What Lies Underneath the LOVEly Image of sLOVEnia?

The construction of Slovenia and its national identity through nation branding on the website “I feel Slovenia”

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ABSTRACT

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Nowadays it is becoming common for countries to present themselves as brands in order to survive in the competitive environment of the global market. Especially the transition countries from Central and Eastern Europe increasingly employ practices of nation branding with the desire to disconnect from the negative stereotypes that Western countries held upon them. The thesis explores nation branding in Slovenia through the official website www.slovenia.info, exploring its connection to the construction of national identity. The thesis draws on the concepts of nation, national identities, selection, idealization and commodification, relating them to nation branding from a critical perspective. By doing so, the thesis uses the method of critical discourse analysis to reveal what kind of ideas, norms and values are presented on the website, what kind of information is foregrounded and what is made invisible. With power relations in mind, the thesis desires to reveal underlying interests and ideologies that might lie behind such branding strategy. As the analyzed website presents Slovenia only as an idyllic green country, without any social or political problems, without diversity, without people and plurality within itself, the study confirms the assumption that nation branding is, indeed, a practice of selection and idealization, where certain images are selected with a purpose of commodification.

Keywords: Slovenia, I feel Slovenia, nation branding, national identity, selection, ideology, commodification.
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1. Introduction

I feel Slovenia, I feel love. Slovenia - the only country with the word 'love' in its name, as it often promotes itself in the global environment.

Today we are living in a world where it is becoming more and more common for countries to present themselves as brands in order to survive in the competitive environment of the global market. It is important how countries present themselves as the image of a country can possibly affect their economy. Even though today numerous countries are making use of nation branding for their promotional reasons, this concept has a special importance for the (re)discovery of tourism destinations severely impacted by global crises - such as war, genocide or ethnic and political conflict for example. The importance of such a marketing tool is especially apparent in former republics of the Soviet Union or those of Yugoslavia, where due to political history the West often still holds negative stereotypes about these countries (Vitic & Ringer, 2007; Volcic, 2008).

After the bloody collapse of Yugoslavia and especially after joining the European Union in 2004, Slovenia, like other countries in transition, had to search for a coherent and clear (national) identity of belonging. As such it was forced to transform its state institutions and discourses and has, in response, employed nation-branding project(s) (Volcic, 2008).

Since 2007, Slovenia has presented itself through the “I feel Slovenia” national brand, where the word ‘love’ is emphasized in ‘Slovenia’. The brand identity was created by 30 Slovenian opinion leaders who concluded that the key idea of Slovenia’s identity should be related to nature and the colour green (Ruzzier, 2012). Its official website www.slovenia.info serves as a platform where the Slovenian Tourist Board promotes the country and tries to attract potential visitors by presenting Slovenia as a green, sustainable and idyllic country. In February 2017 the country was even named “the world’s most sustainable country” by National Geographic, having won the “World Legacy Award’. Thus, in 2016 the capital city Ljubljana was named Europe’s Greenest Capital by the European Union (Christ, 2017). The country has clearly come a long way to distinguish itself from the ‘Balkan country’ discourse, which was accompanied with a discourse of war and countries of conflict, to a ‘green, sustainable and loving country’ discourse.

However, the website does not only serve as a platform for promoting Slovenian touristic attractions but can also function as a presentation of Slovenian national identity. With that being said, I specifically want to analyze how the country and its national identity are constructed and presented on the official website “I feel Slovenia”, connecting it to nation branding from a critical perspective.

A critical discourse analysis (CDA) will be applied to see what kind of ideas, norms and values
are communicated on the website, what kind of information is foregrounded on the website and what kind of information is made invisible. By doing that, I will try to appoint certain underlying ideologies that may be behind such a branding strategy.

1.1. The problem

The thesis is based on the assumption that nation branding is a practice of selection and idealization, whereas certain images are selected with the purpose of commodification of a nation. Therefore, the problem I want to emphasize in my research is that nation branding can select a specific image of a country that usually serves as a commodity to attract specific audiences and does not necessarily represent the whole image of a certain country. For example, Slovenia attempted (and still attempts) to reinforce the imagery of historically and culturally being a part of a ‘civilized’ western Europe by emphasizing its ‘distinctive, strong, historical Central European character’, Habsburg heritage, Alpine associations and contiguity with Austria and Italy. By doing that the country attempts to distance itself from belonging to ‘the Balkans’, which are still often defined as barbaric and undemocratic regions (Volcic, 2008). As I argue that nations and national identities are discursively constructed as brands with an aim to compete in the global environment, I want to reveal the underlying ideology that might lie beneath the mentioned choice of nation branding. For that, the study employs a qualitative method of Critical Discourse Analysis, since such a method does not only study linguistic units but rather complex social phenomena (Wodak et al., 2009), or at least puts the language in a social context. Furthermore, it also aims to expose ideological strategies that are often hidden in texts (Machin & Mayr, 2012) in order to show how language is part of power.

1.2. Aim and research questions

Focusing on a critical discourse perspective, the thesis examines the content of “I feel Slovenia” website to study how it presents Slovenia as a country and furthermore constructs its national identity.

The aim of this research is to explore nation branding in Slovenia and analyze how the country and its national identity are presented and constructed on the official website “I feel Slovenia”. Slovenia is clearly promoting itself as a green country surrounded by natural beauty, but is this all that Slovenia is or are there some things about the country that are salient and left behind?

The study will attempt to answer one overarching question, which is:

**Q:** How is Slovenia (and its national identity) presented on the website “I feel Slovenia”?
To specify the above question, the thesis will also employ two sub questions:

a) What information is being foregrounded and is visible on the website, what kind of values, ideas and norms are promoted and what is being omitted?

b) What kind of ideology and interests are promoted through these discourses?

### 1.3. The purpose of the thesis

Nation branding seeks to create an appealing image of a country through communicating and presenting selected and idealized images and values. With the thesis I therefore want to examine what kind of ideas, norms and values are communicated on the website – what is foregrounded and therefore visible, and what is being excluded. This will be done with the idea of power relations in mind, to try to appoint certain underlying ideologies that may be behind such a branding strategy. The thesis therefore seeks to contribute to the field of media and communication studies since it does not contain many studies on nation branding, as will be evident in the chapter about previous research.

### 1.4. Structure of the thesis

Above I have introduced my topic as well as the aim of the study. Further on, I will first give some background information about Slovenia and its branding strategy and furthermore present its existing nation brand “I feel Slovenia”. This background information helps to clarify the case which this study is based on.

Afterwards, in the third chapter, I will present the summary of a previous research which was conducted in a similar field of study. Thereby, my focus lies on studies that dealt with the concepts of national identity construction, more specifically national identity in Slovenia and national identity in connection with nation branding. Next, I will present studies that deal with nation branding specifically in the transition countries of Central and Eastern Europe. And at the end of the chapter, knowledge gaps are presented as well as the potential contribution of my master thesis to the current area of research.

The fourth chapter presents the theoretical frame and concepts that were employed in this study. I firstly draw on concepts of nationalism, nation and national identity and furthermore present the concept of nation branding (in relation to the media). Moreover, I connect nation branding to the concept of commodification and lastly present the concepts of selection and idealization.

To continue, the fifth chapter presents the methodological standpoint of the study which employs a qualitative method of critical discourse analysis. It begins with a presentation of the qualitative method of critical discourse analysis to further on understand the notions of
discourse, ideology and power. It then continues with the presentation of the material, the overview of the selected website as well with the presentation of the selection criteria for the analyzed texts. Finally, the chapter presents the analytical approach of the research as well as the quality of the study.

Next, the sixth chapter reveals the analysis of the study with its results and lastly, the final chapter presents the summary and conclusion of the study as well as it gives some suggestions for future research.

2. Slovenia and the nation brand “I feel Slovenia”

Firstly, I give some background information about Slovenia which is important for understanding the choices that were made for Slovenian nation branding from a historical, political and social context. And secondly, I present the nation brand “I feel Slovenia” which has been in use since 2007 to promote the country at home and especially abroad.

2.1. Brief overview of Slovenia

Slovenia is a young country even though its territory has a very long history. It has been independent since June 25 1991, when it separated from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia after a short, 10-day war of independence. It was the only republic whose independence from former Yugoslavia remained almost bloodless (Volcic, 2008). In January 1992 Slovenia was recognized as an independent country by the European Union and by United Nations in May 1992 (Government Communication Office, 2013).

Slovenian ancestors were known as ‘the Slavs’, who came to the area of present-day Slovenia in the 6th century. They migrated from the area of Carpathians in the 6th century and in the 7th century founded Carantania, the oldest known Slavic state, which did not last long. Up until the 20th century Slovenia was ruled by foreigners, mostly by the Habsburgs or the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. This was the period when Slovenian people emerged as a nation and forged their own identity, despite oppression and sustained pressure to assimilate. After the First World War Slovenia became part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and then later part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia after the Second World War. After living under foreign rule for almost all its history, Slovenians had built a consensus for an independent future and voted for independence from Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the 1990 plebiscite (Slovenian Tourist Board, 2017).

Today, Slovenia is a small Central European country that lies on the “sunny side of Alps”, surrounded by the Adriatic Sea, Dinaric Karst and Pannonian valley. It is bordered by four countries – Austria to the north, Hungary to the east, Croatia to the south and Italy to the west. It has been a member of the European Union and NATO since 2004, and it is often seen
as a “bridge” between the Balkans and the rest of the Europe, based on its connection with both sides (Lindstrom, 2003). The Slovenian population of just two million people lives on a little more than 20,000 square kilometres. The capital of the country is Ljubljana and the official language is Slovenian. The Slovenian language has a special historical significance in the country since the common language together with the people’s culture was the reason Slovenians survived as a nation when they were under foreign rule (Slovenian Tourist Board, 2017).

The country is a democratic republic and a social state governed by the rule of law. It is represented by the president of the republic, who is also the commander-in-chief of Slovenian armed forces. The government of Slovenia is the executive and supreme body of state administration and the Parliament of Slovenia (consisting of 90 members that are elected every four years) acts as the legislative authority (Government Communication Office, 2013).

