

DESTINATION BRANDING THROUGH THE PERCEPTION OF THE TOURIST: CASE FROM CROATIA

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Abstract:

Creating a distinctive destination brand in order to maintain a uniform positioning of a place, region or country among the world travelers is a complex and challenging task. As the competition is becoming more intense, an increasing number of destinations or places struggle to make them visible in the global tourism market. Lack of understanding of the power of brand could be one the reasons for failure. In tourism, consumers often don't buy individual products but images associated with products. Therefore, understanding how a tourist destination can identify its unique selling propositions and positioning for marketing itself to global customers (tourists), is the key question. The ultimate aim of this paper is to demonstrate an innovative approach to destination branding by exploiting the consumer power and their curiosity. The study is based on a marketing project conducted in *Riviera Gradac*, an attractive region situated on the southern coastline of Dalmatia in Croatia. It is a typical Mediterranean seaside destination that has traditionally attracted sun-sand-sea holidaymakers during the summer period. Faced with seasonality problems and increased economic stagnation, the local government decided to take measures to overcome these challenges and further leverage its destination brand. To reposition this appealing Riviera as a year-round tourist destination it requires much more to offer than warm climate and clean beaches. This time the projected brand has been constructed around a perception built on the key destination strengths including nature, culture, history and food. The theme of the new approach was to invite people to visit Riviera Gradac and enjoy the diverse range of experiences available there. The campaign appears to be a new, original, way of the destination branding.

Keywords: tourism, branding, perception, destination

1. INTRODUCTION

The growth of tourism on a global level is the result of improving the infrastructure and creating differentiation of a certain destination. Diversity enables destinations to grow as well as encourage different tourism trends.¹ Branding is the driving force behind the development of tourism at a certain destination. The implementation of tourist facilities results in a stronger interest of a particular destination. Motives that attract tourists today are special activities, experiences, events, etc. The original and thoughtful events contribute to the growth of touristic visits, especially in periods outside the main tourist season. In these periods the primary resources of the destination are not sufficient to create a reason for visitation. Today, the tourist chooses their destination according to the total amount of attractions it has to offer, meaning that the destination and its brand are perceived through the total amount of tourist attractions. The hosts at particular destinations should also be concerned about the level of desirability, since the profitability of a guest's stay is estimated on the total benefits that the guest can obtain. By not fully promoting the resources and tourist facilities, destinations often not knowingly reject potential visitors.² Tourists no longer choose a destination based on what is offered, but based on what they want.³

In 2012, the number of tourists globally grew 4%, compared to 2011.⁴ For the first time in history, the number of tourists crossed one billion (1,135 billion visits). The continuous growth of tourism is also recorded in the countries of Asia and the Pacific (an increase of 7 %). Southeast Asia and North Africa grew by 8% compared to the growth in 2011. Also, Central and Eastern Europe increased by 9%. It is evident that touristic offers in these destinations show that manifestations are of great significance.⁵ In 2013 there was an additional growth of more than 3%. In the period of 2010 to 2020, the forecast of the average annual growth rate of tourists is 3.8% per year. A prerequisite to record such growth is to employ correct marketing management of the destination.⁶

The image of the tourist destination is no longer sufficient for the growth of that destination.⁷ It is necessary to adjust the destination's brand management in order to achieve desirable tourist perceptions of target segments. Brand management should further try and differentiate the tourism destination. In Croatia, the growth of tourism only shows in destinations which promote new tourist facilities.⁸

Activities that include destination branding are increasingly common in receptive tourism in Croatia. Usually these activities start and end with the brand's logo and web promotions.⁹ Often, the expected results in tourism of such activities are absent. The branding of destinations based on creating a logotype often ignores the development and promotion of new tourist facilities. The competitiveness of a destination and brand recognition of that destination in the global market can strengthen the destination. So what stands out in a destination? Historical and cultural heritage, culinary traditions, landscapes and other preliminary studies that the authors dealt with during the past five years have pointed to the potential of such ideas to strengthen the perception of the tourist destination.

