

# STANDARD FRONT PAGE FOR EXAMINATION PAPERS

To be filled in by the student(s). Please use capital letters.

Subjects: (tick box)	Project	Synopsis	Portfolio	Thesis X	Written Assignment
----------------------	---------	----------	-----------	----------	--------------------

Study programme:	Tourism	
Semester:	10 th	
Exam Title:	Master Thesis	
Name and date of birth/ Names and dates of birth of group members:	Name(s)	Date(s) of birth
	Katarina Pierzgova	03.02.1988
Hand in date:	31.05.2013	
Project title /Synopsis Title/Thesis Title	Slovakia as a tourist destination A case study of Danes' perceptions of Slovakia as a tourist destination which also questions the presentation of Slovakia in the promotional materials issued by Slovak Tourist Board and its branding as a Central European Country	
According to the study regulations, the maximum number of keystrokes of the paper is:	192 000	
Number of keystrokes (one standard page = 2400 keystrokes, including spaces) (table of contents, bibliography and appendix do not count)*	188 048	
Supervisor (project/synopsis/thesis):	Lill Rastad Bjørst	
<p>I/we hereby declare that the work submitted is my/our own work. I/we understand that plagiarism is defined as presenting someone else's work as one's own without crediting the original source. I/we are aware that plagiarism is a serious offense, and that anyone committing it is liable to academic sanctions.</p> <p>Rules regarding Disciplinary Measures towards Students at Aalborg University (PDF):</p> <p><a href="http://plagiat.aau.dk/GetAsset.action?contentId=4117331&amp;assetId=4171389">http://plagiat.aau.dk/GetAsset.action?contentId=4117331&amp;assetId=4171389</a></p> <p>Date and signature(s):</p> <p>31.05 2013</p>		

\* Please note that you are not allowed to hand in the paper if it exceeds the maximum number of keystrokes indicated in the study regulations. Handing in the paper means using an exam attempt.

**DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE AND GLOBAL STUDIES  
STUDY PROGRAMME : TOURISM**

**MASTER THESIS**

**SLOVAKIA AS A TOURIST DESTINATION**

**A case study of Danes' perceptions of Slovakia as a tourist destination which also questions the presentation of Slovakia in the promotional materials issued by Slovak Tourist Board and its branding as a Central European Country**



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The writing of this dissertation has been the most significant academic challenge I have ever had to face. First and foremost I offer my sincerest gratitude to my supervisor, Lill Rastad Bjørst, who has supported me throughout my thesis with her patience and knowledge, while allowing me the room to work in my own way. I attribute the level of my degree to her encouragement and effort and without her this thesis, too, would not have been completed or written. One simply could not wish for a better or friendlier supervisor.

I would also like to express my gratitude to all informants who found time to talk to me about their holidays in Slovakia, in person or via Skype, some of them also from abroad and hence provided valuable data for this research.

I am also heartily thankful to those who made this thesis possible such as my parents, family and friends who gave me the moral support and helped me with the gathering of research material.

## **ABSTRACT**

The concepts of a destination image, destination marketing and branding are closely interrelated. The objective of this study is to examine perceived images of Slovakia as tourism destination amongst Danes, analyse what images of Slovakia are created in promotional materials that are available to Danish tourists in Denmark and investigate what are the barriers that prevents Danish tourists from travelling to Slovakia.

The empirical data were collected by interviewing Danes who have been to Slovakia for various purposes, who lived in Slovakia and Danes who have not been to Slovakia yet. The aim of conducting interviews was to determine what images of Slovakia informants had before travelling to Slovakia, how were these images formed by various sources of information and if and how they changed after visiting Slovakia. Furthermore, the research aimed to confirm assumption, that images are one of the most important factors that influence tourists in their decision making process about their holidays. Moreover, the research focuses on analysing how Slovakia is presented in promotional materials which are distributed to potential Danish tourists during tourism fairs. The aim of analysing these materials is to find out if Slovakia creates images that distinguish the country from the competition since this is the main goal of country's branding strategy. Consideration is also given to a fact that Slovakia is one of the countries that try to re-brand themselves as Central European in order to get rid of negative images connected with communist past of Eastern Block.

The results of the analysis do not support presented assumptions about destination images influencing tourism behaviour in this particular case. Furthermore, images created in promotional materials do not present Slovakia as a unique country, rather presents Slovakia as a part of various regions and worth to visit in a combination with other countries. The analysis furthermore shows Danes' inability in distinguishing the regions of Central and Eastern Europe and hence country's failing in giving up of post-communist past.

Theoretical implications were drawn based on the study findings, and recommendations for future researchers were made.

Key words: Brands and Branding; Consumer behaviour; Country image; Destination image; Nation image; Central Europe; Eastern Europe

## **LIST OF PICTURES**

Picture nr. 1: The cover of the Lonely Planet Guide Book to the Central Europe (2005).....52

Picture nr. 2: The cover of the Lonely Planet Guide Book to the Eastern Europe (2001).....52

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>LIST OF PICTURES.....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>1 INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2 METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 Research Design .....	7
2.1.1 Goal of the research.....	7
2.1.2 Research position .....	8
2.1.3 Research methods .....	8
2.1.4 Research approach .....	9
2.2 Data collection.....	10
2.2.1 Sampling .....	11
2.2.2 Interviews .....	12
2.2.3 Interview guide .....	15
2.3 Defining barriers .....	17
2.4 Quality criteria .....	17
2.4.1 Replication .....	18
2.4.2 Limitations .....	18
2.4.3 Delimitations .....	19
2.5 Research critique .....	20
<b>3 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND .....</b>	<b>21</b>
3.1 Brands and Branding .....	22
3.2 Destination Branding vs. Nation Branding .....	23
3.3 Destination and Nation branding in Central and Eastern Europe .....	26
3.4 Destination Brand and Destination Image .....	28
3.5 Nation Brand and Nation Image .....	29
3.6 Nation Image and Stereotypes .....	31
3.7 Image and its formation process.....	34

3.8	Typology of images .....	36
3.9	Destination Image and its influence on Consumer Behaviour in Tourism .....	37
<b>4</b>	<b>ANALYSIS .....</b>	<b>41</b>
4.1	Awareness of Slovakia in Denmark .....	41
4.2	Slovak Nation Brand created in promotional materials .....	45
4.3	Analysis of the interviews according to chosen themes .....	49
4.3.1	Central Europe vs. Eastern Europe .....	50
4.3.2	Danes and Tourism .....	53
4.3.3	Slovakia as a part of the country called 'Eastern Europe' .....	55
4.3.4	The differences in the CEE region.....	56
4.3.5	Informants' behaviour and their decision making process .....	57
4.3.6	Organic and induced images of Slovakia.....	58
4.3.7	Slovakia is grey .....	64
4.4	Images of Slovakia perceived during holidays .....	68
4.4.1	Eastern country with western cities .....	68
4.4.2	Slovak hospitality .....	69
4.4.3	It is a challenge to be a tourist in Slovakia .....	71
4.5	Evaluation of re-branding strategy .....	77
<b>5</b>	<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>78</b>
5.1	Research contribution and suggestions .....	81
<b>6</b>	<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>APPENDIX .....</b>	<b>89</b>

# 1 INTRODUCTION

It does sometimes seem that globalization is turning the world into a gigantic supermarket, where nations are nothing more than products on the shelf, frantically trying to attract the attention of each passing consumer. As globalization increases, nations compete with each other to successfully export their goods and services, attract tourism and foreign investment (Kotler et. al., 1997) and position and differentiate themselves in the perceptions of consumers, managers and investors (Chattalas et. al., 2007). Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, twenty eight countries have emerged out of the eight former communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe which engaged in a substantial and complex exercise to position themselves on to the geographical and mental map of Europe and indeed the entire world as democratic, politically stable countries with emerging and promising market economies. During the late 1990s image management became institutionalized in Central Europe and became more strategic, making the first steps towards a more holistic and coordinated approach that would result in country brands (Szondi, 2007). However, destination branding and positioning strategy are generally still poorly developed in much of this region's tourism industry, owing to a combination of lack of finance, experience and expertise (Morgan et. al., 2004; Hall, 1999, 2002). On the contrary, looking at the successful campaigns (for example Hungary's "Talent for Entertaining" campaign developed by the Hungarian National Tourism Organization in 2005 or Poland's "The Polish Plumber" campaign created by the French anti-constitution campaigners or the joint effort of neighbouring countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) to promote the region so-called "Visegrad group" together), it can be argued that the above statement does not hold true for the majority of Central and Eastern European countries as their destination brands have been successfully developed and communicated (Szondi, 2007).

Slovakia as the Central European country with the difficult background influenced by the communistic era after the Second World War is still struggling with attracting tourists from other European countries. Analysing inbound tourism in Slovakia, the Slovak Tourist Board (Slovenská agentúra pre cestovný ruch) has had reported a decline in international arrivals since 2008 caused mainly by the global financial crisis (Slovak Tourists Board, 2012<sup>A</sup>). Even though there was the slight increase in international arrivals to Slovakia in 2011 (1,326,639



international tourists in 2010, 1,460,361 tourists in 2011), numbers are still very low in comparison to other Central European countries - Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. However, it is from these countries that the majority of tourists travelling to Slovakia come from; hence they are considered to be source markets of tourists (Slovak Tourist Board/Marketing Strategy, 2011<sup>B</sup>).

As the author of this paper is Slovak and studies in Denmark, she has a personal connection to both of these countries and decided to analyse their interrelationship within the tourism industry. Scandinavian countries, like Denmark, can be considered as a market for potential tourists. Looking at the statistics of tourists travelling to Slovakia from 2008 to 2011, none of the Scandinavian countries were among the first 15 countries (Slovak Tourist Board, 2012<sup>C</sup>). According to another statistics made by Slovak Statistical Office (Štatistický úrad Slovenskej Republiky) in May 2012, which aimed to analyse inbound and outbound organized tourism in Slovakia, only 341 tourists from Denmark came to visit Slovakia in 2011 against 216 in 2010 (Slovak Statistical Office, 2012<sup>D</sup>). In addition to same, Slovak Tourist Board designs an annual report about the structure of foreign tourists in accommodation establishments. Report shows how many Danish tourists were accommodated in Slovakia in a period from 1998 until 2011. While in 1998 the number of visitors circulated around 5,000, in 2007 it was more than 14,000 visitors (Slovak Tourism Board, 2012<sup>E</sup>). After this year a decline occurred which led to rapid decrease of Danish tourists in Slovakia to 7,153 in 2010 with the slight increase in 2011 to 7,774 tourists. Among Scandinavian countries, Denmark showed the lowest increase in tourist numbers when comparing 2010 and 2011. More tourists have arrived from Finland (11,982), followed by tourists from Sweden (9,976) and the only lower number of tourists travelled from Norway (6227). Following previous discussion it can be claimed that people from Denmark are not very interested in visiting Slovakia and reasons for same need to be explored.

As Morgan et. al. (2010, p. 112) discuss, tourism holds a significant position in the substantial political, economic and social restructuring processes that have taken place in Central European Countries since the early 1990s. Similarly, even though travel and tourism industry and its infrastructure are still not well developed in Slovakia and its direct contribution to Slovak GDP was only 2,56 % in 2010 and 2,53 % in 2011 (Slovak Statistical Office, 2012<sup>D</sup>), it is still considered to be a very important industry which needs to be more developed. One of the major objectives for Slovakia is therefore to attract more tourists from

source countries (Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary) but also from Western and Scandinavian countries with potential interest in travelling to Slovakia and potential tourists. One of the tools used to achieve such a goal might be to develop a good brand and build up positive image of the country; as image is a key in how a destination is represented and can inspire people to visit and revisit a particular country (Morgan et. al., 2004).

As discussed previously, looking at the statistics about inbound tourism from Scandinavian countries it can be assumed that tourists from Denmark do not have much interest in travelling to Slovakia and reasons why should be explored and revealed. There are many different factors influencing consumers' decision-making process about their holiday destination and the positive destination image is undoubtedly one of them. Image of a country determines the way the world sees a nation and the way it treats a nation (Anholt, 2007). A country's image results from its geography, history, proclamations, art and music, famous citizens and other features (Kotler & Gertner, 2002, p. 251). A Nation's image affects the individual's subjective perception and consequent behaviour and destination choice (Echtner and Ritchie, 2003; Gallarza et. al., 2002, p.56; Chon, 1990). National image is important in tourism industry in terms of shaping an opinion about a nation/country. Moreover, positive image of a country might be a powerful weapon in high competing environment.

As it is apparent from the above statistics and discussion, Danish people do not travel very much to Slovakia, hence they do have other preferences in holiday destinations. If Slovak Tourist Board and other tourism bodies in Slovakia are interested in bringing more tourists from Denmark, it is necessary for them to know what Danes think about Slovakia as a tourist destination, hence what is a perceived image of Slovakia in Denmark.

Destination image is believed to be a key factor in the travel decision making process (Tasci and Gartner, 2007; Beerli and Martin, 2004; Echtner and Ritchie, 2003; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999). When discussing a nation image, also stereotypes must be taken into the consideration. If tourists do not have knowledge about the image of a country, stereotypes build in their subconscious what will influence their decision.

Therefore, the aim of this research is to determine how Danes perceive Slovakia as the tourist destination. Hence, study aims to examine what images about Slovakia are holds amongst Danes and the paper will also focus on detecting and identifying how these images influence consumers (tourists) in their decision making process when deciding on holidays. Furthermore, this research examines what images of Slovakia are created in the promotional

materials made by Slovak Tourist Board which are available in Denmark and Danes can come in contact with during various tourism fairs where the Slovak Embassy promotes Slovakia as the tourist destination. Another aim of the research is to ascertain if Slovakia is successful in the efforts of eliminating negative images of the country which can be caused and entrenched in communism past of the country.

Based upon the study's aim and previous discussion above destination branding and destination image and its influence on consumer behaviour, following research question has been established:

***How Danes perceive Slovakia as a tourist destination and what are the barriers that prevent Danes from travelling to Slovakia? How is Slovakia progressing with the branding as a country from Central Europe and how is presented in the promotional materials made by the Slovak Tourist Board?***

The research paper is divided into four main chapters; methodology, theoretical background, data analysis and conclusion. Methodology part is devoted to explanation of the used research design and research method and data analysis method. The theoretical background chapter includes the relevant literature regarding brands and branding, destination branding, nation branding, branding in Central and Eastern European countries and last but not least destination image and its influence on consumer behaviour in tourism. The empirical data are later analysed in the analysis chapter, which is the path of determining perceived images of Slovakia amongst Danes. The findings and suggestions are presented in the conclusion chapter.

## **2 METHODOLOGY**

The aim of the methodology chapter is to provide an understanding of the methodological considerations of the research and describe and explain how the author has proceeded in order to fulfil the purpose of the research. In each section a theoretical definitions and explanations are given followed by the author's own choice of methodology and justification for it. Firstly, the research design and approaches to the study are discussed. Thereafter, the discussion about the research method, data and data collection is provided. Last but not least, the research examines the quality criteria, its limitations, delimitations and provides critique of the study. Furthermore, the chapter provides the reader with the list of informants with the short description of their background and details of their holidays in Slovakia.

### **2.1 Research design**

Research design is a logical progression of stages or tasks, from problem formulation to the generation of conclusions or theory that are necessary in planning or carrying out a study (Bickman & Rog 2009; Marshall & Rossman 1999; Creswell 1997). Therefore, in the following part of the paper information about research goals, conceptual framework, research methods and quality criteria will be provided.

#### **2.1.1 Goal of the research**

Destination image plays a key role in contemporary world of tourism and it is a very important part of the destination branding process. There are many studies (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Echtner & Ritchie, 2003; Banayi, 2010; Kornberger, 2010) discussing significance of branding and destination image and its' influence on tourists' decisions about holidays destinations. This research is conducted in order to analyse how is Slovakia promoted in Denmark and what is a perceived images of Slovakia as a tourist destination in Denmark. Perception is the process by which an individual selects, organizes, and interprets information to create a meaningful picture of the world (Pizam & Mansfeld, 2005). Perceptions create opinions about a destination and might also lead to the actions; hence they

influence consumers in initial phases of deciding where to travel for a holidays. Therefore, the aim of this research is also examining all factors that form destination image and affect Danish tourists to travel and/or not to travel to Slovakia. Findings of the study could be relevant for Slovak Tourist Board - the author of Tourism Marketing Strategy as well as for other tourism organizations operating within travel and tourism industry in Slovakia. Knowledge about how Danes perceive Slovakia as a tourist destination can help understand their travelling and behavioural intentions and might show how the image of Slovakia as tourist destination need to be re-created or re-shaped in order to attract target groups of tourists from Denmark.

### **2.1.2 Research position**

The author of the research comes from Slovakia but she took her master studies in Denmark (September 2011 – June 2013). During her stay in Denmark she has met many different opinions about Slovakia and decided to conduct a study about perceived images of Slovakia as a tourist destination. The author, and hence the research, have been also influenced by prior statistical findings and reports made by the Slovak Statistical Office and the Slovak Tourist Board, which shows low number in international inbound tourist's arrivals to Slovakia from Denmark and from the Scandinavian countries in general. The research is based on various theories that discuss nation brand and destination and nation branding (Kotler & Gertner, 2002; Anholt, 2005/2007; Dinnie, 2008), destination image (Banyai, 2009; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991; San Martin & del Bosque, 2008; Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2001), image formation (Banayi, 2010; San Martin & del Bosque, 2008), image and stereotypes (Dinnie, 2008; Shaughnessy & Shaughnessy, 2000; Clausen, 2009) and consumer behaviour in tourism (Echtner and Ritchie, 1991; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Beerli and Martin, 2004; Tasci and Gartner, 2007; Ulyssal & Brown, 2011).

### **2.1.3 Research methods**

As Bryman (2008) explains, a research method is simply a technique for collecting data. It can involve a specific instrument, such as a self-completion questionnaire or a structured interview schedule, or participant observation. In this part of the paper actions that were taken

in order to conduct the study will be introduced and techniques used to collect and analyse data will be discussed.

When conducting a research study, the researcher can choose between a quantitative and qualitative research method. Qualitative research is a multifaceted approach that investigates culture, society and behaviour through an analysis and synthesis of people's word and actions (Hogan et. al., 2009). This approach does not try to transform verbal symbols into numerical ones and the data remains at the level of words, pictures, reports etc. (Hogan et. al., 2009). In general, qualitative research has traditionally been conducted by means of direct observation of a sample, case studies, personal experience, introspection, interviews, focus groups or the researcher's own participation. Furthermore, the qualitative approach to research differs from the quantitative approach in a number of distinct and important respects; it tends to focus upon small samples rather than larger samples used in quantitative methods (Hogan et. al., 2009). Similarly, this research is approached in the qualitative way; the research is conducted by means of semi-structured interviews conducted with small sample of Danish people who (1) have been to Slovakia, (2) have not been to Slovakia or (3) used to live in Slovakia.

#### **2.1.4 Research approach**

One of the features of the qualitative study is an inductive view of the relationship between theory and research, whereby the former is generated out of the latter (Bryman, 2012). According to Bryman (2008), researcher normally studies literature and theories on a specific subject and then applies them into the research problem. In this case, the studied phenomenon of nation brand and destination image and their influence on consumers' decisions about holidays is well known and researched. On the contrary, there is lack of knowledge and research in relation to the Danish-Slovak tourism relationship and Danes' perception of Slovakia as the tourist destination.

Therefore, this present paper will take an exploratory approach of the research question given the absence of previous studies on the destination image of Slovakia. Given the fact that the paper is limited to the representations of a single country in minds of people from another country and due to the high degree of relativism and subjectivity of destination image, the inductive perspective was considered to be the best option for carrying the analysis and interpreting the findings of the research.

The epistemology of this paper is grounded in interpretivism. Interpretivism as an approach which share a view that the subject matter of the social sciences (people, institutions) is different from that of the natural sciences and therefore requires reflection of distinctiveness of humans as against the natural order (Bryman, 2012). This perspective seemed appropriate for the present research that tries to explore and understand the Slovak brand and image of Slovakia amongst Danes and therefore gives an interpretation of other's interpretations, one of the features of interpretivism.