After the transition from the so-called communist block, Slovenia had to transform from a socialist-regime to a democratic one and transform its centrally planned economy into a free market economy. Even though the country was long seen as one of the best performing countries to go through the transition it was dragged into a deep recession by the European financial crisis in 2012 (Prijon, 2012). That year dissatisfaction with the economic and social situation and especially the ruling political elites initiated huge protests in several Slovenian cities. The citizens went to the streets and demanded the resignation of Slovenian politicians in government, because the social elite had more or less not changed since 1945 (Zavratnik & Kurnik, 2013).

Today, the country is still facing problems regarding the economic and political systems, civil society, etc. (Prijon, 2012). For example, the unemployment rate remains quite high (with a big population ageing impact), there is inequality within income (OECD, 2015) and corruption remains one of the most serious social problems in the country (Fedran et al, 2015).

2.2. “I feel Slovenia” nation brand

As in many other countries, the Slovenian government recognized the importance of building a strong country brand that does not only require finding a new slogan or logo but more importantly requires defining the essence of the country brand by developing the elements of Slovenian identity. Even though Slovenia was a part of former Yugoslavia, it always felt a stronger connection to Central European countries than to the Balkan ones. After gaining its independence, Slovenian brand developers focused even more on distinguishing Slovenia.
from the “Balkan” notion and promoting itself more as a country of Central Europe (Hall, 2002).

The name of today’s Slovenian nation brand is “I feel Slovenia”, with the internal word “love” emphasized in “Slovenia”. Such a slogan was meant to invoke the natural senses and feelings that only Slovenian people have to share (Volcic & Andrejevic, 2011). The brand developers wanted to show that the country should not be encapsulated only by an image but should be felt and experienced as well. This is what should differentiate Slovenia’s brand from nation brands of other countries (Pristop, 2007). The brand was meant to be used by the government as well as the non-governmental sector to promote Slovenia, both to domestic and foreign audiences. Since the word play of the slogan only works in English it can already be clear that the campaign has more of an international focus (Volcic & Andrejevic, 2011).

The nation brand was developed and implemented at the end of 2007, choosing the Government Communication Office as the manager and guardian of the brand. It was the first systematic branding process adopted in the short history of Slovenia whose purpose was both to create a new national image for external consumption and to revive national unity and pride within the country (Ruzzier & Petek, 2012a; Volcic & Andrejevic, 2011). Before that, Slovenia did not have a coordinated national brand, even though national elites wanted to create one for several years (Volcic, 2008; Volcic & Andrejevic, 2011). Furthermore, Slovenia was chosen to be president of the European Union for the period from January until July 2008, which served as an additional push to create a recognizable country brand. The brand was built for the whole country and not solely for its tourism purposes. It included key areas of Slovenia, such as economy, tourism, culture, science, sports, state and the civic sphere. In order to gain important feedback on its development, all influential stakeholders were invited to actively participate in the brand development: opinion leaders from key areas, representatives of key areas, and the largest stakeholder group - the residents of Slovenia (Ruzzier & Petek, 2012b).

The “I feel Slovenia” brand was developed using the place identity model, which contains six identity elements: mission, vision, values, personality, distinguishing preferences and benefits (Ruzzier et al., 2015). The identity elements pointed out during the “I feel Slovenia” brand development clearly indicated the necessity of including the colour green, nature and natural concepts in the Slovenian nation brand (Ruzzier & Petek, 2012a). The green colour forms the core of the Slovenian brand identity because Slovenians feel very close to nature and its landscape. Therefore, “I feel Slovenia” now represents a nation brand where the sustainability concept is incorporated as the main branding idea in a country brand (Ruzzier et al., 2015). It was very important for Slovenia to create its own identity, because if small and unrecognizable countries (such as Slovenia) do not do that, other countries have the power to
craft a stereotypical image for it – which can lead to limited foreign investment (Volcic, 2008).

Today, the brand is presented through different communication channels – in traditional media (e.g. print media, radio, TV, brochures and posters) as well as in new media (e.g. the website and social media channels).

The website of the brand, www.slovenia.info, which will serve as a platform for this study's analysis, was established in 2008 with the aim to promote the nation brand of Slovenia.

Furthermore, the nation brand is active on social media as well, such as on Facebook page (Feel Slovenia) with a rank of 4.6 stars and almost 404,000 likes, Twitter account (@SloveniaInfo) with 13.2K tweets and Instagram account (Feel Slovenia) with 56.6K followers. Next to that, the brand also communicates through their Pinterest and LinkedIn pages as well as through the YouTube channel and TripAdvisor page.

3. Previous research

This section contains studied previous research based on two main research areas: national identity and nation branding. In the beginning, different studies about the national identity construction are presented, further on focusing specifically on Slovenian national identity. Next, I mention studies that explore the connection between national identity and nation branding. Moreover, I present studies that deal with the topic of nation branding, furthermore focusing on the ones that deal with nation branding in transition countries (of Central and Eastern Europe).

At the end, knowledge gaps of the studied research are presented as well as the positioning and potential contribution of my master thesis to the current area of research.

3.1. Nations, nationalism and national identity construction

There has been quite a lot of research done on nations, nationalism and national identity construction. The essential contribution on nations and nationalism was presented by Anderson (1983), who explained that a nation is a social construct, imagined by people who can identify with that exact group. That national identity is a collective phenomenon was argued by Smith (1999) as well, whereas he was more concerned with the political consequences of different kinds of national identity, their potential for the proliferation of ethnic conflicts and the chances of superseding the identities and ideologies that give rise to such endemic instability. Similarly, Hall (1997) described nations not only as political formations but also as ‘systems of cultural representation’.
Important work for my research, since I am also interested in what kind of ideology and (political) interests lie beneath the Slovenian nation brand, was presented by Wodak, De Cillia, Reisigl and Liebhart in 2009, scholars who linked Van Dijk’s and Fairclough’s work with the discourse of national identity in Europe with particular attention given to Austria. The authors used the methodology of the Vienna School of Discourse Analysis to study the linguistic strategies in the construction of national identity. They collected and examined different data (such as commemorative speeches by politicians, interviews with focus groups and individuals, media texts, etc.). They recognized the state and the culture as the main aspects in Austrian identity construction, however they found no relationship in what individuals and what those in power think about what being Austrian means.

Because there have been a lot of different debates and theories about nations and nationalism from scholars from different academic areas, Delanty & Kumar (2006) presented a volume where they brought together the diversity of theoretical approaches within different disciplines (such as political, social, and cultural theory) from around the world. They divided the book into three sections that involved emerging themes – from modernity to memory, migration and genocide and the diversity of nationalisms from around the globe.

3.2. Slovenian national identity

The fundamental study for my research to understand Slovenian national identity was presented by Ana Kučan in 2007. In her study, she encountered the problem of defining the identity of the landscape in Slovenia. She approached this problem in three ways – firstly she reviewed the historical evolution of the Slovenian ethnic identity and Slovenian national identity. Then she analyzed the pictorial advertising material with which she aimed to discern the ‘national’ components of the visual communication in tourist, commercial and political propaganda between 1945 and 1995. And finally, a public opinion survey was conducted to confirm the immediate recognition of these components by the general populace. Her research revealed that in Slovenia landscape identity is related to the concept of the nation whereas the national identity is bound to the environment – to specific landscapes and to an idealized landscape type. These selected places then appear as representatives of the whole, which is unrealistic since they can blind us to serious problems in the environment.

Furthermore, because being part of Yugoslavia was such a big part of Slovenian history, Lindstrom (2003) wanted to examine how Slovenia (and Croatia in this case) framed their “return to Europe” after the breakup of Yugoslavia. Based on Todorova’s framework of “Balkanism” she examined how the leaders of these two countries sought recognition as belonging to Europe by defining their respective national identities in opposition to Balkan or Yugoslav ones.
3.3. National identity in connection to nation branding

Some practitioners saw a very strong connection between national identity and nation branding. One of them was Aronczyk (2013), who understood nation branding as the creation and communication of national identity using tools, techniques, and expertise from the world of corporate brand management.

Moreover, one of the most recent articles that explored how nation branding constructs and promotes national identity was presented by Ståhlberg and Bolin (2016), who argued that nation branding is not a democratic procedure of constructing nationality but rather a practice motivated and pursued by concerns of the market. They analyzed how the branded nation qualitatively differs from earlier forms of imagined communities by focusing on the tension between inward- and outward-directed dimensions of nation branding. Nation branding during the political unrest in Ukraine served as a case study where the authors argued that nation branding can only be conducted in times of social harmony. They concluded that collective identity is not the main issue when branding a nation but rather understand the second as a form of cosmopolitanism imagination.

3.4. Nation Branding

Despite the short history of the phenomenon, nation branding has attracted a number of scholars. Firstly, Kaneva’s (2011) work is fundamental for this study, for the understanding of the nation branding concept from a critical perspective. In her review article, she discussed the existing research on nation branding, arguing for an expanded critical research agenda on this topic. Her study begins with an overview of scholarly writings on the topic that is based on 186 sources from different areas, which she divided into three categories: technical-economic, political and cultural. Finally, she proposed a conceptual map which identified four types of research orientations across disciplines – firstly, with the vertical continuum she refers to the underlying position of the research toward processes of marketization. Kaneva labelled this continuum consensus/dissensus, which refers to the positioning of research in relation to social power. And secondly, with the horizontal continuum she refers to the premises of the research about the nature of national identities, which she labelled essentialism/constructivism and it refers to a study’s theoretical assumptions about the nature of nationhood. Based on Kaneva’ conceptual map of nation branding research I place my study within consensus/essentialist orientation, since I view nation branding in Slovenia as a form of persuasion that employs the tools of marketing communication with the main purpose of “representing” national identities to specific audiences, in this case namely foreign audiences – tourists.

Next, one of the comprehensive texts that demonstrate why nations are embracing the
principles of brand management was presented by Dinnie in 2008, where he explains how the concepts and techniques of branding can be adapted to the context of nations instead of only products or services. Furthermore, Varga (2013) argued that nation branding does not target external markets but is seen as an implicit cultural policy that is inner-oriented and targets the citizens of the national state. By doing that, it transforms the nation and legitimizes a neoliberal social order.

