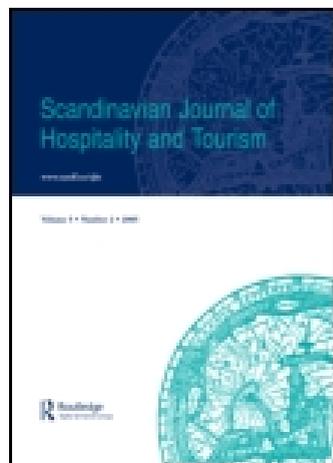


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One Clear Image? Challenging Simplicity in Place Branding

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ABSTRACT *Unique selling points! Simplicity sells! One clear identity! One clear image! These are some of the place branding mantras of today. In this paper, this “simplicity trend” is critically examined and challenged by raising the question whether clear images and simplicity are truly the only options in destination branding. After a short introduction and discussion of the underlying assumptions of destination branding strategy, an illustrative case is used to demonstrate how tourism stakeholders create several different “versions” of the tourist destination through a multiplicity of discursive, performative and socio-material practices at the tourist destination. Based on these findings, place marketers are encouraged to embrace and benefit from the multiple destination rather than seeking to reduce its multiplicity. It is argued that diversity branding might actually be deployed, strategically, in order to create more refined points of difference rooted in a richer and more complex understanding of destination identity(ies) and image(s).*

KEY WORDS: Branding, identity, image, diversity branding, destination “versions”

Introduction

In recent years, the practices of branding and marketing have become extremely popular within the context of destinations (see e.g. Ekinici & Hosany, 2006; Blain, Levy, & Ritchie, 2005). Accordingly, marketing and branding scholars spend much time and effort in order to offer normative theories on how branding and marketing can turn places into tourist destinations attractive to, and visited by, staggering numbers of tourists (Morgan, Pritchard, & Pride, 2004). Furthermore, practitioners (mostly defined as DMOs – destination marketing organisations) have turned towards the practices of branding and marketing and eagerly try to develop *that* destination brand which will make their destination stand out from the crowd. But why has branding become so popular amongst DMOs? Foremost, DMOs have turned to the magic world of branding because branding is perceived as a (or even the only) way, in which clear destination identities can be created and meaningfully communicated

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to consumers (Park & Petrick, 2006; Morgan et al., 2004; Ritchie & Ritchie, 1998). Temporal (2002) argues that brand *identity* is the total promise a company (or in our case a destination) makes to the consumers and thus, brand identity is what the DMO wants the place brand to be seen as. Temporal (2002) further argues that whereas brand identity relates to the marketer's promise, brand *image* relates to how consumers actually see the brand; i.e. the total sum of perceptions target audiences have about the brand. Accordingly, although brand image and brand identity may *not* be exactly the same, if marketers' communicate successfully to target audiences, then hopefully identity (i.e. how the brand *should* be seen) will have a vast influence on image (i.e. how the brand is *really* seen by consumers – however they are defined). As a result, the key idea underlying most normative theory pertaining to place branding is that if the DMO excels at communicating brand identity, then consumers will see what the DMO wishes for them to see. Therefore, to construct one clear identity and to subsequently communicate this to target audience should make target audiences (in our case tourists) hold *one, clear image* of the destination; an image that will hopefully make the brand stand out positively when tourists decide where to go on holiday.

Clear and differentiating identities are perceived to be a means to a series of valuable ends and in particular, clear destination identities are expected to make tourists form clear destination images, which will influence tourists' vacation decision-making processes and their choice of destination (Blain et al., 2005; van Riel & van den Ban, 2001) as well as expectation formation prior to visits to the destination (Park & Petrick, 2006). Accordingly, identification and dissemination of a clear and focused destination identity are expected to make potential tourists think of the destination in terms of a clear and focused image, which will subsequently dramatically increase the likelihood that the potential tourists will choose to visit this specific destination and not another destination. However, a critical question, that remains unanswered, is whether the quest to develop "that" clear and focused identity and henceforth, hopefully "that" clear image is actually the (only) way to attract tourists. Consequently, the purpose of this paper is first to examine the fundamental principles of marketing and branding of destinations and secondly to discuss whether a more multiplicity-oriented approach to place branding may qualify as a viable alternative. This is done by using an illustrative case in which the notion of "destination versions" is presented.

In this paper, we will first present and critically address the more or less implicit assumptions and underlying perceptions of destination branding. In doing so, we also discuss extant literature pertaining to the tourists as well as the tourists perception of the destination. Having outlined place branding as based on a pronounced wish for differentiation and demonstrating how this is done by reducing brand message complexity, we challenge this quest for simplicity. We do so by calling for more intricate place brands using insight from performative and material currents in social research to account for the multiplicity of the tourist destination. Through a presentation of fieldwork carried out at a Polish destination, we first show how destinations are *enacted* (Mol, 2002), i.e. articulated, performed and constructed, as multiple. Drawing on this insight, we argue that acknowledging the diversity and multiplicity of the destination does not – per se – lead to a branding catastrophe. Rather, as a fact that can and

should be dealt with, it may ultimately lead to not only more credible, but perhaps also more broadly appealing and truly differentiated place brands.

Differentiation and Simplicity – The Only Way to go?