In this research, the destination image is seen as a relative and dynamic concept and the research effort is targeted towards the understanding of how a specific group of people perceive it. Therefore, this study takes a constructivist perspective on the ontological question which argues that social phenomena are produced through social interactions and are under a constant state of revision (Bryman, 2012). Adopting this ontological dimension, the author presents only one version of social reality that is not considered to be definitive (Bryman, 2008). Similarly in this study, the author presents findings of the research based on the interviews with a small sample of Danes. Therefore, the findings of the research are not definitive and cannot be taken as the only version of perceived image. Results of this study are limited by sample of people, their individualism, background and subjective view on the matter.

## **2.2 Data collection**

Data collection is the very important step in a research process. When conducting a research study there are two main sources of data: primary and secondary. Primary data are collected specifically for the research and the most common data collection methods are surveys and interviews. The greatest advance of primary data is its relevance, while negative aspects include time and monetary costs connected to the data collection process (Kinnear & Taylor, 1996). For the purposes of this study, interviews conducted during the research process are considered to be primary data. Secondary data, on the other hand, are already published data that has been originally collected for other purposes. The greatest benefits of secondary data are the savings in costs and time, while disadvantages include to what extent the information is relevant, current, accurate and impartially collected (Kinnear & Taylor, 1996). Secondary sources of data for this study consist of the tourism statistics about

international inbound tourism in Slovakia made by the Slovak Tourist Board and the Slovak Statistical Office. Furthermore, the promotional materials about Slovakia collected at the Slovak Embassy in Copenhagen are also considered to be secondary data for this research. Moreover, the author gained knowledge about various activities of the Slovak Embassy in Copenhagen in articles published on the embassy's web site; hence the web-site and the news-articles published on the web site also belong to the secondary data. As television broadcasts, films, radio programmes and recordings of all sorts provide information in an audio-visual non-written form (Walliman, 2006, p.53), two movies were discussed in the research (the EuroTrip and the Hostel) and are also considered to be secondary data for this research.

### **2.2.1 Sampling**

Qualitative researchers typically engage in purposive sampling. This type of sampling is essentially to do with the selection of units (which may be people, organizations, documents, departments, etc.) with direct reference to the research questions being asked (Bryman, 2012, p. 416). Taken into the consideration a limitation that purposive sampling should not be generalized on the whole population, it is still used as a core sampling in this research, more specifically, theoretical sampling was chosen. Theoretical sampling is meant to be an iterative approach, in which there is a movement backwards and forwards between sampling and theoretical reflection; data are collected until theoretical saturation has been achieved (Bryman, 2012). For the purposes of this paper, number and structure of informants were not decided prior, the author was interviewing informants until no new or relevant data were appearing to be emerging. However, during the difficult process of findings interviewees (discussed in the following parts of the chapter), theoretical sampling converted to the snowball sampling. Snowballing is sometimes the best way to locate subjects with certain attributes or characteristics necessary in the study. The basic strategy of snowballing involves first identifying several people with relevant characteristics and interviewing them; these subjects are then asked for the names of other people who possess the same attributes they do (Berg, 2007). In this research, informants who were interviewed were asked by the author and to provide names of other people who have visited Slovakia. Hence, besides initial theoretical sampling also snowball sampling was used.



There were two levels of sampling in this research. Firstly, sampling of context; researcher selected two contrasting countries, Slovakia as a country with a certain image and Denmark as a country with potential tourists who possess images of Slovakia. The author choose these two countries as Slovakia is a country where the author was born and raised; in Denmark the author lived and studied for two years, from 2011 to 2013. Therefore she had a close personal relationship and connection to both of the countries. Second level of sampling consisted of participant sampling. Informants were chosen according two main criterions. Firstly, participants had to have Danish nationality; people of different nationalities living in Denmark were not involved in the research. Secondly, they were supposed to was on holidays in Slovakia (business trips or other purposes were also accepted). However, in the research process the author decided to interview also informants who have not been to Slovakia as they could come to contact with information about Slovakia from various sources (promotional materials about Slovakia, movies, books, word-of-mouth, sports involvement etc.), hence could possess an image of the country.

### **2.2.2 Interviews**

The interviews were conducted in the period from the 07<sup>th</sup> April 2013 until the 09<sup>th</sup> May 2013. Obviously, the period for conducting interviews was quite long. Reason for same was caused by difficulties in finding informants who have been to Slovakia and who would be able to provide information about their trip. The author contacted and asked all Danes she knows in order to find out if there is someone who has been to Slovakia. Moreover, she required also their assistance in form of asking their families or friends via social networks or other channels in order to find more people for her interviews. Two informants have emerged out of these efforts. Furthermore, the author contacted Slovak students in Aalborg and Goteborg and asked for help. Four informants were suggested, unfortunately even though they agreed on the interviews, only two of them responded to the direct message from the author. The author tried to contact also friends in Slovakia with same request. As it turned out, one of them was working for Danish company back in Slovakia and provided the author with five names of his Danish ex-colleagues; two informants agreed on the interview and same persons provided the author with another two contacts. Some of the informants from suggested group

refused to help when they found out that the author wanted to conduct the interview in English language.

Besides friends, the author contacted the eight tour operators which offer and sell trips to Slovakia (Spa Tours, Fremad Rejser, 65 Ferie, Dansommer, Novasol, Tiger Reiser, Aktiv familieferie, Ziebe Rejser) and also the Danish-Slovak friendship club (Dansk-Slovakisk Venskabsforening) asking for their assistance, unfortunately only one of the organizations mentioned above would respond to the authors' request even after repeated calls. The interview with Helge Bech, the owner of the Ziebe Rejser, was conducted on the 29<sup>th</sup> April 2013; unfortunately, due to very bad Skype connection it was terminated prematurely.

Last but not least, the author contacted the Slovak Embassy in Copenhagen and asked for its assistance with the research. She visited the Embassy on the 11<sup>th</sup> April 2013 and interviewed the Slovak Economic–Commercial counsellor Michal Vrábel. The counsellor provided the author with valuable information about Slovak-Danish relationships in area of tourism and investments. Furthermore, he described activities and efforts of the embassy in promoting Slovakia as the tourist destination in Denmark. Amongst others, the counsellor described familiarization trip to Slovakia organized for Danish journalists; one of the outcomes of the trip was the article about Slovakia, its mountains and golf, written by Aage Krogsdam and published in Rejser. The author of the article was also contacted and asked for interview, unfortunately he would not respond to the author's email.

After all difficulties with finding informants who have been to Slovakia, the author decided to interview also Danes who have not been there yet. The author understood that they might be also a valuable source of information as formation of image is a development of a mental construct based upon a few impressions chosen from a flood of information (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003). Therefore, if informants who have not been to Slovakia would have come into contact with anything related to Slovakia (promotional materials, commercials, books, movies, stories etc.), they could have images about Slovakia; also unconscious stereotypes were taken into the author's consideration.

All the interviews conducted in this research are semi-structured. Semi-structured interviews in particular, have attracted interest and are widely used (Flick, 2009). The interest is linked to the expectation that the interviewed subjects' viewpoint are more likely to be expressed in an openly design interview situation than in a standardized interview or a questionnaire (Flick, 2009). In this case, the author presented prepared questions to the

interviewees and they followed up these questions. The author encouraged informants to elaborate on questions by asking them also questions which were not prepared in advance but aroused from the context of the interview. Hence, interviews conducted for the purpose of this study were semi-structured. The interviews were conducted with fourteen people from Denmark as per below list:

**Informants who have been to Slovakia as tourists:**

**Anders Frandsen** – creative media manager, 40 years, from Rungsted Kyst, lives in Helsingør.

He was in Bratislava only one day with the group of friends as a short stop between two other destinations; Vienna and Budapest. Date of the trip: Summer 2008.

**Peter Martin Røder** – carpenter, 29 years, from Copenhagen, lives in Kastrup.  
He was in Bratislava during the inter-rail trip with his friends. Date of the trip: Summer 2012.

**Rasmus Mejborg Borup** – student at the Copenhagen University, 22 years, from Slagelse, lives in Copenhagen.

He has been to Slovakia for three days together with other friends during their road trip in Eastern Europe. They stayed only in Bratislava. Date of the trip: Summer 2012.

**Jeppe Skov Svendsen** – customer advisor at Telia, 23 years old, from Bornholm, lives in Copenhagen.

He was in Slovakia to visit a friend, stayed one week in Košice. Date of the trip: July 2011.

**Helge Bech** – owner of the Zieber Rejser, also physiotherapist and lecturer at the University, lives in Esbjerg, age not available.

He was in Slovakia only one time, planning on to there in June 2013.

**Klaus Okkels Erler** – mechanical engineer, 37 years old, from Padborg, lives in Skovby.  
Date of trip: Summer 2009

He went to Slovakia three times, twice to visit a friend and once as supplement to his trip to Budapest with some friends. Every time he stayed in Prešov.

**Simon Nygaard-Thomsen** – cook, 23 years old, from Aalborg, lives in Aalborg. Date of trip: July 2012.

He went to Slovakia with his girlfriend who is Slovakian to visit her family and spent two weeks in Prešov.

#### **Informants who lived in Slovakia:**

**Kim Jepsen** – engineer in Linak, 38 years old. From Sønderborg, lives in Sønderborg. He lived and worked in Slovakia, in Prešov for two years from August 2008 to July 2010.

**Mads Harck** – project leader at the VistaPrint in Zurich, from Sønderborg, currently lives in Zurich, Switzerland.

He lived and worked in Slovakia for six months in 2008.

#### **Informants who have not been to Slovakia:**

**Helle Krogsgaard** – HR manager in business tourism organization, 38 years, from Roskilde, lives in Lyngby/Copenhagen.

**Bjarke Lyngs Mouritsen** – student at the Copenhagen University, 25 years, from Visby, lives in Bronshøj/Copenhagen.

**Phillip Sadolin** – student at the Niels Brock, 22 years old, from Copenhagen, lives in Copenhagen.

**Sidse Mortensen** – student at the Aalborg University, 26 years old, from Kjellerup, currently lives in Thailand.

**Emil Krag Madsen** – student at Copenhagen University, 23 years, from Århus, lives in Bronshøj/Copenhagen.

### **2.2.3 Interview guide**

As it is explained in above part of the chapter, the interviews conducted in this research were semi-structured. Questions were divided into the three main themes: (1) consumer behaviour and decision making process, (2) image formation – perception of Slovakia before travelling, (3) image of Slovakia based on the visit and experiences. However, as using

theoretical saturation, these questions happened to change according to information the author needed to gain.

The kinds of questions asked in qualitative interviews are highly variable (Bryman, 2012). Similarly in this research the author built up the interview guide upon various types of questions. Introducing questions such as “what is your personal relationship towards tourism and travelling?” or “where have you travelled by now?” were used at the beginning in order to make informants feel more relaxed. The author used follow-up questions to make informants elaborate on their answers, probing questions to follow up what has been said “could you say more about that?”, and specifying questions like “how did you handle that situation?”. Direct questions such as “would you evaluate your trip as a good experience?” were used at the end of interviews. In order not to lead informants in their responses the author asked non-leading, indirect questions. For instance the author asked informants about their knowledge from history classes in order to find out if the political background of Slovakia (post-soviet country) was born in informants’ minds.

However, the interview guide had to change when the author decided to interview also people who have not been to Slovakia yet. In their case, the author decided to ask questions about their interrelation with tourism, travelling preferences and experiences and future intentions. The author asked these questions in order to make informants feel relaxed as it was obvious they are a bit confused and stressed talking about a country they have never visited. Afterwards, the author tried to create a situation and put informants into a position of being a tourist in Slovakia by asking: “just imagine that you have decided to go to Slovakia, you took of the plane and you are in Slovakia/Bratislava now, how would you imagine Slovakia/Bratislava to look like?”. The author decided to ask not only about Slovakia, but also about Bratislava, as she noticed many of the informants did trips only to European capital cities and assumed they might be able to have a certain image of Bratislava by comparing it to adjacent capitals.

It has to be mentioned that seven interviews were conducted via Skype. Some of the informants live abroad (Thailand, Switzerland) and had limited time to talk to the author. Therefore, questions in these interviews had to be revised in order to ask the most important questions.

All the interviews were recorded and fully transcribed by the author. Even though a transcribing process is very time-consuming and repetitive, the author decided to transcribe all

interviews by herself. Transcribing allowed the author to get familiar with the data and start analysing themes at the very early stage of analysis process. According to Oliver et al. (2006) transcription practices can be thought of in terms of a continuum with two dominant modes; naturalism, in which every utterance is transcribed in as much detail as possible, and denaturalism, in which idiosyncratic elements of speech (e.g., stutters, pauses, nonverbal, involuntary vocalizations) are removed. Yet while still working for a “full and faithful transcription” (Cameron, 2001), denaturalism has less to do with depicting accents or involuntary vocalization; rather, accuracy concerns the substance of the interview, that is, the meanings and perceptions created and shared during a conversation (Oliver et al., 2006). The author transcribed the interviews on the principles of denaturalism, excluding pauses, nonverbal, interjections or parts which were not related to the research (for instance one of the informants was talking about his dogs during the interview).

Special consideration is given to the interview with the Slovakian counsellor, which took place at the Slovak Embassy. The author was not allowed to record the interview, only notes were taken. The interview was conducted in the Slovak language and notes were transformed into sentences and subsequently translated into English by the author.

### **2.3 Defining barriers**

As discussed in the introduction chapter, one of the aims of this research is to determine the barriers that prevent Danes travelling to Slovakia. For the purpose of this study, the barriers is understood as images and stereotypes Danes hold about Slovakia which can influence them in their decision making process. If these images and stereotypes are considered as negative it is more likely that Danes would not choose Slovakia as their holiday destination.

### **2.4 Quality criteria**

There has been a discussion of whether quality criteria used in quantitative research are also relevant in qualitative studies. Since the research is based on the constructivist perspective, that means there is no definite answer for this research, the author decided to discuss only replication of the study and also its limitations and delimitations which settle

borders of the research and hence specifies research's discourse. The author decided not to discuss reliability and validity in this research since it is always possible to interpret the results of the study in different way in different social settings.

#### **2.4.1 Replication**

The replication of the given research may not produce the similar findings because of the different social settings as well as due to different interviewers and interviewees. As "LeCompte and Goetz recognize, it is impossible to freeze a social setting and the circumstances of an initial study to make it replicable in the sense in which the terms are usually employed" (Bryman, 2012, p. 390), therefore, replication in social study is quite rare (Bryman, 2012). Similarly this research is not replicable. If further research would choose different interviewees, based on their background, personal characteristics, subjective preferences and individualism, the results of the research could become very different.

#### **2.4.2 Limitations**

There are always some limitations during the research process which can influence final results of the study. These limitations need to be specified and eliminated at the minimum level.

The author considers several limitations of the study. These limitations are described below. First of all, number of the informants is very low comparing to the whole Danish nation. However, due to limited time and scope of the research was not possible to interview more informants, especially after all difficulties the author experienced with finding them.

The author has interviewed the informants who have not been to Slovakia or have been to Slovakia, unfortunately the author failed in finding Danes who were in their decision making process to travel to Slovakia or actually before travelling there. It would be essential for the purposes of the study to find people at these stages and examine their expectations, as people who have already been there were describing their feelings and expectations only retrospectively, hence their answers could be influenced by overall experience of Slovakia and distorted.

Another limitation is that the author was not successful in finding and interviewing people who were in different places in Slovakia; most of the informants visited only Bratislava, Košice and Prešov that are the biggest cities in Slovakia. However the positive fact is that some of the informants visited also natural or heritage sites out of these cities, so their images were not influenced only by the big metropolis of Slovakia.

Additionally, individualism and subjectivity of each person are the factors which can be considered as very complicated criteria for evaluating the image of a country, hence can be considered as limitations to the study.

All the above mentioned limitations can be at the same time considered as critiques of the research. Further critique of the study is discussed in the last part of the chapter.

### **2.4.3 Delimitations**

There are many tourists who had travelled to Slovakia since its inception as a separate country (numbers are presented in the introduction part). Understandably, although this study is trying to determine what general perception of Slovakia amongst the whole Danish nation is, it was not possible to conduct interviews with all Danes who have been to Slovakia; hence only small sample of these tourists was interviewed.

Similarly, it can be assumed that there are plenty of promotional materials issued about Slovakia during the past decades by the Slovak Tourist Board or other tourism bodies in Slovakia. However, as this research was primarily aimed to determine how the image is perceived by tourists, the promotional materials was analysed only in brief. These materials were collected at the Slovak Embassy in Copenhagen. For the purposes of this study no further advertisements or promotional videos were analysed. Neither the way how Slovakia is promoted on the websites of the mentioned tour-operators which sell trips to Slovakia was analysed. Furthermore, the research does not deal with the brand communication very much into the depth.

Choosing purposive (theoretical) sampling for the study was inevitable as the author decided to approach the study qualitatively and there were two criteria for sampling informants. However, purposive sampling is considered to be inapplicable when generalizing results of the study for a whole nation.



## **2.5 Research critique**

As qualitative studies are often criticised for problems of generalization, similarly this study can be put under this critique. As discussed earlier, the study is based on the small sample of Danes; hence it is difficult to generalize findings of the research to the whole Danish nation. Reason for same is that if research was made in different social settings (for instance only with professionals who work within tourism industry), the results of such study could be different. However, this research still generalizes the findings on the whole Danish nation.

Moreover, qualitative studies are often considered to be very subjective. One of the critiques of this study could be the fact that the author comes from Slovakia, hence can be very much influenced by her own background when asking questions and analysing the data. Similarly, it can be argued that informants could be also influenced by the author's background and in order not to offend her might use and express more positive views of the Slovakia. However the author believes that all the informants were honest in their answers and did not hide any negative facts or opinions about Slovakia.

### **3 THEORETICAL BACKGROUNDS**

Today, the world is one tourism market. The rapid growth of globalization has caused that each country, region or city must to compete with each other for its share of the consumers, tourists or investors; and represents themselves in a way that brings a respect of the world, international media, other governments and people. In such a fast paced world, people do not have enough time to learn about other nations or places and continue to have stereotypical or clichés views even if they know they might not always be truth. For instance, France is known for its fashion, Japan and technology, Italy and good pasta or coffee and most African nations are known as poor and under developed. It is difficult to go beyond these traditional images and perceive nations in a new and different way, in a way they try to present themselves nowadays. On the one hand, some of progressive countries do not get the attention, visitors or business they deserve because of their negative reputation, on the other hand countries benefits from their good image acquired in the past with minimum of efforts do deserve it. Today, most countries try to steer their reputation via marketing and strong and positive branding. Achieving strong and positive destination image became a focus of governments and other bodies, agencies and ministries in almost all countries.

Therefore, theory chapter will be divided into several parts with a main goal of giving an overview to theories related to brands and branding with main focus on destination branding and destination image. Along with destination brand and destination image also nation brand and nation image will be discussed as their characteristics are also relevant for discussing images of Slovakia. Furthermore, nation image and its transformation in post-soviet countries will be discussed. Image formation process will be shortly introduced as it is important to know how it is formed and what influence the process of its formation. Moreover, various types of images will be described. In order to understand tourists' behaviour when travelling, theories discussing consumers' behaviour in tourism and factors influencing their decision making process will be explored and presented.

In order to avoid misunderstanding, the reader should note from the beginning that Slovakia is defined in this study as a destination; therefore all characteristics of a destination will be applied to it. Furthermore, branding is characterized as destination branding and nation

branding (differences will be discussed later); brand image is for the purposes of this study equal to destination image.

### **3.1 Brands and Branding**

Branding is one topic constantly presented in the media. Consumers encounter brands every day and have their own opinions on them. Opinions and perceptions of brands create brand image. In order to understand a process of creating a brand image, brands and branding will be shortly characterized and discussed in the following part of the paper.