The most similar idea of research to mine was presented within the master thesis of Ana Zamora Barberá in 2016, who explored the construction of Spain through nation branding on the website Marca España. She explored the notion of nation branding as ideologically loaded in media discourse. Even though our research ideas can be seen as fairly similar, there are some major differences. Firstly, the cases are different since we focus on Spain and Slovenia, which are countries that are extremely different from each other and do not share any similarities in terms of culture, tradition or language. Furthermore, our focus is different, Zamora Barberá focuses on how Spain is constructed from a media approach and I focus more on connecting nation branding to the theories of commodification, selection and idealization.

3.5. Nation branding in transition countries of Central and Eastern Europe

Quite a lot of scholars that were interested in nation branding focused furthermore on transition countries (of Central and Eastern Europe) as these countries had to put themselves on the world map as new, independent countries free from nation-states under communist regime. Szondi (2007) for example observed nation brands from transitional countries in Central and Eastern Europe but further on concentrated his research on countries that joined the European Union in 2004. He argued that developing coherent and comprehensive nation brands is of vital importance for transition countries as branding can contribute to the success of transition. Similarly, Jansen (2008) studied the rise of nation branding as a commercial practice at the end of the Cold War, focusing on the “Brand Estonia” initiative, which was part of Estonia’s effort to project a new vision of itself to potential investment partners, tourists, and its own population. She argued that nation branding movements are a product of neoliberalism that privileges economic relations.

In her dissertation Kania-Lundholm (2012) tried to understand how the concepts of nationalism and patriotism are related to each other by problematizing nation-branding as an “updated” form of nationalism. She discursively analyzed the processes of national reproduction and re-definition in an online, post-socialist context. Her analyses included letters, articles and comments from Polish portals where she tried to examine the role of citizens in the re-branding of Poland’s nation brand online.
Some scholars have focused more on countries that were part of Yugoslavia. Already in 2002, Hall presented a paper where he examined the development of national brands for former Yugoslavian states and focused on the relationship between national identity and tourism promotion. For him, Yugoslavia had a successful tourism industry and was acknowledged with a positive image which changed after 1989 when the political conflicts arose and destroyed the unitary image of Yugoslavia. He examined how the new independent states branded themselves to establish a new identity and put their communist past behind them.

Volcic (2008) similar to Kania-Lundholm, who focused on Poland, was interested in how the “new” nation-states of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro and Macedonia used the Internet to create and represent self-images for the world. She explained that governmental websites frame these nation-states as ‘brands’ and argued that that these stereotypical, branded, packaged, commoditized self-representations are constructed within the context of global capitalism – but they start to function as a commercialized identity only to be sold to powerful global cultural and political actors. She concluded that online nation-branding should be understood as problematic, because it adopts economic models for the governance of nations where political discourses are replaced by discourse about economics. I found this article useful, especially for understanding Slovenia’s way of nation branding from a historical perspective.

Furthermore, Vitic and Ringer (2007) examined the branding of Montenegro after the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Just like Slovenia, Montenegro saw the potential in branding itself as a green and sustainable country due to the rich biological and cultural geography of the region. With such a strategy the country firstly wished to (re)gain visitors’ appeal, to furthermore distinguish itself from its competitors in the Mediterranean and lastly, and most importantly, to overcome a negative imagery of belonging to the Balkans.

Moreover, in 2011, Volcic and Andrejevic presented a study, where they again argued that the nation branding trend serves as a technique of governance in the global capitalism era. They analyzed the case of Slovenia as it represents a new nation-state in political and economic transition. They concluded that nation branding in the case of Slovenia represented a shift from official, state propaganda to reliance on a commercial campaign for building a sense of national identity both at home and abroad.

When it comes to nation branding in Slovenia particularly Maja Konecnik Ruzzier contributed a lot of theoretical and empirical knowledge connected with the “I feel Slovenia” brand. In 2012 she published an article where she presented the development of the “I feel Slovenia” brand identity from the viewpoint of 30 Slovenian opinion leaders. According to them, the main idea of brand identity should be related to the colour green and nature. Furthermore, together with Nuša Petek they presented two papers in 2012, the first one
focusing on the residents’ first response to the new brand “I feel Slovenia” and the second dealing with the importance of diverse stakeholders when branding a nation. Nation branding in Slovenia again serves as a case since its nation building was approached from an identity perspective and targeted three different groups of internal stakeholders – opinion leaders, representatives from selected key areas and the general public. In addition, together with Nuša Petek and Mitja Ruzzier (2015) she published a paper where they examined how the sustainability aspect is incorporated in the “I feel Slovenia” brand.

3.6. Knowledge gaps and potential contribution of the master thesis to the current area of research

As can be seen above, national identity construction with a connection to nation branding is a very popular research topic, especially for transition countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The main contribution of the presented studies is the understanding and problematizing of national identity construction and nation branding. However, the phenomenon of nation branding is usually researched from economic or political point of views. Not a lot of attention has been paid on how nation branding is constructed through media which gives room for research within the media and communication field. I position my thesis within this area with the aim to explore how the country and its national identity are constructed on the Internet, specifically on the website of Slovenian nation branding.

Furthermore, even though there are some studies (for example Kučan, 2007) that deal with Slovenian national identity construction and nation branding specifically in Slovenia (Ruzzier 2012; Ruzzier & Petek, 2012a; Ruzzier & Petek, 2012b; Ruzzier et. al, 2015), there are no studies that explore how the Slovenian national identity is constructed through nation branding “I feel Slovenia” on the Internet. As I want to see what is foregrounded and therefore visible on the website and what is being excluded I will analyze what kind of ideas, norms and values are communicated on this specific website. By doing that, I want to reveal the ideology behind such a branding strategy and also point out the concepts of power relations. Therefore, the thesis aims to contribute to the field of communication studies focusing on how the country and its national identity are constructed online. In addition, the thesis does not focus on a marketing point of view, when dealing with nation branding, but rather focuses on nation branding as a tool for presenting a selected and idealized image of a country which is done with certain underlying interests in mind.

The study should contribute to the knowledge about national identity and nation branding as constructed on the Internet. The analysis of Slovenia represents only the empirical case and therefore the findings could also be adapted to other countries that deal with the mentioned phenomenon.
4. Theoretical frame and concepts

Since my study deals with the construction of national identity through Slovenian nation branding, I therefore firstly define the concepts of nationalism, nation and national identity. The introduction of these concepts is important because I want to reveal what kind of ideas, norms and values are communicated through the representation of the nation of Slovenia, which is the case of this study. After that, I define the concept of nation branding, which is a practice that has been widely used by several countries to present themselves as brands on the global market, especially in the transition countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Nation branding is also explained in relation to the media. Furthermore, I connect nation branding to the concept of commodification, since it has been argued by several authors that countries started to present themselves as a product in order to attract certain (usually foreign) audiences. Lastly, concepts of selection and idealization are presented since the notion of nation branding usually selects an uniform image with which the country is then presented.

4.1. Concepts of nationalism, nation and national identity

Nationalism is a modern phenomenon (Smith, 1999) that has cemented itself as the dominant ideology in the northern hemisphere (Malešević as cited in Delanty & Kumar, 2006).

The nation is a complex concept that is usually understood as a form of collective community, for which individuals can feel that they belong to and can identify with (Ståhlberg & Bolin, 2016). It is a ‘bordered power-container’ which exists ‘when a state has a unified administrative reach over the territory over which its sovereignty is claimed’ (Giddens, 1985). Anderson (1983) on the other hand, argues that a nation is an imagined political community, since it consists of a group of people who will never meet or know most of their fellow-members but still share a common belief that they belong to the same community. Similarly, Hall (1997) describes nations not only as political formations but as ‘systems of cultural representations’, since the idea of the nation is represented in its national culture, which construct identities by producing meaning about the nation with which citizens of one’s nation can identify with.

For Smith (1999) the concept of national identity combines a homeland or a historic territory, historical memories and common myths, a common culture and common economy, common legal rights and duties for all its members, as well an increased territorial mobility for its members.

Even though defining national identity has been seen as a challenge (Ståhlberg & Bolin,
2016), this thesis will approach the concept of national identities with what Wodak et al. (2009) understand as special forms of social identities that are constructed and (re)produced discursively through everyday cultural narratives. They relate to Bourdieu’s concept of habitus\(^1\) since the national identity is shared collectively and internalized through socialization. They understand the concept to be context-dependent and dynamic, since it never signifies anything static, unchanging, or substantial but is always involved in a process and situated in the flow of time. Therefore, they assume that there is no such thing as one national identity, but rather that different identities are discursively constructed according to a context (audience, setting, topic or substantive content).

4.2. From national identity to nation branding

Furthermore, the understanding of nation branding is crucial for my future research. Already since the ancient Greek period, countries have been expressing their identity through their own symbols (flags and anthems), currency, politics, armies, etc. (Anholt, 2003) but it was only in the later decades of the twentieth century, when there were a lot of political and geographical changes around the world, that countries started to seek their own place and image in a new world order (Jansen, 2008). Specifically, Aronczyk (2013) understands that the practice of nation branding arose shortly after the Second World War, when state and corporate leaders started to think about the nation as a valuable resource in the growing competition for global investment, trade and tourism. Since then, nation branding has been seen as a historically specific phenomenon connected to ideological and economic changes on a global scale (Ståhlberg & Bolin, 2016, p. 275). Because of that, the topic of nation branding has gained considerable importance in recent years through many marketing as well as communication practitioners and researchers.

By definition of the American Marketing Association a brand is “a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of the competition” (Kotler & Gertner, 2002, p. 249). When it is applied to a geographic place, a nation brand is seen as “a compendium of discourses and practices aimed at reconstituting nationhood through marketing and branding paradigm” (Kaneva, 2011, p. 118). Furthermore, Kaneva (2011) explains that nation branding includes a wide variety of activities, such as from firstly creating the national logos and slogans to secondly institutionalization of branding by

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\(^1\) For Bourdieu, habitus is a complex of common and diverse notions of perception, related emotional dispositions and attitudes as well as of behavioral dispositions and conventions. All of these practices are internalized through socialization (Wodak et al., 2009)
creating (quasi)governmental bodies that oversee long-term nation branding effort. Lastly, she explains that nation branding is usually oriented at both domestic and international audiences and the nation branding initiatives are often funded with public money.

