

Assignment 1

1. Introduction: The Choice of Subject

Liège is the most important tourist city in Wallonia, the French-speaking region of Belgium (liege.be/tourisme) but according to the statistics of the Liège Tourist Office,¹ and the information provided by the Belgian Tourist Office for Brussels and Wallonia (OPT),² the large majority of tourists visiting Liège and its surroundings come from Belgium. According to the OPT, 79% of tourists visiting the region are domestic tourists or visitors from the neighbouring Netherlands (OPT 2011: 2).

At the same time, the assortment of tourist attractions Liège has to offer can be considered: “... *extremely rich and varied*”³ (Fédération du Tourisme de la Province de Liège 2012: 26)⁴, belonging to the strengths of Liège as a tourism destination according to the SWOT analysis introduced in the tourism strategy for the years 2012–2015 for the province of Liège.⁵ This evaluation is in accordance with the observations made by the author of this assignment on the spot. Relevant details on Liège tourism potential will be given in the third part of the assignment.

According to the SWOT analysis referred to above, one of the weaknesses of Liège and its region as a tourism destination is low awareness of the area on the international markets (FTPL 2012: 26). This evaluation can be confirmed by the statistics collected by the tourism market analysts, as well as by the travellers’ opinions gathered by several institutions. Based on the consumer markets research conducted by the Euromonitor International, Liège does not belong to 100 top city destinations of the world in terms of international tourist arrivals (euromonitor.com). Liège is not mentioned in the list of top destinations of Europe according to the travellers’ vote initiated by the European Consumers Choice (europeanconsumerschoice.org), not represented in the list of 50 popular destinations in Europe according to the Europe Travel Guide (virtualtourist.com), nor mentioned among the top destinations of the world according to the Travellers’ Choice 2012 (tripadvisor.com).

Based on the information provided by the tourism developers of Liège and its region, as well as by the institutions monitoring the travel preferences of international tourists, it is possible to claim that Liège is not well known internationally as a tourism destination, and does not belong to the first choice destinations on the markets outside of Belgium and its neighbouring countries. At the same time, it can be argued that there is a discrepancy between the tourism potential of Liège and its

1 Office du Tourisme de la Ville de Liège.

2 Office de Promotion du Tourisme de Wallonie et de Bruxelles. The title of the document: *Contrat de gestion entre la Région wallonne, la Commission Communautaire Française (Cocof) et Wallonie-Bruxelles Tourisme ASBL (OPT) pour les années 2011-2014*; henceforth referred to as OPT 2011.

3 *Offre touristique extrêmement riche et variée*.

⁴ Henceforth referred to as FTPL 2012.

⁵ *Plan stratégique 2012-2015*, launched by Fédération du Tourisme de la Province de Liège.

reputation as a tourism destination on the international markets.

1.1 Supposition Underlying the Present Study

The perceived contrast between the tourism potential of Liège and the information suggesting that the city is not well-known on the international tourism markets leads to the following supposition:

- On the markets outside of Belgium and its nearest neighbourhood, Liège does not have the image of a tourism destination.

On the one hand, it can be supposed that Liège is not well-known due to the marketing work that has not yet reached a sufficient scale and scope in order to raise the awareness of Liège and its tourism offer on the international markets. On the other hand, it is possible to argue that there are many cities that do not need any large marketing campaigns to attract visitors since they have already established themselves on the international markets as tourism destinations, or even have long traditions as tourist cities. It can be argued that in the case of Liège, effective marketing is needed in order to position the city on the map of internationally known tourism destinations.

1.2 The Purpose of the Assignment

The aim of this assignment is to study some theoretical issues concerning tourism destination image, and to apply a set of selected theoretical ideas to the case of Liège in order to answer the following question:

- Which factors can influence the image of Liège as a tourism destination on the international markets?

Prior to that, the assignment focuses on the theoretical perspective of the issue, establishing knowledge on the following subject:

- Which factors can participate in the formation of image of a destination in the absence of actual visitation?⁶

In addition, based on a supposition that the city of Liège needs effective marketing in order to make it better known on the international markets and achieve the goal to position Liège and its region as: “... a first choice tourism destination” (FTPL 2012: 3), some ideas of experiential marketing will be included into the work. It enables to discuss the possibilities of applying ideas of experiential marketing to the image creation and marketing of the city of Liège. In the analysis part of the assignment it will be examined how could application of ideas of experiential marketing help to promote tourism offer of Liège, taking its specific nature into consideration.

The choice of topic and the outcome of the analysis can be considered relevant in the context of the aims set for Liège as a tourism destination by local tourism developers. The goals set can be found in several documents concerning tourism development in the city of Liège, in the Liège region, as

⁶ The term used by Baloglu and McCleary (1999).

well as in the whole Wallonia region for coming years. These goals will be presented and discussed later in the assignment.

2. Destination Image – the Theoretical Perspective

Tourism destination image can be defined as a set of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that people have of a destination. It can be understood as a mental representation of a place formed by processing information offered by various sources. These sources may include travel guides, advertisements and other promotional materials launched by travel companies, but also the news and articles spread in media, word-of-mouth, books and films, etc. (Baloglu and McCleary 1999: 871-880). It is argued by Echtner and Ritchie that in the case of the majority of products and services, information sources are for the most part commercial, and the role of general media or, for example, the information obtained at school, has limited influence on the formation of the image of a product. Destination image, in contrast, seems to be: “... *derived from a much wider spectrum of information sources*” than the images of the most of products or services (Echtner and Ritchie 2003: 38-39). It can be argued that due to the wide spectrum of possible influences involved into the formation of destination image, it can be a complicated task to understand the process of destination image formation, as well as to detect and describe the factors and agents involved.