Branding is one of the most artificial and yet most real forces in our society (Kornberger, 2010). Anholt (2007) describes branding as the process of designing, planning and communicating the name and the identity, in order to build or manage the reputation. In an increasingly globalized economy, where reputation of a country really matters, the challenge of distinguishing country or company product offerings from those of the competition has assumed to be a critical importance for nations competing for both domestic and foreign consumers. Therefore, branding can be also defined as the process by which companies distinguish their product offerings from those of the competition (Dinnie, 2008). Branding is an activity carried out by parliaments or other nation bodies in order to develop a competitive advantage with an aim to differentiate from other countries. Branding is essential to the tourism industry; as Morgan et. al. (2004, p. 60) notes it is perhaps the most powerful marketing weapon available to contemporary destination marketers confronted by tourists who are increasingly seeking lifestyle fulfilment and experience rather than recognizing differentiation in the more tangible elements of the destination product such as accommodation and attractions.

However, it can be argued that there are also many different reasons for carrying out branding within the tourism sector. Besides competitive advantage which might help to win a battle amongst competitors, branding is also a tool on how to present a country and build country awareness. Moreover, branding introduces a country and its nation and manages a country's reputation worldwide. The result of branding is a brand.

The American Marketing Association defines a brand as a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition (Kotler & Gertner, 2002,

p.249). Similarly, a positive and successful brand can be described and characterized as a name, symbol, design, or some combination, which identifies the product of a particular organisation as having a sustainable differential advantage (Dinnie, 2008; Doyle, 1992). Olins (2008) describes that a brand is simply an organization, or a product, or service with a personality. As noted by Anholt (2007) brand is a product or service or organization, considered in combination with its name, its identity and its reputation. Brands play an important role since they pre-structure action and create a frame between action and semiosis, or between doing and interpretation (Kornberger, 2010, p.47; Arvidsson, 2006, p.7-8; Lury, 2004). Furthermore, brand represents an unique combination of characteristics and added values, both functional and non-functional, which have taken on a relevant meaning that is inextricably linked to the brand awareness of which might be conscious or intuitive (Dinnie, 2008, p.14; Macrae et. al., 1995).

In surveying these varied definitions, it is evident that the term brand takes many forms and can represent a name, product, service or organization. Brands have their own characteristics, values and personality and should comprise clear image, association with quality, ability to deliver long-time competitive advantage and overall something greater than physical attributes. Brands are perceived by consumers in a positive or negative way, either consciously or unconsciously. To develop a competitive brand, places need to consider their past, present and future; must identify those they compete with and position themselves to stand out in the minds of their target markets (Kotler et. al, 1999).

### **3.2 Destination Branding vs. Nation Branding**

As discussed in the previous paragraph, branding has become one of the most actual powers in contemporary society. Different countries have adopted different branding strategies in order to confront the specific challenges they face. More and more countries worldwide are embracing nation branding in order to differentiate themselves on the world stage and to strengthen their economic performance, primarily in terms of exporting, inward investment and tourism. To avoid confusion over terms, it may be helpful to differentiate destination branding and nation branding and develop understanding of nation branding characteristics and their influences on tourism. Therefore, firstly destination branding will be shortly discussed following by the discussion about nation branding and their mutual

comparison. The term ‘destination’, in the context of this study, is limited to the study of large entities, such countries (Slovakia), rather than individual attractions or resorts. Therefore, in this study country is a destination. In addition to same, according to Szondi (2007) the aim of destination branding is to attract visitors and boost tourism, while country branding promotes economic, commercial and political interests at home and abroad. For the purposes of this study destination branding and country branding will be considered equal and a stress will be given only on the difference between destination branding and nation branding. Therefore, the purpose of destination branding will be characterized as attracting visitors and tourists with a help of promoting economic, commercial and political interests of a nation.

Distinguishing between the terms country and nation is also necessary in this study, as they share a number of commonalities but are also different. Slovakia is a country – destination in this study. However, it is not possible to exclude nation characteristics from its definitions. Nation is something that characterizes each country; it has culture soul, habits, language, music, food, drinks, traditions etc. On the one hand, not everyone who lives in the country is a part of the nation. On the other hand, members of certain nation do not necessarily live in the country; therefore they do represent their nation and country by their way of living and acting abroad.

Destination branding and nation branding play an important role on the world stage. Nevertheless, there is a significant difference between destination branding and nation branding. Destination branding can help to bridge any gaps between a destination’s strengths and potential visitors’ perceptions and it is most concerned with visualisation and symbolism (Morgan et. al. 2004, p. 65). National Tourism Boards and other destination marketing organisations (DMOs) heralded in developing touristy logos, slogans and other elements of designs. The key objectives to be attained by destination branding are stimulation of inward investment, promotion of a country and last but not least the attraction of tourists.

Branding has a deep responsibility in this changing world, which is closely connected with its role in promoting nation-states, regions or cities (Anholt, 2005). As noted by Dinnie (2008) applications of branding techniques to nations is a relatively new phenomenon, but one which is growing. Dinnie (2008) discuss that although it is a new phenomenon, if nation branding is put into wider historical perspective, it could be claimed that nations have always branded themselves through their symbols, currency, anthems, names and so on. Nations has

built their brands over decades of their existence and nation branding as it is known nowadays only helps shaping or re-creating already existing brand.

Dinnie (2008, p.13) furthermore discuss that nation branding is an exciting, complex and controversial phenomenon. It is exciting, as it represents an area in which there is little existing theory but a huge amount of real world activity; complex, because it encompasses multiple disciplines beyond the limited realm of conventional brand strategy; and controversial, in that it is a highly politicized activity that generates passionately held and frequently conflicting viewpoints and opinions (Dinnie, 2008). Nation branding can help erase misconceptions about a country and allow the country to reposition itself more favourably with regard to targeted audiences (Dinnie, 2008).

What can be conclude from above discussion, destination branding serves the purposes of attracting visitors and boost tourism using multiply resources such as logos or slogans and using also economic and political power. Nation branding represents nation and its culture; people life style, habits, traditions, music, food etc. that have been developed in the past history. It can be assumed that destination branding overlaps with nation branding. Destinations use nation brands in the process of branding and try to attract tourists by promoting nations – its culture soul, heritage, traditions etc. Therefore, as mentioned earlier, nation branding is a part of destination branding. Support for the previous statement comes from Dinnie (2008) who explains that it is obvious that destination branding and nation branding are overlapping in many areas. Even though these two terms are different, many times are combined in different theories saying that: nations are making increasingly conscious efforts to hone their country branding in recognition of the need to fulfil three major objectives: to attract tourists, to stimulate inward investment and to boost exports (Dinnie, 2008) or vice versa, countries (destinations) are using nations characteristics to promote the country and nation itself (Anholt, 2005).

This part of the paper has provided an overview of destination branding and nation branding and their relevance in the world of tourism. Nation branding can be considered as a part of destination branding (if destination is a country) and it helps to promote country by presenting unique features and characteristics of a particular nation that might become attractions for tourists. Nations may be viewed as unique brands with its own personality, characteristics and added values; however it should be always treated in different way as products brands since they are very complex.

### **3.3 Destination and Nation branding in Central and Eastern Europe**

Despite the short duration of communist era in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), it has produced significant political, economic and social upheavals that were felt in all areas of societal activities, including tourism (Page & Connell, 2010, p.296). Tourism holds a significant position in the substantial political, economic and social restructuring processes which have taken place in CEE in the past decades (Hall, 1999). Tourism in all post-communist countries suffers from country's political background and might be considered as undeveloped industry in economic system. To overcome a problem with attracting more tourists to post soviet countries, attention to destination brand and nation brand needs to be paid.

Destination branding is poorly developed in the CEE regions' tourism industry, due to a combination of lack of finance, experience and expertise, and has often tended to be employed to counteract negative images (prior communism) rather than positive images (Hall, 1999). Moreover, Hall (1999) discusses that because of different conflicts in Europe also tourism development has tended to constrain at a sub-regional level; hence South-eastern part of Europe is way behind Central European countries.

According to above, CEE image that is presented can be perceived often as negative. Kotler et. al. (1993) described the image of the former Soviet Union as a vast, closed country-a prison. The image evoked pictures of Siberian forced-labour camps; grim shortages of food and products; citizens living in stark apartments, repression of Jewish citizens; clunky Russian cars based on a thirty-five-year-old design; and taciturn, secretive Soviet leaders. The overall impression was one of darkness and control – a place that few people wanted to visit (Kotler et. al., 1993, p. 159). Looking at above characteristics of CEE countries it can be claimed that their image, which is mostly based on the past events, is not very positive. Hence, these countries have difficult task to change that image and position themselves as attractive, modern and safe countries.

Countries that emerged from the dissolution of the Soviet Union and hence have such a negative image as described above need develop strong destination branding and try to change this negative image. Hence, country's branding has its own functions in CEE. The aim of branding in these countries is (1) distance themselves from the images of communism and the negative connotations evoked by 'Eastern Europe' which often meant backwardness, despair,

something poor or inferior (during the Cold war, Eastern Europe and communism became synonyms and have been used interchangeably); therefore many countries in transition have consciously defined and position themselves as Central European Countries; (2) to change negative or false stereotypes or reinforce some positive stereotypes associated with the country and its people; (3) to position the country as the reliable and eligible member of the new system and international community; (4) to position the country as the centre of the region and the leader of transition; (5) to re-define and re-construct national identities as identity is also changing during transition (Szondi, 2007, p.10).

CEE countries have adopted different branding strategies, created various campaigns and developed various slogans, logos or mottos to express the nature of the country (Szondi, 2007). As Szondi (2007) discuss, Eastern European countries as destinations have positioned themselves as inexpensive, affordable, modern, sunny and welcoming countries. However, some of these countries (Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Austria, Slovenia, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein) have been trying to re-brand themselves as Central European countries to get a better image in the western world (Szondi, 2007). These efforts are based on willingness of these countries to escape from negative image which can be associated with Eastern Europe. Therefore, this research will focus on determining if Slovakia succeeds in these efforts to brand itself as Central European country and if country branding in CEE performed its functions.

Important question remains how these countries should promote themselves and who the target market or niche market should be. Ex-communist countries might welcome cultural tourism in the furtherance of political ends that arise through its image-generation potential (Hughes & Allen, 2005). CEE countries mostly provide promotion of heritage that was characteristic of the communist period (Hall, 1998). Similarly, rural and nature tourism has received substantial promotion in the region (Hall, 1999). However, the important question, if this kind of branding will give these countries possibility to stand out from others, remains.

In addition, transitional countries can have little confidence and often view themselves in a negative or pessimistic way; branding can strengthen the 'we' feeling and unite a country's people (Szondi, 2007). This is the very important fact since it is significant for countries and nations to believe in themselves and in their potential to offer tourists lifestyle experience they seek for.



### **3.4 Destination Brand and Destination Image**

There are three key elements of branding theory; brand identity, brand image and brand positioning. The importance of all of them has been highlighted by many leading writers on brand management. As a focus of this study is to analyse destination image of Slovakia, in the following part of the paper theories developed in relation to same will be introduced and discussed.

Firstly, it is necessary to explain why a destination image and a focus on its building are important. One of the reasons is that countries need to know how they are perceived by other countries and public around the world and to ascertain how the country's achievements, people, products and so on are reflected in external world. Additionally, the value of the destination image to the local destination marketing organizations and other destination promoters is incontestable due to its power to attract more tourists to the area (Banyai, 2010, p.5). Furthermore, images are of paramount importance to destinations because they have the power to change and rearrange the tourists' impressions and perceptions of a destination and give them a pre-taste of the destination (Banyai, 2010; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991).

It can be concluded from the above statements that destination image is substantial in tourism industry and has a great impact on tourists' perception of a destination. These perceptions and opinions about a certain destination (country) play a key role when tourists are deciding where to travel for a holidays (consumer behaviour is discussed in following parts of the paper). However, it can be argued, that although images might play a key role in decision making process for holidays, it is still only one of many factors that might influence the process (amongst other might be motivation, financial situation, social situation, marital status, having kids etc.). Most importantly, the cognition that results from the above discussion is that knowing a destination image provides a country with information about how world perceive the country. Consequently, country can try to re-build, re-create or improve its image in order to develop appropriate branding strategy and attract target groups.

Researchers have been struggling with an exact definition for a destination image. Because there is no single definition which is accepted by all researchers, San Martin & del Bosque (2008) compiled a table to show the main similarities among definitions. Most of the definitions include terms such as "impression" and "perception" of tourists to describe the concept of destination image. For example, Kotler et.al. (1993) define a place's image as the

sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a people have of place. The repetition of these terms reinforces the idea that the tourists are ultimately the ones who influence the way a destination is viewed by the world (Kotler et.al., 1993). Based on their personal impressions and perceptions, tourists have the power to influence the tourism flow to any destination.

In conclusion, a destination image represents the way how tourists see and perceive a destination. According to perceptions people create opinions about a destination and evaluate it. Process of image/perceptions formation is long term and complicated and will be discussed in following part of the paper.

Destination image is defined as not only the perceptions of individual destination attributes but also the holistic impression made by the destination (Kotler, et. al., 1993). The destination images held by consumers are so powerful that they can either benefit the country or have a negative impact. In order to benefit the destination, images have to be distinctive, appealing, simple, and most importantly, believable and should be based on reality (Banayi, 2010; Kotler & Gertner, 2002). However, because authenticity is a widely subjective concept, any image can be perceived as authentic depending on whom the viewer is (Banayi, 2010, p. 7). This is a key statement that needs to be taken into the readers' consideration as a limitation of this study. It can be claimed that analysing a perception of a destination is very subjective. Destination is presented and promoted a certain way but actual image can be perceived vastly different, depending on a person. Individual perception of every person is subjective and what is for one person positive image might be for another negative. Different people can hold quite different images of the same place; one person may see a particular city as a childhood hometown while others may see it as a bustling city or a great weekend gateway destination (Kotler et. al., 1993, p.141). It is even more complicated when considering a country as a destination. For example, that a country's image results from its geography, history, proclamations, art and music, famous citizens and other features (Kotler & Gertner, 2002, p.251). Mostly for the last definition it is possible to see how country's holistic image is built upon images of small country's attributes.

### **3.5 Nation Brand and Nation Image**

Even if we accept that the concept of a brand and brand image has applicability to a nation, a nation is not a product, and the nation image is very much bound up with the social concept

of the nation. The concept of a nation consists of a people inhabiting a fixed territory, sharing key elements of a common culture (values, beliefs, norms, institutions), and possessing a sense of common interests. Therefore, in creation of a nation brand lots of aspects need to be taken into a consideration; branding nation means to present something that is tangible, but at the same time something that is not tangible and people have to be happy about their nation brand.

Dinnie (2008, p.15) defines nation brand as the unique, multi-dimensional blend of elements that provide nation with culturally grounded differentiation and relevance for all of its target audiences. As noted by the author, nation brand exists in consumer's minds rather than being a totally controllable creation of the marketing function and it's nature is multi-faceted. The biggest difference between product brand and nation brand is that while product brand represents only one product or service, nation brand is a melt of many attributes such as history, geography, culture, people, life-style etc. Therefore, it can be concluded that creating a nation brand is much more complicated than creating a product brand and it is a long time process. As discussed previously, nations build their brands over decades of their existence (Dinnie, 2008). Nation brand has to represent all aspects of one nation, combine them and present them as a one unit.

Nation brand is a specific type of brand and represents various aspects of a nation, tangible or intangible. The way of how nation brand is perceived is called nation image. Nation image plays an important role also in the world of tourism. Nowadays, tourism has become dependent on image (Leep, Gibson & Lane, 2011; Tasci & Gartner, 2007). To define nation image is not easy as it depends on many factors which might be also of subjective origins. The brand image is the perception of the brand that exists in the mind of the consumer or audience: it is virtually the same thing as reputation. Brand image is the context in which messages are received; it is a mix of associations, memories, expectations and other feelings that are bound up with the product, the service (Anholt, 2007). The author explains that just as products and companies have brands, every inhabited place on earth has a reputation which is more complex. The country's reputation powerfully affects the way people inside and outside the place think about it, the way they behave towards it, and the way they respond to everything that is made or done there. The image of a nation is so complex and fluid as to deny the clarity implicit in a term such as brand image; different parts of a nation's identity come into focus on the international stage at different times, affected by current political

events and even by the latest movie or new bulletin (Dinnie, 2008; O'Shaughnessy, J. & O'Shaughnessy, N., 2000).

Following above discussion, it can be assumed that nation image is basically country's reputation amongst other countries and tourists. Few characteristics can be assigned to nation image; firstly, building a nation image is a complicated and very long process and it is something that it is built with generations. Secondly, nation image is build up on many aspects including history, geography or political and economic background of a country and thirdly, all these aspects are promoted as one unit, hence the image is very complex. Unquestionably, besides all aspects mention above, nation image is build up and influenced by current events, political or economic situation of the country as well.

### **3.6 Nation Image and Stereotypes**

As noted by Anholt (2005) the image of a country determines the way the world sees it and treats it. Previous chapter shows that nation image is not something purely created by marketing bodies in a desired way, it is also something that is influenced by cultural background, history, geography and many other factors and it is entrenched in consumers' minds. What is more, according to Shaughnessy & Shaughnessy (2000) most country images are in fact stereotypes, extreme simplifications of the reality that are not necessarily accurate; they might be dated, based on exceptions rather than of facts, but are nonetheless pervasive. Anholt (2005) explains that changing the world's perceptions of a nation based on stereotypes is neither easy nor quick as it may evolve over many centuries. Stereotyping thinking is also significant to tourism industry since one of the specific characteristic of the nation images is that they are built in time, hence they are also influenced by historical events that might be turned into the stereotypes. Therefore, in the following part of the paper stereotypes and their relationship to nation and destination images will be explored and discussed.

The socio/cultural approach makes no assumptions whatsoever as to why stereotypes exists; they either derive from the direct observation of the differences among various groups in a given society or are a consequence of exposure to media and other channels of information, most notably via social learning and social interaction (Leyens et. al., 1994). Most researchers seem to assume the members of the mass media audience simply "absorb" what is portrayed

in the media (Leyens et. al., 1994, p.41). Believing what is in the media is in people nature and of course what they hear and see in the media can be embedded in their subconscious.

When countries have an international presence, it is common to talk of 'stereotyping' with respect to the nation's images. When used in sociology, the word stereotype means a biased view of a group or class of people, a view that is resistant to change or correction from countervailing evidence (Elliott & Cameron, 1994; Dinnie, 2008). The construction of stereotypes often serves as a way to create a group identity by establishing a positive image of self (in-groups) against less positive images of others (out-groups). Stereotypes of national cultures and people may be created and perpetuated through historical accounts and media representations (Clausen, 2009). Yet stereotypes play a role in the overall image of a nation (Shaughnessy & Shaughnessy, 2000). As it is obvious from above discussion, stereotypes can be created and influenced by past or historical background, but also can be created by groups of people in order to secure their position towards other groups. Applying same within tourism industry and applying this to nations it can be assumed that various cultures or nations have biases towards each other that can be based on various aspects. These do not have to be necessarily negative.

Clausen (2009) explains that a cultural stereotype is a widely held, generalized and simplified conception or image of a specific group of people. Cultural artefacts can be important determinants of national stereotype perceptions. Nation's stereotype can be built up, planned or unplanned in many ways. It is given that people perceive other cultures through projections based on their own culture: for the most part, they do not first see and then define; they define first and then see. People rely on their own personal perceptions and own cultural background to understand encounters (Clausen, 2009). This is very interesting to discuss especially in tourism. Tourists before travelling create an image of the destination they travel to and they have certain expectations. If they do not have deeper knowledge about the destination, stereotypes could play a big role and influence them in image formation. In addition, whether harmful or helpful to the image of those being categorized, stereotypes may be fundamental to the way we process information and make sense of experiences (Clausen, 2009). Therefore, different people perceive information differently and hence have different stereotypes.