Furthermore, quite a few authors have connected nation branding with national identity. Aronczyk (2013) sees nation branding as the creation and communication of national identity using tools, techniques, and expertise from the world of corporate brand management. Volcic and Andrejevic (2011) furthermore see it as extending national interests and promoting a sense of loyalty and belonging. For them, creating a nation brand and its identity should include citizen participation (who at the same time should act like representatives, stakeholders and customer of the brand) and then using the facts of these participants to enjoin citizens to “live” the brand, that is, to perform attitudes and behaviours that are compatible with the brand strategy. In contrast, Billig (1995) has a different opinion. For him, nation branding lacks the most crucial form of banal nationalism, with which he refers to the everyday representations of the nation which then build a shared sense of national belonging among individuals. Nation branding therefore lacks the public discourse of “we” and “us” and is only “there for you”, which implies that it is only appointed to external audiences (e.g. tourists) and leaves the people belonging to one’s nation behind.

4.3. Nation branding and the media

The media plays a crucial role when creating and reproducing national identities and nation branding. The way we imagine and picture ourselves as part of a nation is in a substantial part result of the media (Zamora Barberá, 2016), thus “media representations construct, deconstruct and reconstruct the nation as a symbolic category of belonging” (Orgad, 2012, p. 160). It can act as a powerful gatekeeper that controls what is shown and what is not. It has the power to decide about what its audience will hear, see or read. As such, media plays a fundamental role in constructing the reality of the occurring events by creating manipulated images of countries (Avraham & Ketter, 2008).

Local and international decision makers, marketers and PR professionals spend resources, time and effort in creating a positive media image about a country (Avraham & Ketter, 2008). Particularly mass media is the place where people gather information about faraway places (Avraham & Ketter, 2008). Especially the Internet is a powerful tool for nation branding, since it targets the world and the external audiences have access to information about desired countries from everywhere and at every time (Zamora Barberá, 2016). The governmental websites can specifically frame the nation as a ‘brand’ which represent national territories, histories, products and citizens as commodities that can be sold to foreign investors and tourists (Volcic, 2008).
4.4. Nation branding as commodification

In recent decades the nation has been transformed and reconfigured from a political idea into a commercial product (Ståhlberg & Bolin, 2016). Some researchers (Anholt, 2003; Ruzzier 2012; Jansen, 2008; Ståhlberg & Bolin, 2016; Volcic & Andrejevic, 2011) have therefore studied the ability of certain countries to market themselves as an attractive commodity and ‘sell’ themselves to an international audience.

Ståhlberg and Bolin (2016) understand branding in its basic form as a technology for marketing a commodity to potential customers. But who are then the customers for the nation? Of course a nation branding campaign can encourage people to spend holidays at home or to buy domestic products, but more than this it is assumed that the nation’s customers are found within the international area – such as tourists, investors, trading partners or political actors. For them, nation branding is a practice of governments, PR consultants, media organizations and corporate business to promote a specific image of a particular country or a nation-state. Like that, countries are presented as commercials on foreign television channels, in advertisements or on billboards, in the printed or online media (Ståhlberg & Bolin, 2016).

Volcic and Andrejevic (2011) see nation branding as a technique of governance in the era of global capitalism. They see the nation branding trend as a explicit connection between nationalism and marketing since “it is characterized by unprecedented levels of state expenditure on branding consultants, the mobilization of private/public partnerships for promoting national identity, and the convergence of the state’s use of commercial strategies for public and international relations with the private sector’s use of nationalism to sell products” (Volcic & Andrejevic, 2011, p. 599)

Ståhlberg & Bolin (2016) furthermore appointed that even so, the governments should be able to shape their populations in a desired direction with their nation branding campaigns and strengthen a collective national sense of community - while simultaneously marketing the nation as an attractive commodity towards an international audience.

4.5. Selection and idealization

As already discussed, in the aspect of commercial nationalism, nation branding chooses to select only one particular version of national identification to present itself as an interesting commodity to a mainly international audience (Ståhlberg & Bolin, 2016; Volcic & Andrejevic, 2011). The process of selection, as defined by the Oxford Dictionaries (2017), is “the action or fact of carefully choosing someone or something as being the best or most suitable”. In Slovenia, Kučan (2007) sees that one particular version of national identification that is
selected and communicated at home and abroad is connected to Slovenian landscape. Specific landscape, to be exact. Despite the territorial diversity of the country, some places were picked out to represent Slovenia as a homogeneous territory, usually appearing as symbolic, uniform and idealized places in which meaning has been spontaneously or intentionally invested. This meaning does not necessarily originate from the physical reality of the space but rather from symbolic and idealized meanings ascribed to them. Hereby, idealization refers to “the action of regarding or representing something as perfect or better than in reality” (Oxford University Press, 2017).

At this point the influence of ideology and political strategy cannot be denied, as the presentation of such landscapes can be well designed to express the virtues of a particular political or social community. Even though the choice of ‘national’ landscapes usually starts with personal opinions it is at the end a result of the systematic action of the ideological apparatuses of the state (Kučan, 2007).

Furthermore, Kučan (2007) explains that in Slovenia, mountains, fields and meadows, vineyards and small churches on the hill are usually represented as these symbolic, ‘sacred’ places of the nation. She sees Bled as the most frequently chosen representative of the country. Further she argues that some landscape units adopted various contents relative to the social-political context as the characteristics of these places no longer have inherent meaning at the national level but rather their meaning depends on the symbolic network that determines it. She adds: “Today they are a truly picturesque example of how a certain social group uses selected components of national identification to link through them the concept of the ‘national’ to its own value system” (Kučan, 2007, p. 37).

5. Method (and material)

This chapter presents the methodological standpoint of this study. It employs a qualitative method of critical discourse analysis to reveal what kind of ideas, norms and values are communicated on the website, what kind of information is foregrounded and backgrounded with the idea of power relations and visibility in mind. This section begins with a presentation of the qualitative method of critical discourse analysis to further understand the notions of discourse, ideology and power. It then continues with the presentation of material, the overview of the selected website as well as with the presentation of the selection criteria for the analyzed texts. Finally, the chapter presents the analytical approach of the research as well as presents the quality of the study.
5.1. Critical Discourse Analysis; discourse, ideology and power

Chosen texts for this study will be analyzed with the method of CDA, in order to examine how Slovenian national identity is constructed through nation branding on the “I feel Slovenia” website. As I am interested in what kind of ideas, norms and values are promoted, what is foregrounded and backgrounded with the idea of power relations and visibility in mind, I will try to reveal the ideology behind such a branding strategy in Slovenia. And for that, the qualitative method of CDA seems like the most appropriate method to get the desired results. CDA has its origins in ‘Critical Linguistics’ and is a complex, multidisciplinary field that deals with analyzing structural relations of dominance, control, social relationships and power that manifest in language use (Van Dijk, 1993). Or as Wodak et al. (2009) explained:

The aim of Critical Discourse Analysis is to unmask ideologically permeated and often obscured structures of power, political control, and dominance, as well as strategies of discriminatory inclusion and exclusion in language use. (Wodak et al., 2009, p.8)

I argue that nations and national identities are discursively constructed as brands with an aim to compete in a global environment. We established that nation branding adopts selected images of a particular country to present itself as an interesting commodity for certain audiences. In addition, the practice of nation branding has special importance in countries of Central and Eastern Europe, as they sought their new place on the global map after the collapse of multi-national communist states they belonged to in the past.

But who decides what kind of images are going to be used for the presentation of one’s nation? This is where the concepts of discourse, power and ideology are relevant. The concept of a discourse is central to CDA. For Simpson and Mayr (2010), discourse means language patterns in the real context of use that “work above the level of grammar and semantics to capture what happens when these language forms are played out in different social, political and cultural arenas” (Simpson & Mayr, 2010, p. 5). It is perceived as a form of social practice, it is socially constitutive as well as socially shaped (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). It constitutes social practices, social relations, identities and other formations (Kania-Lundholm, 2012).

Furthermore, CDA assumes that power relations are discursive, since the analysis of language can reveal underlying assumptions which are expressed in texts and can point to the power structures in societies (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). We understand that power comes from the privileged access to social resources such as education, knowledge and wealth, which can furthermore provide authority, status and influence that enables those subjects to dominate, coerce and control subordinate groups (Simpson & Mayr, 2010). The aim of the CDA has also
been to reveal what kind of social relations of power are present in the text and what kind of inequalities or interests these seek to generate (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

The process of doing CDA involves looking at texts in order to discover the underlying discourse(s) and it is often the smallest linguistic details where power relations and political ideology can be found (Machin & Mayr, 2012). For Simpson and Mayr (2010, p.4), ideology represents the “ways in which a person’s beliefs, opinions and value-systems intersect with the broader social and political structures of the society in which they live”. For them, the language is influenced by ideology and all texts are shaped and determined by political beliefs and socio-cultural practices (Simpson & Mayr, 2010).

5.2. Material

As Volcic (2008) argued in her study, websites are the ones that frame nation-states as brands. With this idea in mind, the empirical material for this study has been collected from www.slovenia.info, an official website of the Slovenian Tourist Board (managed by the Government Communication Office). The reason why I chose to analyze the material of this specific website is because its main focus lies in the promotion of the Slovenian nation brand “I feel Slovenia” at home and abroad.

I have chosen 53 different paragraphs from two different sections of the website (“Things to do” and “Plan your trip”) as well as from the opening page of the website. The selected paragraphs of the texts comprise different information about Slovenia – about the experiences the country offers, its traditional food, its culture, diverse geography as well as its brief history.

All of the chosen paragraphs were written by the Slovenian Tourist Board and were available on the website when the analysis of this research took place, e.g. between April and May 2017. I have chosen to analyze these specific paragraphs because I was interested in examining as many different texts from different sections as possible since this would allow me to see the bigger picture of how the mentioned website presents Slovenia as a country and constructs its national identity.

