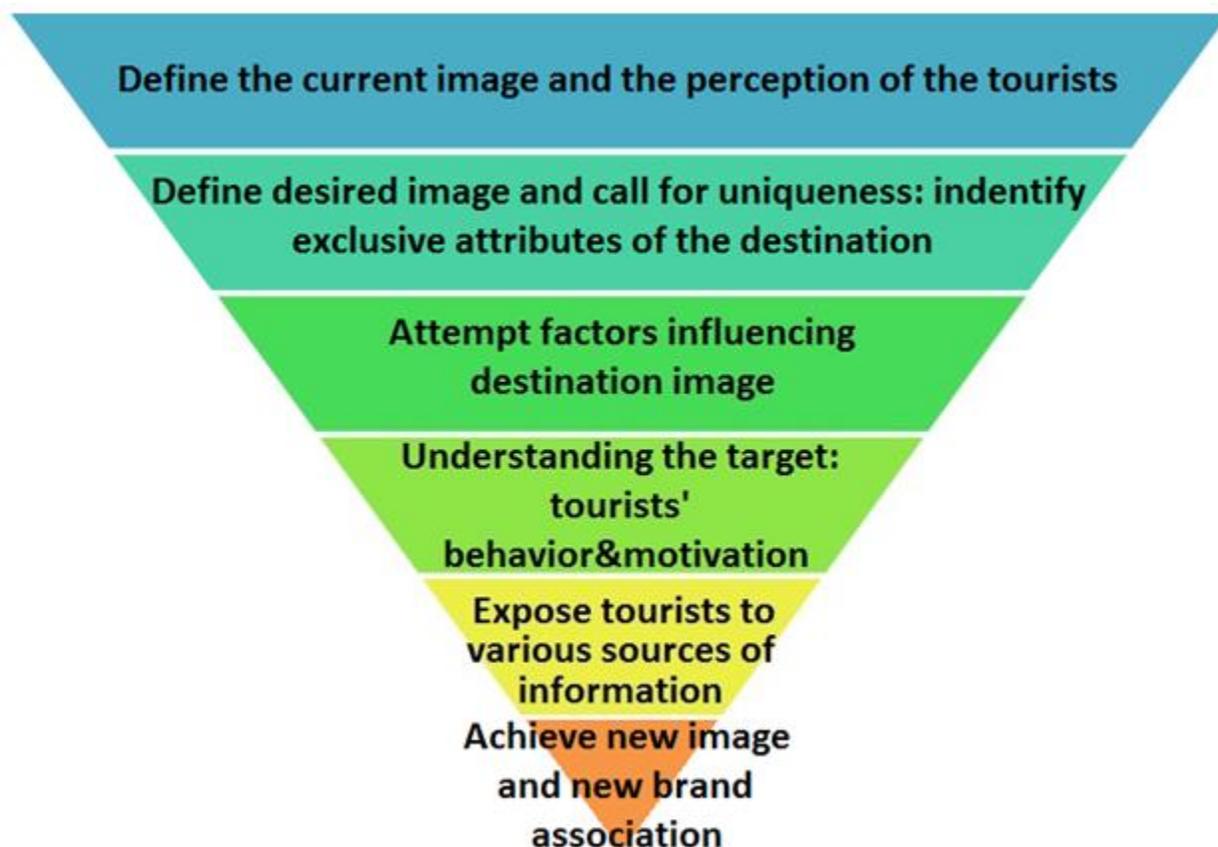
Figure 3: An overall framework of re-branding process (self-made)

The linear character of the model stands for its nature of a project based initiative, that might be applied by local destination managers. This would mean, that eventual re-branding campaign has settled in the beginning strategic goals, starting point and ultimate result, which are to be achieved through following certain steps. In this sense, figure 3 suggests particular series of actions put in particular order, that must be followed by the executor of the re-branding project. The triangular shape of the model describes the sequence of the actions from broad to specific, which the stages of the re-branding practices follow. The suggested framework starts with defining the current image in order for the executors to estimate the degree of the problem. This

means that the initial phase represents an activity, which comprises of extensive research to identify people's perceptions and associations with the destination. In this way, the problematic aspects are to be defined at the earliest stage of the re-branding process, which benefits the forthcoming stage of identifying attributes to tackle the problem. Then, each subsequent stage entails more and more specific actions of understanding the influential factors, ascertain concrete target audience and understand its needs and preferences, and then defining particular way to serve branding information.

Since the image of the destination triggers the perception of the brand (Qu et al., 2011), for eventual re-branding campaign it is then important to know the present vision of the particular place. Therefore the study argues, that in order to change the brand associations, first the current image and perception among consumers must be defined. Thus the management organization would have better understanding where the problem roots and what needs to be changed. Secondly, it is important to define a role model of a good image (Gallarza et al., 2002) and then design the desired overall image of the destination. In order to do that, at this stage the entity in charge must identify the unique attributes and possessions of the particular place (Morgan et al., 2002; Blain et al., 2005), upon which the new association to the destination will be made. As the literature earlier suggested, these features are aimed to differentiate the place among other relevant choices. Ultimate goal is to influence both the cognitive and affective tourist evaluations and head toward building new overall perception of the destination (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Qu et al., 2011). In the third stage of re-branding, the actor (i.e. the DMO) is meant to approach those agents, that have been defined as having impact on the image. Since it is suggested, that not only recognizing sources of influence, but also to realize the tourist actions in behavioral context, the next phase in accordance is understanding tourists' behavior and motivation. The variety and type of the sources, through which information is served has significant impact on the perceptual/cognitive evaluation (Hypothesis 4 and 5, Baloglu & McCleary, 1999:874). Therefore, having already defined the attributes and the contents, at the next stage the sender decides on particular types and sources of information. At last, a new perception of the place and new brand associations (e.g. symbols, names, signs) are to be achieved.

The framework above is considered applicable to countries, whose destination image is perceived in an incorrect way by the tourists and thus are an object of different associations. As a consequence, the particular place becomes addressed to various elements, that differ from the actual appearance of the destination. In this respect, the Bulgarian destination image seems still unfavorable and pending significant changes. In the context of a country scholars argued, that the smaller the country is the more achievable potential branding

would be, as the small population in a country means, the managing functions are to be easier (Gilmore, 2002). Considering the characteristics of Bulgaria, future re-branding practices would be completely applicable and relevant. However, no actions toward this goal seem to be applied to date. Therefore, the model above will be later used as a main framework in the analytical part and the sequence of the different phases will be implemented as a leading structure.

4.   Methodology

This section defines the methodological techniques that have been used in this research in order to achieve the final goal and to answer the problem question: *"What is the way destination Bulgaria is perceived among Danes and how could this image and brand association be changed?"*. The methodological choices that the researcher adopts in his research can not be rated as true or false, but can be categorized as more or less useful, in the context of their applicability to the particular study (Silverman, 2006). In other words, some particular selection of methods may be more suitable for the concrete investigation than others. Therefore, the methods that were felt relevant to the present paper were not only exposed, but also argumentations behind the methodological selection is provided.

4.1.   Philosophy of science

Although philosophical paradigms remain to a large extent implicit within the context of the research, it is still essential to the study as they influence the researcher's worldview, which in turn results in particular approach to the problem (Creswell, 2014). This research attempts to explore the present image of destination Bulgaria on the Danish tourism market. It is therefore crucial to identify and reason the philosophical ideas, which have been adopted as guiding set of beliefs (Guba, 1990). Scholars (e.g. Lincoln et al., 2011) generally distinguish five main philosophical paradigms - (1) positivism, (2) post-positivism, (3) critical theory, (4) constructivism, and (5) participatory. Each of these paradigms consists of ontological, epistemological and methodological components, that give answers to vital questions for the research (Creswell, 2014). These perspectives are a point of discussion ahead in this chapter.

The goal of this paper is to identify people's attitudes and behavior in a tourism context and to explore their associations with a destination, as well as evaluations of a destination image. In this line of thinking, constructivism was chosen as guiding philosophy, as understanding informant's point of view rests in its basis. Therefore, the constructivist philosophical paradigm will best serve as a tool to gain knowledge about

the perceptions of a place. Normally, constructivism as a philosophy is an approach, which is applicable to various qualitative studies, where the researcher seeks to identify a number of different meanings and views, then narrow them down into fewer general categories (Creswell, 2014). The main idea behind constructivism is to establish understanding that there are multiple realities existing in individual's mind, to consider the reality as sequence of individuals' actions (Bryman, 2012) and to interpret the meanings of others about the reality (Creswell, 2014). The way a constructivist makes interpretations about the world is through engaging the environment he interprets (Crotty, 1998) and pose broad and general, open-ended questions, as to let the participants gain a meaning of the situation (Creswell, 2014). Though, these meanings are reflected by the historical and cultural background of the participant. Therefore, the researcher engages with the context he interprets, so as to gain his own experience and understanding (Guba, 1990). Therefore, it was attempted to join the interview informant's environment through being present and meeting them in person. Besides, the interview guide was designed so, that it the questions do not limit the responses and let the respondents drawn upon their own reality. The essentiality of the existing realities then evokes understanding the constructivist paradigm as a system of ontological, epistemological and methodological beliefs (Guba, 1990).

Ontology has to do with questions, such as *what is the nature of reality?* (Guba, 1990) or *what is there that can be know?* (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Guba & Lincoln (2013:39) argue the interdependence between the individual and the reality in the context of constructivism: *"Change the individuals and you change the reality."* The authors further claim, that the ontological assumptions depend not only on the individual, but also on the particular paradigm that the researcher applies: *"change the context and you change the reality"*. In other words, the 'truth' about the reality or realities is multiple and exists in various shapes in the mindset of different individuals or different contexts they live in. Hence, the different ontological presuppositions exist in various forms, depending on particular individuals' perceptions. In the current paper these variety of ontological beliefs emerge as reflections of people's perception about the destination image of a place. Adopting constructivism, the researcher acknowledge the multiple nature of reality and agrees, that the research findings will be based on relativism as it is *"the basic ontological presupposition of constructivism"* (Lincoln & Guba, 2013:39). Therefore, in the present study it is counted on different views and perceptions of the place. So there is no 'ultimate truth' about the destination image of Bulgaria, rather variety of opinions, upon which a final evaluation is done.