Häubl (1996, p.76) claims that country stereotypes have an impact on the purchasing behaviour both of individual consumers and organizations (Häubl, 1996). Same is supported

by Kotler & Gertner (2002, p. 250-251) who state that even when country does not consciously manage its name as a brand, people still have images of countries that can be activated by simply voicing the name. People in general might associate different countries with various things. Country names amount to brands and help consumers evaluate products and make purchasing decisions (Kotler & Gertner, 2002, p.250). It becomes even more complicated when an object of branding is nation itself. Anholt (2005, p.108) discuss the most attractive brands came from countries such America, England, France, Japan or Scandinavia. Products from these countries are immediately accepted and certain kind of brand image, level of quality and usually higher price is expected. The acceptance of taken-for-granted images of a given country or people such as 'pragmatic Danes' or 'polite Japanese' is referred to as 'banal nationalism' (Clausen, 2009). As obvious from above statements, some countries have had built very successful images. These images have become so successful that it has transformed to a positive stereotypes. Therefore, people trust products and services produced in these countries and do not require further information about them. In such case stereotyping can be considered as positive phenomenon and can be applied also in tourism industry; if tourists hold positive images about a country they rather consider visiting. On the other hand, if stereotypes entrenched in people's minds are considered as not positive, countries put lots of effort in trying to change them. For instance, as discussed previously, Szondi (2007, p.10) noticed many eastern European countries have consciously defined and position as a Central European countries. One of the reasons for defining this position is also to change negative or false stereotypes or reinforce some positive stereotypes associated with the country and its people. However, some of these stereotypes can be deeply rooted and difficult to change.

According to Kotler et al. (2003, p. 141) there is a difference between images and stereotypes. A stereotype suggests a widely held image that is highly distorted and simplistic and that carries a favourable or unfavourable attitude toward the place. An image, on the other hand, is more personal perception of a place that can vary from person to person.

What is necessary to conclude here is that having stereotypes is part of human nature. Stereotypes might be hold by each person individually or by a group of people. They could be entrenched in the past but could be influenced by recent events. People can associate various things (food, drinks, way of living, fashion etc.) and feelings with different countries and this can be powerful tool in tourism industry. In tourism, stereotypes can be useful if they are

positive, in other words if a country is 'taken for granted'. Negative stereotypes are usually based on historical but also present events and it is difficult to get rid of them.

### **3.7 Image and its formation process**

In previous parts of the paper an overview about brands, branding (destination and nation branding) and destination and nation image was given and basic theories about same were discussed. However, for the purposes of this study is also important to understand how images are formed and what influence the process of image formation. As can be assumed, formation of image is a long term process and it does evolve in time. However, hand there might be only disposable impulses that might also influence people' opinions on anything without further research or interest to learn more about a thing. Therefore, in this part of the paper ways in which images can be formed and created will be discuss and agents that influence the process of images formation will be analysed.

The formation of images has been described by Reynolds (1965) as the development of a mental construct based upon a few impressions chosen from a flood of information. In the case of destination image, this 'flood of information' has many sources including promotional literature (travel brochures, posters), the opinions of others (family/friends, travel agents) and the general media (newspapers, magazines, television, books, movies) (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003, p. 38). San Martin & del Bosque (2008), in their explanation of how destination images are formed, note that the consumers' perception of a destination is based on information from different sources over time, which is selected, elaborated and embellished in order to have a meaningful existence. The information involved in image formation can include promotion materials, the opinions of family and friends, media reports but also popular culture which includes novels and movies (Govers, Go & Kumar, 2007). In addition to later, Banayi (2010) also notes that the traveller's image of a destination is built not only on past experiences and marketing communications, but also on non-promotional media such as films, novels and television shows. The image of a destination can therefore be based on images being portrayed in movies and novels, but also on the tourists' interpretation of these images and their expectations of these images to be seen at the destination. This is seen mostly nowadays when movies and representation of countries, regions or towns in the movies can significantly influence their image. Many countries or their regions have encounter consumer appeal

improve because of their links with respective films and television productions. Even more interesting is analysing the influence of the movies that provide a negative image of a country or various regions. Negative image might be perceived via presenting economic or political scandals, violence in the country, poor development, unemployment, bad social system or even poverty etc. According to these images presented by media, consumers might on the one hand side decide not to travel to such destination; or on the contrary, it can provoke consumers and raise interest to travel in order to find out to what extend presented is true.

Another perspective (similar to one from Govers et. al., 2007) to image formation is taken by Dinnie (2008) who explains that the mental representations that people may have of different countries can derive from various influencing factors; firstly personal experience through working or holidaying there; secondly, word-of-mouth influence and thirdly, pre-existing national stereotypes. Especially stereotypes about nations are relevant to discuss in this paper as it is assumed that lack of tourism in Slovakia and lack of tourists from Denmark is partly caused by these stereotypes rooted in the past.

Image formation involves the creation of images about a destination based on information selected by a person from various image formation agents (Banayi, 2010, Tasci & Gartner, 2007). Process of image formation involves three main agents; (1) supply-side, (2) independent and (3) demand-side. The supply side is often identified as information promoted by the destination, while the demand side represents tourists' expectations. However, it is necessary to take into the consideration also how are materials from supply-side going to get to the potential consumers. In this case, mediator such as media is very important for distributing these materials. Very interesting is also demand-side agent; it can be argued that once consumers do not have any information they might have none or distorted expectations and image formation might be also misshapen.

To summarize, various models presented above discuss different factors which influence image formation process. First of all, promotional materials produced and provided by destination in order to present and promote country. These materials can reach consumer via different channels and agents, especially via tour operators, advertisements in a newspaper, commercials on the TV, leaflets etc. Personal experience might be considered as the most significant factor influencing image formation as people listen to other experiences and opinions; hence word-of-mouth play significant role in image formation. Furthermore, there are also unconscious factors that influence image formations, for instance stereotypes rooted



in consumers' minds. Media are important factor as well; through media consumers get information about a country or destination, learn about various events or scandals in the country etc. Amongst non-commercial factor there are movies, documentaries or books about countries and destinations.

### **3.8 Typology of images**

Naturally, there is not only one existing image of a destination, country or a nation. Several types of images can be recognized; they can be formed and changed. In the following part of the paper these images will be characterized.

As discussed in the previous part of the paper, there are many agents and factors that influence creation of images. Images are created in different phases. Echtner & Ritchie (2003) in their article 'The Meaning and Measurement of Destination Image' discuss Gunn's model of the seven phases of the travel experience: (1) Accumulation of mental images about vacation experiences, (2) Modification of those images by further information (3) Decision to take a vacation trip (4) Travel to the destination. (5) Participation at the destination, (6) Return home and (7) Modification of images based on the vacation experience. For the purposes of this research is significant to notice first two phases and then phase seven. In the first phase, image is primarily based upon information assimilated from non-touristic, non-commercial sources, such as media (newspapers, magazines, books, and movies), education (school courses) and the opinions of family/friends (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003), in other words 'indirect' agents (Hughes & Allen, 2005). Such an image is called organic image. In the second phase, commercial sources of information, such as travel brochures, travel agents and travel books are used. In this phase organic image may be altered; such image is then called induced image (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003). Induced images are the outcome of agents such as those with a direct association with the destination including tourist boards and also those with a vested interest but without a direct association with the destination such as tour operators (Hughes & Allen, 2005). In the seventh phase image can be altered again, this time based on personal experiences after visiting certain destination.

In summary, organic and induced images are mostly related to knowledge about a destination before travelling or in other words they depend on agents which are responsible

for support of creating images. Organic images can be unconscious or conscious and can be formed by various agents and sources.

However, there are another two types of images generally identified in tourism: cognitive and affective. Cognitive images are perceptions of the cultural, natural and social aspects of a destination as well as its infrastructure. Affective images reflect the feelings or emotions a tourist has about a destination, including perceptions of safety and security (Leep, Gibson & Lane, 2011; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993). Both types of image affect travel decisions and choice of destinations. It can be assumed that nation images are a reflection of events which has happened in a country in the past but also in the present times and are preserved in people's minds. In order to change or re-shape perceptions of a nation both cognitive and affective images need to be recognized, analysed and used when building up and presenting images of a country to external world.

In conclusion, these types of images can exist at the same time and they can mutually overlap and supplement each other. For instance, tourists can have affective organic images that might alter to affective induced images when searching more information. Or, if people do not have any information in relation to nature or culture of the nation, they might search for additional information and gain some induced images that will be at the same time also cognitive.

### **3.9 Destination Image and its influence on Consumer Behaviour in Tourism**

In order to understand complexity of the problem why Danes do not travel to Slovakia very much, it is also important to discuss and explore nature of consumers' behaviour in tourism since it is also influenced by perceived image. Therefore, in the following part of the paper consumer behaviour in tourism will be shortly described in order to understand how destination image influence tourists' decision making process about holidays.

What exactly and to what extent influence tourists when they make a decision where to go on holidays stays a very important question with no exact answer. It can be argued that oftentimes tourists make travel decisions based on how they sense, understand, use and connect to the place (Banayi, 2010). Perception of a destination, its understanding and connection to it is also based on something that people know about place or they saw about it etc. So it is also based on previously described preliminary image – organic image.

It is just recently that those in the tourism field have attempted to understand the role of image in the travel decision process and to measure destination images (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003). Although many general models of consumer behaviour are known and advanced (as for example Andreason model 1965, Nicosia model 1966, Howard-Sheth model 1969, Solomon model 1996 etc.), research on consumer behaviour in tourism is very much in the early stages of development (Swarbrook & Horner, 2007). However, several studies have illustrated that destination images do, indeed, influence tourist's behaviour (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003). Naturally, it is acknowledged that there are methodological limitations when presenting destination image as a factor that influences consumers' behaviour. First of all, it is important to bear in mind that destination image is only one of the many factors that influence consumers' decision making process about holidays. Looking at some studies as for instance Purchase-Consumption System study, it is obvious there are many other factors influencing tourists' decisions; motivation, destination options activity choices, attraction choices, accommodation choices etc. (March & Woodside, 2005). However, in this research, it is assumed that destination image and stereotypes would be the firsts to influence consumers to decide on a particular destination before considering for instance financial situation, accommodation or transport choices etc. To support this suggestion, it is possible to have a look on consumer buying process presented by Lumsdon (1997) who assumes that a consumer moves through a number of stages leading up to purchase. He develops a seven stage consumer buying process model where he describes first two phases as a 1) Awareness phase and 2) Search and comprehension stage. He argues that in the first phase motivation and vague images play a key role, following by the second phase which involves the buyer obtaining more information (Lumsdon, 1997). In the second phase consumers discuss their decision with friends and pick up brochures from travel agencies. Space does not permit a wider discussion on other phases of Lumsdon model, moreover they are not considered to be important and relevant for the purposes of the study. Similarly, Gunn's model of the seven phases of the travel experience which was discussed earlier shows that the first phase (organic image phase) and the second phase (induced image) are followed by third phase which is 'decision to take a vacation trip'. These models are not used for the purposes of analysis, they just provide the reader with the example of the phases consumers go through when deciding on holidays.

Following above discussion, images play roles in both phases of presented models. In the first phase of decision making process it is only a vague image which was characterized as organic image in previous parts of the chapter. In the second part induced image is created. It is very clear now how can image itself and its formation influence a consumer to pick up a holiday destination. Also it is very important to notice that all of image formation agents that were discussed in the image formation part of the paper fulfil their role in these two phases. Therefore it is possible to conclude that images plays a huge role in decision making process since they influences the both phases of the process that leads to a final phase - decision about holidays.

The importance of the tourist destination's image is universally acknowledged, since it affects the individual's subjective perception and consequent behaviour and destination choice (Gallarza et. al., 2002, p.56; Chon, 1990; Echtner and Ritchie, 2003). Furthermore, according to Molina et. al. (2012) destination's image is important not only due to its influence on the tourist's decision-making process when selecting the destination, but also because it shapes the tourist's behaviour post-decision, including their participation and future behaviour. Hence, images formed during holidays can influence consumers in their decision to re-visit destination.

Stereotypes are also very important in decision making process. Whether stereotypes are positive or negative, fundamentally affect behaviour towards other places, people and products (Anholt, 2007). It is very hard for a country to persuade people in other parts of the world to go beyond these simple images and start to understand the rich complexity that lies behind them (Anholt, 2007). Stereotypes also belong to the factors that influence first decision making phase since they provided basis for organic image.

Since this research deals also with brands, it is important to mention that it is not only brand images but also brands themselves that starts the whole process of deciding. Brands play an important role since they pre-structure action and create a frame between action and semiosis, or between doing and interpretation (Kornberger, 2010, p.47; Arvidsson, 2006, p. 7-8; Lury, 2004). It is the buyer or the user who forms a mental vision of the brand, which may be different from the intended marketing thrust. Kotler & Gertner (2002, p.249) in their study explains that brands incite beliefs, evoke emotions and prompt behaviours. Beliefs and emotions evoke consumers' intentions to travel. Hence, behavioural intention seems to be an important concept in understanding tourist' choice of tourism products and future motives and

behaviour (Ramkinsson, Ulysal & Brown, 2011). Hence, it is brands which start the whole process of deciding and influence these travel intentions. If brand can evoke certain feelings in consumer mind it can be a starting point in thinking of going to a destination.

To conclude this part of the paper, it can be claimed that destination image has a significant influence on tourists' decisions. It helps tourists to create an abstraction of a destination, compile emotions and evoke feelings for something unknown. Furthermore, destination brand gives a preliminary vision, creates organic image that give a basis for noticing some destination and starting point for thinking of going there. Organic images can be conscious or unconscious and with a help of various agents it is transformed to the induced image in the second phase of decision making process.

## **4 ANALYSIS**

The purpose of the research is to examine the image of Slovakia as a tourist destination amongst Danes. Therefore, the focus of interpretations of the given data is to find out how both, Danes who have been to Slovakia or lived there and who have not been there yet, perceive Slovakia as the destination for holidays. The chapter is divided into several main parts. Firstly, general awareness of Slovakia in Denmark is discussed, followed by the discussion about Slovak nation brand created and presented in the promotional materials that are available in Denmark. Secondly, the analysis of the interviews according to various themes is provided; images the informants held about Slovakia before they travelled there and their influence on their decision to travel to Slovakia are discussed. Also if and how these images were changed during informants' holidays in Slovakia is discussed. Last but not least, difficulties tourists can experience in Slovakia are presented and if branding strategy applied in the transitional countries was successful evaluated.

### **4.1 Awareness of Slovakia in Denmark**

As discussed in the theory chapter, branding is a tool how to present a country and get to the public awareness. This can be organized via various channels. In the following part of the paper, the findings about how well Slovakia is known in Denmark and what is the general awareness of Slovakia amongst Danes will be presented.

Based on the theory, nation branding is carried out by parliaments or other tourism bodies in order to develop a competitive advantage with the aim to be different from other countries and hence to attract more tourists. In order to find out how Slovakia is promoted in Denmark, meeting with the Slovak counsellor at the Slovak Embassy in Copenhagen was initiated. The purpose of the meeting was to get an overall picture about the Slovak–Danish relations related to tourism and gaining knowledge and information about the Slovak Embassy's activities taken in order to promote Slovakia in Denmark. As it is stated on the Slovak Embassy's web site, besides others, the role of the Slovak Embassy in the Kingdom of Denmark is to provide basic information about Slovakia and contribute to the promotion of Slovakia in Denmark (The Slovak Embassy in CPH, 2013<sup>F</sup>). The counsellor confirmed same by explaining that

tourism and its support and development are the tasks of every embassy (Vrábel, 2013), hence support and development of tourism and promotion of Slovakia in Denmark is one of the tasks of the Slovak Embassy in Denmark. Furthermore, he explains that good marketing strategy is one of the tools to achieve a desired goal of developing the Slovak–Danish relationships within tourism industry; certainly, the strategy always needs to adopt local specifics (Vrábel, 2013). During the interview, the counsellor described various fairs and exhibitions where the embassy participated and presented Slovakia as a tourist destination. As an example, the latest one the ‘Ferie & Fritid’, took place in January 2013 in Copenhagen. The embassy presented Slovakia through promotional stand and two separate presentations connected with tasting of the Slovak wine (Vrábel, 2013). According to news published on the embassy’s web site, the presentation reflected efforts of the embassy actively contribute to greater awareness of the professional and general public and to increase the interest of Danish tourists in Slovakia and increase the flow of Danish tourists to Slovakia (The Slovak Embassy in CPH, 2013<sup>G</sup>). Furthermore, the counsellor mentioned also the largest tourism fair in Scandinavia ‘Ferie for Alle’ in Herning or non-tourism related exhibition the ‘Bibiana Copenhagen’ in Copenhagen. Furthermore, the embassy runs a project called “Invest and Visit Slovakia”. One part of the project is organizing various presentations in order to extend the Slovak-Danish economic ties and present Slovakia as the top investment and tourist destination for Danish businesses, travel agencies, the media and the public (Vrábel, 2013). In addition to above, two groups of Danish journalists visited the High Tatras and Slovak Golf Resort Black Stork. Visits took place in relation to the activities aimed at promoting Slovakia at tourism fairs in Herning and Copenhagen and on-going work with journalists in order to explore sport and tourism attractiveness of Slovakia (Vrábel, 2013).

The Slovak counsellor is convinced that awareness of Slovakia here in Denmark is very good, that many people from Denmark travel to Slovakia and most of them return back (Vrábel, 2013). On the contrary, looking at the interviews, opposite can be claimed. The interviewees were asked the question if they have ever seen any tourism related promotional materials about Slovakia, any articles in newspapers, commercials in TV or any other materials (bulletins, posters, leaflets etc.) in Denmark that would actually invite them to visit Slovakia. As it is apparent from the below quotes, in both groups (informants who have been to Slovakia or lived there and informants who have not been to Slovakia) their answers were negative.

*“No, I do not believe I have. The only thing was I think I saw something for Norwegian flight. They opened up the new route and I think that is the only thing that might have been able to invite me to Slovakia.” (Mortensen, 2013)*

*“I think I have seen once a commercial for a cheap flight to Slovakia, but I think that is it.” (Sadolin, 2013)*

*“Hmmm not that comes to mind.” (Lyngs, 2013)*

*“No, not at all. Maybe only when Slovakia joined EU in 2004 I have heard some news at that time.” (Krogsgaard, 2013)*

*“Yes, there was one in 2009 I think on Eurosport. Like a 20 second advertisement of Slovakia. I was really surprised about seeing that because that was the only thing I've seen since then and that was the only thing I've seen.” (Jepsen, 2013)*

As it is obvious from above quotes, informants did not see anything that would promote Slovakia in Denmark and actually invite them for holidays to Slovakia. They can recall something about Slovakia, however it is not tourism related. On the positive side, almost all informants were aware of the new route of Norwegian airline to Bratislava, which may present potential for the future. Distance was also one of the concerns of informants when discussing reasons why Danes do not prefer to travel to Slovakia or eastern part of Europe in general. These concerns and informants' opinions about Danes' intentions and willingness travel or not to travel to Slovakia will be discussed later.

Some of the informants were uncertain about seeing some commercials. They claim they might see something but have not noticed that it was about Slovakia (Sadolin, 2013) or had difficulties to remember if the commercials they saw were in fact for Slovakia or other country, for example Slovenia (Lyngs, 2013). However, it can be claimed that since it was possible for informants to remember ads about flights to Slovakia when they saw them, there would be the same pattern with other information about Slovakia. Therefore, it is possible to say that it is not human indifference and disengagement that is the barrier to public awareness about Slovakia but it is the lack of promotion in Denmark in general.

The counsellor at the Slovak Embassy is also very happy about the Familiarization trip organized for Danish journalists in spring 2012. After the trip, according to him, media were



overwhelmed with the articles about Slovakia and possibilities to travel there (Vrábel, 2013). However, searching the database Infomedia.dk<sup>1</sup> has proved only few articles in relation to Slovakia. Moreover, almost all of them were related to sports events or to the sports games between Denmark and Slovakia. Some of the articles discussed how Slovak farms in comparison to Danish ones are; one article described the “Bibiana Copenhagen” event. According to the news on the embassy’ web-site, one of the outcomes after the trip was an article written by the journalist Aage Krogsdam presenting High Tatras, golfing and hospitality in Slovakia (Slovak embassy, 2012<sup>F</sup>). Unfortunately, not even that article was found by browsing internet or the database. So it should be questioned if the media were really overwhelmed by articles about Slovakia, especially if we take into the consideration that it is only one year ago that the trip took place, hence the articles should be available and easy to find.