A key tenet in marketing is product differentiation. The fundamental tenet of differentiation is essential in order to grasp what underlies the idea that destinations should be presented by means of “one clear identity” and thus hopefully be perceived as having “a clear image”. Accordingly, as consumer goods producers wish for their product to stand out from the other products on the supermarket shelves, so is the premise that places should stand out from other places. Hence, the critical question shifts from what the place has to offer to what the place may offer, that other destinations do not. This kind of thinking originates from the idea of points-of-parity versus points-of-difference. According to Keller (2003) points-of-parity are associations that are not unique to the brand. Instead, they are shared with other brands and hence, this relates to associations that are “. . . necessary – but not necessarily sufficient – conditions for brand choice” (Keller, 2003, p.133). For example, for a resort targeted at families with dependent children a swimming pool and playgrounds will probably act as points-of-parity as these facilities are necessary, albeit not sufficient, in the quest to pull guests to the resort.

Points-of-difference, on the other hand, have much in common with the notion of unique selling propositions (USP). Keller (2003, p.131) defines points-of-difference as “attributes or benefits that consumers strongly associate with a brand, positively evaluate, and believe that they could not find to the same extent with a competitive brand” and furthermore, he argues that “consumers’ actual brand choice often depend on the perceived uniqueness of brand associations” (p. 132). In a destination branding context this means that choice of destination relates more to the destination’s unique points-of-difference than to the points-of-parity shared with others destination brands. For instance, in a Sun&Sea vacation context, points-of-parity versus points-of-difference thinking means that lovely beaches are necessary, but not sufficient to attract tourists. Hence, a destination must offer something “beyond” nice beaches in order to stand out from the welter of Sun&Sea destinations, i.e. it must possess destination specific points-of-difference.

A second branding tenet is that the way to ensure that one’s place stands out from the crowd is that it has a *clear* image. Furthermore, as pointed out by Pike (2004), Temporal (2002) and Daye (2010), a destination image is, at least partially, derived from the brand’s identity. Accordingly, branding in the form of identification and dissemination of a brand’s core identity increases the correspondence between the communicated identity and the images that the customers form in their minds. Clarity in destination branding is seen as an important feature of destination marketing strategies. Therkelsen (2007) argues that destination branding is to create a coherent, unique and differentiated identity for a destination. In this view, the management of communication in destination branding must concern itself with how messages and content are controlled, diffused to, and adopted by recipients, i.e. the potential tourist. The aim is to secure an unperturbed message transmission reducing “noise” to a minimum (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 2006; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2004).

The idea of management of communication relates to an understanding of the process of communication which is seen as both *unidirectional* and *controlled*. According to this fundamentally functionalist approach, a message is transmitted through words or images from a sender to one or more receivers using one or several channels of communication. It is this model of communication, which in a destination marketing perspective leads to the appreciation of the communication of “one clear identity”. The basic idea is that a clear identity can “hit” recipients better in today’s over-communicated world than a fuzzier image can and thus, dissemination of a clear and focused identity increases the extent to which brand communication can affect destination images formed by tourists.

According to traditional branding approaches relying on a functionalist understanding of communication, marketers can ensure that the communicated identity is the same as (or at least as close to) the image created in consumers’ minds if transmission noise is eliminated. In her discussion of destination marketing, Therkelsen (2007) points to the fact that destination branding becomes problematic when various actors’ ways of communicating the place differ from (or even collide with) the destination brand as this makes the representation of the place less coherent and clear. Blurred and/or multifaceted brand identities will thus not draw visitors to the place and in order to avoid this situation, traditional normative branding theories prescribe that destination images should be kept simple, emphasising a few strong points-of-difference.

During the last decade or so, a series of seminal publications on corporate branding have changed and refined the body of branding theory (e.g. Hatch & Schultz, 2001; Harris & de Chernatony, 2001; van Riel & Balmer, 1997). First and foremost, these publications emphasise that responsibility for branding expands beyond the boundaries of the marketing department and flows into the board room as well as into all organisational departments. This means that whereas product branding primarily concerned creation and maintenance of bonds with customers created by marketing departments, corporate branding relates to top management vision, organisational culture and the outside world’s impression of the company (Hatch & Schultz, 2001; Tosti & Stotz, 2001; King & Grace, 2008).

Secondly, in this new approach to branding, the “branding audience” expands beyond customers and includes all stakeholders. As such, branding becomes an emotional bond between the organisation and many different groups of stakeholders (e.g. partners, suppliers, employees, potential employees as well as “the public”). The perspective that corporate branding incorporates bonds with a multiplicity of stakeholders opens up for a more multi-faceted approach to corporate branding and consequently, new theories that focus on emotional bonds between corporations and specific groups of stakeholders have emerged; a trend that is especially evident within the new stream of branding literature dedicated to the study of employer branding (e.g. Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Moroko & Uncles, 2008).

These newer publications draw in a reality according to which corporations communicate to, and with, many different stakeholders. More of them even emphasise corporations’ opportunity to communicate different dimensions of corporate identity to different stakeholders. Nonetheless, apart from the increasing use of the concepts “place brand” (which may cover more stakeholder groups than the destination brand, which traditionally emphasises bonds between places and tourists) and “public

diplomacy” (which adds a political dimension to place branding), literature on destination branding has only adopted these lines of reasoning to a very limited extent. Accordingly, the mantra of identifying and communicating “the” clear identity (preferably by means of a catchy slogan or tag-line) still predominates within destination branding thinking.