From the perspective of inbound tourism, destination image can also be seen as a set of impressions persons hold about a destination in a state in which they do not reside (Gartner 1986: 635). According to Baloglu and McCleary, the definitions of this kind emphasize: “... *perceptual or cognitive component of image*” referring to knowledge and beliefs about a destination (Baloglu and McCleary 1999: 871). At the same time, image construction can involve affective evaluations referring to feelings towards a destination or attachment to it (Ibid.: 870). It can be argued that destination image is a multifaceted construct, and it is a complicated task to define, describe and measure it (Rodrigues *et al.* 2011: 93-94, Echtner and Ritchie 2003: 38). Moreover, it is possible to say that the concept of image itself is difficult to define, and the authors analysing destination image do not offer a clear explanation of how does “image” differ from other concepts used in tourism research, such as “perception” or “attitude” (White 2004: 309).

According to several authors, there exists a general consensus about the important role destination image can play in the process of decision making and opting for one or another tourism destination (Beerli and Martin 2004: 657, Baloglu and McCleary 1999: 868, Echtner and Ritchie 2003: 37-38, Gallarza *et al.* 2002: 56). It can be said that the concept of destination image has a significant importance in tourism both from a practical and a theoretical point of view: from the perspective of tourists, and tourism developers, as well as tourism researchers (Rodrigues *et al.* 2011: 93, Echtner and Ritchie 2003: 38). Studying destination image can contribute to understanding travel behaviour, and provide tourism developers with information that helps to design effective marketing strategies (Echtner and Ritchie 2003: 38).

From the perspective of research, one of the most essential characteristics of destination image studies is its multidisciplinary. There can be several possible approaches in destination image studies since several facets of human behaviour may be involved into the formation of image.

Therefore, it can be approached through different disciplines, such as anthropology, semiotics, marketing, etc.; presented, according to Gallarza *et al.*: “... *with respect to the understanding of tourism consumer behaviour*” (Gallarza *et al.* 2002: 57).

Destination image can have influence not only on individual tourists’ consumer behaviour but also on the choice of convention destinations (Oppermann 1996: 15-16). It is pointed out by Ramirez *et al.* that: “*A favourable perception of a destination can positively affect attendance intentions because convention attendees prefer certain destinations over others and delegate numbers will be higher in some destinations largely due to their perceived image*” (Ramirez *et al.* n.d.: 2-3). The role of destination image in the choice of convention destination is also one of the subjects the convention tourism research often focuses on, other subjects being convention site selection, the economic impact of conventions, convention bureau operations, etc. (Ibid.).

Due to the topic selected for this assignment, several works that can help to understand the formation of destination image in the absence of previous experience with a destination are chosen to review.

It is argued by Brokaw that before studying how image can influence behaviour, it is: “... *important to understand what influences image*” (Brokaw 1990: 32⁷ in Baloglu and McCleary 1999: 869), i.e. which factors can create and influence destination image (Ibid.). To be more specific, the goal of the literature review presented in the next part of the work, being short due to limited volume of the assignment, is to try to understand which factors, agents or forces can participate in forming destination image in the absence of actual visitation (Ibid.: 869-870).

7 Brokaw, S.C. (1990), *An Investigation of Jewelry Store Image Structure*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. Florida State University, Tallahassee.

Assignment 2

In the second part of the assignment, the issues of the formation of destination image will be elaborated, some ideas of experiential marketing discussed, and methodological considerations presented.

1. Functional and Psychological Components of Destination Image

Basing their study on the ideas of Martineau (1958), Echtner and Ritchie make a distinction between functional characteristics and psychological characteristics of destination image. Functional components of image can be described as directly observable or measurable, like prices, or location. Psychological attributes – like friendliness or atmosphere – cannot be directly measured (Echtner and Ritchie 2003: 40). This differentiation can be seen in line with the ideas of MacKay and Fesenmaier that see the components participating in the image formation divided into tangible (attractions, scenery), and abstract (friendliness, attractiveness, opportunity for adventure) attributes (MacKay and Fesenmaier 1997: 541). It can be assumed that “measurable” or “tangible” components participating in the formation of destination image can be less complicated to define than “psychological” or “abstract” components. In the case of Liège, several components that can be difficult to define may have an important role to play.

According to Echtner and Ritchie: “... *images of destinations can range from those based on 'common' functional and psychological traits to those based on more 'unique' features, events, feelings or auras*” (Echtner and Ritchie 2003: 43). Furthermore, the image can be: “... *composed of the impressions of a core group of traits on which all destinations are commonly rated and compared*” (Ibid.). As specified by the authors cited, people can compare one destination to another, rating it on the basis of “common” functional characteristics (transport infrastructure, types of accommodation, etc.) but also on psychological characteristics (safety, quality of service). On the other hand, the basis of comparison can also be unique features and events (functional characteristics) or auras (psychological), although it is difficult to define what constitutes a unique aura (Ibid.). Despite of intangibility of psychological characteristics, many destinations: “... *may be distinguished by special atmospheres*” (Ibid.). Places may have their specific cultural patterns, traditions and community values, as well as landscapes and history; altogether they can constitute a unique character of the place that may be projected into a distinctive image of destination (Bramwell and Rawding 1996: 203).

