Strategic Brand Analysis in Destination Identity Context
- A Case Study of Albania

Authors:  
Erkan Ertörün
Saimir Suma

Supervisor:  
Vladimir Vanyushyn

Student
Umeå School of Business
Spring Semester 2011
Master Thesis, two year, 30 hp
Summary

Tourism industry is one of the most prominent industries at the moment. Globalization has been playing a big role by mainly diminishing traveling barriers between countries. This trend had brought also an increase in competition between countries to identify themselves and to define how they want to be perceived by the tourists. In this case, developing a clear destination brand identity is crucial for success. Brand identity and brand image are two concepts that are related to each other but their meanings are different. There are several studies from the demand side concerning with destination brand image. Conversely, there is a lack of studies conducted in destination brand identity by considering the supplier side. Thus, the main purpose of this study is to investigate the brand identity creation from the supplier side.

A conceptual model of “Strategic Brand Analysis in Destination Identity Context” was developed from the reviewed literature. This model guided the empirical investigation of regulators, academicians, civil society and business enterprises in Albanian identity context. In order to collect diverse perspectives, ten qualitative interviews from different fields were conducted. By conduction of interviews and qualitative content analysis with the support of “QSR NVivo 7” software, the strategic brand analysis of destination identity in Albanian context was examined. Additionally, presented theories about brand identity and collected empirical data were analyzed together. Based on this analysis, revised model was recommended for the “Strategic Brand Analysis in Destination Identity Context”. The results suggested that a comprehensive analysis including “Stakeholders Analysis” and “Tourism Competition Analysis” is required as the initial phase of destination identity formation. Each part of analysis has combining aspects, which need to be considered.

This study contributes to the literature on brand identity and personality. In addition, the study also has implications for policy-makers of tourism destinations and managers of tourism companies. While the theoretical findings can be regarded as an exploration in the literature, this study fulfilled first research concerning destination brand identity of Albania in tourism.

Keywords: Destination branding, destination identity, Albania, strategic brand analysis, supplier side
Acknowledgements

There are several people who have contributed to the development of this thesis work. First of all, we would like to thank our dear supervisor Vladimir Vanyushyn for his devotion of time and supervision. He has guided us through correct way of success in this research. We would like to thank Markus Hälgren as well for his guidance for the analysis of the data. We also appreciate outstanding supports from all the people, who have helped in our data collection: Nikoll Lesi, Mahir Hoti, Bashkim Lahi, Djana Bejko, Luan Dervishej, Ismail Beka, Ridvan Sokoli, BesnikVathi, Shkelqim Tuzi, Alma Ferhati, Ahmet Omi and Zef Gjini.

Last but not least, very special thanks go to our families who supported and believed in us during all the process of our thesis research.

Umeå, May 9, 2011

Erkan Ertörün

Saimir Suma
Table of Contents

1 INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................................................... 1

1.1 Background ............................................................................................................................... 1

1.1.1 Theoretical Background ........................................................................................................ 1

1.1.2 Country Background .............................................................................................................. 2

1.2 Problematization and Purpose ................................................................................................. 3

1.3 Research Question .................................................................................................................... 5

1.4 Delimitations .............................................................................................................................. 5

1.5 Preconceptions .......................................................................................................................... 5

1.6 Disposition ................................................................................................................................. 5

2 FRAME OF REFERENCES ............................................................................................................ 7

BRAND ......................................................................................................................................... 7

2.1 The Notion ................................................................................................................................. 7

2.2 Brand Identity ............................................................................................................................. 8

2.2.1 The Concept .......................................................................................................................... 8

2.2.2 Identity Perspectives and Image ............................................................................................ 9

2.2.3 Identity: Core & Extended ..................................................................................................... 10

2.2.4 Marketing: Identity-Based .................................................................................................... 11

2.3 Strategic Brand Analysis ........................................................................................................... 12

2.3.1 Customer Analysis ................................................................................................................ 13

2.3.2 Competitor Analysis ............................................................................................................ 13

2.3.3 Self-Analysis ........................................................................................................................ 13

DESTINATION BRAND .............................................................................................................. 14

2.4 The Description ......................................................................................................................... 14

2.5 Examples of Destination Brands .............................................................................................. 15

2.6 Essential Destination Branding Studies .................................................................................... 16