Epistemology in turn deals with theory-related questions, trying to explore the relationship between the researcher and the object under research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), where the answers are predetermined

by the ontological questions about the nature of reality (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). In the context of constructivism, the epistemological presupposition has to do with what researcher's relation (Guba, 1990) or transaction (Lincoln & Guba, 2013) to the 'multiple realities' defined in the ontological assumptions, as to achieve in-depth understanding and take advantage of it in answering the research question. Subjectivity then is the main determining feature of epistemology, which would mean that the transaction between the researcher and the researched is individual and depending on various indicators from the researcher's background (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Although objectivity in a constructive research is difficult to achieve or even impossible (Guba, 1990), as it deals with subjective 'truths', the researcher still has to evaluate the variety of subjective truths in an objective way (Gray, 2014). Therefore, in order to avoid subjectivity to a large extent, it was tried in this research to evaluate and pay attention on all perceptions of Bulgaria. Thus, in order to extract an objective overview of all existing realities, there is a need to explore each point of view constructed in individuals' mind. In this way, the multiple truths, that exist largely in the form of Danish individuals' opinions about the destination, were processed and structured, as to identify concrete patterns among the informants.

Then, the *methodology* questions the researcher's approach to gain knowledge or *"How does one go about acquiring knowledge?"*, where the answer one may give is restricted by the earlier posed ontological (what reality actually is?) and epistemological (transaction between the researcher and researched) questions (Lincoln & Guba, 2013:37). *"Choosing a methodology is a time-consuming, personal and reflective process"* (Goulding, 1999:870), and so choosing the right methodological approach that best fits the concrete research is hardly achievable. The selection of methods is individual, as different researchers have their own way to construct the 'truth' (Stern, 1994 in Goulding, 1999). A constructivist researcher interacts with the object of investigation (i.e. the 'realities'), in order to gain profound understanding and answer the main research question (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Finally, a 'true reality' is produced by the investigator, which is based on the informants' constructions (Schwandt, 1994:118 in Goulding, 1999). In that sense, the researcher tries to gain understanding on the 'truths' individuals have constructed about destination Bulgaria. Then, based on these truths the investigator constructs his own meaning of the reality is. Considering the complexity of the methodological procedure (Goulding, 1999), the researcher needs to structure the study, and a proper way to do so is to create a systematic model of procedure, which serves then as a guiding tool for the entire research. In this sense, the researcher needs to cycle back to the initial stages of the research (Gray, 2014). Therefore, the paper ahead proceeds with an explanation of the particular design of this research.

4.2. Research design

The design of a research refers to a system of processes, which helps the researcher to construct the plan for his investigation (Gray, 2014), or a guiding plan, that the entire study is based upon (Creswell, 2014). The elements of the research design therefore represent the highlights of the whole research process), which would mean, that it consists of major pivots that bear the paper toward answering the research question (Gray, 2014. Furthermore, the design of a research follows certain strategic sequence, which leads from one point to another (Yin, 2009). In this sense, the thesis ahead indicates consecutive points of emphasis in investigating *"What is the way destination Bulgaria is perceived among Danes and how could this image and brand association be changed?"*, outlined in Figure 4:

Gaining new knowledge:
image re-construction

↑

Interpretative analysis

↑

Data gathering

↑

Methodological choices

↑

Understanding the field:
literature review

↑

Formulate particular focus
and research question

↑

Seek for problem
confirmation: pilot study

↑

Identify problem area
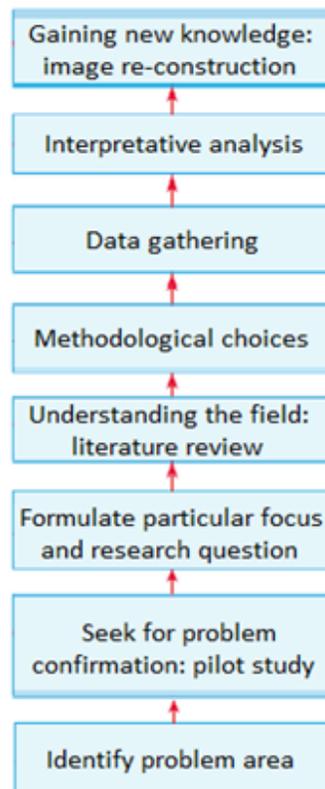
Figure 4: *Consecutive stages of knowledge construction (self-made)*

To explain in short, researcher's personal experience and observation were the driving forces in identifying the problematic area. Then, the study needed real-life confirmation about the issue, therefore a pilot study was conducted (later explained in detail) in order to witness the perception of Bulgaria among Danes. As to formulate the particular problem question that the study investigates, the researcher then attempted to

broaden the initial preliminary investigation and seeked for additional data sources in the network. The next stage draws upon the inductive approach to the thesis and entails a review of related theoretical concepts, such as destination image formation, tourist behavior and place branding. Then it was decided on concrete methodology, which presents philosophical choices and predetermines techniques for the data collection process. After that, the respondents were approached inductively, trying to discover common structures or themes (Thomas, 2006) and make sense of it by processing and interpreting. At the end, the analysis comprises of *"detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes or a model through interpretations"*, done by the researcher (Thomas, 2006:238). Ultimately, a new piece of knowledge is constructed with regards to the destination image reconstruction and place re-branding practices. All in all, the findings of this research are a product of reflecting upon theoretical claims and interpreting the gathered information.

4.3. Inductive approach

Within a constructive philosophical understanding, the literature suggests that the research process is mainly inductive, where *"the inquirer generates meaning from the data collected in the field"* (Crotty, 1998 in Creswell, 2014:38). Thomas (2006) defines the inductive approach as a systemized process of analyzing in which the analysis is led by certain goals. In this way the researcher understands the setting of the researched field and then brings his understandings to the analysis. The major purpose of this approach is to allow the investigator to construct meaning from frequent and hegemonic patterns of beliefs among others, and at the end *"to develop a model or theory about the underlying structure of experiences"* (Thomas, 2006:238).

Authors claim, that the researcher construct meaning from the collected data in order to benefit his own research and achieve the goals of the study (Goulding, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Creswell, 2014). Hence, the larger the extent of diversity of the information is, the more reliable the derived meaning out of it would be. Since the research area of this paper is strictly relative and multiple truths exist, it is as mentioned above extremely difficult to escape the scope of subjectivity. Therefore, it was tried to expand the diversity of the informants, as to try to construct own understanding of reality upon numerous meanings and perceptions about destination Bulgaria. The analysis then is based on researcher's own interpretation of the respondent's subjective constructions of 'truths' and detects patterns among the multiple meanings, which are taken into account as an objective reality. As was earlier discussed, the subjective nature of a qualitative data originates as a result of the backgrounds of the respondents. Therefore, it was attempted to approach people with various backgrounds, which will be later explained in a separate section, dedicated to the qualitative data.

4.4. Qualitative data

This section aims to explain reasons behind the qualitative method selection as most applicable to the current thesis. Various authors acknowledge the applicability of qualitative methods for constructivist way (Blackler & Brown, 1983; Goulding, 1999; Creswell, 2014) to approach a research that examines individuals' views about social problem (Ragin, 1994; Creswell, 2014; Flick, 2007; Yin, 2011; Montello & Sutton, 2013). To summarize, qualitative data is the largely accepted method to interact and interpret with the multiple realities in a constructivist research (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, qualitative research approach was embraced as most relevant, as the present paper departs in an area of real-life problematic area. Moreover, in order to investigate the nature of the problem, the researcher needs to engage with actors from the field under research (i.e. participants in image evaluation). Additionally, qualitative methods are found as a vital procedure instrument for conducting studies in a tourism domain, as they imply use of theoretical concepts at earliest stages of the paper and finally emerge in the shape of research findings (Hannam & Knox, 2010).

4.4.1. Primary research

The primary research frames those practices, that imply an actual research process in which the researcher collects original data directly from the targeted respondents (Driscoll, 2011; Doyle, 2011). There are various applicable instruments for conducting a primary research, such as one-on-one interviews, surveys, observations, questionnaires (Doyle, 2011). The techniques of original data collection differ from the secondary data gathering, as the secondary research characterizes with applying already collected and used data, which is normally exhausted (Doyle, 2011). The primary research in turn suggests collecting firsthand data, instead of re-using already prepared information from a book, database or a journal. The final purpose of conducting a primary research is to produce new knowledge within the field of research, which can be verified by the participants and finally establish a basis for future investigations (Driscoll, 2011). Although it gathers up-to-date original information about the area of research, an inconvenience that the primary research technique causes is the time- and resource-consumption. Therefore, secondary data research was initially conducted, as to inform about already existing findings and avoid repetition of data gathering knowledge production (Driscoll, 2011). The applied primary research instruments in this paper are a pilot study, one-on-one interviews, as well as conducting a survey, which are to be discussed ahead.

4.4.1.1. Interviews

The interview, as a primary research technique may be generally explained as *"Asking participants questions in one-on-one or small group setting"* (Driscoll, 2011:154). Face-to-face qualitative interviews were conducted, where unrestricted questions were posed to the respondents in order to let them construct meanings upon their own experience (McCracken, 1988 in Creswell, 2014). Taking this suggestions into account, contacted were 12 tourism experts from Bulgaria, both academics and practitioners from different institutions. Due to various reasons however (thoroughly explained in the limitations section), answers were collected by a total of 5 professionals, among which only 4 of them agreed to spend time in answering the question guide one on-on-one. Only two of them though permitted to be recorded. It must be noted, that among these 4 interviews in person was the meeting with experts from the Bulgarian Ministry of Tourism, details about which will be later presented in the sample of participants subchapter. The criteria of choosing the respondent was based on their background of experts in tourism and Besides, the researcher's relation to the respondents was considered highly important, as it enhances the chance to get a positive answer for a meeting.