Some authors see a relationship between the image of a destination and its perceived authenticity, finding that perceived authenticity can influence tourists’ motivation to visit a place (Ramkissoon and Uysal 2011: 539- 543). Therefore, it can be argued that it is important to places interested in attracting visitors to maintain the authenticity of their historical districts in order to: “... *ensure visitors' favourable impressions of their experiences*” (Naoi 2004 :59). It can be assumed that for tourists appreciating historical districts the places where historical architecture is partly replaced with new buildings⁸ may seem less attractive.

⁸ Like in Liège.

1.2 Factors Influencing Destination Image

In the absence of actual visitation of a place, three groups of determinants are seen as possible factors influencing the formation of destination image: tourism motivations, socio-demographical factors, and various information sources (Baloglu and McCleary 1999: 870). Several authors pay attention to the importance and variety of information sources forming images of destinations in the mind of people: promotional materials (travel brochures, destination's promotion activities), opinions of others (family, friends, school, travel agents), the mass media (newspapers, magazines, television, advertisements), books, movies, and the Internet (Echtner and Ritchie 2003: 38, Beerli and Martin 2004: 661, Molina and Esteban 2006: 1037, Govers *et al.* 2007: 978). Some authors find that today the Internet may have a dominating role as an information source on tourism destinations (Pan and Li 2011: 138), and together with global media the technological advancement affects: "... *the way in which destinations are imagined, perceived, and consumed*" (Govers *et al.* 2007: 978). At the same time, the proliferation of the Internet can make tourism destination images: "... *increasingly fragmented and ephemeral in nature*" (Ibid.: 977-978). The information found in different sources can involve a wide spectrum of subjects – historical, social, political, economic, national, etc., which can be incorporated into destination image (Echtner and Ritchie 2003: 38-39). Analysing the relationship between media messages and the perception of destination image, it has been found that both positive and negative events happening at a destination may influence its image, depending on the choice of topics and favourability of media coverage (Stepchenkova and Eales 2011: 198).

1.2.1 The Importance of Visual

Representing a tourism destination, visual information can be considered having crucial importance, being especially important in the creation of image when the destination is not familiar (Nicoletta and Servidio 2012: 26). Moreover, creating image of a destination, pictures do not only present the place but may also communicate: "... *characteristics, concepts, values, and ideas*" of a destination (MacKay and Fesenmaier 1997: 538). Therefore, it is important to pay attention to visual information about places since the visual can affect the beliefs held about destinations (Ibid.). As image can be considered subjective knowledge, it can be said that even if it is the task of the DMOs to control the image, there can be many different interpretations of it (Ibid.: 541). Besides, there are many sources of information over which the DMOs have no control (like videos in YouTube, etc.) but which can influence the image of a destination.

2. Experiential Marketing

It can be argued that image is an important factor in the marketing of a destination. Taking an aim of local DMOs to achieve better position to Liège on the international tourism markets into consideration, it can be possible that some ideas of experiential marketing may offer efficient tools for achieving the goal.

Experiential marketing with its central idea to design memorable experiences and engage as many senses as possible in order to create a powerful and creative experience can become the dominant marketing tool in the future (Pine and Gilmore 1998: 102-104, Scmitt 1999: 53, Williams 2006: 485, Lin *et al.* 2011:172-173). According to Pine and Gilmore, the companies can intentionally use: “... *services as the stage, and good as props, to engage individual customers in a way that creates a memorable event*” (Pine and Gilmore 1998: 98), as: “*An experience is not a amorphous construct; it is as real an offering as any service, good, or commodity*” (Ibid.). In this context, the tourism developer as service provider, designing and offering experiences to the tourist, can be seen as “stager”, actively involving the consumer and building the relationship between the consumer and the product offered (Ibid., Prentice 2004: 924, Smilansky 2009:6, 256), making the consumer “feel” the product by: “... *being part of it*” (Williams 2006: 485). In the light of the subject of this assignment it is significant that it is considered important to develop positive images to build that relationship (Prentice 2004: 924).

According to Scmitt, the main difference between traditional marketing and experiential marketing lies in the fact that: “*Traditional marketing views consumers as rational decision-makers who care about functional features and benefits*”, while experiential marketers view consumers as: “... *rational and emotional human beings*” looking for pleasurable experiences (Schmitt 1999: 53), i.e. customers are seen both rationally as well as emotionally driven (Ibid. 58-59).

Pine and Gilmore have pointed out that: “*The more senses the experience engages, the more effective and memorable it can be,*” (Pine and Gilmore 1998:104), emphasizing the importance to engage as many senses from the five as possible: hearing, sight, touch, smell and taste (Ibid.). At the same time, in “staging” an experience envisioning a well-defined theme or central idea can be considered crucial (Ibid.:102, Smilansky 2009:6).

It is possible to say that the ideas of experiential marketing are not entirely new. Still, it can be argued that what makes them significant is the approach chosen, seeing people as emotional creatures, and designing experiences appealing consciously to the five senses.

3. Methodological Considerations

In order to answer the question which factors can influence the image of Liège as a tourism destination on the international markets, primarily for possible visitors with no previous touristic experience of Liège, secondary data is chosen to use in this assignment, starting with the data offered by the DMOs.