Clearness and Uniqueness of Images

Unfortunately, the literature on destination branding does not contribute much in regard to the exact meaning of “clear” in a destination context. In an attempt to define the concept of destination branding, Blain et al. (2005, p. 331) argue that destination branding is comprised of various marketing activities “all with the intent purpose of creating an *image* that influences consumers’ *decisions* to visit the destination in question, as opposed to an *alternative* one”. The emphasis on marketing activities can also be found in Bærenholdt’s (2007) discussion of the destination concept as he argues that the destination identity draws on the various projects that actors engage in at the destination, in order to collaborate on marketing of the place. In the same vein, Kaplanidou and Vogt (2003, p. 2) argue that “branding creates that first idea about a destination in the consumer’s mind”.

Quite interestingly, as indicated by the quotes above, both branding practitioners and researchers talk about “an identity”, “an” image and/or “the” idea about the destination. At the outset, neither destination identity, nor destination image are thus defined in plural when we put on the branding and marketing glasses. The notion “clearness” strictly relates to identity being “an” identity and thus, subsequently also to image being “an” image. This kind of thinking makes a lot of sense in relation to most traditional products. Here the image functions as a kind of “shorthand” making the product stand out from other brands that crowd the brand landscape. This kind of thinking has proven successful within the world of tangible goods – after all this is the basic premise that underlies the “unique selling proposition” theory. Keeping it simple and emphasising only one, or a few, aspects (or attributes) of the products is a viable strategy within the world, from which branding theory originates (i.e. that of tangible goods).

Destinations, however, are different from tangible products (Blichfeldt, 2005, 2007; Therkelsen, 2007). Such differences especially hinge on the fact that, overall, a destination has many more facets than a tangible product. Even more importantly, destination image (i.e. how tourists see the place) is not exclusively shaped or created by marketing activities and considerations. Focusing on this aspect, Papadopoulos and Heslop (2002, p. 295) offer the following statement:

whether positive or negative, focused or diffuse, held widely or by only a few, developed deliberately or by default, and formed from education, the media, travel, immigration, product purchases, business experiences or any combination of sources, *every place has an image*.

With this statement, Papadopoulos and Heslop (2002) open the discussion on differences between place images and images of “simpler products”. What is especially

interesting, though, is that they, in the end, state that every place has *an* image in tourists' minds. Accordingly, although Papadopoulos and Heslop (2002) agree that knowledge about a place may come from a multiplicity of sources, they stick to the idea that the outcome of being exposed to the multiplicity of information on the place is that a singular image is formed.

Increasingly, interpretive and semiotic approaches challenge these assumptions, claiming that image formation is context related and subject to subjective or cultural "translations" (Askehave & Norlyk, 2006). Communicating identity is, accordingly, not a one-way transmission but rather a process involving a multiplicity of actors, artefacts, and technologies, as well as cultural, social and individual competences (Solomon et al., 2006). According to these interactionist approaches to communication (e.g. Blumer, 1969; Fisher, 1978), communication cannot be reduced to the transmission of simple messages, because messages (or transmissions) are never "simple". Also, identity never contains an essence accessible and understandable to all in the same way (Solomon et al., 2006) and thus, tourists all exposed to the same marketing communication may form different images. As a consequence, there can never be *one* image. Following the realisations which stem from such perspectives into the area of place branding, the idea of "one clear identity" being communicated and subsequently transformed into "one clear image" must be challenged.

A few researchers have attempted to go beyond the conception of destination images as "an" image. For example, John Urry defines tourism marketing as "a practice in which tourism marketers and operators provide tourists with a range of representational images of what places are like, and tourists begin their attempts to understand those places through the imaginary construction of reality contained within those texts" (see Goss, 1993, p. 671). Urry thus moves beyond the singularity inherent in most conceptions of place and destination identity as he speaks of "a range of representational images". Nonetheless, Urry sticks to the idea that identities (or in his words, representational images of what places are like) are, somehow, chosen by tourism marketers and operators (or DMOs) amongst the welter of identities relating to a place. This means that although Urry opens up for a more multifaceted approach to destinations identity and image, he still relies on the idea that potential tourists are confronted with *simplified* identities. Even more importantly, perhaps, Urry, more or less implicitly, sticks to the idea that tourists need such simplification in order to begin to understand the place in question.

Challenging simplicity

As was demonstrated in the above, the traditional branding approach assumes that it is better to communicate one identity than many as this will increase the likelihood that tourists see the destination as marketers would like them to see it. In a destination context, one might pose the question on what this assumption is based. One answer is to be found in the perceptions of the nature of tourists and their capacity to absorb and make use of information faced with, in this case, choices of purchase and consumption. Quite surprisingly, not much research has focused on potential tourists' perceptions, and use, of destination material during their up-front vacation decision-making processes. As a result, we (i.e. academia) do not know whether the conception of

potential tourists as people who need and want to draw on simplified images is right or wrong. When talking about one clear image as a competitive advantage, it is implied that tourists expect, favour and choose simplicity and uniformity over diversity and complexity. It is based on this underlying assumption and in order not to “confuse” the tourist that branding focuses on the “one clear image”.