The authors are participating in the project called Riviera Gradac, which is a small tourist area that has recognizable identity and consists of five villages located between Makarska and Dubrovnik. Branding in this project is a medium, not the target. One of the strategic objectives of branding is creating new

¹Sheng Y., *The impact of destination personality dimensions on destination brand awareness and attractiveness: Australia as a case study*, *Tourism*, vol 60, no. 4, Institute for tourism, Zagreb, p. 397-409. 2012.

²Šerić, N., *Management of the national touristic brand: the role of the branding strategy in Croatia*, *International Journal of Management Cases*, vol.13 Issue 4, UK. Darwen, Lancashire, 2011.

³Anholt, S., *Competitive Identity: The new brand management for nations, cities and regions*, Palgrave Maximillan, New York 2007.

⁴<http://media.unwto.org/en/press-release/2013-01-28/international-tourism-continue-robust-growth-2013>.

⁵Own research of authors of the paper - <httphttps://www.wbginvestmentclimate.org/toolkits/investment-generation-toolkit/upload/Travel-Tourism-Comp-Report.pdf>, 25.01.2014.

⁶<http://media.unwto.org/en/press-release/2013-01-28/international-tourism-continue-robust-growth-2014>.

⁷Sheng Y., *The impact of destination personality dimensions on destination brand awareness and attractiveness: Australia as a case study*, *Tourism*, vol 60, no. 4, Institute for tourism, Zagreb, p. 397-409. 2012.

⁸Own research of authors of the paper - <httphttps://www.wbginvestmentclimate.org/toolkits/investment-generation-toolkit/upload/Travel-Tourism-Comp-Report.pdf>, 25.02.2013.

⁹ In chapter 4.1.

tourist facilities, while including the identity of the destination. In this particular context, the brand is the identity of the destination - Riviera Gradac. This paper will present the main findings of the research survey, conducted on a sample of relevant visitors. What was researched was the current perception of the destination.

2. RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

In accordance with the subject and the research problem, the aim of this paper is based on research findings that point out the recommended guidelines for management activities for branding a tourist destination. The tendency was to determine the perception of the existing touristic offerings of a destination, and to see the potential of the destination's resources in order to strengthen its attractiveness.

Through continuous research in the area of Riviera Gradac, the contribution of different tourist attractions and the perception of the destination's brand is measured. The exploratory studies of the authors suggest that this approach is more efficient than the destination's branding approach based on the perception of the attractiveness of the destination's logotype.

The research hypothesis H1: *Implementation of the identity of the destination through touristic contents contributes to the strengthening of perception of the attractiveness of the destination in the eyes of the tourists.* The additional hypothesis H11: *Implementation of the destination's resources contributes to a stronger image of the destination.* The hypothesis is tested by conducting primary research on a relevant sample of guests at the destination.

3. THEORETICAL KNOWLEDGE

Although the first activities employed in order to create a branded destination, started long ago, relevant scientific research in this area were carried out only recently.¹⁰ Theoretical knowledge is continuously improving the findings of the research. Thus, in practice, the activities that can be observed are: branding destinations, destination image management, destination differentiation, etc. Some research emphasizes the importance of separating the activities of creating brands and brand management continuity (Marcus Mitchell¹¹, Gelder and Allan¹²). Deviations from this approach have had negative repercussions on the perception of the destination of guests. The authors of the article Brand of Gold¹³, also take caution; for example London and Jerusalem. Although these destinations have already been branded, studies have shown that the modest and irregular activities of brand management weaken the brand image of the destination in both instances.

Brand management should strengthen the identity of the destination,¹⁴ since the identity of a destination has original and sustainable value.¹⁵ The brand, from the marketing aspect, is not sufficient by itself. It is necessary to act and support the brand image. From the destination's point of view, this means: to manage the components of brand image. Tourist facilities based on the identity and the destination's resources are desirable for this purpose. The brand of the destination should not be treated as a single marketing campaign. There should be continuity and a background story behind it. The story is often referred to the historical identity of the destination. The identity of the destination is effectively enhanced by implementing the history into the touristic offerings.¹⁶ Brand management

¹⁰ <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/6357/1/6357.pdf> 10.01.2014.