It could be possible to collect data for this research in the form of a questionnaire or by conducting semi-structured interviews. Questioning people that have never visited Liège could offer information about knowledge on the city, the image it has in the eyes of respondents, as well as the factors that have created that image. Still, it would be difficult to decide how to choose the target group, what number of participants could be representative, and how to carry out the research (via tourist offices or travel magazines?). Moreover, for this assignment, using these methods of data

collection could be too large-scale and time-consuming.

Therefore, the following sources of information have been chosen to be used in this work.

Firstly, the documents created by the DMOs: the Liège Tourist Office, the OPT, the FTPL, and Maison du Tourisme du pays de Liège, providing the work with the statistics, analysing the present tourism situation and explaining the aims set for Liège as a tourism destination. It enables to examine where do the visitors come from, and how do the DMOs see the position of Liège on the international tourism markets.

Secondly, the information available on the Internet: official sites of the DMOs, YouTube, and the news on Liège distributed in the international media. On the one hand, the sources mentioned allow analysing how is Liège presented by local tourism developers both visually and verbally, and what kind of image it may communicate to the potential visitors of the city. On the other hand, using the information the DMOs cannot control, like the news on the city in media, enables to analyse what kind of image can be created to the city by other actors, and how much does it overlap or contradict the image created by the DMOs.

Finally, some sources providing the work with the information on the history of Liège will be used, and some academic research concerning Liège as a tourism destination will be involved.

Since it is chosen to establish knowledge on the factors that can influence the image creation in the absence of actual visitation, the majority of information used in the analysis is available on the Internet.

The analysis of the data applying the theoretical ideas presented above will help to understand which factors may participate in the creation of the image of Liège as a tourism destination. In addition, some problems related to the factors that can contribute to the image creation of Liège, such as contradicting information about the city on the Internet and issues of authenticity, will be under the observation. Finally, some ideas will be presented about the possibilities of image creation and marketing Liège in the light of the ideas of experiential marketing.

Assignment 3

The goal of this assignment is to establish knowledge on the factors that can influence the image of Liège as a tourism destination on the international markets. The supposition underlying this research is that outside of Belgium and its nearest neighbourhood, Liège does not have the image of a tourism destination. At the same time, it can be said that there is a discrepancy between the tourism potential of Liège and its reputation as a tourism destination abroad. Therefore, the analysis of the factors that can influence the image of Liège will be followed by a short discussion of the possibilities to raise the awareness of the city and its tourism offer applying some ideas of experiential marketing.

1. Selection of Information for the Analysis

Defining tourism destination image as a set of impressions, beliefs and ideas, several authors see it as being derived from a wide spectrum of information sources. These sources may include promotional materials offered by tourism developers, the news in mass media, word of mouth, books and films, as well as any kind of information available on the Internet (Baloglu and McCleary 1999: 870, Echtner and Ritchie 2003: 38-39, Beerli and Martin 2004: 661, Molina and Esteban 2006: 1037, Govers *et al.* 2007: 978). Today, the Internet may have dominating role as an information source forming images of tourism destinations (Pan and Li 2011: 138).

1.1 Information Accessible on the Internet

Whereas the aim of the assignment is to examine which factors can influence the image of Liège as a tourism destination in the absence of actual visitation, i.e. which factors may create the image of the city for people that have never visited Liège, the role of the Internet as a widespread information source can be considered particularly important. Therefore, the majority of data used in this work are also available on the Internet.

It can be said that both the information created and controlled by the DMOs (available on their official sites, etc.), and the information spread by other actors such as tourists, local inhabitants or the news agencies may influence the images people have about destinations. Thus, the information offered by other sources than promotional material presented by the DMOs is also under the observation in this work with the aim to analyse what kind of image can it create to Liège, and how much is it in line with the information presented by local tourism developers, or contradicts it. Among other information, the news about Liège from the last two years spread in English by internationally well-known agencies (like BBC) and available on the Internet is used as data for the analysis. It can be said that coverage of two tragic events mentioned below is dominating. In this matter, it can be considered important that the choice of topic in media may have influence on the image of a destination (Stepchenkova and Eales 2011: 198).

1.2 Other Information

In addition to the information available on the Internet providing this work with the information on possible factors that can influence the image of Liège, visitor statistics offered by the Liège Tourist Office (Office du Tourisme de la Ville de Liège, henceforth referred to as OT), and Maison du Tourisme du pays de Liège (henceforth MT) is used in the work in order to show where do the tourists visiting Liège come from. Besides, some goals set for Liège by the DMOs are presented to indicate the aspiration of the local tourism developers to make the city more recognized on the international markets. Additionally, some academic research concerning Liège, and information on the history of the city is used in the assignment.

2. Destination Management Organisations

In Liège, several institutions offering tourist information on the city, and/or dealing with promotion of Liège as a tourism destination can be found: the OT, the MT, Office de Promotion du Tourisme de Wallonie et de Bruxelles (OPT), Fédération du Tourisme de la Province de Liège (FTPL), VisitBelgium. At the same time, it is possible to say that these institutions seem to act independently of each other, and it is hard to find evidence of collaboration between them (with the exception of the OT and the MT). One of the signs of lack of collaboration is that there is no one common strategy for Liège as a tourism destination. Moreover, it is not clear what is considered to be the brand of Liège. This issue attracts attention in the context of this work since destination image and destination brand can be seen as closely related phenomena. Destination branding can help to build up a positive image to a destination, differentiating it from others by selection of distinctive elements that represent a destination and present it as unique place worth of visiting (Qu *et al.* 2011: 465, 474).