This understanding may well be said to rely on an uncorroborated understanding of the tourist as a mass tourist. Today, people travel more than previously and many take both short-breaks and more than one longer holiday a year. Also, many holiday-takers are experienced travellers. Accordingly, it may be erroneous to presume that any given tourist always prefers to be confronted with simplified images and unique selling propositions. Especially, this seems to be the case if we compare such perceptions of tourists with research on the post-modern consumer and the ways, in which (s)he relates to consumption. Certainly, new types of tourists such as John Urry’s post-mass tourists are characterized by their search for the elusively different elements of the tourism experience within a postmodern, globally interconnected world. This search is characterised by an attempt to avoid staged events in favour of more locally anchored experiences (Perkins & Thorns, 2001). The question remains, if an accomplished traveller might not in fact be attracted to less homogeneous, uniform and well-groomed places and brands. Could it be that the post-modern tourist is especially drawn to complex places seeing these as more intriguing? If this is indeed the case, how and based on what may multiple brands reflecting this complexity be conceived?

In order to approach these questions, we suggest taking a further look at the destination. Hence, a more diverse branding approach could start with taking a multiplicity approach to the tourist destination and to what and who take part in its process of construction. To do so, we propose to see the destination as enacted in different “versions”. These versions vary according to which stakeholders are addressed or involved in the process of creation. This understanding is exemplified using a case from the Polish mountain town of Zakopane. It is first argued that a focus on these various versions of the destination, which not only manifest themselves in discourse and images but also in destination performances and materiality, help recognise the multiple and processual character of the destination (Ren, 2009). Secondly, we argue that multiplicity should not be ignored or ignored by place branders. Rather, it should be seen as a possibility to enrich and diversify the place brand in question by using different enactments of the destination rooted in existing tourist services and offers as well as practices and discourses identified and located on place. Connecting place branding to these versions is a favourable way to create truly differentiating points-of-interest.

Conceptual Framework

Before proceeding to the case presentation, a theoretical grounding is necessary in order to situate our understanding of the concept of “versions” in relation to the destination. By using this concept we draw on the work of researchers such as Law and Singleton (2005), Mol (2002) and De Laet and Mol (2000) who within the social sciences have contributed to what has been termed the ontological or performative turn of Actor

Network Theory (ANT) (Nickelsen, 2003). Inspiration is drawn from these researchers because of their focus on the relational and performative nature of practices of everyday life and their stressing of the lack of singularity when exploring the enactments and multi-discursive orderings of objects or realities. In relation to the destination this entails seeing it not as containing one fixed identity (or image), but rather as being constantly constructed, negotiated and enacted.

As a methodological tool, ANT and derived approaches offer a radically new understanding of the destination in seeing non-human and natural objects as afforded with the possibility to act (Latour, 1999; Ren in press). Hence, the researcher has the opportunity to collect and use unorthodox and very diverse data, upon which the analysis can be based. Strategy papers, brochures and ads, physical structures, food products, clothes, discourses as well as tourism consumers and producers and local residents all become “actors” in relation to how the destination is constructed, made possible and also contested (Edensor, 2001). This approach encourages inclusive research undertakings in which a variety of actors and entities are constantly comingled (Callon, 1986). In a tourism context, such an approach has many advantages in allowing not only the quantifiable, the comparable, the strategically best placed or the most popular or loudest messengers to be selected as informants (for more on tourism and ANT, see van der Duim, Jóhannesson, & Ren forthcoming).

In this study, an approach sensitive to the multiple destination actors and their performative skills was deployed in order to describe ways in which stakeholders take part in shaping and constructing the destination hereby furthering their “version” of the destination. The enactments of these versions were studied as they were carried out through a variety of *discourses* – ways of imagining, talking and writing about the destination (Jaworski & Lawson, 2005) – deployed by stakeholders to point to certain important or positive characteristics or traits defining the destination. This could be identified through written material, on web pages, during guided tours or in other tourism contexts. The discursive approach was supplemented by observing *performances* that accentuated or challenged various tourism services, strategies and spaces (Bærenholdt et al., 2007) through tourism-related activities, from waiting tables and crafting wooden souvenirs to developing tourism web pages or the town’s tourism strategy. Lastly, it was studied how stakeholders made use of and actively shaped the *materiality* of the destination (Haldrup & Larsen, 2006). Hence, seeing how ski lifts are built, traditional houses are conserved or pulled down or how landscapes, infrastructure, web sites and regional cuisine is developed all points to how the destination is constructed and communicated. Including and investigating these three aspects enabled a description and retracing of the constant and ongoing construction of the destination (Murdoch, 1998; Ren, in press).

The images, discourses, performances, physical objects and technologies engaged in the destination construct were not necessarily articulated as part of any conscious or strategic act of destination branding. The study revealed however that they all contributed to the destination construct. In this perspective, all of the above practices are seen as related and interconnected as active and acting parts in the shaping and “assembling” of the destination (van der Duim, 2007a, 2007b). This multi-layered approach to how local stakeholders envision, communicate and ultimately enact the destination led to the understanding of the destination as a result of an ongoing, contingent and

socio-material process. Also, it showed that the destination was not envisioned, performed and constructed into a homogenous and fix entity, but rather as a multiplicity of versions which were continuously produced on and through place. In the subsequent section we exemplify these considerations by means of a single case study. Accordingly, what is important in the following is not the case itself (it could have been the Danish Island Fanø, Lofoten or Stockholm as well), but how the destination is characterised by a multiplicity of images, all of which are “true”.