5.3. The overview of the website “I feel Slovenia”

At this point it is necessary to get familiar with the structure of the website. Firstly, the header of the website contains a logo of the national brand “I feel Slovenia, which is positioned on the top left corner. The headline of the website is positioned in the middle under that, which changes several times per year. At the point of this analysis it has been “Sense the play of spring colours in green Slovenia”. A menu, which lies underneath the headline is divided into four sections, the first three combine “Things to do”, “Places to go”
and “Plan your trip” and the last section combines five options that can ease discovering the website: “Map”, “Favourites”, “Stay”, “Search” and the language options of the website. As the website’s aim is to promote Slovenia both on national level and especially international level, the website is available in seven different languages - Slovenian, English, German, Italian, French, Russian and Spanish. The analysis of this study has been based and performed on the English version of the website since this was the most appropriate choice for the validity of the thesis.

Moreover, let us describe the first three sections of the website. Firstly, “Things to do” shows the variety of things tourists and visitors can do and see in Slovenia. It is further divided into 11 sub-sections. Firstly, the sub-section named “Active holidays” is presented, which shows the variety of different sport activities and experiences that are offered in Slovenia. It is divided into seven different categories, of which two of them, “Hiking” and “Biking” also include more subcategories. Secondly, the sub-section “Spas and health resorts” is presented which gives the reader brief information about wellness in Slovenia, Slovenian health and medical centres as well as some thermal water parks. It is divided into four categories. Thirdly, the sub-section “Discover nature” is offered, which is divided into five categories altogether and gets the reader familiar with all the diverse natural sights that can be found within the country. Furthermore, a sub-section named “Food and wine” presents information about Slovenian culinary experiences as well as about the rich Slovenian wine culture. It is divided into five categories. The sub-section “Culture” combines seven different categories which get the reader familiar with Slovenian cultural events and institutions and well as with architectural sights in the country. And lastly the described first section includes sub-sections “Shopping”, “Family fun”, “Romantic getaways”, “Slovenia from a different angle” and “Casinos and Events” which give the readers some additional information on what to do when visiting Slovenia.

Within the second section on the website, “Places to go”, potential visitors can learn about special attractions, regions and cities that are worth seeing in Slovenia. The section is furthermore divided into three different sub-sections which all combine different categories as well.

And last but not least, section “Plan your Trip” is presented, where potential visitors can learn about how to travel to and around Slovenia, where are the best places to stay and moreover, some practical information is presented as well. It is divided into eight sub-sections of which three (“Getting to and around Slovenia”, “Practical info” and “Facts about Slovenia”) are further divided into several categories.

The second part of the website is the core menu that combines seven texts. Firstly, a text named “Feel Green, Active and Healthy Slovenia” serves as an introductory part that gives
the reader brief information about Slovenia. After that texts named “Slovenia at a glance”, “Across Slovenia in hiking boots”, “Active and relaxed holidays”, “An explorer’s paradise”, “Holiday fun for the whole family” and “Allow us to pamper you” give the reader some first practical information about the country and already present some of the names and images of the country’s most known places and attractions.

Under that a part called ”@FeelSlovenia on Instagram” invites visitors to share their photos and videos about or from Slovenia through the photo and video sharing platform Instagram.

The last part of the website combines sections “Home”, “Business site”, “Press”, “Media Library”, “Publications” and “Contact”.

And lastly, under that the links to their social networks are presented: to their Facebook site, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest and LinkedIn profiles as well as to their YouTube channel and TripAdvisor page.

From this wide variety of information about Slovenia it is already clear that the website wants to present itself in the best way possible in potential visitor’s eyes. As seen, the website contains a variety of different information. It was not possible to analyze everything therefore, a selection had to be made.

![Image of Slovenia's landscape](image.jpg)

**Figure 1: The opening page of the "I feel Slovenia" website**

5.4. **Selection Criteria**

Since I wanted to analyze how the country of Slovenia and its national identity are constructed on the website www.slovenia.info, I decided to include as much different content
as possible so as to get an appropriate overview. I mentioned that the content on the website is divided into different sections, subsections, categories and subcategories. My analysis was based on the “tourism site” of the website and it included the first page of the website, which comprised a total of seven paragraphs with mainly brief information about Slovenia.

Furthermore, I analyzed the first 5 sub-sections of the “Things to do” section, e.g. “Active holidays”, “Spas and health resorts”, “Discover nature”, “Food and wine” and “Culture”. All categories of these sections have been included in the analysis. However, if categories included subcategories (such as for example “Hiking” included five different subcategories, “Biking” included six and “Festivals” included three different subcategories) I analyzed only one of them (in this case I analyzed subcategories “Mountains”, “Mountain biking” and “Special festivals”). Altogether 28 different paragraphs were analyzed under this sub-section.

Furthermore, I also analyzed the entire sub-section “Facts about Slovenia” (under section “Plan your trip”), which included “History and culture”, “Nature” and “Geography”. Here, 18 different paragraphs were analyzed.

At this point it is essential to mention that the analysis of the texts presented under the first five sub-sections of “Things to do” section included only the first paragraph of each selected material, since this paragraph comprised a summary of the whole written text. The sub-section “Facts about Slovenia” was however, analyzed entirely since it included only the most important facts about the country, which was useful to analyze. For the analysis of this study I longed to include a variety of different sections that could offer me diverse information about the country, but there would have been too much material if I had analyzed whole parts of the texts.

Together the sampling of my material included 53 different paragraphs of selected texts. All of them included different information about the country with which I wished to get an overview of how Slovenia and Slovenian national identity is constructed, what kind of information is foregrounded on the website and what is made invisible, what kind of values, ideas and norms are communicated and what kind of ideology and interests lie behind such a branding strategy.

5.5. Analytical Approach

To reveal certain interests and ideologies that might lie under the choice of branding strategy in Slovenia, a discourse analytical approach seems most adequate as it is based on the assumption that national identities are social constructs. Wodak et al. (2009) define national identities as special forms of social identities that are constructed and (re)produced discursively through everyday cultural narratives.
With the use of the CDA I wanted to examine how Slovenia and its national identity is constructed on the website www.slovenia.info. As Machin and Mayr (2012) explained, by using CDA, the researcher aims to identify what kinds of ideas, values and identities are being promoted. With that being said, with the use of an analytical approach I looked at all the material at the same time with an aim to identify specific words/themes that were repeatedly used within the chosen texts. I firstly identified the notions of “green”, “idyllic”, “beautiful” “active”, “healthy” and “experience” as most widely used within the chosen texts. As such I recognized the first theme - a presentation of Slovenia as an idyllic green oasis that offers tasty dishes, excellent wine and unique and relaxed experiences for everyone. This was the absolute overarching theme which was identified in the chosen text. Secondly I identified that the Slovenian society is almost not apparent within the material and it lacks the presentation of Slovenian national identity. Lastly, I aimed to identify the backgrounded aspects and information that are kept hidden on the website and the reasons why they are kept invisible. Therefore, with the use of the analytical approach I divided the analysis into three specific themes that appeared during the analytical process. This allowed me to analyze how Slovenia and Slovenian national identity are presented and constructed through the nation branding website “I feel Slovenia”.

5.6. Quality of the study

Above we have outlined the analytical approach of this study, below the quality of the study will be determined.

Since the study employs a qualitative method of critical discourse analysis, it is clear that it cannot apply the same criteria as in quantitative research – such as validity, reliability and objectivity (Wodak & Meyer, 2008). As Leung (2015) explained: “The essence of qualitative research is to make sense of and recognize patterns among words in order to build up a meaningful picture without compromising its richness and dimensionality” (Leung, 2015, p. 324). Compared to quantitative methods that usually use numbers and statistical measures, qualitative research is based on nonnumerical data, that can be obtained from textual, observational or linguistic content (Leung, 2015).

Nevertheless, the question of trustworthiness in qualitative research is seen as comparable to the mentioned criteria of quantitative research. A relative small sample has been selected for the analysis in this study, which in discourse analysis can be seen as an advantage, since it allows the researcher a deeper analysis of the material (Barker, 2008). However, the interpretation in the qualitative research can never be completely objective and the conclusions are always to some extent influenced by the researcher’s own perception, which aroused some controversies among researchers regarding the quality and trustworthiness of
qualitative research (Leung, 2015). It is necessary to state that all the results that are obtained in this study are results of an analysis of a specific case of nation branding in Slovenia. As such, the results do not necessarily apply to other cases as well but they add to the knowledge about ideology and nation branding.

The relation between the theoretical framework of this study, the choice of its methodology and the obtained analysis show the reliability of this study since the whole analytical approach comes from a reasoned aim and relies on previous research from different scholars that studied the concepts of nations, nation branding and national identities.

To furthermore ensure the transparency of the study the presented analysis provides quotations from the analyzed paragraphs so that the argumentation's reliability can be additionally checked. The selected material has also been saved in an offline version and is accessible to whomever needs to verify the presented results.

6. Analysis

This chapter presents the results obtained by the empirical analysis, which explored how Slovenia and Slovenian national identity are constructed through nation branding on the specific website www.slovenia.info.

The presented analysis is divided into specific themes that appeared during the analytical approach. The first theme presents Slovenia as an idyllic green oasis that offers tasty dishes, excellent wine and unique and relaxed experiences for everyone. The second one presents Slovenian national identity, which is almost absent since it presents Slovenians as people who love everything and everyone. The last section contains the analysis of what cannot be found on the website, such as the already mentioned part about society, the absent description of Slovenia as a diverse country in terms of landscapes, regions, people, history and culture, and also the absence of the website being available in one of the ex-Yugoslavian languages (Croatian, for example). Furthermore, I point out that the website lacks a presentation of Slovenia as being similar to other Balkan countries and the absence of the social and political situation in Slovenia. Compared to Sweden for example, where the whole nation branding is about society, Slovenian nation branding almost completely leaves out the 'society' part on the website.

6.1. Slovenia as an oasis for tourists

The first thing that is pointed out and is made very visible on the website is the discourse of Slovenia as a green, beautiful place where tourist can come and enjoy unique experiences
without any worries. Slovenian nation branding constructs Slovenia as a country that has something for everyone who decides to visit it. A quote that captures all of that can already be seen in the title of the first text on the website, "Feel green, active and healthy Slovenia", which is a quote that is repeated several times throughout the whole website.