3. Current Visitor Statistics

In a document issued by the FTPL, the neighbouring countries of Belgium are indicated as countries where the largest numbers of tourists visiting Liège in 2010 came from: the Netherlands (429 611 visitors), France (250 102) and Germany (113 942). Visitor numbers from the countries holding the 4th-6th positions are remarkably smaller: United Kingdom (99 941), Italy (45 199) and Spain (25 816). Outside of Europe, the United States (27 054) and China (11 679) were the main markets (FTPL 2012: 17).

The data concerning overnight stays in Wallonia region with its principal town Liège shows that 79% of tourists visiting the region come from Flanders or from the Netherlands, i.e. the region is largely characterised by domestic tourism and inbound tourism from its neighbouring countries (OPT 2011: 2).

The statistics collected by the OT and the MT reveal the same tendency.

According to the statistics of the OT, out of 15 163 persons that visited the tourist information centre from January to June 2012, 8857 came from different regions of Belgium, 1566 from the

Netherlands, 2584 from Germany, and 955 from France. Thus, 13 962 visitors of 15 163, i.e. more than 90% of persons asking for tourist information where representing domestic tourism or tourism from the neighbouring countries.

The data collected by the MT shows that in 2011, 57 288 people contacted the MT by e-mail, by regular mail, by phone, by fax, or on the spot. Nearly 90% of contacts originated from Belgium or its neighbouring countries.

In summary, the statistics indicates that the percentage of tourists coming outside of Belgium and its neighbouring countries is very small, and allows assuming that outside of this area Liège does not have the image of a tourism destination.

4. Aims Set for Liège

In a SWOT analysis of the city,⁹ low awareness of Liège as a tourism destination on the external markets is mentioned first in the list of weaknesses, while the favourable geographic situation and extremely rich tourist offer are considered its biggest strengths (FTPL 2012: 26). One of the aims set for the city by the FTPL is to position Liège as the first choice destination on the tourism markets both in Belgium as well as abroad. In order to do it, it is considered important to communicate “strong, attractive and distinctive image” for the city, emphasising the unique character of the tourist offer of Liège and its region (FTPL 2012: 3, 40).

In a document concerning the whole French-speaking part of Belgium, one of the goals set is to improve and enhance the perception of the region on the international tourism markets. In order to achieve the goal, branding, positioning, visibility and the perception of the region by its potential visitors are considered the key words. Among the main targets on the international tourism market, Great Britain is mentioned first in the document (OPT 2011: 3-5).

5. Analysis

Starting from the assumption that outside of Belgium and its neighbouring countries Liège does not have the image of a tourism destination, it will be analysed in the framework of theoretical ideas of tourism destination image which factors can contribute to the creation of the image of Liège.

5.1 Functional and Psychological Factors That Can Create the Image of Liège

As mentioned above, destination image can be defined as a set of ideas, impressions and beliefs people have of a destination, derived from a wide spectrum of information sources. Furthermore, destination image can be seen as being composed of functional (or tangible) components that are directly observable or measurable, such as location, scenery, attractions or prices; as well as of psychological (or abstract) components which cannot be directly measured, like atmosphere or friendliness of the local people (MacKay and Fesenmaier 1997: 541, Baloglu and McCleary 1999: 871, 874, 880; Echtner and Ritchie 2003: 38-40).

⁹ Presented in the *Plan stratégique 2012-2015*.

In the case of Liège, both functional and psychological factors are accentuated in the information presented by local DMOs on the Internet: the factors related to its location, scenery and architecture (functional or tangible factors), as well as folklore, cultural richness, atmosphere, and character of the local people (psychological or abstract factors).

5.1.1 Functional Factors

Liège is introduced as a city in the very heart of Europe (visitbelgium.com, belgiumtheplaceto.be). Its architectural heritage is pointed out as one of its biggest richnesses offering both historical architecture and examples of modern, sometimes hypermodern architecture. The latter is often represented by the Liège-Guillemins railway station that can be considered one of the symbols of the city (visitbelgium.com, liege.be/tourisme, opt.be).

The city is presented as a place offering various tourist attractions such as churches and museums (liege.be/tourisme, visitbelgium.com, opt.be). Often the importance of the Grand Curtius Museum is pointed out for its rich collection of archaeological objects, masterpieces of glass, arms, and decorative art (visitbelgium.com, Bovy *et al.* 2009). The present cathedral of Liège (St. Paul's Cathedral) was not the central church of the city until the 19th century when it took over the function of the historical cathedral (St. Lambert's Cathedral) demolished during the Liège Revolution started at the end of the 18th century. Being one of the largest cathedrals in Europe, it may have been one of the main tourist attractions of Liège today. The Archéoforum museum founded under the site of the former cathedral and exposing archaeological vestiges of different periods of the history of the city is the largest infrastructure of that kind in Europe (Kokelberg in Botta *et al.* 2007: 19, archeoforumdeliege.be).