In the following, a presentation is given of two distinctly enacted versions of the destination retraced in the different ways in which the tourist destination of Zakopane is presented, constructed and performed by its actors. By retracing the discursive, performative and material practices of a number of destination actors, it is shown how each of the versions was connected to different images, practices, artefacts, discourses and spaces. The two illustrative examples of versions presented in this paper show that neither places nor their images are one. The very dominant versions of *the village* and of *the international destination* presented here were chosen as they are specifically relevant in a tourism context. However, the field material also pointed to other versions, some of which had very little or nothing to do with Zakopane as a tourist destination, hence showing that branding places as tourist destinations is also a contested activity.

Case Presentation

The following case is informed by fieldwork carried out in two stages for a total of four months in the early spring and summer of 2007 in the town of Zakopane, an all-year tourist destination in the Tatra Mountains of Southern Poland (Ren, 2009). Receiving more than three million visitors a year, it is one of Poland’s largest and most well-known destinations. During fieldwork, an aim was to investigate how local tourism stakeholders communicated and developed the destination based on their understanding of the town’s identity as a tourist destination. A special interest was also to investigate whether – and if so how – new stakeholders, such as investors, agencies and a rising number of tourists from abroad, were impacting on the enactments of this century-old destination after the EU enlargement.

During this ethnographic fieldwork, the research participants were selected not according to a priori ideas of importance, but on how these engaged with and delineated the field of study, as also explained by van der Duim (2007b, p. 971). Many of them were informants referred to by others based on their roles and partaking in local tourism development, marketing and branding. They included people from the local authorities as well as local or foreign (but locally based) entrepreneurs and businesses. Also, the inquiry sought to include local cultural or tourism organisations as well as individuals who held important public roles related to tourism in this community comprised of approximately 30,000 people. Many of these people were directly or indirectly working within tourism. Information was collected through interviews, participant observation as well as close descriptions of the various tourism-related practices carried out in Zakopane. Also, as part of an ANT inspired fieldwork, attention was put to the material and performative aspects of the destination (for a more thorough discussion of ANT methods in tourism research, see Ren, 2010).

Zakopane: The Village Version

When inquiring about the roots of tourism in Zakopane, one finds that tourism in this region has a long history. Historic and promotional material in guide books, museums and tourism brochures often tell you of the many prominent Polish artists and scholars that have come to recreate here since the late 1800s. One may read about the first train connection established in the early 1900s and the subsequent development of tourism, which reached a scale of mass tourism during the socialist era. Today, the town and its tourism stakeholders offer hiking and skiing facilities, cultural and folklore displays, regional dishes and widespread bed and breakfast-based accommodation to over 3 million yearly visitors from Poland, Russia and increasingly, Western Europe. The interesting thing about this place is not only the intense tourism activities and its long tradition, neither is it the extensive changes from a socialist to a capitalist economy or the consequences in local tourism of Poland entering into the EU. Rather, it is the fact that – in spite of the conspicuous and pervasive history and current activities of tourism – many tourism stakeholders do not talk about Zakopane as a tourist destination. When interviewing locals on the identity of Zakopane, they often describe it in terms of a *village*. Even the town mayor insists on this status:

Zakopane is in its nature a big village. We have over a thousand farmers here, people who have their fields, their farms. It's really like a big village.

Following the mayor's lines of reasoning, another local informant elaborates on this village status as follows:

Zakopane itself was never a city – it was always a village and it still remains a village. We're right in the city centre. This house is one of the oldest ones around – built in 1897. We used to have cows and other animals here only a few years ago, when my father-in-law was still alive. We used to have a proper farm with fields, and we ran the farm in the Górale (Highlander, eds.) manner directly in the city centre [...] Zakopane, like some villages in the Alps, has it's own, characteristic style – you have a big, fancy hotel, some shops, and right next to it – a barn and a heap of dung. Zakopane isn't a city in the minds of the people. Zakopane is something different.

These statements highlight Zakopane as a village by connecting it to farming, traditions and folklore. Also, Zakopane is compared to other well-known examples of mountain habitats from the Alps. The perception of Zakopane as a village is substantiated by referring and pointing to long-established tradition (“this house is one of the oldest ones around”), to animals (“cows and other animals”), to physical structures such as farmers, fields, buildings (the barn) and the heap of dung and to unspecified practices of farming (“we ran the farm”). Hence, Zakopane as a village is performatively invoked by stakeholders by pointing at village-related buildings, farming practices and artefacts. Presenting Zakopane as a village involved highlighting things which supported this status. Similarly, other “non-village” practices which contradict these practices were

condemned. For example, the town's spatial lay-out was addressed as follows by one of the informants:

There have been some attempts to make [Zakopane] look like a regular city – take a look at Krupówki street (the main pedestrian shopping street, eds.). It was a very bad idea, you can still see its echo here and there. It'd be better to turn it into a garden city, like Witkiewicz (famous architect, eds.) planned, with all the villas, houses and pensions standing in gardens, parks, in the green, right? The communists came up with an idea of turning Zakopane into a Communistic city, as they thought it was a symbol of pre-war Poland. They built blocks; they brought in people to work. They turned it into something very weird, we won't live till the day when it's all repaired.