A fact that Slovakia is mostly known in Denmark because of sport is supported also by few informants. Quotes below refers to the question what did respondents know about Slovakia before they travelled there:

*(...) “I knew the capital was Bratislava. And I knew that there was a lot of ice hockey and also handball because Denmark is also quite into handball and I have seen Slovakia has couple of team.” (...) (Harck, 2013)*

*“Well yes, it is not related to tourism but I remember Slovak football team during world championship.” (...) (Frandsen, 2013)*

*“That they have a good ice hockey I think.” (...) (Røder, 2013)*

It is also important to take into the consideration that most of the informants were men and male might be influenced by their natural interest for sport. Hence their awareness is more related to sports in Slovakia than to Slovakia itself and sports cannot really be considered as promotional tools even though they promote Slovakia in a certain way and build awareness of Slovakia.

---

<sup>1</sup> Key words for searching: Tourisme, Slovakiet. Years of searching 2008-2013

Analysis shows that awareness of Slovakia is none or if any, it is not tourism related. Obviously there are not enough opportunities for Danes to get in touch with the tourism related material about Slovakia. Also the counsellor of Slovakia mentioned only several fairs the embassy participated at with the aim of promoting Slovakia; it can be argued though how many Danes attend such fairs. This kind of promotion effects only small amount of Danes, moreover, it can be assumed mostly tourism ‘professionals’ (ones working within tourism industry). It can be concluded that the Slovak Embassy is not very successful in promoting Slovakia in Denmark and participating at the few tourism fairs a year is not enough to get into Danes’ minds. Danes know Slovakia very little, mostly in relation to the sport or sport events and these cannot be considered as branding efforts.

#### **4.2 Slovak Nation Brand created in promotional materials**

In previous part of the chapter it was discussed that promoting Slovakia in Denmark is in responsibility of the Slovak Embassy in Copenhagen. However, the embassy is presenting Slovakia by the promotional materials which were made by the Slovak Tourist Board in Slovakia. The brand and image Slovak Tourist Board tries to create in these materials will be shortly analysed and discussed in the following part of the chapter. By discussing Slovak nation brand created in these materials the author aims to find out if the desired image will match informants’ perceptions and images of Slovakia. Certainly it is not possible to seek, analyse and discuss all promotional materials about Slovakia that can be found in Denmark. Therefore, only the promotional materials collected by the author at the Slovak Embassy in Copenhagen will be analysed.

As mentioned above, there were only a limited number of promotional materials available for analysis<sup>2</sup>. It consisted of several brochures and bulletins about various parts of Slovakia. Some of them were made as summarization of the most beautiful places to visit. To be more specific, these bulletins and brochures were about (1) the mountain range High Tatras, (2) the second biggest city and European Capital of Culture 2013 Košice, (3) the UNESCO sites located in Slovakia, (4) the Castles and Chateaux in Slovakia, (5) the ‘Top of Slovakia’ and

---

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 1

(6) the capital Bratislava and its region. All these brochures were made by Slovak Tourist Board in 2008 and collected at the Slovak Embassy in September 2011 (when visiting the Slovak Embassy in April 2013, the author found out that promotional materials available there are same as the one she had already collected).

The main motto of the whole Slovakian campaign is the “Little Big Country”. It can be assumed that this motto aims to show that even though Slovakia is a ‘Little’ country in terms of size, it is a ‘Big’ country in term of possibilities for tourists. Looking at the ‘Top Slovakia’ brochure, which is summarization of the best tourism places for visiting in Slovakia, is possible to see that Slovakia does not want to present one clear image, and rather wants to present a diversity of the country. The brochure describes Slovakia as the “Country of majestic peaks and fertile valleys, large rivers and small torrents. It emanates both a glorious history and the pulse of modern life. The peace of its natural beauty is supplemented by therapeutic springs, the food and wine adds a finishing touch to past and present civilization; the gentleness of the countryside is balanced by the bustle of the cities” (Top Slovakia, 2008). As it is apparent from the above quote, the creators of the brochure try to show contrasts that can be found in Slovakia and hence present diversity. In complex, the desired image is a combination of nature, history and modernity that can be found in the countryside or cities. Nature is obviously presented by the mountain range High Tatras. The brochure invites tourists to come and enjoy high-mountain hiking, climbing or bicycle tours in the summer season and various winter sports during winter. Besides the High Tatras as the main nature attraction, other nature sights as the Slovak Paradise (national park), the Slovak sea (lake in the Liptov region) or various caves are presented. History is represented mostly by castles and chateaux supplemented by the description of the Gothic Route and medieval appearance of the cities. Wine Route and six wine regions are also presented as the attraction that combines beautiful nature with fine food and wine. The sign of modernity is considered to be hundreds of museums and galleries supplemented by modern artists in Bratislava who beautify streets with modern sculptures. It can be concluded that only Bratislava is presented in a modern way, other parts of the Slovakia are more associated with the Slovak nature and history. However, spa and wellness with mineral springs portrayed in the brochure can be also considered as the modern aspect of Slovakia and of course these can be found all around the Slovakia.

The brochure about the 'UNESCO sites' in Slovakia is pretty straightforward. It describes UNESCO sites in Slovakia, however not all of them. As the UNESCO sites are usually related to cultural aspects, there is no difference in Slovakia. Amongst these sites there is a castle, small cities with beautiful historical centres and culture, but also two natural national parks. However in summary, in this particular brochure it is mostly culture and heritage that is presented.

The next brochure is about the 'Castles and Chateaux in Slovakia'; it presents, describes and provides pictures of many chateaux or castles or their ruins. It can be concluded that this brochure is also promoting history and historical heritage face of Slovakia.

In order to find something else besides nature and history, one have to have a look on the brochures that present Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia and Košice, the European Capital of culture 2013 and second biggest city in Slovakia. Bratislava is presented as 'at the top of the golden triangle': the triangle connects the three capital cities: Vienna, Budapest and Bratislava. Presumably, creators of the brochure want to achieve a picture of easy accessible city that might be a stop between two more popular cities. It is interesting to think of reason why is Bratislava presented this way. It seems like the creators of the brochure are not confident enough to present Bratislava without combining it with other cities; like there are not enough attractions in Bratislava that can attract tourists. Furthermore, geographically it is true that Bratislava is on the top of the triangle; however from tourism point of view it is on the bottom of that triangle since most of the interviewed Danes have already been to Budapest and know more about Vienna than Bratislava. Bratislava in this branding does not stand alone and it is not presented as a something unique to visit.

Similarly, according to the general campaign 'Little Big Country', Bratislava is promoted as the "Little Big City" in the brochure, which should tell about a relatively small and young capital but with rich history, culture and diversity. Bratislava region is characterized as the region without borders, land of sun and water and wine region (Bratislava and its region, 2008). Pictures capture various images, firstly images of the most important historical monuments and buildings, castles, and people dressed in medieval costumes. Next page of the brochure displays city as a modern city, with new architecture, also presenting few activities that are possible to do in the region, for instance swimming in the lake or kayaking. Again, Bratislava region is presented as 'a region without borders'. Analysing this slogan; it creates the image of the Slovak openness and welcoming hospitality, but again, 'without borders'

create an image that this region is melt with another regions, it does not stand alone like something special. All these slogans just enhance the image that there is not Slovakia, but Eastern Europe as one big country where all countries are melt together (same is discussed in the following part of the chapter). This way of branding corresponds with the destination (country) branding. The materials try to visualize the most beautiful places in Slovakia and the Tourism Board develops various slogans and mottos to give potential tourists the idea about Slovakia.

As discussed in the theoretical chapter, nation branding has its own characteristics. Firstly, it is necessary to notice that the Slovak image has not been developed over decades since Slovakia exists only from 1993; hence it is only 20 years of its independant existence. Looking at the interviews it can be claimed that there are no images about the Slovak nation; especially older generation is still referring to Czechoslovakia. Characteristics of the Slovak nation are not pictured in the brochures. When Slovak people dance or participate on the national holidays' events they wear certain kind of clothes, usually typical for their region. Unfortunately, it is not possible to find the pictures of these clothes in the materials. There is only one picture of a man playing the shepherds pipe in his regional clothes. However, this picture can be found in the brochure about the 'UNESCO sites'; the shepherds pipe and its sound and music are classified as the UNESCO heritage. Hence focus of that picture is not given to shepherd's clothes, but the musical instrument. Music and dance might be difficult to capture, but it is possible to get some images out of pictures and photographs. However, there are no pictures of Slovak people dancing national dances or singing, even though that this is very popular in Slovakia and people do that during various events or on public holidays etc. Furthermore, language could be represented in the brochures by introducing few basic phrases in Slovak language; however there are no phrases showed. What is really missing in all the brochures are people. Streets and cities are captured empty, without people. If there are people, they are usually tourists. This gives the image of 'no-man-land'. It does not show interaction of locals and tourists; hence it does not give the image of very hospitable country ready for tourists to come. The reason why creators do not present the nation might be also rooted in short time existence of Slovak nation; the process of the nation building is not presented in the brochures. One can argue that the 'no-man-land' image could be useful and attractive for tourists, who seek for not crowded places. However, these people seek for the places with no tourists, but they still want to see locals.

In summary, it seems like Slovakia wants to present itself as a country with beautiful nature and historic cities. However, Slovak nation and its characteristics are deeply missing in the materials since nothing that characterize Slovak nation (clothes, food, drinks, dance, musical instruments, habits etc.) appears in the analysed materials. Instead of presenting nation and its specifics, creators of the materials focus mostly on the historic and natural sites of Slovakia, trying to present history of Slovakia via castles and also beautiful and unspoilt nature. Modernity is possible to find mostly in Bratislava. It is obvious that the main themes in all these brochures are nature and history and castles which do not create a very different image from other European countries. Following theory part, the pattern of promoting heritage and history that is typical for CEE is apparent. Promotion of nature is also substantial for the region, same can be observed in Slovakia. Analysis shows that Slovakia is not presented as the country that stands alone amongst others; on the contrary it is often combined with other countries. Lack of confidence is observed in the branding.

Even though it is well known that destination branding and nation branding overlaps, this analysis shows that Slovakia is adopting the destination branding strategy more than the nation branding when promoting Slovakia. Hence, Slovakia is not using nation branding in order to help a destination branding as it is supposed to work according to the theories presented. Reason for same can be that Slovak nation is still very young and its image is not built yet, it does not stand alone. Same can be considered as not very good for Slovakia since nation branding is the tool that helps erase misconceptions and builds bridges between nations-countries.

#### **4.3 Analysis of the interviews according to chosen themes**

In the previous part of the chapter the way how Slovakia is branded in the promotional materials was analysed and general awareness of Slovakia in Denmark was described. In the following part of the paper, findings about how Danes perceive Slovakia as the tourist destination are going to be presented. In addition, the way how Danes perceive Central and Eastern Europe countries (CEE) and distinction between them will be analysed.

#### 4.3.1 Central Europe vs. Eastern Europe

As described in theory part, after the dissolution of Soviet Union many countries become transitional and since then they try to position themselves on a map as perspective tourist destinations. Although all of them got a label of 'Eastern European countries', some of them keep trying to present and re-brand themselves as the 'Central European' in order to get a better image in the western world. During the interviews, the author tried to ascertain if Danes distinguish between Central and Eastern Europe.

*"Well it would be just imaginations. But I don't know really." (Skov Svendsen, 2013)*

*"Yes I do know the term but I do not know about countries." (Mejborg, 2013)*

*"Depending what you mean by Central, I have been to Greece." (Lyngs, 2013)*

As it is apparent from the above quotes, respondents do have knowledge that there is a region in Europe called Central Europe, but they fail in recognizing countries that belong to that region. Below quotes confirm same and indicates that for some informants it is still only about West and East of the Europe and they see only one line dividing Europe.

*"I have just learnt that Slovakia is in Central Europe but in my mind it is more eastern, I don't know why." (...) "I feel like I would choose more countries to be eastern even though they are central." (Mortensen, 2013)*

*"Well I distinguish between Western and Eastern Europe I would say, not central." (Harck, 2013)*

*"For me it is more less Eastern Europe and then Western Europe. Central Europe? No." (Erler, 2013)*

Bjarke and Phillip describe their past travelling experiences. They both speak about their trips to Hungary and Budapest as about the trips to the Eastern Europe. Jeppe mentions that he was happy going to Slovakia because he always wanted to go to the Eastern Europe.

*(...) "I went around Europe with some friends to Eastern Europe" (...) "We went to Hungary." (...) (Lyngs, 2013)*

*(...) "I went to Budapest once" (...) "but I want to see more of Eastern Europe." (Sadolin, 2013)*

*"I did not think that I should go to Slovakia really, but I always wanted to see Eastern Europe." (Skov Svendsen, 2013)*

Above quotes indicate that not only Slovakia, but also the rest of the countries that try to position themselves as the Central European are not really successful in their efforts. The term "Central Europe" is known in general, probably from the media or other commercial sources or movies, but recognition of the countries that belongs to that region is none or very poor. Hence, analysis shows that Slovakia is still perceived as the Eastern European Country in the western world and when Danes imagine Europe there are only east and west parts of it.

However, the fact that people can perceive the word 'central' from different point of view should not be forgotten:

*"It is geographical difference. Because Slovakia is not east, it is in the middle. So it cannot be eastern simply. It is just something that I learn it school, everything what was east from the wall was eastern. And that is what most Danish people learn in school. As soon as you go eastern where the wall used to be, you go to Eastern Europe." (Nygaard-Thomsen, 2013)*

As it is apparent, Simon distinguishes between the Central and Eastern Europe but for him it is pure geographical point of view. Naturally, Slovakia is the Central European country from geographical point of view, but the meaning of re-branding was more less to get rid of a label of poor, less developed and dangerous post-soviet country. For the complexity of the paper, below pictures are included in order to show the reader how is Slovakia promoted and characterized in the very famous tourism guides created by the Lonely Planet. It was discussed in the previous part of the paper that low awareness of Slovakia is the consequence of insufficient promotion. On the contrary, Danes' inability in distinguishing Central and Eastern Europe may derive from the fact that Slovakia is still presented as the Eastern European country in some books. If Danes would have a look to the famous Lonely Planet' guides books (as three informants did), they would find Slovakia to be a part of both regions.



Whether you seek high culture in Vienna or high jinks at Munich's Oktoberfest, want to ride a horse drawn carriage through eastern Slovakia or hike through Poland's dramatic Tatra mountains, you'll be inspired to uncover the charms of Central Europe with this comprehensive guide.

The Cover of the Lonely Planet Guide Book  
to the Central Europe (2005)

This comprehensive guide to Eastern Europe covers Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Yugoslavia.

The Cover of the Lonely Planet Guide Book  
to the Eastern Europe (2001)

Looking at above pictures it is understandable that Danes don't know about the Slovakia being in Central Europe if only few years ago it was still presented as part of the Eastern Europe. Also as Simon explains, people in Denmark learn in school that there are only two

parts of the Europe, east and west, hence they are given wrong information (from Slovakian point of view) and just follow it.

#### **4.3.2 Danes and Tourism**

To express the complexity of the problem it is also important to shortly discuss what Danish attitude towards tourism is. The aim of this part of the chapter is to develop an understanding of Danes' intentions when they travel and hence why Slovakia is not their preferred destination.

To begin with, it can be concluded from the interviews that Danes do like travelling and have very positive attitude towards tourism. Even though their travelling purposes differs very often, as it is apparent from below quotes, they usually travel in order to see something new and unknown, get new impression, experience new cultures and meet new people.

*"Yes, I like travelling very much. I have been travelling all my life both as a tourist and professionally." (...) (Frandsen, 2013)*

*"As a famous Hans Christian Andersen said 'travelling is living' and that is the way I feel. For me it is a necessity as getting my sleep. I need to travel; I need to get new impressions, see new cultures, meet new people and so." (Krogsgaard, 2013)*

*"I do like travelling very much. I love to experience new countries and I don't like to go to the same country many times because I want to experience different country every time I travel." (Røder, 2013)*

*"I like travelling; I have not done a lot of it I think. I went to lots of countries in Europe, lots of Western Europe and South. But I still think I have not seen a lot, there are lots of places I want to go to." (Sadolin, 2013)*

*"I like to travel. I think a big part of the life is exploring new horizons, see very different cities, otherwise just being in Denmark just try something new. I like to travel, as H. C. Andersen travelled for living." (Skov Svendsen, 2013)*

Travelling plays a big role in informants' lives; many of them have a feeling that they have not been travelling enough and have future plans to travel. Informants claim that they look for something new, special, and unknown, with new experiences. Hence it can be concluded that Slovakia does not appear to have these features in their perception. In fact, some of the informants expressed the view that Slovakia is similar to western countries:

*“Bratislava looks almost like Copenhagen.” (Røder, 2013)*

*“Bratislava is more less similar city or close to Copenhagen or Berlin” (...) “of course in a little bit smaller scale.” (Harck, 2013)*

Another example and prove of perceived similarity between Slovakia and Denmark could be statements made by Danish students who have not been to Slovakia and were asked how they would imagine the Slovak food to be like. Sidse and Bjarke would imagine Slovak food to be similar to Danish (Lyngs, 2013; Mortensen, 2013). Both informants mention meat and potatoes which are also some of very often used ingredients in Danish cuisine. Bjarke also explains why he thinks the food would be similar to Danish. Bjarke also explain reason for same; he thinks that Slovak food is more similar to Danish than to French food consisted of flimsy bread and cheese (Lyngs, 2013). It can be assumed that Bjarke has an image of Slovakia as not very sophisticated country that would pay attention to a quality food that is very expensive. He thinks that food in Slovakia is something that would get one through the day, he mentions farmers, and hence he sees Slovakia as a farmer country (another similarity with Denmark) (Lyngs, 2013).

In summary, Danish tourists love travelling and try to travel as much as possible. Danes like to explore new places and cultures. It is also important to think of financial possibilities of Danes for travelling; many Danes can afford to travel every year or several times in a year. However, there have to be something special or exotic about the country in order for them to choose that destination. Those who have been to Bratislava consider it to be similar to Copenhagen; furthermore, informants who have not been to Slovakia also can imagine that it would be similar in terms of food for instance. Therefore, based on above discussion it can be concluded that for Danes Slovakia is not something new and interesting to explore and the fact that Danes do not know much about Slovakia and its attractions made it even worse.

However, it is also important to have a look and compare if Danes do travel to destinations they claim are interesting for them. Danes claim they are looking for something unknown, new cultures, experiences etc., but at the same time these places should not be crowded, rather not explored by mass tourism. If combining these two criteria, Slovakia can be the option. If Danes are looking for exploring new things and new cultures, and at the same time they are looking for something not crowded, Slovakia is the place to go. The only question remains if it would be interesting enough for them to decide to go there. Looking at the analysed promotional material, Slovakia is definitely shown as non-crowded country, but there are no attributes that would stand out and picture Slovakia as something unique.

#### **4.3.3 Slovakia as a part of the country called ‘Eastern Europe’**

Danes preferences when travelling and their travel intentions were discussed previously. It was determined that Slovakia does not play the role of the interesting destination with unique features to see. On the contrary, similarities between Bratislava and Copenhagen or in general Slovakia and Denmark perceived by informants were described. Furthermore, in relation to above part of the chapter, informants were comparing Slovakia also to other CEE countries. These similarities and characteristics will be described in the following part of the chapter.

*“I guess for me a lot of the cultures of the Eastern European countries blend together, it is almost like Denmark and Sweden; we have similar cultures as we are directly next to each other. So for me I have been working on the assumption that it is basically the same thing. So when I went to Hungary I was thinking: well I experienced Budapest and that pretty must be what the rest is like.” (Lyngs, 2013)*

By above quote Bjarke also explains his reasons why he has not been to Slovakia yet. He would imagine Slovakia and Hungary and their cultures to be same.