5.1.2 Psychological Factors

As mentioned above, psychological (abstract) factors that may participate in the formation of image of a destination can be more difficult to define. Still, several authors dealing with the issues of destination image emphasize the importance of abstract factors such as atmospheres or auras, or specific cultural patterns, traditions and community values that can be projected into a distinctive destination image (Bramwell and Rawding 1996: 203, MacKay and Fesenmaier 1997: 541, Echtner and Ritchie 2003: 40-43).

In the case of Liège, the psychological factors are considered highly important to present by local DMOs on the Internet. The city is introduced to its potential visitors as a destination with “positive-minded population, always ready for a feast” (liege.be/tourisme), having intense cultural and artistic life (liege.be/tourisme, visitbelgium.com); a city full of joy of life (visitbelgium.com), “alive and bustling around the clock”, and hosting cultural activities all year around (opt.be). Liège is also presented as having “rebellious, anti-authority spirit”, and as a place where love of traditions and many festivities create a unique atmosphere (belgiumtheplaceto.be).

Personal experience of the author of this assignment overlaps with the information offered by the DMOs allowing to say that there can be perceived a specific warm and lively atmosphere in Liège.

At the same time, several researchers have found that Liège can have the image of a place with a distinctive friendly atmosphere only when tourist speaks some French, and the language issue can be a problem for its visitors coming from other countries (Buijsman *et al.* 2011: 18, Winder *et al.* 2011: 47).

Among other information providers than the DMOs, Wikipedia also pays attention to city's atmosphere and its rich cultural life, including its crowded folk festivals and La Batte, an internationally popular market open on Sundays, and points out the "significant nightlife" of Liège ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki.liège](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/liège)).

In the promotional material available on paper, the expression "Ardent City" is often used in order to capture the character of life and atmosphere of Liège (opt.be) but is very seldom displayed on the Internet.

5.2 Contradicting Information That Can Complicate the Image Creation

It is argued by Govers *et al.* that information available on the Internet can influence the way in which destinations are perceived and can make destination images fragmented (Govers *et al.* 2007: 978). It is possible to say that in the case of Liège, the information on the Internet that may contribute to the formation of the image of Liège can be seen both fragmented and confusing for its potential visitors.

Among the information sources not controlled by local DMOs, the sources can be found that introduce Liège in a way that may be seen as contradicting with the information offered by the DMOs, and that can create a different image to the city than intended to create by the DMOs. For instance, in Wikipedia Liège is primarily introduced as an economic capital of the region and a former industrial city (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liège) not a city with rich cultural life and architectural heritage as exposed by the DMOs (liege.be/tourisme, visitbelgium.com). Lonely Planet presents Liège as an industrial city as well; moreover, the source describes the city as a "decaying" place people "love or loathe", holding a rich showcase of mediaeval art and old intimate quarters at the same time (lonelyplanet.com). According to Lonely Planet, Liège is a place where visitor has to take time in order to discover its charm since it is not "immediately apparent" (Ibid.).

According to Echtner and Ritchie, a wide spectrum of subjects can be incorporated into destination image, including historical and economic issues (Echtner and Ritchie 2003: 38-39). It can be said that in the case of Liège, the city's long-term central role in the economic life of the region have rather created an image of an industrial city to Liège, and it is a complicated task to change it whereas the image of a tourist city is not established yet (Sohn *et al.* 2011: 30).

Among other types of tourism, the issues mentioned above can also influence the conference tourism (or MICE tourism) whereas perceived image of a potential convention venue may have an effect on the choice of the place (Oppermann 1996: 15-16, Ramirez *et al.* n.d.: 2-3). At the same time, MICE tourism is considered important facet of tourism to Liège, including on the markets outside of Belgium and its neighbouring countries (FTPL 2012: 22-25, belgiumtheplaceto.be).

It can be said that there are several psychological factors represented that could contribute to the creation of an image to Liège as a friendly destination with positive atmosphere. At the same time, the news spread about the city in media (in English) during last few years can be seen as strongly contradicting it. Looking for information on Liège on the Internet, extensive media coverage of two tragic events that took place in Liège recently can be found: gas explosion with several victims in 2010 (news. bbc.co.uk, france24.com, foxnews.com), and killing on the main square of the city in 2011 (bbc.co.uk, telegraph.co.uk, guardian.co.uk).¹⁰ Both events are also represented by several videos in YouTube. It can be said that coverage of these two events dominates over other news in the international media concerning Liège. According to Stepchenkova and Eales, the choice of topics and favourability of media coverage may have influence on the image of a tourism destination. In line with this argument, it is possible to assume that attention paid to these events by international media may have negative effect on the image of Liège (Stepchenkova and Eales 2011: 198).

5.3 Issues of Authenticity

According to several authors, the perceived authenticity of a place can influence the image of a destination and the tourists' motivation to visit a destination, which makes it important to maintain the authenticity of the historical districts of a destination (Ramkissoon and Uysal 2011: 539- 543, Naoi 2004 :59). In Liège, several historical quarters are well preserved (D'Anna 2009: 1) while numerous historical buildings are replaced with new constructions. In the old town, the changes were often carried out with the aim to keep or bring back inhabitants in order avoid depopulation of the historical districts (Frankignoulle and Jacob 1988: 39). Major transformations of the urban landscape of Liège started already in the 19th century (Stiennon in Stiennon and Mahaux 1981: 104).