2.7 Management and Marketing for Destination Brands ............................................................... 18

2.7.1 Stakeholders .......................................................................................................................... 18

2.7.2 Tourism Products ................................................................................................................ 19

2.7.3 Challenges ............................................................................................................................ 20

2.8 Conceptual Model: Strategic Brand Analysis in Destination Identity Context ......................... 22

2.8.1 Stakeholder Analysis ............................................................................................................. 23

2.8.2 Tourism Competition Analysis .............................................................................................. 23

2.9 Concluding Remarks ............................................................................................................... 25
3 MARKETING ALBANIA AS A DESTINATION .................................................................................. 26

3.1. Background .......................................................................................................................... 26

3.1.1 Historical Periods ................................................................................................................. 26

3.1.2 From Earlier to Present Periods ............................................................................................ 26

3.2 Global Tourism and Communist Bloc ..................................................................................... 27

3.3 Tourism Development under Communist Albania ...................................................................... 28

3.4 Tourism as a Major Economic Reconstruct in Post-Communist Development ........................ 29

3.5 Actual Efforts of Constructing Destination Identity for Albania ............................................... 30

3.6 Concluding Remarks .............................................................................................................. 32

4 METHODOLOGY ....................................................................................................................... 33

4.1 Philosophical Standpoints ........................................................................................................ 33

4.2 Qualitative Research ................................................................................................................ 35

4.3 Case Study as a Strategy for Inquiry ......................................................................................... 36

4.4 Data Collection ......................................................................................................................... 37

4.4.1 Interview Design and Method ............................................................................................... 37

4.4.2 Participants in the Study ......................................................................................................... 38

4.5 Qualitative Content Analysis ................................................................................................ 40

4.6 Quality Criteria ....................................................................................................................... 41

4.7 Ethical Concerns ...................................................................................................................... 41

5 EMPIRICAL RESULTS ............................................................................................................... 43

5.1 Personal Role in Constructing Albanian Identity in Tourism ...................................................(43

5.2 The Interaction between Local People, Regulators and Business Enterprises ........................ 47

5.3 Important Strategic Factors for Developing Albanian Brand Identity ..................................... 49

5.4 Albania as a Desirable Destination .......................................................................................... 49

5.5 How the Tourists Perceive Albania as a Destination ............................................................... 50

5.6 The Competitors of Albania and Differentiating Features ..................................................... 53

6 ANALYSIS .................................................................................................................................. 54

6.1 Internal Stakeholder Analysis .................................................................................................. 54

6.1.1 Local People ......................................................................................................................... 55

6.1.2 Local Enterprises ................................................................................................................. 55

6.1.3 Regulators ............................................................................................................................ 56

6.1.4 Existing Brand Image ........................................................................................................... 58

6.2 External Stakeholder Analysis ................................................................................................ 59

6.2.1 Trends in Tourism ............................................................................................................... 61
6.2.2 Communication and Promotion ................................................................. 61
6.2.3 Destination Image vs. Satisfaction ............................................................ 61
6.3 Tourism Competition Analysis ...................................................................... 61
  6.3.1 Brand Identity .......................................................................................... 62
  6.3.2 Brand Image ............................................................................................ 63
6.4 Revision of the Conceptual Model .................................................................. 65

7 CONCLUSIONS ........................................................................................................ 68
  7.1 Theoretical Contributions ........................................................................... 70
  7.2 Empirical Contributions .............................................................................. 70
  7.3 Limitations ................................................................................................... 71
  7.4 Recommendations for Further Research .................................................... 72

Reference List ......................................................................................................... 73