In this quote, the informant, an architect, folklore musician and famous cultural notability, not only distances Zakopane from a city status, pointing to the idea of turning it into a city as “a very bad idea”. He also associates town development and architectural trends with two ideologies. The communist era is first associated with building blocks, an alien work force and the busy shopping street (which righteously so was probably not intended by the communist planners). Furthermore, it is compared to the garden city of a national-romantic era, in which Witkiewicz promoted the Tatras Mountains as a truly “Polish” place and the Górale highlanders as an unspoiled people (Cooley, 2005). Each ideology and the specificity of their places are morally judged by attaching them with normative labels such as “weird” or “better”.

The idea of the village was used by many informants as a means to specify and accentuate a local distinction and uniqueness. However, this does not mean that the specific locality of the village was not deemed as accessible to tourists. On the contrary, many identified the village-related characteristics to be the main attraction of the town, as highlighted by a staff member from the mayor's office in charge of local events:

I think that Zakopane itself – with the folklore and the Górale tradition – is a very special place, and it's very difficult to find a similar one anywhere in the world. We have our own language – the Górale dialect is almost like a separate language [...]. We have our costumes, we have our culture, and that's the way we attract tourists here.

A local guide and guide book writer agrees to this idea of the village or the local Górale culture as an attraction to tourists:

[The tourists] don't look for European restaurants in Zakopane, they want to find a local Górale inn. That's the reason for all those killed animals on the walls, very simple tables, all this decorum.

The mayor also pointed to the local culture of Zakopane as an asset:

The main asset of this area in my opinion is the Górale culture, which was shaped here over many years, and is now being more and more exposed to the people.

I don't only mean the habits and the behaviour of the people, but also the architectural style [. . .] When I mention the local architecture, we mustn't forget that the traditional Górale architecture was developed due to sheep herding, so it looked differently – different rooftop angles, different methods of joining buildings together. We have some very old buildings like that here; they're 100 or 200 years old. Take the house of Sabała (legendary Górale folk musician from the late 1800s, eds.) as an example. It was renovated recently and serves as a meeting place. It's not widely open for visitors, but it'll sure become a tourist attraction quite soon.

Local culture is not only perceived as “the habits and the behaviour of the people”, but also as the architectural style which is then again related to village practices such as shepherding. The house becomes emblematic as it is used to represent a region, Górale culture and specific local practices. At the same time, the mayor points to the house as a tourist attraction. This statement illustrates the ways in which the material culture and local tradition connect and interact with tourism.

Stakeholders such as the ones presented above point to, represent and enact Zakopane as a village, something which is different from other places and whose uniqueness makes it attractive to tourists. The uniqueness referred to in these stories is not, however, (all) part of a conscious branding strategy but are based on an understanding of culture and history as anchored and specific to place. Nonetheless, Zakopane as a “Górale village” was but one of the enacted versions uncovered through fieldwork and hence, was but one of multiple versions of Zakopane. In the next section, we introduce a different – and competing – version of Zakopane as it was introduced and performed by other actors.

Zakopane: An International Destination

The above version of Zakopane as a place related to and made possible by and through the specificity of local culture, such as buildings, farming practices and food culture is opposed by another version enacted by various stakeholders in quite a different manner. In this version, Zakopane is identified not as a village, but as an international tourist destination. This is exemplified in the following quote from the head of a public tourism development agency:

Zakopane is something like a European town, sometimes containing more things than in the most popular places in Europe. Tourists are thinking that Poland is villages, small villages, hardworking people like in Eastern Europe 20 years ago. It's our job to change that.

By emphasising Zakopane as similar to, rather than different from, “a European town” and as a highly developed place in terms of tourism offers, the developer points to Zakopane as being on a compatible and comparable level with other places – it is not something *different*, as was the village with its unique and place-specific culture, but rather something the *same*, which is recognisable to tourists. This perception is

also described by a tourism agency owner and operator, who challenges the town's identity as a village by comparing it to other European and global ski resorts:

Zakopane is a very good place for families and for beginners. There are not very many places in the world – I used to ski in really many places in Europe – where you have a town that is still a town. There are 30,000 people living here, so it is not a village like I don't know Val d'Isère for example. A lovely place for skiing, but small. Only hotels, restaurants. I was there in May and everything was closed, nobody was there, only our group. The shop was open two hours per day. So you really felt like being at the end of the world. Here, there are so many people, the theatre, [. . .] the cinemas and all these discos, bars, restaurants, etc.

By pointing to its inhabitants, activities and buildings, Zakopane is highlighted as a town - and quite an excellent one on an international scale. In comparison to a renowned French resort which in the informant's opinion is a lovely, but small village "at the end of the world", Zakopane is presented as a real town.

As the international market slowly increases in Zakopane, foreign tourism actors make their appearance on the stage. These actors also engage in the struggle to define *what Zakopane is*. As was clear during interviews with some of these new entrepreneurs, many of them also take on the understanding of Zakopane as a – at least potentially – international destination. This is illustrated by the following quote by a British owner of a web-based tourism company offering its services in Zakopane and a number of other Central and Eastern European destinations.