It is possible to say that due to the replacement of many historical buildings with new constructions, Liège can make an eclectic impression in terms of architecture since the historical buildings are often side by side with newer apartment houses or office buildings. It can be argued that although there are many features that allow presenting Liège as a historical city and creating the image of a tourism destination with rich cultural and architectural heritage (visitbelgium.com), it is rather a complex task to support that image with visual information. Among other issues, it can be considered complicated to take panoramic photos of Liège that could support the image of a historical city as newer and often higher buildings can dominate the photos.

At the same time, according to several authors visual information can play especially important role in the formation of image of destinations that are not yet well-known. Furthermore, pictures representing a destination can communicate its values and ideas (MacKay and Fesenmaier 1997: 538, Nicoletta and Servidio 2012: 26). In Wikipedia that is one of the most widely used information resources (aacsb.edu), Liège is represented by a panoramic photo dominated by the river Meuse and new high buildings (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liège). It can be supposed that for a potential visitor it can communicate that Liège is rather a big modern city than a historical city that values its historical architectural heritage. In contrast to Wikipedia, local DMOs rather prefer to introduce the city presenting the photos of single objects, often historical buildings or sites, that could contribute

¹⁰ Numerous coverages can be found created by the BBC and The Guardian, not all mentioned in the list of references.

to the creation of the image of a historical city to Liège (belgiumthelaceto.be, visitbelgium.com, liege.be/tourisme).

6. Possibilities of Experiential Marketing

In order to achieve the goal of local DMOs to put Liège on the map of internationally well-known tourism destinations, some ideas of experiential marketing with its central idea to design memorable experiences and engage as many senses as possible can be used (Pine and Gilmore 1998: 102-104, Scmitt 1999: 53, Williams 2006: 485, Lin *et al.* 2011:172-173). It can be said that in the case of Liège, it is possible to build up an image of the city and design effective marketing campaigns based on several psychological factors above all, making visitors feel the atmosphere of the city, creating events that allow being part of it, and presenting the cultural and architectural heritage of the town in the context of its distinctive atmosphere (Williams 2006: 485).

In order to engage all five senses that is considered important by Pine and Gilmore in the framework of experiential marketing (hearing, sight, touch, smell and taste), city's rich cultural life can be involved when creating experiences for visitors and designing marketing campaigns, as well as its architectural heritage, local cuisine and shopping facilities offering a wide range of local goods (Pine and Gilmore 1998:104). According to Smilansky, envisioning a well-defined theme or central idea is important in order to create a memorable event (Smilansky 2009:6). In this matter, existing experience of local DMOs in designing events with central ideas derived from local cultural heritage can be used and developed in order to create analogical events for the international markets.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this assignment was to research which factors can influence the image of the city of Liège as a tourism destination on the international markets. As the goal was to establish knowledge about factors that may participate in the image creation in the absence of actual visitation, the information on Liège available on the Internet in English was used in the analysis above all.

It is possible to say that there can be found several functional and psychological factors such as location, architectural heritage, distinctive atmosphere or rich cultural life that could contribute to the creation of an image to Liège that can allow making the city better known as a tourism destination on the international markets. At the same time, one can argue that there is not too much information on Liège available in other languages than French on the Internet presenting the city's tourism potential to the markets outside of its present sources of incoming tourism. Moreover, it is possible to say that information on the city available in English can be considered contradicting and confusing for potential visitors of the town.

It can be said that it needs close collaboration of local DMOs, and the creation of a common strategy on the basis of an analysis of all factors that can participate in the image creation of Liège as a tourism destination in order to improve its perception on the international markets. Moreover, it

is possible to argue that effective marketing work in other languages than French is needed to promote tourism offer of Liège outside of Belgium and its neighbouring countries.

Assignment 4

In this final part of the assignment the learning outcome obtained in the process of working with the portfolio assignment will be discussed, followed by a short description of the structure and objectives of the internship organisation, the Liège Tourist Office, as well as an evaluation of the tasks carried out during the internship. In addition, the social and cultural experiences obtained in the course of working at the office will be included into the discussion.

1. Learning Outcome of the Portfolio Assignment

Working with the portfolio assignment enabled to apply theoretical knowledge acquired in the framework of the Tourism Master's programme at the Aalborg University to a concrete case, a selected topic related to the city of Liège as a tourism destination.

It can be said that working with the internship assignment was very different from working with the assignments written during the two theoretical semesters. Differently from the most of works completed before the internship semester that can be categorised as desk research, the internship portfolio assignment was written on the spot where the author of the work was daily in a close contact with the local tourism professionals offering a lot of information that had influence on the choice of topic. Furthermore, it is possible to say that in some cases it was a challenge to keep the theoretical perspective of the assignment apart from the practical perspective of the daily work at the office.

Writing the assignment offered a valuable possibility to reflect on the relationship between theory and practice in the field of tourism. The documents issued by different local institutions dealing with the tourism issues in Liège were analysed in the light of the chosen theoretical framework. It was interesting to learn that often the aims set in the documents were of very general nature, and probably not supported by any research. It can be supposed that involving academic research in the development of documents of that kind could help to set more concrete goals, and find the ways how to achieve them.

The theoretical framework chosen for the assignment offers much wider range of ideas than those used in this work. One of the most important learning outcomes of the assignment was to get informed in many ways the selected topic can be treated, and created a wish to continue working with the issues of tourism destination image and experiential marketing in further research.

2. Internship Organisation – the Liège Tourist Office

Liège Tourist Office (Office du Tourisme de la Ville de Liège) is an institution of the city of Liège. The office is financed from the budget of the city, and its website is a part of the website of the city of Liège that is also reflected in its internet address, www.liege.be/tourisme.