¹¹ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2008/oct/01/city.urban.branding> 08.01.2014.

¹² http://www.placebrands.net/_files/placebrands_city_branding_book.pdf 1.12.2013.

¹³ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2008/oct/01/city.urban.branding> 08.01.2014.

¹⁴ Sheng Y., *The impact of destination personality dimensions on destination brand awareness and attractiveness: Australia as a case study*, *Tourism*, vol 60, no. 4, Institute for tourism, Zagreb, p. 397-409. 2012.

¹⁵ Pike, S., "Tourism destination branding complexity", *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, 14 (4), 2005.

¹⁶ Luković, T., Šerić, N., *Modeling of the marketing strategy on tourism destination with a special ambience value*, The International Tourism Research Conference "Sustainable Tourism Development" Stockholm, Sweden, Conference proceedings 2008.

activities maintain the existing image of the destination, but they should also be continuously improved and adapted.¹⁷

The brand of the destination should not be understood by its logo or trademark, slogan, promotional material, etc.¹⁸ Only new tourist facilities of the destination strengthen the loyalty of guests and increases visits.

The implementation of all available resources is a concrete contribution to strengthening the brand recognition of the destination in the eyes of the guest. Perception of a destination significantly affects choice. It is hard to manipulate with tourists, but brand management through the development of new tourist facilities and offerings affects the perception of the destination's identity.¹⁹

By looking at theories, it can be said that the idea for new tourist destinations should be assessed on the current available resources and their adaptability to tourist standards.²⁰ Brand management of a destination should unite the image of tourism and guarantee what was promised to the visitors.²¹ In theory, this can strengthen the perception of identity through the brand image of the destination. The recognizable brand image of a destination does not necessarily result in an increase of tourism to destinations.²²

4. THE FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH: CASE STUDIES IN CROATIA

Many branding projects undertaken in Croatia did not bring the expected results. In these unsuccessful projects, a common approach to branding was that it was implemented as an isolated process: to outsourcing partners. In the realization of the project, the representatives did not take active part in the branding of the local destinations. Outsourcing entities that conduct branding of a destination often ignore the identity and the resources of the tourist destination. In this kind of approach, branding is the goal, not a means to strengthen the perception of the touristic image of the destination. Finally, the expected growth of visits in destinations is not positive. The common characteristic of these practical cases of destination branding is the lack of brand management activities.

Rare positive experiences suggest that local tourism stakeholders manage the brand of a destination better, than outsourcing partners. In order to achieve synergy between creating brands and future brand management, what is required of the local representatives is that they are actively involved in the process of destination branding. In the examples that follow, this is not the case.

4.1 The experience of branding destinations and regions in Croatia²³

The complex process of creating a brand of the city of Karlovac has united many activities.²⁴ An analysis was done on the promotional material about the destination, the study of the destination's image and how it is viewed by the public, the identity of the city, the attitudes of the local population about the identity and values of the city, the advantages and disadvantages of touristic offers, and an evaluation of the competitiveness of the market position. Based on the collected data, a brand book

¹⁷Perišić, M., Talijančić, J., Šerić, N., *Identity of national heritage in function of specialised tourist offer of Croatia*, 3rd Critical Tourism Studies Conference Connecting Academies of Hope, Zadar, Croatia, Conference proceedings, 2009.

¹⁸Own research of authors of the paper - <http://www.wbginvestmentclimate.org/toolkits/investment-generation-toolkit/upload/Travel-Tourism-Comp-Report.pdf>, 25.01.2014.

¹⁹Šerić, N., *Management of the national touristic brand: the role of the branding strategy in Croatia*, International Journal of Management Cases, vol.13 Issue 4, UK, Darwen, Lancashire, 2011.

²⁰Kapferer, J-N., *The New Strategic Brand Management: Creating and Sustaining Brand Equity Longterm*, Kogan Page Limited, London 2004.