The decision for speaking with the respondents in their mother language (Bulgarian) was preliminary taken, with regards to the qualitative character of the interviews and not the least the significant language barrier that a conversation in English would have built. An English interview was definitely going to bring advantage in terms of data processing and the need of translation transcriptions, but it would have inevitably harmed the quality of the collected materials as well. The interviews took between 20 and 40 minutes and the interview plan was standard - generally posing preliminary designed 6 semi-structured questions (Appendix 10; 11). The interview guide was designed in a qualitative way, consisting of semi-structured and open-ended questions, aimed to extract respondent's personal views on the problem (Creswell, 2014). The sequence of the questions was coordinated by that of the overall framework of re-branding practices (Figure 3), which suggests that first the respondent's view about destination Bulgaria was tried to be extracted. Thereafter the questions started to become more and more concrete and relevant to the research problem of this paper. However, it must be noted, that sticking to the preliminary settled order was a great challenge, due to the open-ended character of the questions. Therefore, at one point all interviews turned into an open talk, yet still following the structure of the question guide. Eventually, this way of conducting the interviews managed to elicit views and opinions from the respondents, which grounded a basis for an interpretative analysis.

4.4.1.2. Survey

Another tool to conduct a primary research is the survey approach, which comprises of *"asking participants about their opinions and behaviors"* (Driscoll, 2011:154). Over the recent decade web surveys have become a popular way to gather multiple-respondent data, as less costly and much more efficient method, as well as the ability to reach many respondents in a short time (DeLeeuw, 2005). Moreover, web surveys could easily discuss a number of points with the participants and *"the research agenda can expand to include important topics that do not attract support from the usual sources"* (Couper & Miller, 2008). Therefore, designed were 7 questions (Appendix 7), aimed to explore the perception of destination Bulgaria that Danish people have. It must be noted, that getting in touch with native Danish respondents represented a great challenge for the researcher, due to the narrow scope of Danish acquaintances. The questions were selected in relation to the overall framework for re-branding practices (Figure 3). The general idea behind the survey guide was to explore the perception about Bulgaria, basic behavioral information about the sample (e.g. frequency of travelling abroad, preferences in a destination), and to understand how these sample of Danes have built their sense of the country.

Despite the fact, that Denmark is one of the countries with highest level of spoken English as a foreign language (http://studyindenmark.dk), the questions were designed in the respondent's mother language (Danish), the motives for which are identical to those that drove the choice of the language for the interviews. By a reason of the researcher's background, the questions were first designed in English, than literally translated by a Danish native speaker (Appendix 7). The survey was running for a total of 30 days (between 24th April and 24th May), and the questions were designed in a sequence as the overall theoretical framework of this paper (Figure 3). Also, as to test the reliability of the data and avoid subjectivity, although difficult in a qualitative setup (Creswell, 2014), the strategy of selection of respondents was to pick over people from different ages, social statuses and backgrounds. Therefore, the survey was conducted among Danish respondents from all ages of the adulthood, statuses and education levels. Moreover, into account must be taken the fact, that the responses of the 'nonrespondents' eventually affected the overall result of the survey (Creswell, 2014).

4.4.1.3. Pilot study

It must be noted, that the the primary idea for this thesis was employing dental tourism as an instrument for re-branding. In order to evidence the need of a research in this direction, as advised by the scientific supervisor, a pilot study was conducted among 10 Danish participants. This experimental initial research however indicated, that for various reasons none of them would undertake any trip to Bulgaria for having a dental care (Appendix 1). Yet, the objective to explore the perception of Bulgaria among Danish people remained the same. As the study attempts to explore how Bulgaria is perceived among Danes, the pilot study was conducted with respondents from Denmark. For the questions about the image of the country, the respondents were intendedly asked to give straight and sincere answers in the form of keywords and associations, in order for the researcher to extract an overall idea of the current vision of the country. Although rejected the initial topic for cheaper dental tourism opportunities in Bulgaria, the pilot study yet confirmed another issue about the general perception of Bulgaria among Danes and the study was found applicable.

4.4.1.4. Fieldwork

The term fieldwork is generally referred to a process of gathering anthropological data by the researcher, conducted whilst present in the field under research, and the goal is to practical knowledge through firsthand observations and interviews (Hastrup & Hervik, 1993 in Amit, 2003). The field of research then is traditionally understood as *"a place in the anthropological imagination"* (Knowles, 2003:54), which suggests that the researcher actually engages with the environment of investigation, so that he can practically experience the researched domain (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992 in Amit, 2003). In this respect, a fieldwork was conducted in order to collect the necessary data for this research and to engage the field through social interactions and meetings in person (Knowles, 2003). Being present and personal interaction for one-on-one interviews was considered crucial, with regards to the qualitative structure of the open-ended question (Creswell, 2014). As noted earlier, the respondents were contacted in advance and it must be pointed out, that reaching the contact persons in any digital way (emails, phones, text messages) was barely possible, due to their busy timetables considering their professional status of professors. Therefore, the fieldwork significantly reduced the chance of rejection. Also, perhaps even more important - the fieldwork granted the opportunity irritation and shortened answers, which would have resulted in incomplete explanations and thus cut down the chances a fruitful open conversation. In this respect, conducting interviews in person was vital for this paper, as it admittedly enhanced the quality of the collected data, which will favor to the value of the findings.

4.4.2. Sample of participants

The current subsection appears to give brief profile description of the respondents, who gave meaning to this thesis and made possible its investigation.

4.4.2.1. Bulgarian Ministry of Tourism

The contact person in the Bulgarian Ministry of Tourism was Mrs. Albena Metodieva - director for marketing, advertising and information in tourism. The department she manages is responsible for a number of marketing operations, including *"research of basic and promising markets", "developing and implementing of annual programme for national advertising", "organising the preparation of promotional materials showing Bulgaria as an attractive tourist destination"* (tourism.government.bg). These qualifications and functions of hers drove the belief that Mrs. Metodieva is one, whose stance toward the problem of this thesis will benefit the goals of the paper.

4.4.2.2. Professors

It was tried to reach experts in tourism by the extent of relevance between the field they operate in and the thesis' area of research.

1) Associate Professor Todorka Toncheva - Chairman of the "Department of Economics in Tourism" in "Faculty of Economics of Infrastructure" at UNWE, Sofia, Bulgaria. Interviewed in person, duration of the meeting - 29:45, recorded.

2) Associate Professor Elka Dogramadzhieva - Expert in Territorial research of tourism, Tourism resources and development of tourism products, Planning and managing attractions and tourist destinations. Member of the "Department of Tourism" in the "Geographic Department" at Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, Sofia, Bulgaria. Interviewed in person, duration of the meeting - 34:26, recorded.

3) Professor Doctor of Geographic Sciences Maria Vodenska - Expert in History and Theory of Tourism, Methods of Study in Tourism, Influence of Tourism, Intermediary tourism services, Development, conducting and carrying out of scientific projects in tourism. Member of the "Department of Tourism" in the "Geographic Department" at Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, Sofia, Bulgaria. Contacted on the phone, data sent via email.

Associate Professor Elenita Velikova - Expert in alternative tourism, SPA&Wellness and rural tourism. Member of the "Department of Economics in Tourism" in "Faculty of Economics of Infrastructure" at UNWE, Sofia, Bulgaria. Interviewed in person, duration of the meeting - approximately 20 minutes, notes taken. After completing the interview, the notes were processed on a document as a text, sent to the professor and agreed to be used in the form they appear.

4.4.3.   Secondary research

It was argued, that the secondary research stands for reviewing already collected, processed and analyzed data (Doyle, 2011), which does not have the capability of producing new knowledge or findings, but rather has the function of narrow the research scope and specify a concrete problem formulation (Driscoll, 2011). Conducting a secondary research might be generally addressed to making a re-research (Glass, 1976). Therefore, the materials that are drawn upon a secondary research are *"collected for another purpose, usually by someone other than the researcher"* (Montello & Sutton, 2013:62). The secondary data was picked over with considering what contribution may the findings bring to the current paper's objectives. In this respect, reviewed were previous researches on the Bulgarian image among foreigners, Bulgaria as a brand, effects of the trend Sunny Beach equals Bulgaria etc. The study compiled primarily digital sources - online libraries, web-based literature, books and journals from the network, that supply the research with relevant information as to grasp the available data and decide on a particular focus of the paper (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012).

4.5.   Research analysis

Qualitative researches are traditionally complex and cover a wide scope of philosophical foundations and methodological procedures and there are no established rules to process qualitative data (Seers, 2017). Approaching the collected material in a qualitative setup is rather an individual choice of the researcher, who applies particular research techniques that are considered relevant to the particular study. Yet, the qualitative data processing and analysis own certain features, that appear common in most of the researches. Information organizing and structuring processes rest on reading the transcripts and data texts several times, after which the researcher identifies patterns and similarities among the respondent's answers, and apply this model to the analytical structure (Seers, 2017). In other words, the researcher adopts particular categories of discussion across the gathered material and then use them as underpinnings for the analysis procedure.

The analytical process of qualitative material is mainly based on personal interpretation (Richards & Morse, 2007), begins as soon as the data material is collected (Harboe, 2011) and continues throughout the entire research (Bradley et al., 2007). Although these are generally agreed characteristics of conducting a qualitative analysis, there is no particular framework to proceed (Bradley et al., 2007). The analytical process of this research's data was initiated once the data collection was completed. After processing and analyzing the transcriptions and emailed question answers in the form of texts, identified were similar themes that were touched upon by the respondents. These similarities were then adopted as a further object of discussion, as to develop in-depth interpretation of the materials (Seers, 2017). Although the analysis of this research mainly rests on detailed reading and interpretation of the gathered data material (Thomas, 2006), the literature background, discussed in the third chapter of the paper, serve as a tool to address the findings to previously established theoretical insights. The structure of the analysis follows the sequence of Figure 3 and discusses the data in accordance to the stages of destination re-branding practices. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the results of the analysis and proceeds in the same, proposed by the overall theoretical framework (Figure 3).