Appendix 1: Interview Questions in English
Appendix 2: Interview Questions in Albanian
Appendix 3: Aspects that participants think are significant for “Strategic Brand Analysis of Albania”
LIST OF FIGURES
Figure 1 – Disposition of the thesis ................................................................. 6
Figure 2 – Aspects for Defining Brand Identity .............................................. 8
Figure 3 – Brand Identity and Brand Image .................................................... 10
Figure 4 – The Structure of Brand Identity ..................................................... 10
Figure 5 – Marketing: Identity-Based .............................................................. 11
Figure 6 – Strategic Brand Analysis .............................................................. 12
Figure 7 – Tourism Products Life Cycle in Destination branding .................... 20
Figure 8 – Conceptual Model: “Strategic Brand Analysis in Destination Identity Context” .. 24
Figure 9 – Classification of Main Tourist Centers in Albania ......................... 28
Figure 10– Abductive Research Process of the Thesis ...................................... 34
Figure 11–The Structure of Empirical Results ................................................. 44
Figure 12– Local Enterprises and Combining Aspects .................................... 56
Figure 13– Criticism Levels for Regulators based on Combining Aspects .......... 56
Figure 14– The Aspects of Existing Brand Image and Significance Levels ........ 58
Figure 15– Fragile Image of Albania: Before & After the Visit ....................... 60
Figure 16– Suggested System for External Stakeholder Analysis ..................... 60
Figure 17– Identity Aspects of Competitors ................................................... 62
Figure 18– Combining Aspects of Competitors’ Image .................................... 64
Figure 19– Revised Conceptual Model ............................................................ 67

LIST OF TABLES
Table 1 – Logos, Slogans and Success Factors of Destination Brands .............. 16
Table 2 – Essential Destination Branding Studies .......................................... 17
Table 3 – Global Tourism Growth Figures from 1950 to 1989 .......................... 27
Table 4 – The Number of Non-resident Foreign Tourist Arrivals into Albania ....... 31
Table 5 – Dimensions of Case Study Approach .......................................... 36
Table 6 – The List of the Participants in the Study ........................................ 39
Table 7 – Approaches in Qualitative Content Analysis .................................. 40
Table 8 – The Competitors of Albania in Tourism Industry ............................. 53
Table 9 – Coding Scheme for Internal Stakeholder Analysis .......................... 55
Table 10–Coding Scheme for External Stakeholder Analysis .......................... 59
Table 11–Coding Scheme for Tourism Competition Analysis .......................... 62
1 INTRODUCTION

In this introductory chapter, the authors will present a background to branding and Albania. The discussion will be conducted in destination brand identity context. The theoretical framework (Go and Konecnik, 2008) for strategic brand analysis (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000) in destination identity will be presented. The research question and the purpose of this study will be formed from problem discussion.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Theoretical Background

International trade in a globalized economy is a critical factor in economic growth of a nation (Kotler, Jatusripitak and Maesince, 1997, p. 81). The progress of macro-economic development also involves several components of international trade. International tourism, which is major component of international trade, can be used as a strategy for economic development in developing countries (Jafari, 1974, p. 237-245).

In highly competitive world economy, an enormous role is played by global tourism environment where developing a clear state identity is the key for being successful in this sector (Crockett and Wood, 2004, p. 185). This global tourism environment also offers likelihood for developing countries to leave the poverty cycle by a global brand formation and maintaining a continuous wealth-creation performance (Morgan, Pritchard and Pride, 2004, p. 29). In tourism management and marketing, Schubert, Brida and Risso (2010, p. 377) clarify the role of tourism as a positive influence on the long-term growth of small economies through various channels, e.g., foreign exchange earnings, positive impacts in investments, human capital gatherings and stimulators in various industries. Thus, focusing on tourism sector is crucial for developing countries.

Tourism industry’s competitiveness has a rising trend and calls for marketers to create a center of attention for consumer-travelers (Pike and Ryan, 2004, p. 333). This issue also has reflections in tourism and marketing researches. During the last five years, place branding has been one of the newest research areas (Moilanen and Rainisto, 2009, p. 8), in spite of great popularity of branding studies. The implication is that destinations are now in a challenge of branding. Indeed, destinations can be counted as amalgams consisting mainly of tourism products and they serve combined incentives to travelers (Buhalis, 2000, p. 97), so destination branding involves branding of these products to consumer-travelers.

Particularly concentrating on destination researches in branding and tourism literature, there are not many studies deliberating mobilizations and implementations through how local support can be analyzed and provided for a brand (Ooi, 2004, p. 108). This fact proves that exiguous studies implemented in destination identity compared to destination image. Pike (2009, p. 861) indicated three research areas, which are needed in destination branding: “destination brand identity development”, “destination brand positioning” and “destination brand equity measurement and tracking”. The sequence of these research areas also designates process of establishing a destination brand. Besides, Go and Konecnik (2008, p. 178) states that demand-side perspective has been considered by vast numbers of researchers in destination studies and there are still research gaps concerning with identifying a brand for destination. Associating what Pike (2009) and Go and Konecnik (2008) point out, brand
identity development should be investigated more in order to contribute to established theories in the literature.

Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000, p. 44) constructed a planning model for analysis, development and implementation of brand identity. Prior to development and implementation process, conducting strategic brand analysis (customer, competitor and self-analysis) is advised to present required features for planning. In attempt to highlight constructing tourism destination brand identity via supplier side, Go and Konecnik (2008, p. 179) introduced a theoretical framework for strategic brand analysis by adjusting brand identity planning model (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000, p. 44). Slovenia was the case in that research and fundamental point of the view was formed by considering the supplier side. This framework matches with Pike’s (2009, p. 860) notification on concerning research gaps in brand identity construction in relation to supplier side perspective. However, Go and Konecnik (2008, p. 181) emphasize on the need for further improvements in practical and theoretical level. This study appropriately focuses on developing a new strategic brand analysis within application to the tourism destination identity framework by considering again supplier side perspective but in different country range. For the incorporation of brand identity in marketing, Alssem and Kosteljik (2008, p. 913) explain that the identity paradigm will bridge the gap among marketing science and practice; and might provide a balanced marketing paradigm mutually referring to supply and demand side. This statement also proves that identity-based brand analysis by means of how suppliers identify their brands will contribute to both practical and theoretical level.

1.1.2 Country Background

Republic of Albania is located in Southeastern Europe, west of the Balkan Peninsula and has a coastline of 362 km. The coastline has alongside across Adriatic and Ionian Sea, where keeps great potential for tourism industry. Albania’s geographical territory is 28 748 km² and the population is approximately 3.1 million (Albanian Institute of Statistics, 2001).

The Albanian state won the independency with the fall of Ottoman Empire in 1912. After this year, Albania had passed through different types of government styles from a short term republic to a short monarchy; and communism from 1945 to 1991, when the Democratic Republic of Albania was formed within a continuous democratic system (Vickers, 1999, p. 53 – 77). While the period of independency of the country is not so long, Albanians are regarded as the ethnic descendents of the Illyrians, Thracians, Macedonians, Romans and Ottomans (CountryWatch, 2009, p. 7). The mixture of historical and political movements in Albania can correspondingly be clearly seen in the ruins of “Butrint” where Lobell (2006, p. 18) states:

“This small country is a remarkable destination for archaeologists, particularly its impressive site of Butrint, a microcosm of Mediterranean civilization from the Bronze Age through the Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Venetian, and Ottoman periods. Butrint is also unique in that archaeology there mirrors the major political movements of the twentieth century, from monarchy and fascism to communism and democracy.”

What Lobell (2006) deems signifies to country’s prospective offerings in historical and also in research standpoints. Interconnected with its special and great budding in tourism, Albania has been following “Tourism Development Strategy” that covers the period of 2002 – 2012. This strategy is also in a combination with the Strategy and Plan of Action for the development of natural tourism (Albanian Tourism Sector Strategy 2007-2013, 2008, p. 2 -
23). Principal remarks concluded from what aimed in terms of tourism development according to the strategy submit:

- What needs to be fulfilled for sustainable tourism development,
- Positioning the country as a destination in the region,
- Emphasizing on gaining payoffs after the supply of tourism product offerings.

1.2 Problematization and Purpose

Pike (2009, p. 857) states that analyzing both supplier and demand sides has contributions to branding in terms of creating advantages through differentiation, such as destination loyalty, prospective reduced costs and easier decision making process. However, one of the most difficult tasks in branding is true differentiation (Pride, 2004, p. 159). In case of Albania, the true differentiation lies in its emerging identity in tourism. Linstead (2011) correspondingly described Albania as ‘affordable Mediterranean beaches, rich in folklore’ in Financial Times, whereas “Emerging Destinations for 2011” was investigated.

“Even in 2011, pockets of Europe remain thrillingly unfamiliar. One of this year’s most intriguing prospects is Albania.”

Dan Linstead, Financial Times (2011)

Additionally, the significance of destination identity and rising tourism popularity of Albania in social media was recently analyzed by Lonely Planet (2010), “medieval fantasy novel rather than an up-and-coming destination”. Upshot in this analysis was the indication for Albania’s number one place as tourist destination for 2011. Considering these issues within marketing concept, Albania is an emerging destination brand and its identity encloses crucial functions for advanced brand enhancement. It is also important to emphasize on the role of tourism in global economy. According to WTTC (2010) statistics, travel and tourism will have positive effect to GDP by providing a crucial increase from 9.3% in 2010 to 9.7% in 2020. Conducting a developed brand, therefore, might have additional benefits for the country in macroeconomic level.