²¹Pringle, H., Thompson, M., *Brand Spirit – how cause related marketing builds brands*, John Wiley & Sons, New York 2001.

²²Own research of authors of the paper - <http://www.wbginvestmentclimate.org/toolkits/investment-generation-toolkit/upload/Travel-Tourism-Comp-Report.pdf>, 25.01.2014.

²³Desk research, author's own research 2012. – 2014.

²⁴<http://www.poslovni.hr/vijesti/karlovac-ce-bitu-medu-vodecim-gradovima-149077.aspx> - 15.08.2013.

was created, which showed that the brand should be based on four facts (nature, history, geographic location and population).²⁵ After issuing the brand book, the brand management activities slowed down. Gathered documentation was used to format a booklet, CD-ROMs and posters. Brand management is a continuous process and not something that ends with the completion of the brand's logo and by issuing a brand book. In the case of branding Karlovac, the theoretical principles are not respected. The representatives of the destination were modestly involved in the project. The representatives of local associations were also not involved (Cinema Club Karlovac, Brotherhood of St. Mihovil, etc.). In the eyes of the visitors, Karlovac is still experienced in a similar way, as it was before the branding project.

The representatives of the Dubrovnik-Neretva County had planned to do branding by relying on the global image of the city of Dubrovnik. This kind of approach totally neglects the identity of the city. The project began in 2005, by a consulting firm THR, Spain. The strategy was written for the Dubrovnik-Neretva County. The focus of the document was to shape the visual aspects of the brand, such as its logotype. The proposal of the logo created a scandal, because the Croatian designer's society's proposal was declared plagiarized. The proposed logo is used today by the Tourist board of Dubrovnik. Strengthening the image of Dubrovnik in recent years is the result of word of mouth, following the growth of cruises. The growth in the number of visitors does not follow the growth of the tourism profits. Valuable cultural and historic resources are exposed to uncontrolled levels of commercialization.

The city of Osijek has started the process of branding in 2008, and it was initiated by a company that is not in Osijek. In the first phase, the committee for branding took on the obligation of educating the public about the importance of branding. A website was also designed for that purpose: brend.osijek.hr. A team of experts from the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb conducted research on the identity and the image of the destination. A public competition was also announced, in order to receive proposals for possible logos of the destination, at the end there was a total of 53 possibilities. The jury decided that not a single possibility meets the criteria. The project of branding was then stopped.

The city of Pula started its branding in 2008. The project was entrusted and taken over by a company called Parabureau. The project was based on a creating a new visual identity - the logo of the city, and the slogan including Pula. The branding of the city was designed to include the natural resources of the city; its culture, music, history and tourism. The proposal of the logo is a derivative of the traditional coat of arms of the city. This is everything that was done up until today in terms of branding in Pula.

The city of Samobor started its branding project in 2008, and the project leader was Millenium Promotion, an agency from Zagreb. Studies were conducted in order to find out the attitudes of local people and visitors that came to the city. The project included a new website and a slogan of Samobor: more than you expect. What was also designed was a new visual identity, logo, slogan and several new events were created in the center of Samobor. The slogan of the destination was also defined: Samobor, inspiration, passion.

The thought of branding the city of Split through the symbols of sport and sporting success has been presented around ten years ago, by a local advertising agency Artur Konceptom Split - sport worldwide. This is the only individual initiative that was undertaken and that expressed interest in branding the city.

The Faculty of Architecture in Zagreb has prepared a summary of theoretical ideas about the need to brand Šibenik. Šibenik is supported by its county, and started the implementation of preliminary branding activities in 2010.

The city of Trogir started its branding project in 2008, by McCann Erickson Croatia, but up until today nothing significant has been realized. The idea was to brand the destination based on its old town. The monograph, City of Angels was presented as a means of showing the towns most valuable resources. The proposal of the visual identity of the city has not been presented. The proposed slogan is Trogir – the city of happy moments, the association being on the city's symbol - Kairos.

²⁵ <http://www.karlovac.hr/news.aspx?newsID=1058&pageID=1> – 16.08.2013.