Furthermore, besides Czech Republic, Anders compares Slovakia to the countries which are neither eastern, nor central but are located in the south part of Europe.

*“I have a feeling it is very similar to Czech Republic. I would imagine it is similar to Croatia, Serbia and ex-Yugoslavian countries. I remember once I have been to Slovenia”. (...) “And I can imagine that it would be the same in Slovakia.” (Frandsen, 2013)*

Rasmus see the similarity in countries' history. He explains that he could see a specific mark in all the CEE countries he visited during his trip.

*“I would say that all countries in Eastern Europe we went had a specific mark; you can see USSR was there.” (...) (Mejborg, 2013)*

Kim lived in Slovakia for two years and has also visited many countries in Europe but mostly for business purposes. He has been to Estonia for holidays several times and he considers Slovakia to be similar to Estonia.

*“You can compare Slovakia and Estonia little. Of course Estonia is lot smaller (...) but I think people and the whole mentality is the same.” (Jepsen, 2013)*

It can be assumed that in the Danish perception, all these countries that belong to the eastern part of Europe are more less the same, with similar culture, history, mentality, way of living etc. Danish people who have been travelling to the Central or Eastern Europe equate Slovakia with countries from Central, Eastern but also Southern Europe. It seems like for Danes all these countries form one big country called 'Eastern Europe'. With this finding, it is even more obvious how important is for Slovakia to stand out amongst others and present brand that is unique and people would remember it. Nation branding could be one of the solutions; since Slovakia is not using nation branding very much by now, it is definitely worth to try branding the nation and its characteristics.

#### **4.3.4 The Differences in the CEE region**

In the previous text, the issue with Eastern Europe to be one big country was discussed. In addition to same is worth to notice that many informants indirectly comparing Slovakia to more eastern countries. Rasmus discusses the price level in Slovakia by saying that Slovakia

was not the cheapest country on their trip; hence more eastern countries were cheaper (Mejborg, 2013). Mads discusses the security question and he believes Slovakia to be more safe than Albania or Romania (Harck, 2013). Peter compared Slovakia to Serbia by saying that Serbia is poorer and not so safe (Røder, 2013).

It can be concluded from the above discussion that Romania and Albania are considered to be even poorer countries than Slovakia and, as according to Mads, also not very safe. Similarly Peter expresses same feeling with Beograd. One of the informants mentions Poland, as a country where Danes are afraid to go and where if you park a car it would get stolen immediately (Harck, 2013). Following theories related to CEE countries, differences between countries in this region perceived by informants are obvious. Analysis shows that Balkan countries are considered to be poorer, less developed and less safe than Slovakia, of course all these images might derive and be based on the recent Balkan war; people still consider these countries by unstable in a way. Hence analysis shows that there are perceived differences between the countries which are all considered to be Eastern European. Slovakia has better image in Danes minds comparing to Balkan countries. Some informants explain their admiration of Slovakia for overcoming difficult past and for successful transformation to the democratic republic (Frandsen, 2013; Harck, 2013).

#### **4.3.5 Informants' behaviour and their decision making process**

The informants held different images and opinions about Slovakia before and after they travelled there. In the following part of the chapter these images will be shortly analysed and compared. Furthermore, to what extent informants got influenced by these images when deciding on their holidays in Slovakia will be discussed.

People visited Slovakia for various reasons or purposes. There were different things that influenced informants in their decision process of going to Slovakia. Rasmus is a student who has been travelling to Bratislava with his friends and stayed there for three nights. He explains reasons why they decided to go there.

*“It was just; if we would not go at that time we would probably never go there. So it was like “if we are not going to do that now we will never do it”. So we just thought why not.”*  
(Mejborg, 2013)

Rasmus describes their decision as the decision of a moment, there was no particular reason for travelling to Slovakia; the only criterion was that it was in Eastern Europe. Identically, Peter explains that it was the decision of a moment on their route to go Bratislava.

*“We took Interrail and decided to visit Bratislava. It was just a moment of a decision on a route.” (...) (Røder, 2013)*

For Anders, visiting Bratislava was only a short stop between other destinations. Anders was travelling from Vienna to Budapest and stopped in Bratislava. Again it is possible to see that the slogan ‘On the top of the golden triangle’ as Bratislava is branded is not very successful since he stayed in Budapest and Vienna but only had a short stop in Bratislava.

*(...) “Back then we would go from Vienna to Hungary and we would pass through Bratislava” (...) (Frandsen, 2013)*

Jeppe, Simon and Klaus visited friends in Slovakia; otherwise they would not pick up Slovakia as the destination to visit (since according to them they have not heard about Slovakia before) (Skov Svendsen, 2013; Nygaard-Thomsen, 2013; Erler Okkels, 2013). Kim and Mads went to Slovakia first time for the working purposes and lived there for several months. Slovakia as a destination was not picked-up because of its qualities or because it was interesting in any of the cases.

To sum up, informants who were interviewed for the purposes of this study were not interested particularly in Slovakia as a destination. Their motivations lied mostly on visiting friends or they were motivated to see Eastern Europe as a ‘country’, not particularly Slovakia.

#### **4.3.6 Organic and induced images of Slovakia**

As all informants admitted, their knowledge of Slovakia was not very good. Informants responding to the question what did they know about Slovakia before they travelled there:

*“Not really much.” (Røder, 2013)*

*“Nearly nothing. I did not even know they took Euro in Slovakia so I was very surprised. Yeah, I did not know anything about it. Nearly the capital. It was very new for me. Of course I knew the place on the map when I saw it but nothing else.” (Skov Svendsen, 2013)*

*“Absolutely nothing.” (Mejborg, 2013)*

*“Very limited, like you used to be Czechoslovakia.” (Jepsen, 2013)*

*“Actually nothing, since I was going to see a friend I have heard a bit of him telling about it.” (Erler, 2013)*

Informants' general knowledge about Slovakia before they travelled there was very poor or none. Informants did not get in touch with Slovakia via media (discussed in the first parts of the analysis chapter); education provided them only with knowledge about Eastern Europe, not particularly Slovakia (Nygaard-Thomsen, 2013). The initial images of Slovakia or in other words organic images did not exist in informants' minds. Therefore, in the initial/awareness phase of deciding to go to Slovakia, informants were influenced mostly by other motivation (visiting friends, working etc.), not by images they hold about Slovakia. As discussed above, it was not the destination Slovakia informants were deciding about, it was their friends who they followed and visited in Slovakia. Clients of the Ziebe Rejser also travel to Slovakia for the purposes of health treatments. In addition, Ander stopped in Bratislava for few hours, also Rasmus and Peter did not decide to go to Slovakia because of the country, but because it was one of the stops during their trip in Eastern Europe. Country 'Eastern Europe' was their destination. In addition, in Rasmus' case, they wanted to experience 'Eastern Europe' as they saw it in the movie. There are two famous movies which involve Slovakia: the EuroTrip (adventure & comedy, 2004) and the trilogy The Hostel (horror, 2005, 2007, and 2011). Especially latter one is portraying Slovakia as undeveloped, poor and uncultured land suffering from high criminality, war and prostitution and as a place made up of run down factories and kids who kill for bubble gum. In the EuroTrip movie, when the map of the Europe is created from the things on a restaurant table, Slovakia is pictured as an ashtray. Also scenes in the movie shows only huge concrete buildings, old cars and Romas living there. All these images can seriously hurt Slovak reputation and image, mainly if considering



that they were produced just recently. It also does not create image of very safe country (Harck, 2013). Rasmus describes what he remembers from the movie:

*“I remember that scene with big disco and old buildings”. (...) “It was a funny movie, great movie. Of course we know that they were doing it to the extreme, and we had that in mind but yes, it influenced us.” (Mejborg, 2013)*

As it is obvious from Rasmus’ statement, they had initial images of how Bratislava would look like. They would imagine it to be with old buildings, and big discos which indicates fun and drinking. Since the whole movie was about cheap drinking and enjoying life, they would expect same in Slovakia. Basically, fun and drinking was the reason why they decided to go on their Eastern European trip (Mejborg, 2013). Also Jeppe is describing what he remembers from the EuroTrip movie:

*“I think in a movie it looks like everything is just grey and there is nothing around, like a ghost town.” (Skov Svendsen, 2013)*

*“I have seen EuroTrip. I just remember one scene when they give a waiter one dollar tip and he is going to buy his own hotel.” (Nygaard-Thomsen, 2013)*

Simon remembers scene from the movie that puts Slovakia in to the position of the extremely cheap country. Quitting a job for one dollar tip and building a hotel out of it is definitely not something that is happening in Slovakia nowadays and still it was presented like this in recent movies.

In conclusion, movies as non-commercial agent that builds organic images can really influence peoples’ perceptions about a country. In the case of Slovakia, the way how country and its situation are described is very negative and also offensive (taking into the consideration Slovakia was represented by the ashtray). However, as obvious from above discussion, these negative images about Slovakia and Eastern Europe actually made Rasmus and his friends travelling to the Eastern Europe, hence they had a positive influence on their decision to travel to Slovakia.

Furthermore, organic images could be gained also unconsciously. Although informants responded negatively to the question if they had any images or expectations before travelling to Slovakia, when they were asked about their first impressions of Slovakia, they responded:

*“I was surprised because I did not think that the country will be so beautiful.” (Erler, 2013)*

*“I did not know; it was in my head, there was not forest, just buildings. I was surprised that there were mountains nearby.” (...) “I thought they will be more poor in Slovakia.” (...) (Skov Svendsen, 2013)*

*“I lived in Prešov; it was bigger than I thought.” (...) “I was really surprised that you can get everything just to the same degree as here in Denmark.” (Harck, 2013)*

The word ‘surprised’ indicates that informants did not expect certain things to be in Slovakia or they did not expect Slovakia look in a way it did. Hence they had certain images about Slovakia even though they did not know about having them. It can be concluded from above quotes that informants did not expect Slovakia to be very beautiful, they did not know about its nature and forests and they would not expect that materialistically they would be able to get everything what they needed. Moreover, they expected people to be and look poor and have not very good English (Nygaard-Thomsen, 2013). It is possible to see a pattern from old communist times, when nature was destroyed and concrete buildings were the main characteristic of the post-soviet countries. People were poor and there was only limited amount of goods and merchandise of any type. It can be concluded that these unconscious images hold by informants show the pattern from the past; hence they still consider Slovakia to look like and to function like during the communism times. The question where they got such images is partly answered by the quotes about movies, when it is possible to see that Slovakia is shown as concrete and poor. Again, it can be claimed that all these images are mostly related to a destination than to a nation and can be generalized to whole Eastern Europe.

In summary, it was proved by the analysis that informants who travelled to Slovakia had some vague images about Slovakia they gained unconsciously or consciously from the movies. Hence these organic images were influenced by non-commercial agent. Only in

Rasmus' case, these images influenced him and his friends to travel to Eastern Europe and to Slovakia; other informants were not influenced by these images and had different motivations to travel to Slovakia they based their decision on. Definitely, all these images pictured in the movies Hostel and EuroTrip can be considered as negative and can hurt image of Slovakia and its reputation. However, it seems like these negative images can become an attraction and bring some tourists to Slovakia, especially young generation which is seeking for fun and cheap drinking trips.

It is relevant for this research to have a look on what images have informants who have not been to Slovakia yet as these images might become reasons why would they travel there in the future and can be considered as organic images about Slovakia.

It seems that for young people from Denmark travelling to Eastern Europe represents an opportunity to get drunk for very cheap. Bjarke confirmed that his classmates described their trip to Eastern Europe as trip with lots of fun and drinking (Lyngs, 2013). Discussing similarities in perceptions of all Eastern European countries, Bjarke was in Budapest:

*"We went to Hungary; to Budapest. It was basically just to travel to go for young guys to get smashed and hammered and have fun. It was not about experiencing culture there, it was just to go somewhere and have lots of fun." (Lyngs, 2013)*

Similarly as Slovakia and Bratislava, also Hungary and Budapest are destinations for drinking outings. Bjarke explains why he has not been to Slovakia yet; he thought when he went in Budapest, he basically saw how Eastern Europe looks like (Lyngs, 2013). Now, Bjarke is influenced by the two things in his way of perceiving Slovakia. Firstly, he is influenced by his trip to Budapest, which was basically the drinking trip. Already at that time he assumed that countries of Eastern Europe are similar, and secondly, his assumption was partly validated by his classmates' trip when they also presented Slovakia as a drinking country to him.

Sidse, would imagine Slovakia to be grey (discussed more into the details in the following part of the chapter); on the other hand she would imagine it being similar to Prague:

*"I consider that it might be close to Prague maybe because of whole Czecho-Slovakia thing. And that is what I am hoping because I really enjoyed the Prague. Maybe Bratislava*

*would have some of the feelings, like nice and historical; I think that is how Bratislava would be in my mind.(...) Just maybe less crowded with tourists I think. ” (Mortensen, 2013)*

It can be summarized from above discussion that people who have not been to Slovakia have also some vague, organic images about Slovakia. In these two cases, they are based on assumptions that Slovakia, particularly Bratislava would be similar to other capitals from CEE countries, Budapest and Prague. It can be concluded, that besides traditional agents which form images of countries, analysis revealed another one. People get influenced also by their experiences from other countries and tend to compare countries from same regions. Hence image of Slovakia is also created by neighbouring countries and capital cities. It can be also assumed that it would be mostly Czech Republic that would be considered to be the most similar to Slovakia since Danes still bear in mind as they call it the “Czechoslovakia thing”.

From organic images which influence the first phase of the decision making process is necessary to move towards induced images that might also influence people to travel to a destination in the second phase of the decision making process. However, as discussed earlier, informants who participated in this research were not influenced by images of Slovakia when deciding on holidays; it was another motivation that influenced them. Hence they did not really need to search for additional information to assure themselves about going there. As found out, Rasmus and Peter had bought books about Eastern Europe before their trip and this might be considered as collecting further information, but not as an influencing factor (Mejborg, 2013; Røder, 2013).

Other informants either did not search for any additional information, or just for general background:

*“Well, I am not really that guy for information. I just want to see the things when I come to the place.” (Skov Svendsen, 2013)*

*“We just went there, we did not check that much (...) a little bit to see how the weather is normally and how the people are normally, just a little background.” (Erler, 2013)*

Obviously, as it was proved with organic images, also induced images of Slovakia before travelling were very poor amongst interviewees. Reasons for same stems from the fact that all informants already made their decision to go to Slovakia and did not need further information

about the country. Books that two of the informants bought and used were about Eastern Europe, not Slovakia which, again, supports the fact that for Danes there is no Slovakia but 'Eastern Europe'. To sum up, analysis shows that destination or nation images do not influence decision making process about holidays in the case of Danes travelling to Slovakia.

#### **4.3.7 Slovakia is grey**

As discussed in the theory chapter, images of countries might be built on stereotypes. Analysing stereotypes can be very subjective, since these are created many times unconsciously and are based on the past. Sidse has never been to Slovakia and she does not know lot about it or how it looks like. However, she would imagine Slovakia to be as follows:

*(...) "I don't know why but I would imagine it would be kind of grey (...) Grey is the word in my mind." (Mortensen, 2013)*

'Grey'. Slovakia is 'grey'. It can be argued or discussed what does 'grey' mean. As she explains, grey is only a word in her mind, she was not describing anything from Slovakia. It is possible to claim that she got this image unconsciously, yet from where is still unclear. Since grey colour can be associated with many different things, to find the one Sidse meant by her statement it is necessary to have a look on the other informants' quotes. Obviously, as apparent from below quotes, informants who have been to Slovakia also mention a word 'grey'.

*"The houses are old and grey, like really big betony buildings; it looked like old soviet areas." (...) (Skov Svendsen, 2013)*

Jeppe describes houses and buildings in Slovakia as grey. From this can be understood that grey colour refers to old concrete buildings. It is interesting to see that Jeppe mentions Soviet Union as something that is associated with these buildings, hence with grey colour. The answer to the question why he associates these things together follows from below quote:

*“I think in a movie it looks like everything is just grey and there is nothing around, like a ghost town.” (Skov Svendsen, 2013)*

In above quote, Jeppe describes how he remembers Slovakia from the EuroTrip movie. It can be noticed that in this case grey colour is associated with the ghost town, with a town where no people live in. Usual picture of a ghost town is that it is abandoned, no one lives there and they are usually scary, empty and destroyed. For instance it could be cities left after war battles etc.. Following above, the association with the Soviet Union and the Second World War can be understood. Furthermore, association with branding of Slovakia in the promotional materials can be seen; as it was discussed, one cannot really see people on the streets and some of the pictures (especially ones of castles) are with no people; they look like the ghost towns.

Moreover, Jeppe explains that grey colour is associated with the whole Eastern Europe.

*“Because like I told you when you speak about Eastern Europe you just see grey buildings and factories and grey places.” (Skov Svendsen, 2013)*

Same is confirmed by Sidse:

*“You would not see anyone laughing on the streets. Even the way how people were dressed; it seemed dark and grey, not that colourful at all.” (Mortensen, 2013)*

In above quote Sidse describing atmosphere of Kyjev. Even though she is not speaking about Slovakia, she is using the word ‘grey’ again. ‘Grey’ in this case is associated with people who are not happy, do not laugh and are not relaxed. In other words ‘grey’ refers to unhappy people, sad people and poor people. It can be understood that the word ‘grey’ is really not used to describe something positive, hence ‘grey’ images of the country can be considered as negative.

*“We were surprised many things were still there, like grey buildings.” (Mejborg, 2013)*

As Rasmus was discussing little bit of USSR army in the interview, the author was interested if he could see anything left after them in Slovakia. He answered he was surprised that grey buildings were still there. The word surprised indicates that he was also thinking about it in advance, hence he had an image in his head before he went there. However he also confirms the previously discussed differences in CEE region by saying that these building were not as visible and scary as in Beograd and that in Bratislava they are successfully hidden and coloured (Mejborg, 2013).

*"It was like I would say Eastern Europe just passing by: green fields and some old abandoned factories." (Skov Svendsen, 2013)*

Above statement is giving a support to the previous discussion. Eastern Europe is associated also with abandoned factories; these factories giving images of something empty and grey. This is a typical stereotyping behaviour when stereotypes prevent tourists from seeing what is real and rather make them to perceive only what they have entrenched in their minds. Stereotypes here are based on exceptions, and Jeppe first defined Eastern Europe and then saw his own definition in the form of abandoned factories.

However, Danes do not think of Slovakia as about communist country, they do not think you can feel or see communism past there (Erler, 2013) and it is not something that they see a problem when discussing attracting tourists. As they explain, especially young generation does not bear communism in minds (Harck, 2013).

However, although Danes do not associate communism with Slovakia or do not bear its communism past in their minds when they think of Slovakia, some images from that era are entrenched in their minds; for example grey buildings or fences (typically known from camps etc.). Where they got these images from is difficult to determine since it is possible to claim that they got them unconsciously, maybe just by watching some war movies or pictures in their history books at school, or just from documentaries and TV in general. What is more, what can be said about the country based on such images is also a complicated question. According to what is known from past, grey and grey (concrete) buildings are signs of poverty, poorness, misery, fear and unhappy people. Paradoxically, Danes do not think that this is how Slovakia looks like. Hence it can be concluded that a word 'grey' is entrenched in Danes minds, but they do not build their images about Slovakia entirely on it. Having a grey

image of a country can be considered as stereotypical perceiving of a country. It is not a stereotype that is associated only with Slovakia, but also with the whole Eastern Europe. It is something that is based on past and historic background and pictured in various movies, documentaries, historic books etc. Since history is a very important part of education, people need to learn about it; hence also future generations will get in touch with same images of concrete and grey buildings and countries destroyed by wars. It can be assumed that changing this stereotype will be immensely difficult. Slovakia being grey is the biggest stereotype revealed in this research.