4.6. Validity and Reliability

The existing realities and truths are observed by the researcher, but these observations are necessarily subjective, as they are only seen through theoretical and conceptual lens (Silverman, 2006). Therefore, the research's validity and reliability must be accredited as a significant methodological considerations that lead to meaningful interpretations of the material (Creswell, 2014).

Even though it is more applicable in a quantitative study, the validity component might be also measured in a qualitative setting (Golafshani, 2003), and is depending on the particular paradigm chosen by the researcher (Creswell & Miller, 2000 in Golafshani, 2003). Generally, the validity of a qualitative research measures the quality of the paper and thus evaluates the trustworthiness of the findings (Roberts et al., 2006). The validity of qualitative research needs to be tested, when conducting interviews was the method to gather data material (Roberts et al., 2006). For this research, the lack of records of several conducted interviews, due to reasons discussed in the limitation section, escalate the uncertainties about the validity of the data. Thus it becomes problematic for the researcher to avoid biases upon researcher's data processing and interpretation. To overcome this issue, the researcher needs to stay distanced and not reflective to those materials, whose validity may not be practically tested (Roberts et al., 2006). Therefore, to minimize biases

within the data collection, the analytical interpretations remained less-reactive to the information that was for certain reasons not recorded.

Another way to avoid concerns about the validity of the data in the context of a qualitative research is the triangulation of the data, which generally refers to applying multiple tools for conducting the research, such as combination of theories, methods and data sources (Creswell, 2014; Halcomb & Andrew, 2005 and Williamson, 2005 in Roberts et al., 2006). In other words, the validity of a qualitative research frames the extent, to which the selected procedure methods managed to investigate the object under research (Punch, 1998 in Roberts et al., 2006). In this respect, the current paper combines various theoretical views and data collecting methods, as to reduce the concern about the quality of the study (Golafshani, 2003).

Although it may be argued, that the variety of languages that differ from English is a trait of irregularity, it has been argued that *"any measuring device is valid if it does what it is intended to"* (Carmines & Zeller, 1979:12). In other words, in the name of achieving the goals of a study, taking a risk for any suspicion about inaccuracy may be justified. Moreover, an indicator for a valid information can be the employment of various information sources (i.e. triangulation), which are not in contradiction. Another factor that increases the overall validity of the paper is the researcher's independency when looking upon the collected raw data materials (e.g. objective attitude, correct transcriptions, independent interpretation) (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, the methodological choice to interact verbally with the respondents in their mother language must be understood as an indication for high level of validity, rather than a signal for mistrust.

According to Patton (2001, in Golafshani, 2003), a research is considered valid as long as the data is reliable. Reliability in a qualitative research then stands for *"the trustworthiness of the procedures and data generated"* (Stiles, 1993 in Roberts et al., 2006), and measures whether the results of the study overlap already existing materials (Bryman, 2001 in Roberts et al., 2006). The research will be considered reliable only if the results can be reproduced in different circumstances under similar methodology (Joppe, 2000 in Golafshani, 2003). Therefore, this paper tests the trustworthiness and reliability through gathering the necessary information in different settings (e.g. experts from different institutions; unrestricted background of survey respondents; multiple collecting sources). Yet, ultimate degree of validity and reliability is hardly achievable, but these components may be further enhanced and reestablished by the analysis (Creswell, 2014). It is claimed, that complete objectivity and detachment in a qualitative domain is impossible, but still achieving transparency of

the research process helps the reader to understand the objectives, theories, methods and analysis of the paper (Roberts et al., 2006).

4.7. Limitations

Undoubtedly, the most significant obstacles that was encountered during the methodological process was first to get in touch with the respondents for the one on one meetings. Even more challenging though was to convince them to set aside an hour of their time and arrange an interview. It must be declared, that the first attempt to contact the respondents was on the 1st of March, right before the first visitation to the field of investigation - in the period 02.03 to 15.03. The first trip was preliminary settled, apart from the purpose of the thesis. So, after failure to reach them digitally, it was decided to meet them in person in the institution they teach, and approached were a total of 6 experts from both academic and business domain. Due to considerations of unknown character, perhaps busyness and overloaded timetable, only 2 of them recalled the request, one of which did not accept the voice recording device. The greatest limitation during the fieldwork was the meeting with experts from the Bulgarian Ministry of Tourism, who also rejected to be recorded, so the source to memorize the information was taking notes. The reasons behind these rejections are hard to track, but they might be due to an unpleasant experience or precautions for eventual speculations with data. Finally, it is felt important to be noted, that a total of 3 respondents agreed to answer the set of interview questions via email, and no responses have arrived to date.

Although not recorded, the interviews during the first and the second visitation in Bulgaria were highly fruitful and brought a lot of benefits to the analysis. In order avoid any doubts of speculative transfer of information, after each interview the participants were kindly asked to agree that their contacts will be announced in the part of appendixes.

4.8. Ethical considerations

Although the researcher may not need permission in different situations, he still has to make sure to take into account certain ethical guidelines for conducting the investigation (Driscoll, 2011). He argue, that generally, the ethics of a research need to follow three basic rules: *1) Voluntary participation; 2) Confidentiality and Anonymity; 3) Researcher bias*. In this regard, first of all any actions of putting pressure on any respondent were denied. Although ambitious to reach the contact persons more than once, it was tried to not be intrusive in any way. Secondly, despite the fact that the lack of voice records is considered as a major limitation,

unauthorized undercover recording without permission was not presumed. Then, the 'researcher bias' suggests a particular way of formulating the interview questions and subjective and dependent interpretation of the data, in order to extract information that will serve best to the research's objectives, which questions whether the researcher's personal stance and attitude to the problem may possibly cause variation on respondent's answer.

5. Analysis

The chapter ahead presents the data, gathered for the purpose of this research, which is to be discussed and analyzed using the earlier reviewed theoretical insights as a guiding frame and the empirical phase of the research - collected qualitative materials. The results presented below are conformed with the choice of methodological framework and the philosophical paradigm, selected as relevant to this research. Thus the analysis section below covers the subjective multiple realities/truths, which appeared in the shape of variety of meanings among individuals. Therefore, in order to minimize subjectivity, identified were concrete themes and patterns among the material from both Danish participants and Bulgarian experts from different institutions, which were an object of interpretative analysis, and the results were count on as objective truths. Yet, as the philosophy of science supposes, the qualitative components are strongly subjective and depending on internal factors, so no ultimate generalizations may be concluded (Yin, 2009). As a rule, not all the collected materials were analyzed and interpreted, as not all of the gathered information in a qualitative study can be used, and the data must be winnowed (Guest et al., 2012 in Creswell, 2014). Therefore, as presented in the section presenting the data processing and the analytical strategy, identified were certain similar themes within the data material, which have the role of basic underpinnings for the analysis ahead (Seers, 2017). Although interpretative, the analytical section proceeds on the basis of earlier discussed theoretical views, and associations to the theoretical concept are made so, that at the end it will help to ground new knowledge for eventual re-branding and destination image reconstruction practices.

5.1. Defining the current image of Bulgaria

Since the order of the analytical part follows the sequence of the overall framework of re-branding process (Fig. 5), which suggests at first defining the present destination image of Bulgaria. There was felt an urgent need to maintain what it was supposed in the problem section and maintained by the pilot study - the unpleasant perception of destination Bulgaria among Danish people. Therefore, in the following lines will be

reviewed and interpret comments in this regard, extracted by the three research instruments - the pilot study, the survey and the interviews, which indicated the understanding of Danish respondents and that of Bulgarian experts. It must be explained, that there is a certain particularity within the structure of the first part of the analysis. The approach to the collected data material was chosen by the researcher as most relevant to achieve the goals that were set earlier (Seers, 2017). The decision to do so may have affected the smooth readability of the text and could be considered by the reader as a great challenge. However, the main reason behind presenting the findings separately was to emphasize the variation among the different imaginaries about destination Bulgaria. Thus it was tried to provide clear view of the distinctive senses of the country. Therefore, at first presented were the findings of the pilot study, followed by those of the survey. These two research techniques tried to understand the perception of Danish tourists of Bulgaria and moreover indicated similar themes among the responses (Thomas, 2007; Seers, 2017), which in turn helped to establish an overall view of what this first analytical stage aims to define.
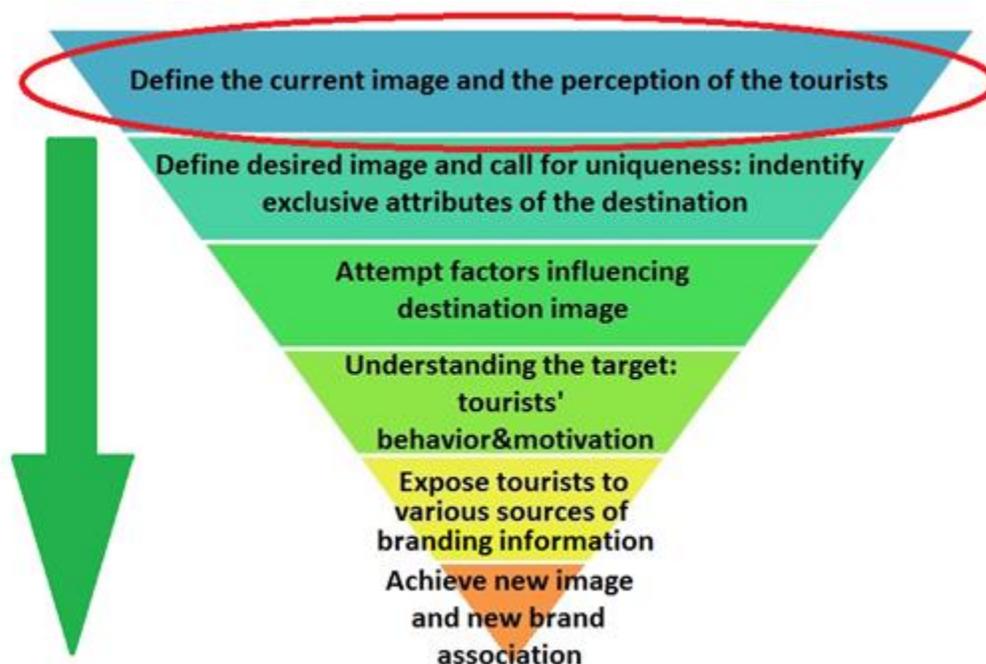
Figure 5: *Sequence of re-branding initiative of re-branding initiative* (Self-made, based on Figure 3.)