The city of Umag started its branding project in 1997: City as a Product. The project was entrusted to outsourcing partners. The future brand of the city is based on the ATP tournaments in Umag and the slogan: first point of Istria - a destination for guests older than 25. In this approach, though, what is neglected are some theoretical suggestions. The project was stopped before the completion of the brand's logo.

The city of Varaždin is branded through the story of baroque in 2005. The project was conducted by a Croatian agency called Branddoctor. The idea is: Varaždin – which is based on the symbolism of the city and its people (residents, visitors, investors). In this context, actions were undertaken to reposition the total tourist offering through concrete manifestations: Špincirfest, Varaždin baroque evenings, Fashion Croatia, Charity balls, and concerts.

The city of Zadar began its branding project informally, by funding the project of the Sea Organ in 2005 (wave energy that creates sounds) and sun salutation in 2008 (accumulates solar energy at night by LED that created a game of lights). In these, and other supporting projects, the investment that was made was more than 1 billion kunas. The promotion of Zadar as the city of congress tourism is also promoted, with a target population being younger guests.

Istria is the first region in Croatia, which systematically begun the process of branding by launching a new visual identity (goats, and blue and green colors). The story of the brand is based on a combination of sea and coast. The target values of the brand are Istria's culture and historical heritage, preservation and authenticity, people and traditions, adventure and gastronomy, all functioning tourist offerings. Through its master plan, it linked seven destinations (Vrsar, Rovinj, Labin, Rabac, Pula, Medulin, and Brijuni). The consultant in the project was a Spanish company called THR. The slogan is Istria - green Mediterranean. Each area was assigned a special role and a separate brand, and what was especially promoted was the inland of Istria - winemaking, olives, and agro tourism. Project Domus was also introduced - a bonus in collaboration with a company called Comunico including local tourist offices, the Istrian Development Agency and the Office of economy. The aim of the project is to create recognition for private accommodation for a chain of more than 400 apartments with a sign: Domus-Bonus. Internet promotion and promotion in catalogues for these apartments is provided for free. Istria also connected with the low-budget air carrier Ryan air, which is a valuable resource for co-branding.

The idea of branding the Krapina-Zagorje County is based on fairy-tales, good people and the magical number seven - the number of major cities, mountains, rivers and natural springs in the county. The essence of the brand is: fairy land and the associated logos are hills, rivers and small homes. Specific activities of brand management do not exist here.

The idea of branding the Split-Dalmatia County is initiated by creating co-operation with the agency McCann Erickson, with which in 2009, a contract was signed to draft out a strategic plan of branding. Since then nothing has been done. Virovitica-Podravina County launched a branding initiative in 1997 by creating a proposal of ideas for its promotional identity. What was presented were the natural, historical and cultural resources of the county, and the river Drava was highlighted as a fundamental resource. The project, at that point came to a halt, and the slogan did not come to life. What is common to all the cases of branding in Croatia is the lack of involvement of local stakeholders in the process of creating a brand, lack of theory, and brand management.

4.2. Branding experience and research findings: Riviera Gradac

The authors are involved in the project of branding Riviera Gradac (2011 - 2015). Riviera Gradac is composed of five smaller tourist sites (Brist, Drvenik, Gradac, Podaca and Zaoštrog). The Riviera stretches for 36 kilometers of coastline, between Makarska and Dubrovnik. In the previous decades, the Riviera was visited by tourists with lower purchasing power compared to Dubrovnik. In order to strengthen the perception of the destination the project to brand the destination has been launched in 2011. The aim was to increase the amount of tourists in a year, and to change the structure of guests in the main tourist season (wealthy clients). The brand management activities that were undertaken in 2012 already resulted in the extension of the tourist season, and change in the structure of guests

(wealthy clients) during 2013.²⁶ Before the implementation of branding, the guests that prevailed were those with modest spending power, and the season lasted mainly only two summer months.