Based on theory facts that stereotypes are held widely, they are distorted and not necessarily accurate, it can be concluded that one of such stereotypes is that Slovakia is poor. All informants during the interviews mention the word 'poor' or they thought Slovakia was poor country. This stereotype and also the 'grey' stereotype discussed above are stereotypes that can be associated with the all CEE countries, hence stereotypes about Slovakia stem from stereotypes held about Eastern Europe. It can be assumed that all these images come from non-commercial agents – movies, but also commercials such as media. Unfortunately, this analysis does not reveal any of events presented in media which would influence and encourage Danes to hold such negative images.

Stereotypical thinking is also possible to see from quotes where informants mention Czecho-Slovakia. Even though these countries have celebrated 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of separation in 2013, in Danes minds they are still very connected. Helge who is the owner of the tour operator and sells trips to Slovakia in the end of the interview explains to the author that there are also other tour operators in Denmark selling trips to Czechoslovakia (Bech, 2013). Helge as the owner of the tour operator obviously knows that Slovakia and Czech Republic are to separate countries and still uses the term Czechoslovakia. Again it is something that is entrenched in his mind since it was the long part of the history that Slovakia and Czech Republic were one country. Similarly also few other informants mention Czechoslovakia in their interviews, mostly in relation to their knowledge before travelling (Jepsen, 2013; Skov Svendsen, 2013). In fact, many Danes when they are asked about Slovakia, Czechoslovakia is the first thing that comes to their minds. Hence, this is considered as one of the stereotypes Danes have about Slovakia.



#### **4.4 Images of Slovakia perceived during holidays**

As discussed in the previous parts of the chapter, before travelling to Slovakia, informants mostly held images of Slovakia that were unconscious. They would imagine that Slovakia is not beautiful, materialistically secured, and poor; also that it is not very modern and little behind (Mortensen, 2013). Some of these images were changed after informants visited Slovakia. Same will be discussed in the following part of the chapter.

##### **4.4.1 Eastern country with western cities**

Informants were surprised by the appearance of the cities, according to them Bratislava is quite modern city like most western cities (Harck, 2013), also main street and shops were very western (Frandsen, 2013). Same matches with previously discussed perceived similarities of Slovakia and Denmark or Bratislava and Copenhagen. Besides the fact that Denmark is a Scandinavian country, in comparison to Slovakia it is western country, hence by expressing similarities between these two countries informants think about Slovakian appearance as western.

Jeppe describes his feelings when he looked at the map before he went to Slovakia. According to him he did not know a lot about Slovakia before his trip and when searching for some information he got really surprised the city is very much to the east of the Europe.

*“It is still funny when I am looking at the map and I am like this should not be here, because this is not Eastern Europe.” (Skov Svendsen, 2013)*

Jeppe discusses that he would not consider Košice to be the eastern European city. He express his feelings that the city should be on the map around Brussels and he consider it even funny that such city is on the east of Slovakia – east of Europe (Skov Svendsen, 2013). However, it is mostly appearance of the cities mostly Bratislava and Košice that informants perceived western. This can be considered as positive perception, but again, it is something that does not make Bratislava to stand alone and make it special to visit.

#### 4.4.2 Slovak hospitality

Every nation is characterized by its traditions, habits, music, food, clothes and of course hospitality. People and impressions they make on foreigners or tourists are immensely important, since behaviour and actions of every individual might be interpreted and generalized to the whole nation. It is very important for people in every destination to behave nicely and show hospitality to tourists and foreigners and so make sure these tourists are coming back. Informants who have visited Slovakia had various experiences with people, mostly positive. Kim and Mads who were living in Slovakia for certain time had a chance to observe Slovak people and get to know them more into depth.

In general, people who visited Slovakia just for short period described Slovak hospitality as good and people as nice. Often, they compared Slovak hospitality do Danish:

*“Mentality has the same problem as here in Denmark, you have to spend some time with people to get them to open” (...) “I would say hospitality in Slovakia is better than here in Denmark.” (Jepsen, 2013)*

*“They are friendly and they are very open-minded also to foreigners. They welcome you with warm arms I think. You live in Denmark so you may know that sometimes if you go somewhere in Denmark you will always get some kind of cold shoulder. They do not want to talk to you and they are always busy. I never met that in Slovakia.” (Erler, 2013)*

The main characteristic of Slovaks described by informants is their openness to foreigners. Kim and Klaus perceive Slovak people to be open and hospitable, even though it might take some time to get to know them. They consider hospitality in general to be better than in Denmark. Peter did not get in touch with Slovak people a lot but he explains that those who met were very nice and warm (Røder, 2013). People in Slovakia were willing to accommodate needs of the informants, for example by upgrading their rooms even after the wrong booking, with no extra charge (Mejborg, 2013). This can be considered as a sign of hospitality as well and it definitely leaves positive image in informants' minds.

Another interesting feature of Slovaks perceived by informants was their curiosity and willingness to learn more about informants' background.

*“They were good, friendly, talkative. (...) they would like to know how Denmark was, why we do such a trip, why we were going to Slovakia. They seemed like they were not really used to tourists.” (Mejborg, 2013)*

*“They were very friendly and curious. So they were interested in me and I was interested in them.” (Frandsen, 2013)*

What can be concluded from above quotes is that Slovak people are very interested in meeting new people, especially foreign tourists. By asking them why do they visit Slovakia they show they are not very confident about country and they do not believe in Slovakia as the attractive destination to visit. As Rasmus said correctly, they seem they are not used to tourists (Mejborg, 2013), hence when they see some they become very friendly and talkative and they are interested in tourists' background. One of the informants mentions that Slovakia is not very set up by tourists, except Bratislava (Harck, 2013). But apparently, following above statements, people from Bratislava are used to tourists either. Related to same, Bjarke, who have not been to Slovakia but Budapest, would imagine people in Slovakia as follows:

*(...) “I would expect people to be very friendly, almost to the point of too friendly” (...) “like encroaching on my personal space and like grabbing my arm to pull me into the shop like “heeeey friend come here and see, I have special offer for you and stuff.”” (Lyngs, 2013)*

Above quote support the fact that people are not very used to tourists; it almost gives a feeling that Slovaks are too friendly cause tourists are something unusual for them and by mentioning special offers it is like they want to get foreigners' money.

Discussing the nations' confidence as the result of the nation branding, some informants pointed out that Slovaks are not very confident and proud of their country (Nygaard-Thomsen, 2013). Same was partly discussed in the first's parts of the analysis chapter, where branding of Slovakia and Bratislava only as the parts of other regions seems like creators of these materials do not believe that Slovakia has something unique that would stand out itself and bring tourists without any indirect help from neighbouring countries. Also Rasmus' quote, about Slovaks asking them why they would go to Slovakia which is discussed above, indicates low confidence of locals about Slovakia being a destination. Simon discusses that in

Denmark, people are so proud of the country that they put flags on in every simple occasion, or just because they feel like, and he does not see this kind of nationalism and proudness in Slovakia (Nygaard-Thomsen, 2013).

*(...) Say 'hey, I have got this really awesome country and I would really like you to come and see it'. And that would show more to me I think.'* (Nygaard-Thomsen, 2013)

In above quote Simon discuss how Slovaks should promote Slovakia by being confident and spreading the word about the country abroad. Nation branding can help people become more confident, however the analysis showed previously that there is no nation branding developed by Slovak tourism bodies. However, it can be taken also from another point of view that it is not nation branding that should make people proud, but proud people should promote nation and hence create the nation branding. Slovaks definitely need to improve their “we” feeling, be more proud of Slovakia and do not be afraid in telling people they should come to Slovakia instead of asking actual tourists why they visited Slovakia.

#### **4.4.3 It is a challenge to be a tourist in Slovakia**

Following part of the chapter will be devoted to the issues and problems informants perceived as tourists in Slovakia which did not make their stay in Slovakia very pleasant. These images gained out of these experiences can have the impact on their future plans to return to Slovakia and definitely also on the message that will be forwarded by them in Denmark. One of the biggest challenges informants had to face was communication with locals in foreign languages.

The owner of the Zieber Rejser describes how his clients feel in Slovakia. His clients often feel pity for Slovaks because they do not speak English or German and hence they do not make their stay very pleasant and also influence their decision returning to Slovakia (Bech, 2013).

Kim describes difficulties he experienced in local restaurants:

*"I point at something and ask a question about something on the menu there is no much help to get from the Slovak people." (...) "Many times we realized that if we started asking and people did not speak English, we didn't get any help at all." (...) (Jepsen, 2013)*

As above quote indicates, tourists have problems to communicate in foreign languages in Slovakia. Moreover, locals do not want to help foreigners and tourists, only when they are forced. It tells about Slovaks that they do not care very much about tourists and tourism situation, which can be a consequence of the fact that they are not used to tourists as previously discussed.

Problems with English did not occur only in personal encounters with locals, but also during travelling around Slovakia. As it was obvious from the quotes mentioned above, situations when locals do not speak English can be very irritating. However, it is not only irritating; it can become a real problem for tourists travelling around Slovakia. Kim is expressing very strong opinion about how one feels in Slovakia:

*"If you do not speak the language you are screwed." (...) "You need to know where you want to go. It is really difficult to find where you are around." (...) "Much of my time in Slovakia was like being blind or deaf. We could read the signs but could not understand what they say." (Jepsen, 2013)*

Same experiences are described by other informant who was confused during his train trip:

*"The only thing I can remember is that everything is in Slovakian. No English and when we were in train I was just sitting there and waiting, enjoying the trip and it was my friend who said we have to go out because it does not go any further. And I was like "Ok, can I get it in English? Or is there any English person in these areas?" (Skov Svendsen, 2013)*

Both informants explain that it is very difficult for tourists to move around Slovakia since there are no signs or no announcements in English. That says a lot about the tourism infrastructure in Slovakia which needs to be definitely improved. According to informants, being tourist in Slovakia is challenging (Harek, 2013) and holidays in Slovakia are mostly intended to open minded people who are not afraid of adventure (Erler, 2013). This is

something that seriously narrows down and determines the tourists target groups. For example one of the informants would not recommend visiting Slovakia to his parents:

*“I would not recommend Košice and things like that because it is very hard and you have to be very experienced traveller to figure out where to go. For example my parents, if they go somewhere they would like to sit on the plane and then go to the hotel and then they would have a list what to do and they would just go there. And then would be hard in Košice.”* (Harck, 2013)

It can be concluded from above discussion that tourists can really experience hard time being in Slovakia. It is hard to understand for Danes that Slovaks do not speak any English or they do speak very little English (Harck, 2013). They find it surprising, challenging and part of the adventure of being a tourist in Slovakia. Unfortunately, the word ‘adventure’ is not used in a positive way, rather it is used ironically.

Because of the language problem informants felt isolated (Harck, 2013). This was an issue especially for the informants who lived in Slovakia, however, the reason for isolation was language barriers, and hence tourists in Slovakia might feel the same way.

Language is one of the issues that make it difficult for tourists in Slovakia and informants perceive Slovakia as a country where people do not speak English. Another issue that creates a negative image about Slovakia is about tourists feeling comfortable and safe in the country. Even though all informants considered Slovakia to be safe country, there was a moment when one of them did not feel very safe:

*“I felt safe until I came to the train station where I felt uncomfortable (...) I found out that was a very dangerous place.”* (Skov Svendsen, 2013)

There is only limited number of flights to Slovakia and most of them are to the capital Bratislava. Hence the gateway to the east Slovakia is considered to be a Košice train station. There are many inter-city trains from Bratislava to Košice that are used on daily basis. And right that gateway was found as a very dangerous place when one of the informants did not have very good experiences with a man following him and begging for money (Skov Svendsen, 2013). It can be concluded that is not welcoming for tourists to feel uncomfortable

or unsafe when they reach their final destination. Places such as train stations or airports are places where tourists get in touch with a country for the first time and where they get the first impressions. And if their first impression is feeling unsafe, then it can influence their perceiving of the country during their whole holidays. Another example in relation to safety in Slovakia is a case of Romas. ‘Something’ that Danes joking about, but they are real (Skov Svendsen, 2013). Seeing Romas and the way how they live can make tourists feel uncomfortable, which definitely does not help in building positive image and recommending the country for further visit. Mads describes how he felt and again how he would imagine his parents to feel in Slovakia:

*(...) “Some of the bad experiences that I had when I visited Slovakia, the Romas there.”  
(...) “That was really probably the only time when I felt insecure. We were driving and passed lots of these camps and on the street and people are stealing everything from the streets. So that felt a bit insecure and then we drove and passed these camps and it was a bit uncomfortable.” (...) “If my parents were visiting or travelling as tourists they would be scared of seeing things like that. They would feel like “Am I in India now? Is it safe or are they going to take all my money and rob me and kill me?” (Harck, 2013)*

Safety is the critical point for tourists when travelling. Meeting Romas and seeing their way of living did not make informants to feel comfortable and safe and this image of the country becomes the serious issue as it is apparent that some of the informants would not recommend visiting Slovakia because of this issue.

Another problem informants experienced was finding promotional materials or web-sites about the places to visit.

*“If I am thinking of Prešov or Košice there was nothing really in terms of tourism there were no brochures. Of course I could look up on the internet obviously but there was not so much in English either; where to go or what to see. (...) Because first you want to go and explore but there is no information. You cannot look up on the internet because it does not say in English that there is a restaurant or you can go to this café. It is written in Slovakian on the internet page, if there is an internet page.” (Harck, 2013)*

Mads was living in Slovakia and he was interested in travelling, however it was very difficult for him to actually find interesting places or acknowledge any events. As he said ‘if there was a website’ then it was in Slovakian (Harck, 2013). Again, this is related to the language issue which was discussed above. Furthermore, Kim is describing the atmosphere of the city where he lived as dynamic; however it is difficult for foreigner to participate because on the events since there are no promotional materials where one could learn about them, also there are no brochures in hotels (Jepsen, 2013). As mention earlier, this makes tourists feel isolated and not involved in what is going on in the country.

Helge Bech explains what his clients miss during their stay in Slovakia; he explains that they miss some possibilities for excursions, entertainment or adventure arranged for them (Bech, 2013). This picture Slovakia as a boring country, or a country where people do not know how to make a program for tourists and entertain them. The owner of the Zeibe Reiser has to organize trip himself, as he says, many times to Krakow, Vienna or Budapest (Bech, 2013), however, he does not do trips to Bratislava. This again confirms that the way how Bratislava is branded (‘on the top of the golden triangle’) is not very realistic.

Informants perceive Slovakia as the destination that is very far away. Specifically, their first impression after they arrived was it is very far away and it is a long trip to go there (Harck, 2013). These opinions were express mostly about the eastern part of Slovakia since there are no flights there; one has to take a train or flight to Budapest to get there. However, it is not further than to go to Austria-Vienna, people just do not know about it and they think it is far away (Jepsen, 2013). Also people can get afraid that they would have to travel to Slovakia via Poland for instance and they are afraid to get robbed there (Jepsen, 2013). When looking on the map of Europe it does create a feeling that for instance Košice cannot be further to east, that it is the most eastern place one can find (Skov Svendsen, 2013). One of the informants nicely concludes the possibilities how to get to Slovakia:

*“I could imagine that transport might be a problem. It is difficult to go directly to eastern part of Slovakia. Bratislava yes, I think you go directly from Copenhagen or Hamburg, but then it is expensive. And as soon as it gets expensive then people don’t go there. You can go by bus or by train but it takes plenty of time, so people are not going.” (Nygaard-Thomsen, 2013)*



As apparent from above quote, Danes perceive Slovakia to be not easy accessible, or if it is accessible, then it is expensive. As all informants were aware of direct flights to Bratislava, this might be an opportunity how to show to Danes that it is actually not so far away. However, the problem will still occur with getting to eastern parts of Slovakia.

Analysis shows that informants, after they visited Slovakia, gain some positive images, but also some negative images. These images are many times in contrasts and related to same things, the best example are people in Slovakia. Amongst positive images are hospitality of the people, their friendliness, openness and adaptability, but as it is obvious they are not used to tourists, hence sometimes are not very helpful which is also caused by their low level of spoken English. Slovakia is perceived as the non-English speaking country. Also locals' confidence about Slovakia being the interesting tourist destination is low. Informants could see that the tourism infrastructure is not developed, information, brochures and web-sites are missing. As a consequence, tourists feel isolated in Slovakia, they cannot move around Slovakia easily, integrate with locals, find places where to go or participate on various events etc. Slovakia possesses the image of a safe country; however seeing for example Romas camps is uncomfortable for tourists and can be scary as well.

On the positive side, informants perceived Slovakia as the country with very beautiful nature and were impressed by the High Tatras and the nature nation parks. For some of them it was unbelievable that in the middle of industrialized Europe one can still find untouched and unspoiled nature (Erler, 2013) and they were also impressed by the cleanliness of these places (Jepsen, 2013). Paradoxically, nature parks or mountains are places where people do not have to get in touch with others very much and they do not need use English maybe that is why these experiences of nature are only positive in informants' minds. Furthermore, Slovakia is perceived as a country where there is a castle on every hill (Jepsen, 2013) and it leaves a message of rich history.

All above discussed difficulties that informants experienced during their stay in Slovakia might form negative images about the country and influence their future decisions about not going to Slovakia and hence becoming the barriers that would prevent them from picking up Slovakia as their holiday destination again or recommending it to others. In conclusion, both, cognitive and affective images are neither negative, nor positive. Cultural, natural and social aspects of the country were evaluated positively by the informants, however tourism infrastructure was considered as negative aspect of Slovakia. Affective images represented by

feelings informants had in Slovakia are positive, however there are some aspects, for example Romas, that can make tourists feel unsafe and uncomfortable.

#### **4.5 Evaluation of re-branding strategy**

Looking at above analysis, evaluation of re-branding strategy of Slovakia and other Central European countries can be provided. It should be evaluated if country branding in transitional countries and its functions were fulfilled.

Overall, analysis shows that branding of Slovakia as one of the transitional countries and its aims were partly fulfilled. (1) Slovakia is still considered as Eastern European country but the reason for same is mostly that Danes do not distinguish between Central and Eastern Europe; they do not know that the region called Central Europe does exist. If they do they fail in recognizing countries that belongs there. Although Slovakia is still considered to be an Eastern European country, it is no longer associated with its historical background and communism is not a thing that would prevent Danes from travelling there. However, unconscious images of poor and less developed country that is a bit behind are still associated with the country. (2) Negative or false stereotypes were partly changed. Although research has not revealed any particularly negative stereotypes, there are few that are based on past, are unconscious and entrenched into Danes minds (grey concrete buildings, poorness). It can be claimed that those who have been to Slovakia have changed their opinions on the country; hence their stereotypes were partly changed. (3) Slovakia managed to position itself as a reliable and eligible member of the new system mostly by entering European Union in 2004. Although it is considered to be Eastern European country, in Danish minds it is a country which is ahead of other countries that are more eastern. Some informants express the admiration for what Slovakia went through and how the country dealt with that. (4) However, Slovakia did not succeed in becoming a leader of the region since countries as Czech Republic or Hungary and their capitals are still more known and more visited by Danish tourists, but also tourists from different nationalities. (5) Last but not least, it is difficult to measure if Slovakia managed to re-define or re-construct nation identity since it can be claimed that Slovakia is a young country and nation image is still not build. Slovak nation's confidence still needs to be developed in order for Slovaks to become proud of nation and build strong nation image that stands out amongst others.

## 5 CONCLUSION

This research investigates what is the general awareness of Slovakia in Denmark, how is Slovakia presented in the promotional materials available in Denmark, how Danes perceive Slovakia as a tourist destination and what are the barriers that prevents Danes from travelling to Slovakia. The findings of the research are discussed below.

The general awareness of Slovakia in Denmark is not developed very much. The Slovak Embassy in Denmark is not successful in getting Slovak brand into Danes' minds. The main focus of the embassy is presenting Slovakia via various tourism fairs; however these efforts are not enough. Awareness of Slovakia is built mostly on non-tourism related information, for example sports events or entering the European Union. General knowledge of Slovakia, for example where Slovakia is on the map or what is the capital, is also very low. Danes do not recognize Slovakia as a country; hence they do not recognize it as a holiday destination.