We tried to create, not an impression, but give a sense of the reality: that Poland is a vibrant and great place for young people as well as being all the history and the culture. That it actually is fun and fairly cheap for people to come here. And that the night life, its clubs and what have you rank. They compare with the rest of, certainly with Western Europe in terms of quality. So we try to project it as a funky place.

According to him, his website seeks to communicate "a sense of reality". By referring to the place as "funky" and pointing to price compatibility with other European ski resorts, his branding strategy clearly contrasts the place assets identified by stakeholders who emphasise Zakopane as a place of Górale ("culture/history"). His understanding of an international destination matching European standards is materialised through the deliberate use of bright colours and perky design of the town maps distributed in Zakopane by his company. All in all, he and the other tourism stakeholders presented above portray and enact Zakopane as something recognizable and easily accessible, well-known to and preferred by foreigners as a combined town and resort. Zakopane is something similar to everywhere else in the world.

A Multiple Approach to Destination Branding: Uses and Consequences

As demonstrated by this presentation of two Zakopane versions, incongruence may be identified between different modes of ordering (Law, 1994) or constructing the

destination when tourism industry workers, developer, marketers, entrepreneurs, politicians and local citizens are asked to define the identity of Zakopane. In this case, two different versions of Zakopane were articulated by the local tourism stakeholder as either a village or an international destination. In tourism and town planning and development, the two versions were reflected in opposing strategies. Various ways of acting and speaking and a wide range of technologies and artefacts were deployed in an attempt to represent the town through a singular image – as either a village or an international destination. This is illustrated in the next quote, in which a local sales representative for a tourism website talks about the need to develop the industry further to attract tourists.

They [local hotel and restaurant owners] must understand about advertisement. You know, mountains, beautiful views, it's not enough. Because if they want to have more tourists, more hotels and restaurants, more money, they must have very good advertisement on their websites, you know what I mean? But you must understand the Górale people are particular, inaccessible. It was hard to convince them that opening up is necessary, especially here in Zakopane. Being open towards advertising, towards the Internet.

In a perspective stressing the material impact and importance on how tourism is shaped and made possible, tourism-related web pages, their content, language(s), and lay-out act as co-producers and mediators of the town image in the same way as local initiatives to keep glass painting, sheep herding and cheese production alive as part of local folklore and culture. Local or standardised building styles, landscape planning and ski area development as well as “being open” to advertisement all take part in the physical and mental shaping of the town and its image. Whether tourism-related practices stress heritage conservation and a restrictive building policy or focuses on development of tourism structures and service becomes very much entangled with the idea one has of what that place is – or should be. Normative and culturally bounded images simultaneously motivate and act as co-creators of the representations and constructions of the place through tourism discourses, performances and materiality.

By adopting an approach which acknowledges the discursive, performative and material relations enacting the destination, the above examples display that the destination is not a homogenous entity, but rather one which is performed in several versions. These versions are not merely *perspectives* on the same place, but real constructions of the multiple destination. They are real (in an ontological sense) given that they relate, as shown in the above presentation, to building, artefacts and performance which take and make place at the destination. The question is, however, why place branders should deal with such an understanding of the multiple destination. A tentative answer to that question is illustrated through a quote from an English website writer:

It's kind of become a little bit a parody of itself [Zakopane] has been a massive tourist destination for Polish people since the 19th century, so you know it's probably one of Poland's oldest tourist destinations in a sense. They have obviously worked out what the appeal is to visitors, including Polish visitors. And they've really kind of capped it off a bit with the mountain boots and the hats. You know

every restaurant almost without exception is a sort of Górale restaurant with Górale musicians. So it is funny material [to write about]. If you take Zakopane too seriously you could be a bit disappointed. It's not like you are going to a remote mountain village and you're going to discover real. . . well you will discover real mountain people. But you'll also discover people pretending to be a hundreds of years older than they are [laugh].

In this quote, the interviewee takes on the version of Zakopane as a village by questioning its authenticity and labelling it as a parody. This points to the fact that the village/destination dichotomy is strongly connected to claims of and fights over place identity (Kneafsey, 1998). Place identity refers to processes of spatial integration, in which only some individuals, things, activities and discourse are included by connecting certain identities to certain places. Hence, individual stakeholders discursively or performatively position and align themselves and others with the destination using place names and stories, pointing out correct behaviour and desirable ways of conduct. Places are not empty containers into which random people, practices and objects may be placed (Crang & Thrift, 2000; Murdoch, 2006), in this case as part of place branding. Instead, they are negotiated and contested "turfs" (Modan, 2007) where struggles unfold over access to space and over power to define what kind of place a given space is or should be. Being an active part in this process of negotiation, destination branding connects to a whole range of discourses and practices concerning what a place should contain and how it ought to be delimited, geographically as well as morally. In this process, destination branding is acting as a tool in the struggle to define what and who are welcomed – or not (Ren, 2006) and as an active participant in creating and shaping distinctions and boundaries not only between places but also, and more importantly, between people.