Albania’s effort for development of tourism industry is concerned with the elimination of left over practices from previous communist planning as well (Albanian Tourism Strategy, 2008). Addressing to the needs for a rapid coordination in a completely free tourism market, there will be increase in social welfare and economic performance (Arrow, 1972, p. 110). In the manner of guiding to a construction of advanced brand identity, the authors of this thesis expect that the outcomes of this study will provide feasible contributions to the country.

Hall (2004, p.116) portrays particular features for brand identity development in post-communist Eastern European countries, including Albania, and accentuates that they should be specially focused on responding through “altering market demands”, “escalating differentiation in the market”, “establishing national image in fresh measurement” and “allowing for heritage but disregarding instability in the region”. Albanian Tourism Strategy (2008) is relatively centered on these specific elements that have more priorities than others but there is a lack of focusing on developing advanced brand identity even though it was already mentioned as an endeavor for marketing the country in tourism industry (Albanian Tourism Sector Strategy 2007-2013, 2008, p. 2-23). The authors of this thesis, therefore,
believe that a strategic brand analysis, which will be empirical contribution, is necessary for the country in destination identity context. Because, the managers and decision makers conducting the destination brand might build up new goods and services (Cravens et al., 2009, p. 297) by considering the results of the analysis. The country can use strategic brand analysis so as to enlarge its brand identity in advance for building a strong brand. Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000, p. 43) also elucidate brand identity as a driving use for brand-building efforts and setting up an analysis for destination identity development is functional so.

Drawing attention to identity development for destinations, theoretical frameworks focused on tourist characteristics vary from studying socio-demographic characteristics in travel choices to the understanding of satisfaction and loyalty of tourists in destinations (Kattiypornpong and Miller, 2009, p. 91). Meanwhile, adapting or creating a model for destination image formation requires the combination of both the stimulus factors and tourist characteristics (Baloglu and Mc Cleary, 1999, p. 891). Most of the studies have been searching for image building in demand-side perspective and there is a need for further studies in supply-side (Go and Kon è n nik, 2008, p. 178). In terms of tourism suppliers in country identity context, theoretical framework launched by Go and Kon è n nik (2008, p. 181) for strategic brand analysis (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000, p. 44) is instrumental for developing brand identity of the country as a destination in global tourism market. Distinctive position of Go and Kon è n nik might ensure substantial factors of what the owners of brand propose to supply for visitors. However, Hall’s (2004) attention on specific identity development factors for the countries recently having free capitalist economies is crucial element. The authors of this study, therefore, believe that developing a new strategic brand analysis in destination identity context might provide important theoretical and practical contributions to brand identity development for destinations. Formic and Kothari (2008, p. 365) even states the need of conducting study for implementing the supply-side in further research in such words:

“Supply side instead of being an information provider, they should become a value enhancer through choosing an integrated model which increase the significance for its customers”.

Connecting with that, Pike (2009, p. 860) also clarifies three potential research gaps in brand identity, which grows all along the supplier side: “the politics of destination brand decision making”, “umbrella strategies for destination brands” and “the host community’s involvement and buy-in efforts”.

This thesis aims to provide an exploratory study on destination branding by collectively observing the exploration of strategic brand analysis and destination identity context. Connecting with the strategic brand analysis (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000) and the theoretical framework of tourism destination brand identity (Go and Kon è n nik, 2008), the researchers of this study attempt to develop a new conceptual model. Apart from theoretical contribution, applying the conceptual model to Albania will present the insights of what Albania should need to stand for constructing a brand identity in advance. Concerning empirical findings and analysis might also elicit other theoretical contributions in terms of evaluating and revising the conceptual model developed in this study. Thus, the purpose of the thesis is twofold:

- To develop a new conceptual model for strategic brand analysis in destination identity context
- To apply the conceptual model in the identity context of Albania
The research is intended for considering supplier side as a standpoint. It is concerned with receiving knowledge of what stakeholders, organizations and decision makers think about destination identity of the country. As case study will be considered as a strategy for inquiry within qualitative research, expected outcomes are to be generated in relation to marketing field by concentrating on tourism industry.