Pilot study indications

Although designed to elicit data, which would supply somewhat different research objectives, the study also displayed a disturbing trend for the perception of the country among Danish people. The answers provided

showed data, which describes respondents' *"sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination"* (Crompton, 1979). On the first question *"**Destination Bulgaria: how would you describe your perception of Bulgaria with a few association keywords?**"*, the vast majority of all 10 respondents (9 out of 10) claim, that they only associate destination Bulgaria with *"Cheap; Sunny Beach; Drunk people"* (Appendix 1, #1-10). Even more solid is the fact, that the popular summer resort "Sunny Beach" is present in almost all answers, provided by the Danish informants (Appendix 1, #1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10), which induces the meaning that this is the major attraction in Bulgaria. On the other hand, only a small minority revealed any knowledge other about attributes of the country other than most common associations - cheap summer vacation in Sunny Beach. The study exposes only two out of ten, who expressed familiarity on the second question *"**Did you know that Bulgaria actually possesses a very rich cultural heritage?**"* (Appendix 1). Jens for instance shares his impression of the Bulgarian culture in the form of *"really nice music, customs and cuisine. Also very difficult traditional dances"* (Appendix 1, #5), and Bitten tells that *"really nice music, customs and cuisine. Also very difficult traditional dances"* (Appendix 1, #7). However, these answers can be criticized and announced for *'sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions'* that are outdated, as the respondents here reflect on their erstwhile experience from *"about 20 years ago"* (Appendix 1, #5, #7), and the trend to maintain an image of *"cheap summer destination"* is more recent, *"from the beginning of the new millennium, after 2000"* (Appendix 3, Q3). This initial study triggered the feeling, that at present Bulgaria only raises unpleasant associations, such as low-cost beach destination.

A consideration of the findings revealed by the pilot study evoked a need of further investigation and deeper understanding on the Danes' perception of destination Bulgaria. Therefore, a survey was conducted in order to gain wider understanding of the image of the country in the minds of Danish people.

Survey indications

In order to extract an overall understanding for how Danes perceive destination Bulgaria, the survey was designed and given to 31 Danish respondents. As explained earlier, the questions start broadly and narrow to the particular focus of this paper.

The first question *"**Tager du ofte ud og rejse i din ferie? / Do you travel often for a vacation?**"*, represents a broad start of the question guide, which aimed to deliver a basic information of the respondent's background as tourists. This was done to verify the accuracy of the respondent's answer. Everyone except for two persons

answered with 'yes', which is a brief indicator for active tourism characteristics of 29 out of 31 respondents (Appendix 7, Q1).

Then the source and the accuracy of the forthcoming direct question *"Hvad forbinder du det land med? (f.eks. natur, strande, bjerge, prisniveau, kultur, historie) / What do you associate the country with?"* was predisposed with *"Har du nogensinde besøgt Bulgarien? / Have you ever visited Bulgaria?"*, as to eventually establish variation among meanings. Only a few of all respondents claimed they have ever visited Bulgaria, and respectively the overwhelming majority have never been in the country. Interpreting these indications would mean, that only a few Danish people of the interviewed know Bulgaria by first hand experience. Hence, all the other respondents have their perception built upon various sources (e.g. articles, books, movies etc.), which is a phenomenon that will later on be a point of departure of the analysis.

In similarity to what the pilot study showed, the survey's results largely demonstrate, that the respondents link the country to attributes, such as *"cheap", "summer", "Sunny beach", "drunk youngsterz", "corruption/criminality"* (Appendix 7, Q5). Reviewing comments like *"Sunny Beach (drinking and party)"* (#9)*, "beach, cheap, parties, alcohol"* (#19) or *"corruption, criminality"* (#12), which are given to represent 'associations with destination Bulgaria', evokes a number of questions, regarding the origin of these beliefs and the source of information that established them. Thus the results of the study triggers the feeling, that Danes would either consider Bulgaria as a choice for their summer vacation, mostly due to the low price level, or would not count on Bulgaria as a selection, based on the country's image of a place crowded with drunk adolescents. As noted earlier, the ontological beliefs about the nature of reality exist in various forms, and none of them could be acknowledged as ultimate truth (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Therefore, although the interpretations above are largely maintained by respondent's opinions, they can not be generalized and it is crucial to explore a multitude of individuals' views that have been constructed in their minds as realities.

In contradiction stay several answers, which reveal awareness about other possessions of Bulgaria, such as *"ancient history; folk culture; beautiful nature; Turkey's dominance"* (Appendix 7, Q5). The bigger part of these comments, however, have been provided by those few Danish respondents, who have actually experienced the country through personal/actual visitation (Gartner, 1993). This trend reveals, that those who got to know Bulgaria personally have discovered another face of the country, related to its origin, history and customs. Thus it might be supposed, that the rest of the corresponding Danes have only been exposed to information from different sources, and upon these materials they have built their perception. Therefore the question about the data that Danish people derive meaning from will be later discussed and analyzed.

The interpretative analysis on the suggestions exposed above leads to the idea, that every person interviewed somehow relates Bulgaria with either cheap summer holiday or Sunny Beach. However, there seems to be a large gap between what has been set as a goal and what is actually achieved. "The strategy of the government..." shows purposes that considerably differ from what the discussion above witnessed. The next few lines follows the epistemological suggestion for the importance to examine multiple individual's opinion and exposes results from the one-on-one interviews with Bulgarian experts in tourism domain.

Experts opinion:

In order to underline the discrepancy between how Danes perceive destination Bulgaria and what the vision of the country actually stands for, the question *"How would you shortly describe tourist destination Bulgaria, what kind of destination is our country?"* was posed in one-on-one interviews with professionals from the Bulgarian tourism field. The results of the interviews revealed the sum of beliefs about Bulgaria that academics stored in their minds. It must be marked, that the findings of this question rest on respondents' personal perception of the place, i.e. what scholars refer to as affective evaluation (Gartner, 1993; Stern & Krakover, 1993; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Qu et al., 2011).

Taking into account the above-exposed findings it might be understood, that the perception of Bulgaria is mostly framed by associations with a summer vacation features, and this image is so well established that it might be impossible to escape. Even though destination Bulgaria possesses a number of natural resources, that could be turned into tourist attractions, these attributes remain totally unfamiliar to the foreign tourists. Besides, basing upon her background of both an academic and a practitioner as well, professor Dogramadzhieva shares that the foreigner's perception of the destination *"finishes with Sunny Beach, indeed"* (Appendix 3). While some of the interviewed academics from the field are having a negative attitude to the associations with destination Bulgaria – *"although my high-school years have passed in Sunny beach, I find this trend very sad"* (Appendix 2), other professors look at it in a more favorable way. Both associate professor Toncheva and professor Velikova, for example, agree that *"Although kind of a cliché, the summer holidays and the not as popular winter holidays would describe the Bulgarian tourism industry the best"* (Appendix 4), and *"there is no way to stay away from the cliches - sun, sea, sand, beautiful mountains"* (Appendix 2). Yet, Velikova states, that we do not necessarily have to shut down the summer vacation as a tourist attraction. Bulgarian tourism has to grow and demonstrate that there are plenty of tourism opportunities that the country offers. The professor further argues, that attention must be also paid on the several new lines, that indicated growth in the recent years (Appendix 4, Q1). Professor Toncheva also commented, that these are not

45

necessarily negative associations, as these natural resources *"are still clean"* and attractive for eventual tourists (Appendix 2). Considering these views, it might be interpreted, that there appears an idea of combining attributes that destination Bulgaria offer, in order to create a distinctive product and lead the country as considerable destination choice (Pike, 2005 in Garcia et al., 2012).

Having in mind the profile of tourism experts, the comments of the interviewed persons is taken into account as accurate reviews of the current image of Bulgaria. Although the corresponding persons are generally aware of the situation with the negative image of destination Bulgaria, they store another perception of the country in their mindset, which comprises of various components (e.g. cultural, historical, natural etc.). The significant differentiation between understanding Bulgaria in the mindset of Danes and those of Bulgarian professionals indicates a serious mismatch between how Danish imagine Bulgaria and the actual attributes of the country. Then what is the desired image that Bulgaria must have? Having revealed the existing perception of destination Bulgaria within the minds of local tourism academics, the study continued with revealing what the desired one is.

5.2. The desired image: employing available attributes

The driving force for defining the desired image of Bulgaria is the concern that *"there is something like this, that some resources, natural gifts, opportunities, which we count for things with a high potential, they actually really have a potential, but we approach them like everybody is aware of them, and in fact we need to develop them more."* (Appendix 3). While the previous section described the affective evaluation of the respondents, which is influenced on subjective internal factors (Gartner, 1993; Stern & Krakover, 1993; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Qu et al., 2011), this section puts focus on rather objective comments on what the Bulgarian destination image should be, i.e. the desired image. In order to explore the ultimate direction of developing Bulgarian destination image, the competent respondents (i.e. professors and experts from the tourism field) were asked questions that will serve as a source to interpret and understand the general views for eventual image reconstruction. Therefore, the extract of data for this purpose happened in two rounds. Although the interview guide for the meetings with both scholars from academic institution and experts from the Ministry of Tourism was primarily the same, the particular question to derive understanding for what is aimed to be achieved was posed indirectly to the academics and directly to the representatives of the Ministry.