Compared with the branding projects in Croatia, which were presented in the previous section, the project of branding Riviera Gradac, the outsourcing experts only have an advisory role. All the relevant decisions, based on the tactical and strategic level are made exclusively by the representatives of the local authority. Joint workshops are regularly held with stakeholders, representatives of the tourist operators and local associations. The project of branding Riviera Gradac is a medium, not a goal. The new logo of the brand and the new website are supporting factors, in addition to other activities of the project. The marketing scenario of the logo was led by a team of local representatives, and the designers of the outsourcing companies just followed the instructions and guidance of the team.

The interactive approach to branding of a destination is based on continuous research on the perception of visitors of the image and identity of the destination. The commercialization of any new tourist facilities is actually market testing. New tourist content is being promoted as a new component of the destination's image. The following presents a section of the findings of the research conducted during 2012, and is in the context of the hypotheses.

Figure 1: Ethnic structure in a sample of tourists: Riviera Gradac

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Croatia	19	7,6	7,7	7,7
Bosnia & Herzegovina	45	18,0	18,2	25,9
United Kingdom	10	4,0	4,0	30,0
Czech Republic	65	26,0	26,3	56,3
Serbia	3	1,2	1,2	57,5
Italy	4	1,6	1,6	59,1
Germany	48	19,2	19,4	78,5
Valid Slovakia	8	3,2	3,2	81,8
Poland	7	2,8	2,8	84,6
Spain	5	2,0	2,0	86,6
USA	6	2,4	2,4	89,1
Sweden	3	1,2	1,2	90,3
Ireland	4	1,6	1,6	91,9
Austria	3	1,2	1,2	93,1
Slovenia	17	6,8	6,9	100,0
Total	247	98,8	100,0	
Missing System	3	1,2		
Total	250	100,0		

Source: Own research, 2013.

The structure of the sample corresponds to the prevailing national structure for registered guests visiting Riviera Gradac. The selection of elements in each group in the sample is random.

²⁶ The availability of small family hotels and guest houses of several categories, is prolonged for more than 25 days during the post-season. There was a decrease in visitors from countries with lower purchasing power in 2013 and increase of visitors from countries whose tourists have more spending power.

Figure 2: Resources that encourages most tourists to return to Riviera Gradac

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
Valid	Previous visit	45	18,0	28,5	28,5
	Information in the media	2	,8	1,3	29,7
	Promotion by tur. agencies	14	5,6	8,9	38,6
	Friendship with residents	17	6,8	10,8	49,4
	Events and activities	48	19,2	30,4	79,7
	Web promotions	11	4,4	7,0	86,7
	Promotion on tur. fairs	6	2,4	3,8	90,5
	Nature	4	1,6	2,5	93,0
	Souvenirs and similar	4	1,6	2,5	95,6
	Gastronomy	2	,8	1,3	96,8
	Accommodation	4	1,6	2,5	99,4
	Something else	1	,4	,6	100,0
	Total	158	63,2	100,0	
Missing System	92	36,8			
Total	250	100,0			

Source: Own research, 2013.

Figure 3: Rating the resources in promoting Riviera Gradac

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
Valid	Insufficient	15	6,0	6,1	6,1
	Sufficient	44	17,6	18,0	24,1
	Good	86	34,4	35,1	59,2
	Very good	57	22,8	23,3	82,4
	Excellent	43	17,2	17,6	100,0
	Total	245	98,0	100,0	
Missing System	5	2,0			
Total	250	100,0			

Source: Own research, 2013.

Figure 4: Perception of the destination's identity of the originality of touristic offers

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
Valid	Insufficient	6	2,4	2,5	2,5
	Sufficient	27	10,8	11,4	14,0
	Good	84	33,6	35,6	49,6
	Very good	72	28,8	30,5	80,1
	Excellent	47	18,8	19,9	100,0
	Total	236	94,4	100,0	
Missing System	14	5,6			
Total	250	100,0			

Source: Own research, 2013.

Figure 6: Perceived quality of the image of Riviera Gradac

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Insufficient	32	12,8	14,2
	Sufficient	39	15,6	17,3
	Good	74	29,6	32,7
	Very good	50	20,0	22,1
	Excellent	31	12,4	13,7
	Total	226	90,4	100,0
Missing	System	24	9,6	
Total		250	100,0	

Source: Own research, 2013.