Furthermore, in relation to the public awareness of Slovakia, one of the reasons for above might be the finding that Danes do not distinguish and recognize countries that are east of the historical 'wall'. Slovakia, in Danes' minds, is a part of one big country called 'Eastern Europe'. Reason for same is definitely lack of knowledge about that part of the Europe, geographical or historical, as many of informants confirmed they do not recall Slovakia from their history classes etc. Moreover, Slovakia is presented as the part of the Eastern Europe in foreign media or books, as it was demonstrated by the 'Lonely Planet' guide books. Therefore, it is difficult for Danes to know Slovakia as one of the Central European Countries if it is presented as Eastern European by media or in the popular travel guides.

Analysing the promotional materials about Slovakia brought the findings that Slovak Tourist Board tries to present the country as the country full of contrasts, with a wide range of possibilities for tourists. However, the main motive of the analysed materials was nature, castles and history, which is characteristic for the whole Eastern Europe. By promoting nature and castles, Slovakia does not stand out amongst neighbouring countries since they do have similar features. It is also not very affective that the creators of the materials present Bratislava and Slovakia as the part of other regions, not a region itself. It shows that Slovaks do not have confidence about Slovakia being the tourist destination; it is like they do not believe Slovakia is unique enough and have lots of aspects that can attract tourists. Branding

of Slovakia in these brochures has mostly characteristics of destination branding, nation branding characteristics are missing.

As Danes do not distinguish between countries in the Eastern Europe and it is only one big country in their minds, naturally they expect every country to be the same. Eastern Europe does not have a very positive image, in travel guide publications sometimes called troublesome. Naturally, these images are associated also with Slovakia. Analysis of the interviews shows that Danes do not hold organic images of Slovakia since they have limited knowledge about it. However, many of them have blurred, unconscious images about Slovakia which derives from the fact that they consider Slovakia to be a part of the Eastern Europe. Slovakia has the image of a grey country, with concrete building and fences, with poor people and with insufficient material security. These unconscious images derive from the basic characteristics of the Eastern European Block and are mostly influenced by communism history of these countries and events that happened there during the Second World War. Although Danes do not consider communism past to be a problem when discussing their intentions to travel to Slovakia, bearing these images in minds is not helping them on deciding to go to Slovakia.

Another important finding of the research is that Slovak image is very much built on reputation of the neighbouring countries or other countries from Balkan Peninsula. Again, it is understandable since these countries are recognized as one big country. Hence the research proved another agent that builds image of Slovakia; image is very much influenced by neighbouring countries or countries Danes consider to be in the same Eastern European Country.

Analysis shows that organic and induced images do not influence Danes in not picking up Slovakia as their holiday destination. Again, the reason for same is that Danes do not have very vague organic images about Slovakia and their induced images are also limited. Informants who were interviewed decided to go to Slovakia for various reasons but none of them went to Slovakia because of the country itself and because he/she considered Slovakia to be a nice destination. Therefore, images are not the most influencing factors in decision making process when discussing Danes choosing Slovakia as their destination. However, after visiting Slovakia most of the informants confirmed that they would go back, hence the images they gained during their stay in Slovakia were mostly positive and would make them visit Slovakia again.

Informants who have been to Slovakia, as they said, were surprised by many things. It was nature that charmed most of them and also the living standards. On the one hand, their images of Slovakia changed in terms of development and quality of life, characteristics of Slovakia became more western. However, it became so western that Danes would consider Slovakia to be so similar to other western countries then suddenly Slovakia does not stand alone. Obviously, their stay in Slovakia was not entirely without complications, most of the informants complained about language difficulties and problems with communication in English or getting any information in general. For some of them this stands out as a serious problem. Due to such language situation they would not recommend Slovakia for visiting to their friends or family.

What is important to notice is that all informants when discussing Eastern European block were convinced that countries that are more east from Slovakia are in even worst position than Slovakia. The word 'east' and feelings and associations that this word evoke in people minds should be a focus of further research.

In conclusion, looking at the above findings, several barriers that prevent Danes from not travelling to Slovakia can be identified:

- low awareness of Slovakia in Denmark,
- lack of tourism related knowledge about Slovakia,
- insufficient branding of Slovakia in Denmark,
- branding based on joining regions,
- Danes do not recognize Slovakia as a country and destination,
- perceived similarity of Slovakia with other countries from Central and Eastern Europe, Slovakia does not stand out,
- attribution of negative characteristics from Eastern Europe to Slovakia,
- rooted unconscious stereotypes from communism era,
- distance, Slovakia seems to be very far east,
- bad transport connection, especially to the eastern parts of Slovakia,
- language difficulties,
- tourism infrastructure not developed (in terms of language)

## **5.1 Research contribution and suggestions**

The paper draws attention to the research of two countries whose mutual relationships are not very studied in any domain yet. It looks at Slovakia by the Danish tourists' eyes and opens the door to a new study that should be developed in the future. The research gives the opportunity to understand why Slovakia is not very preferred destination for Danish tourists.

The research points to the very important fact that countries of Central Europe do not exist for Danes, instead they are still labelled as Eastern European. This shows a new perspective of having a discourse on Central vs. Eastern European image and its influence on tourism. Future research should go into depth with analysing tourists' unconscious perception of 'East' and its influence on their behaviour.

Furthermore, Slovakia needs to get into Danish minds. Danes do not know about Slovakia and they do not consider it as a tourist destination. Lack of knowledge and insufficient promotion caused that there is no image about Slovakia in Denmark; hence it would be easy just to create one. This is considered to be easier than re-building negative image if there was one. Therefore, Slovak tourism bodies should focus more on presenting Slovakia in Denmark and creating a new image at the same time. Slovakia needs to stand out more amongst neighbouring countries which are more successful in attracting tourists. As there is a little awareness about Slovakia related to sports and sport events, Slovakia should consider getting with same even further in forms of organizing sports events and competition and hence indirectly bringing foreign tourist to Slovakia.

As research showed, Danes' recognition of Central Europe is very poor. Therefore, efforts of some countries to re-brand themselves as Central European are not successful. This is an important finding and further research is suggested on same topic and also on finding what 'east' evoke in western people's minds and if it has influence on taking decision to spend holidays in Eastern Europe.

Stereotypes that are rooted in Danes minds about Eastern Europe are difficult to change, but with young generation coming they become weaker. However, rather than presenting nature, history and castles, Slovakia should maybe consider promoting its communism past as something that Danes cannot see anywhere else but in Slovakia. Slovakia needs to find its unique selling proposition that will put it into a position of something special, maybe exotic. Promoting nature actually present Slovakia as a country with unpolluted and untouched

nature, degradation of industrialization, showing more welcoming face; but as one of the informants said “Tree is a tree, no matter where it is”. The author would also suggest involving more nation branding into the process of branding and include nation and its characteristics into the branding of Slovakia. It is nation branding that can erase misconceptions about a country and improve nation self-confidence which as showed in the research is low.

Another opportunity for future research shows up in measuring images of Danes who have not been to Slovakia yet, as imagination is also a part of image formation process. Furthermore their images of Slovakia will be mostly built on stereotypes which can help understanding of the topic.

Moreover, Slovakia as young country originated as 1993 has an amazing opportunity to present itself as new-open destination, a destination that was not available for tourists or visitors in the past but now the gate to Slovakia is open and the country has lots to offer.

## 6 REFERENCES

- Bratislavský samosprávny kraj - Division for Tourism. (2008). *Bratislava region. At the top of the GOLDEN triangle*. Bratislava, Slovakia.
- A: *Slovak Tourism Board/Statistics*. (2012). Retrieved May 23, 2013, from Vývoj CR na Slovensku podľa počtu ubytovaných hostí v UZ CR na Slovensku 1997 - 2011: <http://www.sacr.sk/odborna-verejnost/analyzy-a-statistiky/statistiky/>
- B: *Slovak Tourism Board/Marketing Strategy*. (2011). Retrieved May 23, 2013, from Marketingová stratégia SACR 2011 – 2013 schválená Vládou SR Uznesením č. 300 zo dňa 11. 5. 2011: <http://www.sacr.sk/odborna-verejnost/analyzy-a-statistiky/marketingova-strategia/>
- C: *Slovak Tourism Board/Statistics*. (2012). Retrieved May 23, 2013, from TOP 15 krajín podľa počtu ubytovaných hostí na Slovensku za obdobie 2008 - 2011: <http://www.sacr.sk/odborna-verejnost/analyzy-a-statistiky/statistiky/>
- D: *Slovak Statistical Office*. (2012, May). Retrieved May 23, 2013, from ORGANIZED TOURISM OF THE SR: <http://portal.statistics.sk/showdoc.do?docid=48248>
- E: *Slovak Tourism Board/Statistics*. (2012). Retrieved May 23, 2013, from Vývoj CR na Slovensku podľa počtu ubytovaných hostí v UZ CR na Slovensku 1997 - 2011: <http://www.sacr.sk/odborna-verejnost/analyzy-a-statistiky/statistiky/>
- F: *The Slovak Embassy in Copenhagen*. (2013). Retrieved May 23, 2013, from Our Role: <http://www.copenhagen.mfa.sk/App/WCM/ZU/KodanZU/main.nsf?Open>
- G: *The Slovak Embassz in Copenhagen*. (2013, January 17). Retrieved May 23, 2013, from Slovensko sa predstaví na prestížnom veľtrhu cestovného ruchu v Kodani: <http://www.copenhagen.mfa.sk/App/WCM/ZU/KodanZU/main.nsf?Open>
- Anholt, S. (2005). *Brand New Justice. How branding places and products can help the developing world*. Oxford: Elsevier.
- Anholt, S. (2007). *Competitive Identity. The New Brand Management for Nations, Cities and Regions*. Great Britain: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Arvidsson, A. (2006). *Brands: Meaning and Value in Media Culture*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Baloglu, S., & McCleary, K. (1999). A Model of Destination Image Formation. *Annals of Tourism Research* 26, 808-889.
- Banyai, M. (2010). Dracula's image in tourism: Western bloggers versus tour guides. *European Journal of Tourism Research* (3)1, pp. 5-22.
- Bech, H. (2013, April 29). Slovakia as a tourist destination. (K. Pierzgova, Interviewer)



- Beerli, A., & Martin, J. D. (2004). Factors influencing destination image. *Annals of Tourism Research* Vol. 31, No. 3, 657-681.
- Berg, B. L. (2007). *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences - 6th Edition*. USA: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Bickman, L., & Rog, D. (2009). *The SAGE Handbook of Applied Social Research Methods*. UK: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Bryman, A. (2008). *Social Research Methods, 3rd Edition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social Research Methods, 4th Edition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cameron, D. (2001). *Working With Spoken Discourse*. London: Sage.
- Chattalas, M., Kramer, T., & Takada, H. (2008). The impact of national stereotypes on the country of origin effect. A conceptual framework. *International Marketing Review* 25 (1), 54-74.
- Chon, K. (1990). The role of destination image in tourism: A review and discussion. . *Tourism Review*, 45., 12-19.
- Clausen, L. (2009). *Beyond Stereotypes*. Copenhagen: Copenhagen Business University.
- Creswell, J. (1997). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. UK: Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.
- Dinnie, K. (2008). *Nation Branding. Concepts, Issues, Practice*. Oxford: Elsevier Ltd.
- Doyle, P. (1992). Branding. In e. M.J. Baker, *The Marketing Book*. UK: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Echtner, C. M., & Ritchie, B. J. (May 2003). The Meaning and Measurement of Destination Image. *The Journal Of Tourism Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 1., 37-48.
- Elliot, G., & Cameron, R. (1994). Consumer Perception of Product Quality and the Country-of-Origin Effect. *Journal of International Marketing* 2, p. 49/62.
- Erler, K. (2013, May 5). Slovakia as a tourist destination. (K. Pierzgova, Interviewer)
- Fakeye, P., & Crompton, J. (n.d.). Guarding authenticity at literary tourism sites. *Annals of Tourism Research* (28)3, pp. 686-704.
- Flick, U. (2009). *An introduction to qualitative research*. London: Sage.
- Frandsen, A. (2013, April 7). Slovakia as a tourist destination. (K. Pierzgova, Interviewer)
- Gallarza, M., Saura, I., & Garcia, H. (2002). Destination image toward a conceptual framework. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 29(1), 56-78.

- Govers, R., Go, F., & Kumar, K. (2007). Promoting Tourist destination Image. *Journal of Travel Research* 46(1), 15-23.
- Hall, D. (1998). Tourism development and sustainability issues in Central and South-eastern Europe. *Tourism Management*, Vol. 19, No. 5,, 423-431.
- Hall, D. (1999). Destination branding, niche marketing and national image projection in Central and Eastern Europe. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*. Vol. 5 No. 3, 227-237.
- Hall, D. (2002). Brand development, tourism and national identity: The re-imagining of former Yugoslavia. *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 9, No 4-5, 323-334.
- Harck, M. (2013, April 29). Slovakia as a tourist destination. (K. Pierzgova, Interviewer)
- Häubl, G. (1996). A cross-national investigation of the effects of country of origin and brand name on the evaluation of a new car. *International Marketing Press*, Vol. 13 No. 5, 76-97.
- Hogan, J., Dolan, P., & Donnelly, P. (2009). *Approaches to Qualitative Research: Theory & Practical Application: A Guide for Dissertation Students*. Cork: Oak Tree Press.
- Hughes, H., & Allen, D. (2005). Cultural tourism in Central and Eastern Europe: the views of 'induced image formation agents'. *Tourism Management* 26, pp. 173-183.
- Jaffe, E., & Nebenzahl, I. (2001). *National Image & Competitive Advantage: The Theory and Practice of Country-of-Origin Effect*. Denmark: Copenhagen Business School Press.
- Jepsen, K. (2013, April 22). Slovakia as a tourist destination. (K. Pierzgova, Interviewer)
- Kavaratzis, M., & Ashworth, G. (n.d.). City Branding: an effective assertion of identity or a transitory marketing trick?
- Kinncar, T., & Taylor, J. (1996). *Marketing Research: An Applied Approach*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Kornberger, M. (2010). *Brand Society*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kotler, P., Jatusripitak, S., & Maesincee, S. (1997). *The marketing of nations : a strategic approach to building national wealth*. New York: The Free Press.
- Kotler, P., & Gertner, D. (2002). Country as brand, product, and beyond: A place marketing and brand management perspective. *Brand Management*, Vol. 9 No. 4-5, 249-261.
- Kotler, P., Asplund, C., Rein, I., & Haider, D. H. (1999). *Marketing Places Europe*. Great Britain: Pearsons Education Limited.
- Kotler, P., Haider, D. H., & Rein, I. (1993). *Marketing Places*. New York: The Free Press.
- Krag, E. (2013, April 29). Slovakia as a tourist destination. (K. Pierzgova, Interviewer)

- Krogsgaard, H. (2013, April 6). Slovakia as a tourist destination. (K. Pierzgova, Interviewer)
- Lepp, A., Gibson, H., & Lane, C. (2011). Image and perceived risk: A study of Uganda and its official tourism website. *Tourism Management*, pp. 675-684.
- Leyens, J. P., Yzerbyt, V., & Schadron, G. (1994). *Stereotypes and social cognition*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Lonely Planet: Eastern Europe 6th Edition*. (2001). Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd.
- Lonely Planet: Central Europe 6th Edition*. (2005). Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd.
- Lonely Planet: Eastern Europe 9th Edition*. (2007). Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd.
- Lumsdon, L. (1997). *Tourism Marketing*. London: International Thomson Business Press.
- Lury, C. (2004). *Brands: The Logo of the Global Economy*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Lyngs, B. (2013, April 15). Slovakia as a tourist destination. (K. Pierzgova, Interviewer)
- Macrae, C., Parkinson, S., & Sheerman, J. (1995). Managing marketing's DNA: The role of branding. *Irish marketing Review*, 18, pp. 13-20.
- March, R., & Woodside, A. G. (2005). *Tourism Behaviour: traveller's decision and actions*. Wallingford: Cabi Publishing.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. (1999). *Designing qualitative research (3rd. ed.)*. UK: Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Mejborg, R. (2013, April 18). Slovakia as a tourist destination. (K. Pierzgova, Interviewer)
- Molina, M. A., & Frias-Jamilena, D.-M. (2012). The moderating role of past experience in the formation of a tourist destination's image and in tourists' behavioural intentions. *Current Issues in Tourism*, pp. 1-21.
- Morgan, N., Pritchard, A., & Pride, R. (2004). *Destination branding: creating the unique destination proposition, 2nd Edition*. UK: Taylor & Francis.
- Mortensen, S. (2013, April 21). Slovakia as a tourist destination. (K. Pierzgova, Interviewer)
- Nygaard-Thomsen, S. (2013, May 9). Slovakia as a tourist destination. (K. Pierzgova, Interviewer)
- O' Shaughnessy, J., & O' Shaughnessy, N. J. (2000. Sage Publications Inc.). Treating the nation as a brand: Some neglected issues. *Journal of Macromarketing*, Vol. 20, No.1, pp. 56-64.

- Olins, W. (2008). *The brand handbook*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Oliver, D. G., Serovich, J. M., & Mason, T. L. (2006). Constrains and Opportunities with Interview Transcription: Towards Reflection in Qualitative Research. *Soc Forces*, pp. 1273-1289.
- Page, S., & Connell, J. (2010). *Tourism. Volume 1. The Evolution of the Subject of Study*. London: Sage Library of Tourism, Hospitality and Leisure.
- Pizam, A., & Mansfeld, Y. (2005). *Consumer behavior in travel and tourism*. . Mumbai: Jaico Publihing House.
- Ramkissoon , H., Uysal, M., & Brown, K. (2011). Relationship Between Destination Image and Behavioral Intentions of Tourists to Consume Culltural Attractions. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 20:5, 575-595.
- Røder, P. (2013, April 17). Slovakia as a tourist destination. (K. Pierzgova, Interviewer)
- Roth, E. (Director). (2005, 2007, 2011). *Hostel* [Motion Picture].
- Sadolin, P. (2013, April 15). Slovakia as a tourist destination. (K. Pierzgova, Interviewer)
- San Martin , H., & del Bosque,, I. (2008 (29)2). Exploring the cognitive-affective nature of destination image and the role of psychological factors in its formation. *Tourism Management*, pp. 263-227.
- Schaffer, J. (Director). (2004). *EuroTrip* [Motion Picture].
- Skov Svendsen, J. (2013, April 24). Slovakia as a tourist destination. (K. Pierzgova, Interviewer)
- Slovak Tourist Board. (2008). *UNESCO in Slovakia*. Bratislava, Slovakia: Slovenska Grafia, a.s. Bratislava - print.
- Slovak Tourist Board. (2008). *TOP Slovakia*. Bratislava, Slovakia: Slovenska Grafia, a.s. Bratislava - print.
- Slovak Tourist Board. (2008). *Castles and Chateaux in Slovakia*. Bratislava, Slovakia: Slovenska Grafia, a.s. Bratislava - print.
- Slovak Tourist Board. (2008). *The High Tatras*. Bratislava, Slovakia: Slovenska Grafia, a.s. Bratislava - print.
- Slovak Tourist Board. (2012). *Invitation to the City of KOSICE*. Kosice, Slovakia.
- Swarbrooke, J., & Horner, S. (2007). *Consumer behaviour in tourism, 2nd Edition*. Oxford: Elsevier Ltd.
- Szondi, G. (2007, March). The role and challenges of country branding in transition countries: The Central and Eastern European experience. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, pp. 8-20.

- Tasci, A., & Gartner, W. (2007). Destination image and its functional relationships. *Journal of Travel Research* 45, pp. 413-425.
- Vrábel, M. (2013, April 16). Slovak-Danish relationships within tourism and promotion of Slovakia in Denmark. (K. Pierzgova, Interviewer)
- Walliman, N. (2006). *Social Research Methods*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Zeugner-Roth, K. P., & Diamantopoulos, A. (2010, February). Advancing the country image construct: Reply to Samiee's (2009) commentary. *Journal of Business Research*, pp. 446-449.

## **7 APPENDIX**

Appendix 1 – Promotional materials

Appendix 2 - Interviews