The most visible is the discourse of Slovenia as a “green” country which can be seen already in the headline of the website: “Sense the play of spring colours in Green Slovenia” and in the first paragraph on the opening page of the website which praises the country for getting several awards for being so “famously” green:

“Slovenia is the first country in the world to be declared a green destination based on the Green Destination Criteria [...] We are also proud that our capital Ljubljana was awarded the European Green Capital 2016”.

Due to the large extent of green areas and wide-spread forests the country is also focusing on developing green tourism since the country wants its nature to be preserved for future generations as well:

“To a large extent, the exceptional natural beauties are a gift, which, however, Slovenia is intentionally and systematically preserving and developing. Green is the prevailing colour due to the extensive forests and other green areas. Slovenia is the third most forest-covered country in Europe, since as much as 60 percent of its territory is covered with forests. Since there are only a few countries in the world that are so green, and since Slovenia wants to preserve its nature for future generations as well, the green tourism is being developed.”

Throughout the website Slovenia is firstly presented as a land of mountains and hills, where walkers can enjoy a ‘hiking paradise’:

“Slovenia is a paradise for walkers in every season of the year. It is criss-crossed by more than 10,000 kilometres of marked and maintained hiking trails. Set off into the mountains and enjoy the views from the soaring peaks, or walk across dreamy plains and rolling hills. The old passes used by hunters and herdsmen and today mainly frequented by chamois and mountain guides are a true challenge for enthusiasts seeking out-of-the-way corners of the mountains. If you would prefer to strike out a little further on foot, then choose one of the long-distance paths that cross Slovenia. The country boasts more than 700 different themed trails stretching from the Adriatic coast to the high mountains. Discover them at hiking festivals and events, of which there is no shortage in Slovenia. Take part in organised hikes,
attend a safe mountain and hill walking school or simply enjoy the wide range of accompanying events.”

Furthermore, it is presented also as a land of water:

“In Slovenia, water is everywhere you go. The famous Lake Bled, the emerald green River Soča, the intermittent Lake Cerknica, and sparkling waterfalls. Find refreshment in crystal clear rivers and healing waters in nature. Be filled with new, fresh energy”;

as well as a country with numerous nature parks:

“Numerous parks are home to a range of diverse plant and tree species in all seasons. Each park is unique due to the environment in which it is located. Explore them and they will reward you with their mysterious beauty.”

The website furthermore also promotes Slovenian peaceful countryside:

“Far from crowds and fast-paced everyday life. In greenery and peace. In intimate connection with nature and people, their culture, life wisdom, customs, and cuisine. Only healthy and fresh produce is used to prepare the delights of traditional Slovenian cuisine. Head to the countryside. Lasting impressions await you.”

As it is evident from the above examples, Slovenia is presented as a country where potential visitors can enjoy its natural beauties in peaceful surroundings. The notion of nature, greenery and beauty is apparent in all presented examples.

Kučan (2007) explained in her article that the modern Slovenian identity was created by its distinction from the concept of the industrialized globalized Europe. Slovenia is seen as an oasis, where tourists can return to nature and experience life as it was in the past, when the world was seen as a more relaxed place. Interestingly, one of the slogans of the previous Slovenian nation brand was actually named “Back to nature on the sunny side of the Alps!” which invited tourists to enjoy the sun, peace and natural beauties.

The decision for such a Slovenian presentation has a historical reasoning behind it, because as I already explained in the theoretical chapters, when Slovenia was part of Yugoslavia it did not always agree with Yugoslavian concepts and values and had to find its own distinct identity within the multinational state. As Kučan (2007) interestingly argued, because Slovenia did not have predefined territorial boundaries at that time, landscapes were the ones that were seen as bearers of Slovenian national identity. They were seen as the ones which could provide a feeling of belonging to the territory as home, especially in times of threatened identity (Kučan, 2007).
Furthermore, because of these specific and special landscapes and its rich natural environment, Slovenia wants to be seen as a country where everything that is made out of local, Slovenian ingredients offers the most delicious culinary experience for the potential visitors. As seen, tourists can experience delicious Slovenian local dishes:

“The tastes of Slovenia are the tastes of local nature: vegetables from typical gardens, grains from local fields, wild food from green nature, fruit from the orchards and forests of one of the most wooded countries in Europe, traditionally prepared meat dishes and dairy goods from pastures, and honey produced by the world-renowned Slovenian honeybees”.

And due to its rich wine-growing regions Slovenia also offers some excellent wine:

“White or red, lushly aromatic, strong, full-bodied or light, dry or sweet – no matter what kind of wine you prefer, you will discover your favourite variety in the three wine-growing regions of Slovenia. The select wines from three wine-growing regions with 14 wine-growing districts are ranked among the best in the world with regard to quality. Due to the differences in soil, climate, and cellaring methods, each wine-growing region has its own selection of varieties. Slovenian vineyards are located in the very centre of the European wine-growing belt. The belt of locations ideal for vineyards is similar to those in areas such as Burgundy in France, and the interlinked influences of the climate and the soil allow Slovenia to have a greater diversity in its wine offerings. No less than 52 vine varieties grow here.”

The understanding excellence of everything that is produced in Slovenia or made out of local ingredients can be understood as a country of origin effect, or as it is often called “made in” effect. For Dinnie (2008), a country brand has the power to influence the consumer’s decision whether or not to buy a certain product or a service depending on where it was made. If the country where some product or a service was created has a known, successful and powerful country brand then the possibility to purchase the products is much higher and opposite (Anholt, 2011). Since Slovenia is still quite an unknown country in the world, it is trying hard to present the products (especially culinary products and wine) that are “made in Slovenia” as first-class, rich and tasteful products made out of only natural and local ingredients. In this specific example a comparison between Slovenian wine-growing regions and the ones in France is apparent, since it is generally known that the country of France is famous for its delicious and quality wine culture. Such association is something that Slovenia strives for as well, to be known for its rich diversity in wine offerings. With such presentation
and promotion, the country hopes that in a period of a few years, not only Slovenian wine but various Slovenian products can be perceived as excellent and quality products.

Furthermore, Slovenia represents itself as a country of unique and rich experiences. Whether is hiking, where “the most beautiful views await you on the tallest peaks” biking, skiing, horseback riding, adrenaline sports, golf or any other activity, Slovenia wants to be seen as a country that can offer something for everybody. For example:

“In Slovenia, there’s always something new and special to discover. Venture out on an adventure-filled exploration of underground caves, explore the beauty of UNESCO heritage, set off to the mountains and get to know the friendly locals and their customs. You’re about to experience exiting new adventures”, or:

“Do something just for you and pamper yourself in spas, enjoy culinary masterpieces created by the best chefs, enrich your mind with artistic and cultural experiences. Slovenia will inspire you in more ways than one”.

Besides a country that can offer something for everybody, Slovenia is presented as a country of really unique and special experience:

“Do you enjoy special experiences? When your soul rejoices and your heart pounds. Take a look at Slovenia from a different perspective. See the landscape from the air, hear the sound of rushing water, feel the adrenaline tension. This is an experience that will change your holidays into an unforgettable life event”.

The country wants its visitors to experience its underground cave world as well:

“You have not truly experienced Slovenia until you visit its subterranean splendour. Stunning underground caves, including the world-renowned Postojna Cave, will charm you with images that you have never witnessed before. This is the home of the unique olm or human fish.”

Even the slogan “I feel Slovenia” connotes that the country has to be felt and experienced and not just visited, because only if the visitors dare to feel and experience the country will they see its true image surrounded with love. This can be understood as what Wodak et al. (2009) describe as ‘national uniqueness’, whereas the discursive constructs of nations and national identities emphasize national uniqueness and intra-national uniformity but ignore intra-national differences. This national uniqueness is usually appointing only positive attributes of the nation, which can therefore compensate for the unfulfilled need for individual uniqueness.
For Kučan (2007), Slovenian national identity is until this day bound to the environment; to specific landscapes and to an idealized landscape type. She explains that even though Slovenian territory is small it is at the same time geographically and culturally very diverse. Nonetheless, Slovenian national identity is still oriented towards uniformity instead of diversity. She understands this so-called landscape identity as a social construct which is composed of places or landscape characteristics to which Slovenian society have spontaneously (or intentionally) attached special meanings during its historical development. Slovenians identify with belonging to what such physical components symbolize and not to them as much (Kučan, 2007). Furthermore, Kaneva (2011) argued that presenting a country as a homogeneous and united image means that nation branding mispresents the plurality inside the nation.

However, these selected, picturesque and uniform images of Slovenia can be more easily understood from the touristic perspective, since tourism can be seen as an important substance in the countries that are still overcoming negative imagery and distrust to achieve greater political integration in an increasingly unified Europe (Vitic & Ringer, 2007). Moreover, Kučan (2007) sees such tourist propaganda in Slovenia as political as well, since it presents the country to the world as an idyllic, clean, beautiful, and healthy country as shown by its homeliness and rural hospitality. She further explains that this ‘cleanliness’, however, can also express many negative connotations (Kučan, 2007).

Positive connotations of Slovenia, its nature and landscapes, are dominant in the analyzed material which presents Slovenia as an idyllic country, where everyone can experience unique adventures, relax and find inner peace within him or herself. Even though uniqueness and cleanliness can present something negative as well, Slovenian nation branding wants the country to be seen as a beautiful and special green piece of Central Europe, where visitors can enjoy rich experiences and ‘go back in time’, when the world was seen as a better and nicer place. The country is therefore almost seen as a clean sheet of paper, a country without social or political problems, without diversity, without people and plurality within itself. The presentation of Slovenia can give us a feeling that the country almost does not exist and it is there only for the tourists to visit and experience it. The whole presentation of Slovenia is almost like a big spa resort where tourist can go to relax in a green environment, enjoy beautiful landscapes, restore their energy, meditate and write their own stories:

“Meditate, feel your own energy, and take care of yourself in a Slovenian spa resort of your choice [...] Selfness is a way of life; a special experience that focuses on people, their physical and mental health and good energy. Restore your energy with selfness experiences in Slovenia [...] The most beautiful green areas of Slovenian spas and health resorts are often a great location for relaxation exercises, such as a
very special laughter yoga, breathing and relaxation exercises on the seashore, walking barefoot on sensory trails and energy points [...] In all Slovenian health and spa resorts, romantic or beauty pampering, simple relaxation or the restoration and preservation of well-being with massages, baths, and saunas can be marked by special stories.”