In this respect, the professors were asked to identify the major resources, that an eventual rebranding campaign has to consider. Professor Toncheva emphasizes the fact, that Bulgaria possesses unique and

rich history, which could *"serve for developing this type of tourism in Bulgaria"* (Appendix 2). She argues, that the image of the country is mandatory to include *"our very rich history, dating from thousands of years ago"* (Appendix 2), and further maintain this opinion with existing historical facts about the country, such as *"many many cultural artifacts; very rich history; they have found a tool, which has been used for gold digging 8 thousand years ago; pieces of gold that resemble coins"* (Appendix 2). An agreement among the interviewed persons is observed regarding the cultural and historical richness of the country. Professor Dogramadzhieva, for instance, elaborates about her concern, that aside of Sunny Beach Bulgaria owns ancient treasures, such as *"the Thracian Heritage"* (Appendix 3), which unfortunately is not among the associations foreigners make about Bulgaria. Similarly, professor Vodenska (Appendix 5) says, that as a destination the country is *"developed in a very one-sided way and is being exploited. At the moment Bulgaria is a destination with primarily developed two types of tourism - sea recreational tourism and winter ski tourism."*. She further argues, that Bulgaria is not only underdeveloped, but the rest of the opportunities and resources are neglected and the destination only provides *"low-cost mass tourism"*.

Professor Toncheva also believes, that *"we should not underestimate the SPA&Wellness opportunities that Bulgaria offers, thanks to our numerous mineral springs. We currently discover new mineral springs and still a small part of them are captured and adapted for use"*. She suggests further, that great attention must be also paid also on developing ECO tourism and rural tourism (Appendix 2). In similarity, Velikova also underlines that SPA&Wellness, ECO and rural tourism are the most reliable types of tourism for development, due to the unique existence of healing mineral springs (Appendix 4). The other two contacted professors further agree, that Bulgaria owns significant resources resources to develop cultural tourism, such as *"the Thracian Treasure; culture and nature"* (Appendix 3), as well as *"the hottest geyser in Europe"* and *"amazing conditions for growing and supplement of bio products"* (Appendix 5). These unique features are then evaluated by both cognitive and affective component, so as to set the destination on top of the list with other possibilities. However, the affective image evaluation in this case must be taken into account, considering the background of the respondents. Since the affective image component comprises of personal attachment and emotions toward the place, it should be noted, that the profile of the professors suggests not only awareness to a high level, but also personal attitude toward Bulgaria. Yet, the perceptual/cognitive evaluation is the antecedent of the individual affective evaluation, i.e. the attributes of the place lay the foundations of the internal factors of perceiving an image of a destination. Therefore, the above mentioned evaluations are recognized as truths to the same extent as they were described above.

The results elaborate the above-mentioned suggestion that Bulgarian tourism is underdeveloped and maintain these assumptions with concrete tourism resources that are present in the country. However, in order to construct a good destination image, only those attributes that are exceptional must be picked over. Professor Dogramadzhieva argued, that *"If you take a look at the prioritized types of tourism in the strategy, you will notice that there are not a single type of tourism that is no priority"* (Appendix 3). Furthermore, the scholar quoted a theoretical claim she recently read, where the author argues *"Listen. Before you create any image and promote something, first you need to have a product"* (Appendix 3). In other words, in order to undertake any rebranding activities, first of all an exact product must be defined. In this regard, a selection of the leading resources of Bulgaria must be made on the basis of what the corresponding professionals shared. Thus, an ultimate desired image will be settled and actions might be undertaken in this direction, where the final goal is to establish such an image of destination Bulgaria, that after cognitive and perceptive evaluation the country will be assessed as a considerable travel destination (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Gartner, 1993; Hsu et al., 2009).

Referring to the note-taken interview with experts from the Bulgarian Ministry of Tourism, the corresponding persons were asked about the strategic goals that the institution sets for re-building the image of the country. The interview revealed important information about the strategic plan for developing destination Bulgaria in terms of building new image and rebranding. As priorities to develop they pointed out a number of different types of tourism in Bulgaria, such as Summer tourism, winter tourism, golf-tourism, rural tourism, congress tourism and Eco Tourism. (Appendix 6; Bulgariatravel.org). Moreover it was discussed whether there is any among these types of tourism that they have paid more attention on. The experts shared, that they all represent a priority, as the country provides great opportunities for each of them. Therefore, the branding campaigns attempted to touch upon all those destination attributes, that a tourist can experience in Bulgaria. For instance, the national video ad of the country lasts over 10 minutes and indeed presents a wide ranged compilation of tourism resources, that might attract visitors (Appendix 6; Bulgaria Travel @ Youtube.com). However, the mission of the local management is to design a specific and distinctive product, as well as easily recognizable brand (Pike, 2005; Garcia et al., 2012). Especially in the today's fierce competition and large scope of destination choices (Qu et al., 2011), the product that a place offers needs to include a distinctive set of unique features (Morgan et al., 2002). Thus, the role of the DMO is to enhance the long term competitiveness of the destination (Pike, 2004:39) and to establish brand of the place in order to stay competitive (Blain, 2005; Garcia et al., 2012; Campelo et al., 2014). This confirms what professor

Dogramadzhieva (Appendix 3) suggested for the multiple focuses put at the same time and therefore a lack of concentration on specific product.

Considering what the literature earlier suggested, a good destination image is understood as one that sets the place in a top position among other destination choices (Gartner, 1993; Hsu et al., 2009; Morgan et al., 2002). In this sense, Bulgaria needs to pay greatest attention on those attributes, that can not be provided by other destinations and make the destination unique such as *"the Thracian treasure"* (Appendix 3) and *"the hottest geyser in Europe"* (Appendix 5). Moreover, it must be also treated as a mark of uniqueness, that with the offered diversity of opportunities destination Bulgaria is able to meet all different preferences of the Danish respondents (Appendix 7, Q2, Q3). Yet, in order to attempt any branding actions to influence people's choice of a destination, what drives tourist's behavior and motivation must be understood (Hsu et al., 2009; Pearce, 2005; Hansen, 2005; Smallman & Moore, 2010; Wong & Yeh, 2009). However, before the image of a destination is employed to attract tourists attention, first it is highly important to understand what influences the destination image (Brookaw, 1990:32 in Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). In this regard, the next paragraphs discuss how the information for destination Bulgaria is send to the consumer.

5.3. Image influential factors: the current practices

Having in mind the literature claims about the importance of understanding the destination image formation and agents of impact (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999), this part of the analysis reflects upon the data material, which informs about the current efforts for influencing the image of the country. The section also attempts to reveal the nature of components, upon which the perception of Bulgaria among Danish people is built. In this respect, questions about what builds their perception and the sources of information were posed in the survey data collection.

The image of a destination is a complex matter and it consists of many different elements that influence the way it is constructed (Hosany et al., 2006). As it was argued earlier in this paper, a good destination image has a significant impact on the process of tourist behavior and decision making (Gartner, 1993), and due to its importance tourism researchers attempted to identify the factors that define and enhance the image of a destination (Tasci & Gartner, 2007). The two major factors that influence the image of a place are generally divided into 1) Personal factors; and 2) Stimulus factors, the nature of which was earlier presented. Based on these factors the tourist make choices for a place to travel. However, in order to approach the selection process it is first important to understand the image formation (Baloglu&McCleary, 1999). The personal

factors consist of intrinsic components - social and psychological statuses, which drive individual's perceptual understanding of the destination. These personal elements influence the sum of beliefs, that one holds toward a particular place. The stimulus factors stand for various promotional materials and the information, that aims to promote the destination in an attractive way (Baloglu&McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004). In other words, the stimulus factors is the 'pull' power of the destination (Gartner, 1993). The stimulus factors, together with other factors, such as former experience, attachment and other personal factors, the destination finally settles among other possible choices to travel. This can be witnessed by the fact, that Simply, the main purpose of the destination information instruments is to present *"why is it worth to go there and witness, the "magic" of the place"* (Appendix 2, Q3).

Scholars argued, that the local destination management must find ways to expose tourists to variety of information (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Qu et al., 2011). Accordingly, the Bulgarian branding experts have the task to send information about the country through numerous information channels, so as to reach large scope of people. In order to reveal the stimulus information that destination Bulgaria is sending out to attract potential visitors, the experts from the Bulgarian Ministry of Tourism were asked about the way they communicate with the audience. The main focuses within the information sending campaigns have been put the logo of brand Bulgaria and the promotional video in YouTube. The latter represents 11-minute long video, which captures various tourism attributes of the country, such as attractive landscapes, cultural heritage, national cuisine etc. (Bulgaria Travel channel in YouTube.com). The national logo, according the representatives from the ministry, actually contains multiple national symbols, which best draw a perception of the country. As Figure 6 displays, the national logo is aimed to illustrate Bulgarian rose, nature and sand. The rose symbolizes the Bulgarian sort of roses, from which a unique rose oil is extracted and used in well-known luxury cosmetics and aromatics (bulgarianrose.com). As has already been discussed, although unknown for most of the survey respondents, the natural resources of Bulgaria were defined as *"magnificent"* (Appendix 2) and *"unpolluted"* (Appendix 5). Therefore it is emblematized in the national tourism logo. The summer holiday opportunities, which the country is at present mostly known about, are also represented in the emblematic in the Bulgarian trademark (Figure 6). The yellow line under the picture is purposed to resemble the sands of the country's seacoast (Appendix 6).

Figure 6: *The national logo of destination Bulgaria*

However, the survey results show, that Danes are only aware about the last component of the logo - the summer holidays opportunities on low price levels, that Bulgaria offers. Though, the data indicates, that the awareness they have about the cheap summer proposals has not been brought by either of the branding activities of BulgariaTravel and the Ministry. The majority of correspondents claim to have constructed their perception upon a number of information sources - *"TV; newspapers, articles, internet; social media and friends"* (Appendix 7, Q6; Q7). The variety of sources of information, where the Danish people derive information from underlines the importance of sending branding information through different information channels. Instead, the current efforts to promote destination Bulgaria are only limited in compiling high-rated tourism resources in a video, which appears on the internet.