By exploring the possibility of the existence of several destination versions, "the" identity and henceforth "the" image of the destination is revealed as a simplistic and unproductive reduction. The clear identity of destination branding neglects and omits a variety of destination identities, actors, discourses, performances and artefacts. This suggests that branding, or in broader terms the cultural communication, staging and construction of a tourism destination is not an innocent enterprise but contains the capacity to normatively define and represent the place, people and activities of tourism in a certain place. Place branding does not just reflect a place, but actively takes part in creating what it is – and is not. When considering the aspects of power in relation to a tourism destination, one must direct attention not only to the abundant representations and identities of the destination, but also to the dynamics and complexities of the place. This includes an understanding of the place not as an *a priori* but rather as an *ad hoc* entity. As such, the destination does not contain pre-given or essential qualities that may be "extracted" from it.

Managerial Implications

The study carried out in Zakopane illustrates how destination identities and realities are not only created or represented by DMOs, managers and/or administrators. Neither are official representations complied with, or accepted by, all parts of the destination

network as stakeholders are constantly busy denominating and enacting what they believe to represent or constitute the destination, their version of Zakopane. Apart from this contribution to knowledge and theory, the case could also serve as a source of inspiration for practitioners by pointing to how, within a tourist destination, it is possible – and even desirable – to represent and disseminate more than one identity of the destination. Accordingly, DMOs should consider carefully whether they wish to comply with traditional branding theory and henceforth, identify and disseminate one clear and focused identity or whether they will “take in” the multiplicity of identities that may be of interest to various stakeholders and audiences.

Rooting destination identities in the multiplicity of resources, stories, physical structures and practices which exist locally may not only create a more heterogeneous, but also a more trustworthy representation – not of what the destination is, but what it *can be*. By allowing locals, tourists, managers and mediators to impact and shape the destination, we argue that the destination is made possible as a truly unique and innovative brand, a brand which is not fixed, but is rather open to negotiation, interpretation and co-construction. We further suggest that practitioners, notably DMOs, become more aware of how to provide the visitor with much more complex, but also potentially richer images of the destination. By implementing “diversity marketing” into the branding strategy of the destination, tourism promoters also demonstrate a better understanding of the post-mass tourist as an individual capable of grasping and appreciating multiplicity.

All in all, the challenge of proposed diversity posed to DMOs should not be perceived as a problem, but rather as a fact – a fact to be accepted and dealt with accordingly. We believe that the plurality of the destinations identity and henceforth of destination image(s) and a subsequent attempt to broaden the destination image may provide marketers with a valuable and innovative means of communication, more accurately reflecting the various representations of the place found with locals and tourists alike. A branding strategy basing itself on reciprocal and reflexive communication instead of simple conveying of information might enable the creation of more dynamic, heterogeneous and inclusive destination brands. In taking on this challenge, we may learn to use place diversity and diversity branding in a positive and creative way in order to show what the destination is “always also about”.

Conclusion

“The currency of cultural tourism is difference”, argues Evans-Pritchard (1989). This statement made almost 20 years ago referred specifically to what was at that time a niche market within tourism. Today, we argue, difference rather than uniformity and simplicity ought to be deployed not only in the expanding area of cultural tourism, but also on a broader field of destination branding. In this article we have tried to push this argument by first showing how a number of assumptions underlay contemporary destination branding and marketing strategies. Summing up, destination branding and marketing are based on the idea that someone (usually a DMO) needs and is able to draw visitors to a place by means of one-way communication emphasising a few, selected aspects of the place. Such identities could be a scenic landscape, a special culture, and/or the mere existence of excellent skiing conditions. It is also

assumed that relying on one or a few identities of the destination is the most efficient way to attract visitors.

Drawing on insights from ANT as well as performative and material studies, the case study illustrated how a close examination of the tourist destination reveals a multiplicity of ways of “doing” the destination. The two versions of the case destination, the village and international destination respectively, described ways in which the destination is enacted in a concrete setting.

In Zakopane, the town is not (yet) submitted to a strong or hegemonic identity control undertaken by DMOs. Rather, a large variety of people involve themselves in local destination marketing on many levels, using different tools, based on many strategies. Hence, they provide and enact their own versions of what the town is to them. In this process, local stakeholders work against and challenge the marketing mantra of attempting to inspire tourists to hold “one clear image”. By acknowledging, recognizing and conforming to place diversity, branding takes an uncharted step into a seemingly more uncontrollable field of communication, marketing and branding. The immediate consequence is a richer, more complex picture of destinations otherwise known and recognisable to tourists. It is an identity that sticks more to the lived experiences and acts to be found at the place because it is anchored in exactly these – and not in the template of the global “unique destination”.

As researchers begin to question representations of the tourist as a predictable and simple creature and as functionalist communication theories are challenged by interpretive and multifaceted approaches, so we believe should the idea of “one, clear image” stand up to revision. We believe that moving away from a rigid system of clarity and inevitable simplification does not necessarily result in vagueness or confusion. Rather, we propose that it could give rise to an acceptance and subsequent strategic use of the diversity of not only the destination, but also its potential visitors. Accordingly, although this paper only draws upon one (Polish) destination in illustrating the “multiple destination”, the destination itself is not important. On the contrary, the case is interesting insofar as one would not – at the outset – expect it to be especially multiple. However, as the case study shows even Zakopane has multiple identities and thus, it seems that perhaps one should expect *every* destination to be multiple and never “clear”. Accordingly, we hope that this paper may trigger further studies into the multiplicity of destinations – especially so in a Nordic context.

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