This selected image of Slovenia is of course designed for a special target group, mainly for educated middle class people who like to enjoy life and would like to relax in the beautiful environment of Slovenia. Presenting Slovenia as this idyllic country can be understood as what Volcic and Andrejevic (2011) described as the use of nationalism to sell cultural products. They presented it within the concept of commercial nationalism – the use of nationalist appeals by commercial entities to differentiate their products in a competitive and interdependent global marketplace. They see commercial nationalism as a complementary development of nation branding since it represents a reflexive form of national identity building and chooses to consume only a particular version of national identification. Furthermore, they see the double logic in this phenomenon: on the one hand nationalism is being sold by commercial entities to gain profits and on the other hand the country brands itself as a brand.

Applying that to the Slovenian case, nation branding in Slovenia therefore chose this green and beautiful country discourse as the only version of national identification, to present itself as an interesting commodity for mainly tourist from foreign countries.

6.2. Slovenians - people with almost no national identity?

Firstly, it is necessary to state that there is no part within the analyzed website www.slovenia.info that explicitly mentions Slovenian society. Slovenians are indirectly mentioned only when it comes to Slovenian culture, where they are portrayed as people who love cultural events and socializing, and are good at languages. Especially when it comes to culture (music to be even more specific), the presented image of Slovenians is very vague:

“[...] Slovenians love everything: complex symphonies by Gustav Mahler, who also worked in Ljubljana, the up-beat melodies of the Avsenik brothers, the challenging avant-garde experimentation of the band Laibach, or the fierce techno beats of DJ Umek.”

To state that Slovenians love everything can be seen as an exaggeration. In relation to Benedict Anderson (1983) who argues that nations are mental constructs or ‘imagined communities’ we can understand Slovenia as an imagined community of people, who love everything and everyone. At this point I argue that Slovenia is presented as a country with
almost no clear identity, it is a mental construct of people without any clear characteristics. However, Wodak et al. (2009) explained nonetheless that there is no such thing as only one national identity; rather there are different identities that are discursively constructed according to the audience, setting, topic and substantive content. As such, national identities are therefore malleable, fragile and, frequently, ambivalent and diffuse (Wodak et al., 2009). The audiences of the constructed Slovenian national identity are clearly tourists from other foreign countries, who come to enjoy the beautiful nature and landscapes that Slovenia offers. Slovenian society is almost invisible when it comes to nation branding, as in the little image that is presented it is seen only as an addition to the already mentioned uniform image of Slovenia. According to Ståhlberg and Bolin (2016), who argued that collective identity is not the main issue when branding a nation but it is rather a form of cosmopolitanism imagination, we can understand the absence of Slovenian national identity as a reason to leave the image of it open for the imagination and projection of dreams of the cosmopolitan elite that might decide to visit Slovenia. This hollow image is needed in order to sell Slovenia to everyone.

However, even though Slovenia is presented as a country with almost no clear national identity, I will at this point present the findings of the analysis of the few Slovenian national characteristics that are mentioned on the website. Besides culture, stressed characteristics mainly mention the importance of the Slovenian language (with all its diversity when it comes to dialects) and literature. Moreover, Slovenians are also seen as people, who are generally good at speaking foreign languages.

Firstly, Slovenian national identity is presented through culture:

“Would you like to understand the Slovenians and their identity? Check what is offered by more than 50 museums and galleries, and the musical and theatrical institutions. Visit the remains of castles and manors, of which there are several hundreds. It will be informative and entertaining at the same time.”

And,

“In 2010, Ljubljana was the world book capital as selected by the UNESCO” [...] “In 2012, Maribor was the European Capital of Culture.”

As seen, the representation of culture is very evident on the website. Slovenian nation branding wants to portray Slovenians as people who can identify the most with culture and cultural institutions. It is furthermore explained:

“In Slovenia, culture has a special historical and social significance. It was primarily thanks to their culture and common language – the Slovenian – that the Slovenians
were able to forge themselves and survive as a nation. To Slovenians, the language and culture have for centuries represented a substitute for the lack of their own state and political institutions. Slovenia is one of the rare countries, if not actually the only country in the world, where a day of culture is a national holiday.”

When it comes to Slovenian language, the existence of different dialects is stressed:

“Considering the number of speakers, the Slovenian language has relatively many dialects and subdialects (according to a general assessment, as much as 48), which are divided into eight dialect groups. Such a language variety is the result of geographical, political, historical, social and other reasons”.

Slovenian regional disparities are mentioned only in connection with the Slovenian language (and its dialects) when it is known that despite its size, Slovenian regions differentiate not only in dialects but in their economic and social development as well. For example, the north-east side of the country was long known as an industrial area with a lot of factories and production companies. However, after the financial crisis in 2012, several companies were shut down and the area left people without jobs, consequently the unemployment rate soared and it still remains one of the highest in Slovenia. Nevertheless, the image with which Slovenia is being presented through the “I feel Slovenia” website, is still connected to selected specific idealized places, which then unrealistically represent the whole country as the same scenery and can blind us to the serious problems in the environment (Kučan, 2007).

Moreover, Slovenians are seen as people who are good at foreign languages:

“In addition to Slovenian, most people in Slovenia speak English”; “[...] Numerous ski schools and ski instructors, who speak different languages, will make sure that you really enjoy the snow [...].”

Since the Slovenian population only consists of only two million people, the official language (Slovenian) is naturally not spoken by so many people, generally speaking. Thus, it is not known as one of the world's big languages, which is why Slovenian people are usually the ones who learn other foreign languages when they want to communicate with foreign people. Plus, the knowledge of foreign languages can be furthermore understood from the historical perspective as well. Slovenia was under foreign rule for almost all its history, so it had to learn to speak the official language of the multi-state it belonged to since the Slovenian culture and language were not always approved and acknowledged.

From the above example it is furthermore also clear that no matter what characteristics of Slovenian people are presented, the focus almost always lies on what this means for potential visitors; here they speak many languages so that visitors can just relax and enjoy everything that the country has to offer. This is some sort of a pattern that is visible in this branding,
everything that is presented is done with the focus on what that means for those, who would want to come, visit and enjoy the country of Slovenia. It is apparent that those who have the capital to spend it in this country will have the absolutely best “service”, no matter what they want to see or experience. Yet again, this gives the impression that the whole country is presented like a big oasis, a spa resort, which only exists for its guests.

Overall, it is interesting that Slovenian national identity is presented as quite flat and Slovenian people are presented almost without any identity at all. Generally, Slovenians are portrayed as people who love everything and everybody, which can be seen as an exaggeration. Following Wodak et al. (2009), the respective national identity is shaped by state, political, institutional, media and everyday practice, the material and social conditions which emerge as their result, to which the individual is subjected. In this sense we can understand that in the presentation of Slovenian national identity Slovenian people do not really matter at all, since they are portrayed as so uncomplicated and easygoing, with as little identity as possible. The only social actors that actually do matter are the tourists who want to come to Slovenia and experience it and absorb its beautiful nature. In addition, the country itself and the Slovenian people only exist so they can offer the best possible experience for the country’s guests and visitors. If we return to Wodak et al. (2009), the national identity usually does not include people, but exclude them. It puts up a frame of ‘us’ in a uniform image, and everybody who is not like that does not fit in and is excluded from the picture of Slovenia that is presented.

6.3. Analysis of what is not there

Within the analysis I was also interested in the things that are hidden and not visible on the website. I already mentioned in the previous section that there is no clear presentation of national identity. The nation branding gives the impression that Slovenians are very unproblematic and easygoing people who love culture and languages, and that the country (and its people as well) only exist for the tourist to experience it the best possible way. They are presented with as little identity as possible, since the overall picture constructs only the uniformed image of beautiful landscapes that are there for tourists to explore and experience it.

Furthermore, as also already mentioned, only the most idyllic places, which represent the country as a whole, are presented and no space is left for the places that are less beautiful, poorer or not as picturesque. Slovenia is a diverse country, in means of landscapes, regions, people, history and culture and nonetheless, only one, uniform and unrealistic image of them all is presented through the Slovenian nation brand “I feel Slovenia”.

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To continue, already when I analyzed the structure of the website, I quickly realized that even though the website is available in seven different languages (Slovenian plus six others), the website is not available in any other language of the countries that were part of Yugoslavia (such as the Croatian language, Serbian, Bosnian, Macedonian, etc.). Since Slovenia is still quite an unknown country to most of the world, a lot of tourists that come and visit the country are citizens of ex-Yugoslavian countries. For example, in 2015, tourists from the neighbouring country Croatia were the 4th country with most overnight stays in Slovenia (Slovenian Tourist Organization, 2015). Even though the Slovenian and Croatian languages are quite similar to each other, as they come from the same language group of south Slavic languages, it is still not possible to fully understand each other without knowing the basics of each other's language. And that is why it is interesting that the website is for example not available in the Croatian language (or any other ex-Yugoslavian language at that matter).

Thus, in the analyzed material there is little mention that we were a part of Yugoslavia, that we lie on the Balkan peninsula or that we share a similar culture, customs or tradition with other Balkan countries. The only part where Yugoslavia is mentioned (and even then very briefly) is in the category History and culture where it says:

“[..] Slovenia became part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia after the First World War and then part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia after the Second World War [..]”

This can just confirm that Slovenia, even though being very similar to other Balkan countries in terms of language, culture, traditions, history, etc. still wants to get as far as possible from the “Balkan country” discourse and would be rather seen as one of the countries of Central Europe, which in some way connotes hardworking people and a stable economic and political position. The wanted connection to “Europe” and not the Balkans can be for instance seen through this example, where it wants to present itself as a country with a developed cultural sense:

“Slovenia has a very well-spread network of cultural institutions, organizations and associations, comparable to the culturally most developed European countries [..]”