The evaluation of the responses on this question, Danes reveal, that they only have a notion about Bulgaria upon information sources, which are not promotional, such as TV programs, online articles and newspapers. Moreover, few of the respondents said, they have their opinion based on the Danish TV Series "Summer in Sunny Beach", whose contents are highly unpleasant. Through interpreting these findings it could be suggested, that the branding efforts of the BulgariaTravel have not accomplished their main purpose - to inform about the attributes so that the country will climb on the list of destinations.

5.4. Understanding the target: what do Danes want?

The general idea to understand tourists is to get to know their behavior and what are the factors that makes them want to travel. The research methods tried to reveal what kind of destination Danes would choose for their holidays. The decision making process comprises of a complex set of influential factors, such as

individual's personality, feelings, thoughts, attitudes (Pearce, 2005; Moutinho, 1987). Once realized the need of travelling, the individual begins to search for alternatives, according to his personal interests and preferences. In this line, it is a responsibility of the destination marketers to catch tourist's attention and to excel among other possible destination selections. The process of choosing one particular destination have been generally defined in two main stages - 1) whether or not to travel; and 2) where to travel (Choi, et al 2011). The first part is defined as revealing tourist's need to travel, based on internal personal factors. Therefore, in order to reveal the tourist profile of the corresponding Danish participants, the survey began with the question *"**Tager du ofte ud og rejse i din ferie? / Do you travel often for a vacation?***"*, and as already discussed earlier in 5.1, the vast majority of Danish respondents revealed, that they do travel often for holidays.

Having realized, that they will travel, tourists then head to the second stage of destination selection stands for the actual choosing process. The main driving force of in this phase of 'where to travel' is the cognitive evaluation of the place, i.e. the way one perceives destination Bulgaria, built upon the information sources that delivered a notion of the place (Gartner, 1993). Therefore destination Bulgaria needs to take advantage of the superiority and the *"natural gifts"* (Appendix 3) that the country possess and establish them as pull factors for tourist motivation, that will help the individual decide on the second phase - where to travel. In this way, the country is likely to settle on top of the list of destination choices (Morgan et al., 2002), as *"only those destinations with a strong image… remain viable for selection"* (Gartner, 1993:193).

Reviewing the results of what Danish people responded to *"**Hvad er din favorit type ferie? / What is your favorite type of vacation?***"*, the range of responses is wide and versatil, such as *"nature, relax", "recreation", "cultural tourism", "skiferie", "city tourism", "summer vacation", "sun and sea"* (Appendix 7, Q2). Considering these findings, the respondents are not only interested in summer tourism, but they also seek for various opportunities of travel. In comparison to what the same people associated Bulgaria with (Appendix 7, Q5) it seems, that there is a significant issue, that they search for a variety of tourism opportunities, but they would only consider Bulgaria as a possible choice for their summer holiday, except those very few persons, who have already visited the country. Furthermore, the survey also indicated various components, that Danes find attractive in a destination after they were asked what kind of destinations they would prefer - *"**Når du planlægger din ferie, hvad går du så efter? / When you make plans for your vacation, what are the most attractive features you look for?***"* (Appendix 7, Q3). The corresponding Danes mostly look for *"nature attractions", "cultural richness", "forests and mountains"* and *"price"* (Appendix 7, Q3). Again, out of these

results it might be interpreted, that the corresponding Danish people can find everything they look for in destination Bulgaria, when they plan their journey. Yet, the national brand of the country though produces unfavorable associations, such as *"cheap summer holiday"*, *"corruption, criminality"* and *"drunk teenagers"* (Appendix 1).

Referring to the materials by the professors, Bulgaria seems to possess resources for each of the indications noticed in the second question of the survey. The country provides opportunities for *"nature, relax"*, *"recreation"* (Appendix 7, Q2) in the face of *"balneological, SPA, Wellness and Wellbeing programs"* (Appendix 5, Q1) and *"balneo-healing tourism from a high class"* with *"healthy and healing mineral springs"* (Appendix 2). Besides, Bulgaria disposes with attractive possessions that would meet the indicated preferences for *"nature attractions", "forests and mountains", "cultural richness"* (Appendix 7, Q3), shaped as *""* (Appendix 3). However, taking into account what the same respondents stated as associations to destination Bulgaria, it can be argued, that the national brand of the country is wrongly understood. As Qu et al. (2011) argued, due to the global development and the higher level of competition, it is not sufficient for a destination to provide common attractions, such as luxury accommodation basis and nice views. Besides, along with the increased fierce competition, the tourists' preferences developed likewise, and their expectation of what a destination provides evolved in similarity and became higher (Borzyszkowski, 2014). Therefore, the local management must pay attention on those unique features, that would produce a distinctive sense of a place among tourists (Garcia et al., 2012; Morgan et al., 2002; Qu et al., 2011). In order to stay competitive, destination Bulgaria must not only count on the high-level services and the seaviews, provided by the hotels (Appendix 3; Appendix 5). Destination Bulgaria possesses many attributes, referred to as *"findings and facts that we will be showing to Europe and the world about our history"* (Appendix 2) and *"natural gifts"* (Appendix 3), that seem to be found attractive by Danish travellers. Moreover, the country is capable to excel among other European destinations, due to superior facts as *"Bulgaria takes the second place in Europe in the number of mineral springs, here springs up the hottest geyser in Europe - Separeva Banya, even in Iceland the geysers are not as hot as ours"* (Appendix 5, Q2). Yet information about these attributes has apparently not been presented to them, as the same respondents have earlier associated Bulgaria with primarily beaches, sun and low price level (Appendix 1; Appendix 7).

5.5. The different channels to send branding information

It is suggested, that the brand of a destination has to compile the unique attributes of the place and to combine them into an emblematic symbol, name or logo, which will set within the mindset of the tourists (Blain et al., 2005). Building a recognizable brand is an instrument of the destination to stay competitive and develop a successful destination model. Due to the similar features, that different brands try to excel with, the possession of national tourism resources plays an important role in the context of branding a country. Their purpose is to promise unique experience that will settle in the memories of the traveller (Blain et al., 2005). As the previous parts of the analysis uncovered, Bulgaria do possess unique tourism resources, which Danes would found attractive, according to their various preferences (Appendix 7, Q2, Q3). Besides, the national symbolic logo comprises of country's emblematic symbols. Yet the data indicates, that brand Bulgaria is not recognizable for the symbols it attempts to inform (Appendix 7, Q5), and the branding information has apparently not reached the Danish survey respondents (Appendix 7, Q7, Q7).

The theoretical suggestions claim, that *"resources alone are not enough to make the country competitive"* (Rinaldi & Cavicchi, 2014:158). In order to build a proper brand of a destination, cooperation between the institutions in charge is crucial. It is a responsibility of the local destination marketers to find ways to deliver the branding information to the audience. In this line, the entities in charge have to employ many different information channels in order to reach large scope of audience. However, the current branding practices in Bulgaria seem to be limited to what Gartner (1993) refers to as 'overt induced' practices, which implies standard advertising methods in the mediascope. Though, serving information through different information channels has been defined as urgent moment for reconstructing the image of a place. Professor Velikova (Appendix 4), for example, proposed, that instead of spending considerable amounts of national fundings to conduct contests for the best logo and video making, and then more expenses for commercializing these products, a more effective and not the least less costly method might be applied. She suggests, that the Ministry of Tourism and BulgariaTravel could apply what Gartner (1993) defines as 'covert induced' and 'autonomous' method, and invite famous people in Bulgaria. According to her, applying different methods for building destination image would be a way more effective mechanism to draw people's attention to Bulgaria. Since blogs and vlogs are nowadays more watched than even the TV news, the Ministry could invite 10 top Danish bloggers and vloggers for a 2-week all-inclusive journey and present Bulgaria's national resources of all kinds. Then those will make their materials based on their experience, and thus the tourism richness of Bulgaria will be able to reach a large number of people (Appendix 4, Q4). On top of that, people today trust

bloggers, therefore the information that such initiative will produced will be considered trustworthy (Appendix 3). However this practice might also be a *"two-sided knife"* have a negative result at the end. Professor Dogramadzhieva says, that since bloggers have an independent status, *"it depends on the way they feel - positive or negative"* (Appendix 3). The professor notes, that in order for this method to be really effective, it should rest on true experience and true evaluations. *"Paid blogger's contents I don't believe will be very helpful. More likely those independent evaluations will be helpful, they would have perhaps more significant influence."* (Appendix 3).

These suggestions by Bulgarian tourism scientists raise a question about the current branding practices that the Bulgarian institutions in charge undertakes. Since the information sources are normally controlled by the destination marketers (Tasci & Gartner, 2007; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999), the next part of the analysis elaborates on the operational functions and the branding actions by the entities in charge.

5.6. Achieving new image and brand association

Having defined the present, the desired image and what tourists want, the well-known information channels and the prioritized ones, in this part of the analysis the implementation of image reconstruction and destination re-branding will be discussed. In order to achieve eventual image reconstruction and destination re-branding practices, there is a need of existence of operating national institution, whose final goals are development and prosperity of the national tourism sector (Qu et al., 2011; Yaneva, 2013). This paper investigates methods of destination branding that imply sending information through different channels, aiming to give a lead to the place among other possible choices. In this line, firsthand data about the national strategic goals was extracted by marketing directors from the Bulgarian Ministry of Tourism.

The wide range of functions that a DMO is charged with, as discussed in the literature chapter, predisposes a high level of complexity in executing the operations for destination development. Furthermore, the scholars on the topic (e.g. Holešinská, 2013; Magaš, 2010; Dwyer, 2017) underlined the importance of the collaboration activities between the involved entities. The operational force of the Bulgarian DMO, as presented in the introductory chapter, is mastered by the Bulgarian Ministry of Tourism. The status of the local management organization is defined by *"the tourism policy in Bulgaria"* (Appendix 3). Professor Dogramadzhieva also shares, that *"before years there was posed such question - whether to have special agency… separate organ from the Ministry… but there has never been a body like this to deal with marketing and advertisement of Bulgaria"* (Appendix 3). The lack of existence of an independent institution, engaged

with the management of destination Bulgaria brings a number of challenges. The scholar further claims, that *"There always has been mixture of functions, administration, license regimes, taxes, different things that accompany the tourism activity, but in general… my impression is that the focus of the Ministry of Tourism has always fallen on some administrative activities, and unfortunately they have administrative approach also to the strategic planning… and also to some extent to the marketing."* (Appendix 3). As a consequence of the absence of a separate entity to manage destination Bulgaria, *"the meaningful of all this seems to be missing"* (Appendix 3).