The office was created in 1929 with a view to promote the Expo 1930 organised in Liège. Three main goals set to the office at that time have remained the same today: 1) promotion of the city, 2) offering tourist information, and 3) organisation of events. Several tasks have been added that have an important role to play in the activities of the office today: creation of publications, booking and organisation of guided tours; participation in different events like fairs, expositions, festivals, events dedicated to promotion of cultural and architectural heritage, etc. (Office du Tourisme 2009:1-2). At present, the number of employees of the office is about 30, and they carry out a wide range of tasks related to reception of visitors; promotion, communication and press relations; creation of projects and organisation of events, creation of and carrying out guided tours, collecting information, managing databases, and translation.

The office provides guided tours in the old town on a daily basis. The activities organised by the office, often in collaboration with other institutions such as churches or art galleries, or with artists and musicians, combine the promotion of the tourist attractions of the city with intellectual purposes. It can be said that a typical event organised by the tourist office includes a game that motivates the visitors of the city or its inhabitants to visit different sites of architectural and cultural importance in order to fill in a questionnaire and win a prize. The percentage of the local people participating in the tourist activities organised by the office seems to be high.

An important part of the work of the office is organisation of tourist information days with the purpose to promote the city as a tourism destination, selecting a specific angle (historical, cultural) around which the information provided during the day is organised. Another type of events created by the office is thematic events inspired by cultural phenomena such as literature or comic strips, relating the sites in the city with characters from the books, etc.

It is possible to claim that many activities of the Liège Tourist Office are closely related to the cultural issues, the issues of the local culture in particular.

3. Tasks Carried Out in the Framework of Internship, and the Social and Cultural Outcome

The tasks carried out in the framework of the internship at the Liège Tourist Office included both individual assignments and working in a team.

3.1 Individual Assignments

One of the most important individual tasks carried out during the internship was the analysis of the information offered on the website of the office in English, and its comparison with the information available in French. The outcome of the analysis was presented to the office in the form of report, including several propositions for making changes. Among other things, the task enabled to reflect on the possibilities to present a tourism destination on the international markets.

A major work to realize was the creation of a guided tour in the old town of Liège in English, carried out on the basis of the tour in French. The internship enabled to put the individually prepared material into practice, and get the tour guide work experience. One of the most important

experiences obtained in the course of the preparation work was to learn to find the ways how to present specific local issues to people coming from different cultural context from the perspective of marketing.

Two tasks carried out individually consisted of working with promotional texts for events organised by the office, a tourist rally dedicated to comic strips (August 2012), and the celebration of the year of Grétry¹¹ (preparations for 2013). Both cases enabled to put several theoretical ideas offered by the programme of the university into practice.

In the framework of the marketing campaign of the tourist rally, a contact was established with the Meuse-Rhine Journal, a publication (in English) covering business and leisure news in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands; and a promotional article was written, published in the issue of the 30th of July.

The assignments concerning the celebration of the year of Grétry 2013 consisted of compiling a promotional text (in French) for a booklet, as well as creating ideas and making propositions about how to make the year of Grétry visible in town. Working with this subject enabled to apply theoretical knowledge obtained in the framework of the studies to a real marketing campaign.

3.2 Tasks Carried Out in a Team

The tasks carried out in a team involved participation in creation and organisation of events (tourist rally dedicated to comic strip and tourist information day for German-speaking tourists), as well as in the analysis of the outcome of the events from the perspective of organisation, promotion, collaboration, and customer satisfaction. It enabled to get to know the working culture of the internship organisation, and offered a lot of material for reflections on possible applications of theoretical knowledge acquired in the framework of the university programme to the tasks carried out daily at a tourist office.

The internship offered many culturally enriching experiences as several meetings held for planning events were attended by leading figures of the local cultural life (musicians, artists, representatives of church). It contributed to a better understanding of the cultural and social context of the internship place, and created many ideas that can be used both in further studies and the future work.

During the two theoretical semesters at the university, creating presentations on different topics formed an important part of the studies. The experience obtained in the course of making presentations at the university facilitated carrying out a task during the internship. The office organised a promotion event for a group of tourism students (40 persons) from the Inholland University of Applied Sciences (Amsterdam) interested in marketing activities of the tourist offices of several European cities (in the Netherlands, in Germany and in Belgium). It offered an opportunity to create a presentation of the city of Liège as a tourism destination, and discuss the problems related to promotion and marketing work of Liège.

¹¹ André Grétry (1741-1813), an internationally well-known composer born in Liège.

3.3 Working with Tourists

Working in direct contact with the tourists formed only a small part of the tasks carried out during the internship but offered challenging and culturally enriching experiences. Tour guide work (in English and partly in French) involved contacts with visitors from different countries having different cultural backgrounds. Working at the reception of the tourist office can be considered the most complicated part of the internship since it needed thorough knowledge of the destination that was hard to achieve during a short internship period.

3.4 Liège Tourist Office as an Internship Placement

As an internship placement, the Liège Tourist Office can be considered a remarkably good experience, offering professional supervision and engaging intern in the activities of different nature and scope. Throughout the whole internship period, the colleagues were supportive and ready to share their professional experience and knowledge. The tourist office enabled to establish several valuable professional and personal contacts.

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