One other thing that could not be found on the website is information about the political or social situation is Slovenia. As I mentioned in the chapter “Brief overview of Slovenia”, the country is facing some problems regarding the economic and political systems. Dissatisfaction with the political elite, which more or less has not changed for a number of years, resulted in angry citizens going on the streets to protest against them. The country still has not completely “climbed” out of the financial crisis as the employment rate remains quite
high (with an impact of population ageing), there is inequality within income (OECD, 2015) and corruption remains one of the most serious social problems in the country (Fedran et al., 2015).

This is interesting in comparison to Sweden for example, where on the official website of their country the part “society” is the part that contains the most information about the country, praising it for its gender equality rights, human rights, its openness towards other cultures and religions, its politics, etc. (Swedish Institute et al., n. d.). Of course, these are one of the most positive characteristics of Sweden and its citizens therefore Swedish nation branding picked up on them and presented the country with these characteristics that distinguish them from other countries. Unfortunately, in Slovenia there is a different situation when it comes to politics and society Slovenian nation branding has to present the country with the different positive characteristics the country is known for – in this case green nature, picturesque landscapes, special experiences and healthy activities.

Naturally, the information about the current political and social situation is not presented on the website, as it does not go with the whole “perfect little green country” discourse, with which Slovenia is presented through “I feel Slovenia” nation branding today. The information that is mentioned above would present Slovenia as a real country, with real problems and that is apparently not the way how to attract potential tourists or how to distant the country from the “Balkan country” association.

7. Summary and conclusion

Slovenia is a country that belonged to other multinational state formations throughout almost all its history – from imperial Austria to monarchist and then communist Yugoslavia. After finally gaining its independence in 1991 and especially after joining the European Union and NATO in 2004, the country had to search for its own clear national identity of belonging, which was not an easy thing to do since the country is stuck between the Balkans and the Western society.

After becoming independent from Yugoslavia in June 1991, Slovenia sought recognition as belonging to Central Europe by defining its national identities in opposition to Balkan/Yugoslav stereotypes. Balkan was then seen (and perhaps still is) as an “other” of Europe and was associated with negative connotations such as primitive, barbarian and intolerant society, whereas Slovenians wanted to be seen as progressive, hardworking, tolerant and democratic Europeans (Lindstrom, 2003). The fact that Slovenia borders more with the rest of Europe (Italy, Austria and Hungary) than it does with the former Yugoslavia
(Croatia) was also one of the reasons why Slovenia wanted exit to Europe from Yugoslavia and end the problems of geopolitical identity and integrity posed by the break-up of Yugoslavia (Kelen & Pavković, 2014).

When searching for its own clear identity of belonging, Slovenia was forced to transform its state institutions and discourses and has in response employed a nation-branding project(s) (Volcic, 2008). Back then this was seen as the only available power which can help the country strengthen its economic position, attract investors, skilled labour and lastly, possibly strengthen its collective identity and increase its self-esteem (Volcic & Andrejevic, 2011). Since 2007, Slovenia has presented itself under the “I feel Slovenia” nation brand, which displays Slovenia as a green country that offers active, relaxed and unique experiences, beautiful landscapes and has something for everyone who decides to visit it.

The focus of this thesis was to explore nation branding in Slovenia and analyze how the country and its national identity are presented and constructed on the www.slovenia.info website. With the use of CDA I wanted to examine what kind of ideas, norms and values are communicated on the website – what is foregrounded and therefore visible and what is being excluded. And since CDA does not only study linguistic units but rather social phenomena (Wodak et al., 2009), this was done with the idea of power relations in mind to try to reveal a certain ideology behind such a branding strategy.

The overarching image of Slovenia, as constructed and presented on the website of “I feel Slovenia” nation branding, is an image of an idyllic, green country that is surrounded by beautiful landscapes. The most visible elements that are selected and presented are “green country”, “nature” “health”, “experiences”, “unique adventures”, “tasty dishes” and “delicious wine”. In that sense, the country is seen almost like an oasis or a spa resort, where tourists can return to nature and experience life as it was in the past, when the world was seen as a more relaxed place. The image of Slovenia is presented as very uniform, whereas as Kučan (2007) explained, some places were picked out to represent Slovenia as a homogeneous territory with symbolic meanings ascribed to them. Since the presentation of such landscapes can also be designed to express the virtues of a particular political or social community, the influence of ideology and political strategy cannot be denied (Kučan, 2007). I argue that by appointing these positive connotations of an idyllic green country, Slovenia wanted and still wants to hide its real problems. Yet again I relate to Kučan (2007), who argued that selected landscapes are a “truly picturesque example of how a certain social group uses selected components of national identification to link through them the concept of the ‘national’ to its own value system” (Kučan, 2007, p. 37).

As such, the country is presented almost like a clean sheet of paper, a country without social or political problems, without diversity, without people and plurality within itself. The
presentation of Slovenia can give us a feeling that the country almost does not exist and that everything that is presented is done with the focus on what that means for those, who would want to come, visit and enjoy the country of Slovenia.

I wanted to reveal how Slovenian national identity is constructed on the “I feel Slovenia” website and when we look at its presentation, we can argue that Slovenian national identity on the website almost does not exist. The website lacks a section about society and in the small part of the section where they are presented, they are seen as uncomplicated and easygoing, as people who love everything and everybody. If we were to answer the question in the title “What lies underneath the LOVEly image of sLOVEnia?” The answer would be – (almost) nothing. There is only the lovely and idyllic image of Slovenia as an oasis, without any problems whatsoever, where the identity of the Slovenian people does not matter at all and the only social actors that do matter are potential tourists, who would want to come to Slovenia and enjoy its beautiful nature. Any association with the other Balkan countries is suppressed and there is no information regarding our (sometimes troubled) social and political situation. The absence of Slovenian national identity can also be understood from Ståhlberg and Bolin's (2016) point of view, as a reason to leave the image of it open for the imagination and projection of dreams of the cosmopolitan elite that might decide to visit Slovenia.

With that being said, we can conclude that this selected uniform image of Slovenia is designed for a special target group, for tourists who like to enjoy life and have enough capital to come and relax in the beautiful environment of Slovenia. Such selection within Slovenian nation brand is oriented almost explicitly to foreign audiences, since it does not describe Slovenia in an objective way and does not give the reader all the possible (and needed) information about the country.

In the sense of commercial nationalism, Slovenia chose this green and beautiful country discourse as the only version of national identification, to present itself as an interesting commodity. Volcic and Andrejevic (2011) explained, that in Slovenia, nation branding represented a shift from official, state propaganda to reliance on a commercial campaign (and the private-public partnership that develops it) for building a sense of national identity both at home and abroad. They further on explained:

As the private sector embraces the commercial power of nationalism to address anxieties over the fate of the nation in an era of globalization, the state embraces some of the strategies of marketers. To understand the imagined community of the nation through the mechanism of a brand identity is to participate in the reconfiguration of national identity as a strategic asset in the
entrepreneurialization of the populace. On the side of the market, commercial nationalism is subordinated to a “higher” end—one that transcends loyalty to particular political formations, political representatives, government policies, and even, paradoxically, loyalty to nation. Brand loyalty comes to represent, above all, allegiance to the logic of the marketplace. (Volcic & Andrejevic, 2011, p. 614)

As already mentioned, nation branding in Slovenia wanted the populace to actively participate in firstly the creation of the brand and secondly to promote it in the national and international environment. However, in reality, the Slovenian nation brand does not result in citizens of Slovenia actually wanting to “live” the national brand, which is one more reason to believe that the “I feel Slovenia” nation brand is only appointed to external audiences. As Pompe (2011) explained, even though the brand “I feel Slovenia” was intended for use at all levels in Slovenia, it was mainly used for tourism (in which context the tourism sector made significant progress) and did not find almost any enthusiasm from the Slovenian public. He continued that also in other areas (for example economy, science, culture, etc.) the brand was not applied.

I argue that Slovenian nation and national identity is indeed discursively constructed as a brand to compete in a global environment. If we look at why Slovenia is presented in the way it is presented (described with only positive connotations) from a critical perspective of global capitalism it is clear that there is a commercial interest behind such branding strategy. The country wants to be seen only in a positive light because that is how to “sell” the country to specific audiences, in the Slovenian case tourists from foreign countries. As such, the country is seen as a brand, as a commercial product which can be sold to the mainly international audience and the practice of nation branding can be therefore seen as a way to commoditize a nation. For Volcic and Andrejevic (2011), the job of nation branding is to transpose politics into the register of sales and promotion.

Ståhlberg and Bolin (2016) argued in their study that nation branding is certainly not a democratic procedure of constructing nationality but rather a practice motivated and pursued by concerns of the market. Having this argumentation in mind I can therefore conclude that with the analysis of the “I feel Slovenia” website I am able to confirm that nation branding in Slovenia is indeed a practice of selection and idealization, where certain images are selected with a purpose of commodification.

7.1. Suggestions for future research

In the last words, I would like to propose some ideas for future research. Firstly, a comparison between different countries around the world could be made to examine how
national identities are constructed through their nation branding. As already mentioned, in 2016 Zamora Barberá was interested in how Spanish national identity is constructed through the website of the “Marca España” national brand. Therefore, it would be interesting to compare these countries to each other and see how the websites portray their national identities differently. Another idea for future research is a comparison between ex-Yugoslavian countries specifically, this to see if there are any differences and/or similarities within their selected choice of nation branding, since they all had to search for their own clear identity of belonging after the separation of the multinational state but also wanted to distinguish themselves from other Balkan countries.

Furthermore, I present some suggestions specifically for the research of “I feel Slovenia” nation branding. I mentioned that the nation brand is active on social media platforms, therefore a future study could examine how the country is presented through these channels. For example, a study of how Slovenia and Slovenian national identity are constructed through visual content that is posted on Instagram page @feelslovenia could be conducted.

And lastly, in the beginning of the study I mentioned that Slovenia started to focus on the sector of sustainable tourism and was even named the world’s most sustainable country in 2016. It would therefore be interesting to focus on how the notion of sustainability is communicated through “I feel Slovenia” nation brand - on the website, through its social media channels or perhaps even through the combination of both.
References