In order to understand the actual situation with the functions of the destination managers, their present and prospective plans for branding activities, a one-on-one interview was conducted with the director of the marketing, advertising and information in tourism Albena Metodieva and her chief assistant. The personal meeting with professional representatives from the Ministry revealed, that BulgariaTravel is actually their product, through which the Ministry of Tourism in Bulgaria implements the large scope managing functions of Destination Bulgaria, including branding practices (Appendix 6). As it was earlier argued, the role of the DMO implies cooperation with entities from both the private sector and the government, and it is a challenge task to meet what the other involved institutions demand (Moe, 2001 in Zavatarro & Adams, 2016). Moreover, the local managers face a great challenge to design its mixture of pull sources so, that they can be found attractive by multiple travelling motives (Kim & Lee, 2001). However, as already discussed in the second section of the analytical part, the desired image seems not really defined by the Bulgarian local managers (Appendix 3; Appendix 6; Bulgariatravel.org). Thus, all types of different tourism opportunities and resources are currently labelled as a priority to the executors, which eventually leads to undefined concrete tourism product and a lack of *"clear strategic vision, shared, well deliberated, well argumented, accepted due to the fact it is well argumented"* (Appendix 3).

The branding operations that the local management is charged with are to stand and maintain the tourism values of the particular place, in terms of various touristic features that the destination possesses, such as resources and attractions (Aaker, 1991 in Blain et al., 2005; Yaneva et al., 2013). Generally, in the context of branding, destination managers are primarily engaged with leading the place to a top position in the selection list of travellers (Garcia et al., 2012), through which the destination faces the growing competition (Zenker & Jacobsen, 2015). Gilmore (2002) argued, that the most successful way to attempt eventual image reconstruction practices identify existing attributes within the destination and then pay significant attention on

creating advertisements. Thus, the undertaken branding practices would evoke development in the context of the national tourism sector.

A review of the *"Developing of strategy for brand "Bulgaria" and introducing practice for integrated consecutive brand management"*, launched by the Ministry, shows, that the main preliminary settled goal is achieving *"association/perception of the country as an attractive tourism destination, which offers diverse and high-quality tourism opportunities"* (Appendix 8). Prioritized in this strategic plan, which was completed in the year of 2011, are the development of multiple regions as tourist destinations on the basis of cultural, historical, natural possessions. However it seems, that the actual appearance of Bulgaria in the set of beliefs and ideas in the minds of Danish people strongly differs from what was settled in the strategic development program, which is to be understood as an incorrect destination branding. As it was argued in the theoretical chapter, improper branding and image creation of a place result in an incorrect implementation of country's potential growth in a tourism domain (Hunt, 1971).

In order to extract firsthand data for the current branding efforts of BulgariaTravel, supported by the Bulgarian Ministry of Tourism, the interviewed representatives were asked about existing development programmes. Since it was argued, that the destination managers are those, who must find ways to use various sources for serving information (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999), it was attempted to elicit data about future strategic plans for using alternative information channels to inform tourists about the tourism resources of Bulgaria. The Director of the marketing unit by the ministry, mrs. Metodieva, shared, that in their strategic program for destination development lies new methods for advertising the country. This strategic program for national tourism advertisement from 2017 on (Appendix 9) has two highlighted peaks among others, which the professionals from the Ministry shared: 1) Launching an application 'I love Bulgaria', which is basically a useful tool for tourists that gives information about tourist attractions of all kinds (e.g. cultural, historical, natural, museums, villages etc.) that might be of an interest to the tourists; and 2) a planned campaign for invitation famous European bloggers in Bulgaria with the purpose to present them the possessions of the country and to get them impressed as much, as to write a positive material, which in turn is supposed to reach blogger's entire network of followers (Appendix 6, Q4). Theoretically speaking, these initiatives might be defined as undertaking covert induced methods (Gartner, 1993) and compared to the technological and integral planning aspects (Magaš, 2010) of promotional practices by the DMO.

Through implementing these preliminary decided branding initiatives, the destination management of Bulgaria aims to achieve a good overall destination image and associations to the country brand, and

eventually national development in the tourism branch. However, with regards to the complex character of the destination image (Hosany et al., 2006), it is highly important to gain understanding of the multiple components that affect the image of a place. Therefore, this paper suggests a particular way of procedure, that the local management might apply throughout destination image rebuilding and re-branding initiatives. The section ahead provides a summary of what the different stages of the framework, proposed by this research, revealed.

6.   Conclusions

The thesis researched the image that destination Bulgaria possesses among Danish travellers and suggested a conceptual framework for eventual practices in the context of destination re-branding and image reconstructing. Achieving the objectives of this study, framed by the main research question *"What is the way destination Bulgaria is perceived among Danes and how could this image and brand association be changed?"*, entailed particular theoretical view, as well as methodological approach. In this respect, a qualitative research method was applied as the most suitable methodological approach, in order to bring in-depth disclosure of the people's multiple feelings and perceptions. Then the theoretical basis behind this thesis provided profound knowledge about the complex image of destination image, its structure, understanding tourist's behavior, as well as the role of the destination managers in a re-branding context. Ultimately, a framework of procedure was produced, relevant to potential activities of destination image and national brand rebuilding, and is to be applied by the local destination management institution. Based on the discussion of the collected material, several findings might be concluded.

The first analytical part focused on exploring the perception among different individuals. The paper revealed the beliefs among Danes about destination Bulgaria and the associations they make with the country. Indicated were unfavorable perceptions, as well as poor knowledge about Bulgaria, which differ from what really is to be seen in the country. Splitting the different opinions into separate parts made possible juxtapose contradictory views and to underline the significant difference between the imaginary of the Danish respondents and that of the local academics and practitioners from the Bulgarian tourism sector. A considerable major gap between the evaluations of the two sides of participants was identified, which indicated a problematic mismatch, considering the objectives of the national branding campaign and the beliefs of the inquired Danes. The appearance of this issue then led to the question about the way that destination Bulgaria endeavors to be perceived.

Then the second analytical chapter exposed findings, that delivered understanding on the unique tourism resources of Bulgaria, the direction of the national branding efforts and what the desired image of destination Bulgaria is. In this respect it was first tried to seek for data, which determines those destination attributes, that would be considered as distinctive unique features (Morgan et al., 2012), and are capable to lead destination Bulgaria to being a considerable destination choice (Qu et al.., 2011) and stay competitive (Blain, 2005; Garcia et al., 2012; Campelo et al., 2014). Thus, a number of attractive national tourism resources were revealed by the interview respondents, and a look was taken into the current branding efforts, i.e. how these possessions are used by the branding actors. In this way it was revealed, that those unique attributes of Bulgaria do take place within the list of goals of the local destination management. Yet, considering the findings that were indicated in the initial analytical part, the Danish respondents demonstrated unawareness about these destination resources, despite the branding efforts. As a consequence, the next part of the overall re-branding framework seeks understanding of how the destination image is formed.

The image influential components are a complex matter to study and are generally defined as personal and stimulus factors. The former one rests entirely on internal elements, such as psychological and social background, while the latter represents the influential information sources, to which the individual is exposed. Since the stimulus factors are considered crucial to enhance the image of the destination (Tasci & Gartner, 2007), the data material then was analyzed as to reveal how the stimulus factors that aim to benefit the image of destination Bulgaria. The findings showed, that at present the country's image is only built upon standard advertising practices in the mediascope, initiated by the institution in charge, i.e. overt induced (Gartner, 1933). Analyzing the collected data further, however, indicated that the inquired Danes have derived their perception from multiple information sources, upon which they did not get informed about the attributes of destination Bulgaria. Therefore, it was concluded that the current narrowed practices of serving information did not succeed to reach the Danish people as an audience.

After that, in order to gain understanding of the target's preferences for a destination, the sample of Danish respondents were asked to state their personal favorite type of vacation. This was done to reveal weather Bulgaria owns resources, that would be attractive to the Danish travellers, and to eventually serve as a basis for designing a particular tourism product, which would excel among other possible destinations. The findings indicated, that there are existing unique resources, that bring superiority to destination Bulgaria among other destinations. Since it was argued, that *"resources alone are not enough to make the country competitive"* (Rinaldi & Cavicchi, 2014:158), this part gave understanding on various ways to send the branding

information to the receivers/tourists. With regards to what the theoretical claims suggested, that the destination management is responsible to find ways to expose the audience to various information sources (Baloglu & McCleary), with the help of the data material, different ways of serving branding information were revealed. Both the literature and the interviewed experts acknowledged the use of different tools to create image, such as covert induced and autonomous methods (Gartner, 1993).

As the information sources are normally controlled by the destination marketers (Tasci & Gartner, 2007; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999), the final stage of the framework deals with the actual execution of what the earlier phases revealed. Indicated were findings about the status of the Bulgarian DMO, as well as some challenges that stem from the management encounters. Evaluated were challenges, that might originate as a result of the specific government-dependent nature of the local destination management. The findings revealed, that the mixture of functions between the government and the destination managers resulted in a dependent and to some extent meaningless management of destination Bulgaria. Also, the lack of a DMO leaded to an attempt to keep all involved entities satisfied, and it is argued that it is a great challenge to meet all demands (Moe, 2001 in Zavatarro & Adams, 2016). As a consequence of a missing separate institution, according to professor Dogramadzhieva destination Bulgaria does not really have clear strategic vision. Yet, the Bulgarian destination management, although not being a separate institution, have the status of an actor, authorized to implement branding actions with the goal to develop the national tourism sector of Bulgaria, and such initiatives are about to be undertaken. The ultimate purpose of this thesis is to suggest an overall framework of procedure in a domain of destination image reconstruction and re-branding practices.

7. Bibliography

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