Figure 7: Implementation of the identity of the destination through the brand: Riviera Gradac

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Fully satisfactory	59	23,6	24,0
	Satisfactory	141	56,4	57,3
	Modest	39	15,6	15,9
	Unsatisfactory	7	2,8	2,8
	Total	246	98,4	100,0
Missing	System	4	1,6	
Total		250	100,0	

Source: Own research, 2013.

The analysis that is derived from the collected data confirms the efficiency of the chosen model of branding destinations through perception. The modern tourist chooses their destination in accordance with the diversity of tourist attractions, the perception of the brand and the diversity of the destination. Attitudes of the visitors in Riviera Gradac confirm that the chosen concept of branding the destination boosts its image. Furthermore, the findings point to the potential implementation of tourist attractions based on the identity of the destination and brand management activities.

The identity of the destination, acts as a platform to create a sustainable and responsible tourist destination and it is possible to adequately implement this through tourist facilities. In the case of Riviera Gradac, the core platforms are: preserved nature, cultural and historical activities, as well as touristic and gastronomic traditions.

Extending the tourist season in the area of Riviera Gradac and changes in the structure of guests (percentage of wealthy clientele grows and the percentage of clientele with less purchasing power is reduced) after employing good brand management, indicate that the selected concept is efficient. In the visitors' eyes, the implementation of the destination's identity through new touristic content contributes to the strengthening of perception of the destination's attractiveness. The implementation of the destination's available resources through specialized touristic content strengthens the image of the destination. The branding of a destination should actively involve representatives of local authorities and stakeholders, while outsourcing partners should solely serve the advisory role. This kind of composition that carries out destination branding, results in continuity of brand management activities. Branding destinations without concrete actions of brand management does not guarantee an increase in visitors.

5. CONCLUSION

Destination branding through the perception and experience of guests needs to employ all the resources of the destination through a variety of touristic content. A complex system of coordinated activities of brand management, results in strengthening the perception of the overall identity of the particular destination, but also the image of the destination. Despite the efforts and resources that were invested in creating a brand of the destination (logotype), without supporting activities of brand management it is possible that there would be no progress. This type of scenario leads to the stagnation of visitors. The identity of the destination is the only viable long term platform for effective

brand management. The development of new, specialized touristic offerings is based on the creation of a destination's identity. Guests who respond affirmatively to the traditional values of a destination's identity quickly accept new specialized touristic products. Such guests return to the destination. Strengthening the core of the destination's identity and boosting the brand image results in continuous growth of visitors. Creating and managing the brand of a destination is advisable to conduct as an integrated marketing process.

The brand management strategy needs to be constantly analyzed and modified as necessary. It is useful to expand the number of participants in the activities of the destination's brand management. The brand of the destination strengthens the perception among the visitors. This results in new ideas and forms of commercialization of the destination's resources. The growing investment, and all the individuals involved in the implementation of brand management are all able to individually contribute to additional ideas in order to differentiate the offer. The compliance of the image and identity of the destination provides a stronger perception of all components of the offer. The lifespan of a tourist destination with no recognizable identity is short. The lengthening involves significant costs, what often means undertaking risk. Therefore, the possible measures of rejuvenation are limited. The relevant identity of a destination is identified through indigenous offers based on the resources that need to be implemented in the brand. The development of new tourist attractions that is based on the identity of the destination is just one of the effective activities of brand management. Brand management is more complex than the process of destination branding. The perception of tourists about a destination can't be changed by re-branding the destination, but the activities of brand management can. The usage and creating of a logotype, as a branding technique, is just a medium and should not be regarded as a goal. It is common that the creation of the brand or the formation of a brand's logo is an objective. An additional problem is that this type of approach disregards the identity of the destination and can then further push it into oblivion. The possibility of differentiation and enhancement of the competitiveness of a destination is also limited. These facts are proven through the studies from which here, only some parts are presented.

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