1.3 Research Question

By virtue of the problematization, two underlying research questions are proposed:

- What is the extent of applying strategic brand analysis in destination identity context in the field of destination branding?
- How can specific attributes of Albania be incorporated into strategic brand analysis in destination identity context?

As the purpose of the thesis is twofold but related to each other, the research questions are also interrelated. The first question is concerned with generating the extent of strategically analyzing a destination brand by considering its identity context. The second question refers to specific attributes of Albania in that analysis but its answer will also contribute to measuring the extent of analysis examined in first research question.

1.4 Delimitations

It is significant to articulate that destination branding through its main objective is of producing a reliable focused communication strategy (Morgan and Pritchard, 1998, p. 147). The emphasis of this thesis is relatively finding and analyzing the features that are needed for Albania in building and maintaining a strong destination brand identity. This study is focused on the managerial outlook of destination branding, as a lot of researchers have been studying demand side of this topic. The motivations why the theme should be studied from the managerial perspective are stated comprehensively in the introduction section, but also that there should be created and implemented a clear strategy on developing a destination brand identity by integrating and coordinating all the supplier sides. In the wake of selected standpoint, the authors will present only supplier side implications and the authors will leave the decision makers in tourism sector settle on how those strategic features best match further strategic implementations.

1.5 Preconceptions

While the authors of this study have different backgrounds in country context, they have been studying in the same study field, marketing. Previous work experiences of authors highlighted the significance of marketing in tourism field. This issue showed them the way in order to begin conducting marketing research in this area. The authors believe that work experience and different cultures combined with study field will produce relevant results which are valuable both in theoretical and practical sides. Even though one author is from Albania and being somewhat subjective is possible, the authors believe in developing marketing discussion from two different cultures towards forming strong objective study arguments both in theoretical and practical levels.

1.6 Disposition

The thesis is composed of seven chapters: the structure and each chapter’s description are presented in Figure 1 on next page.
Figure 1 – Disposition of the thesis
2 FRAME OF REFERENCES

In this chapter, the aim is to review and discuss the literature about branding and destination branding. This starts with discussion on the subject of branding and brand identity. After this section, “Strategic Brand Analysis” (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000), which is the main framework of this thesis, will be presented. Then, destination branding, examples of destination brands, essential destination branding studies and management and marketing for destination brands will be described and discussed. Lastly, the authors will propose a new conceptual model “Strategic Brand Analysis in Destination Identity Context” based on reviewed literature.

BRAND

2.1 The Notion

“A brand is a distinguishing name and/or symbol intended to identify the goods or services of either one seller or a group of sellers, and to differentiate those goods from those of competitors” Aaker (1991, p. 7).

This statement shows that branding is concerned with differentiation process in terms of competing with others in the market. Cravens and Piercy (2009, p. 291) correspondingly considers brand as an informative tool used for the synthesis of value offering to consumers/customers. A brand can thus be explained as what formulates particularly it through differentiating a service, product or even a destination.

De Chernatony and Riley (1998, p. 437) clarifies brand as a multidimensional tool with managers’ enhancement of products or services connected to values. Branding eases the progress of consumers’ confident recognition and appreciation of these values. By means of managers’ contribution, a brand, therefore, is composed of product(s) or service(s) getting position as a perception in consumers’ mind.

In order to describe the notion of branding, Cravens and Piercy (2009, p. 291) make a distinction among brand and product through underlining brand as a product particularly supplied. Hence, the success of a brand amounts to presenting difference among competitive offerings in the same product or service category (Wood, 2000, p. 662). It also means that managing is essential point for standing in the market in order to establish greatness of a brand. Laying stress on managerial perspective, branding involves valuable commitments (Kapferer, 1998, p. 31 – 35):

- Adequate price premium - the reputation constructs a foundation of demand with an image in customer’s mind.
- Leading differentiation in attraction and loyalty – having strong brand assures obstacles for new comers to the market.
- Attached margin – reduced risks and costs; added revenue; market supremacy.

While these sources of values to suppliers propose considerable interests, a brand also specifies equity. Present managers deal with how to improve proper relationships among brand equity and customers (Taylor, Celuch and Goodwin, 2004, p. 217). Crucial point to establish the base of this relationship is to understand the brand equity chain (Wood, 2010, p.
663): “brand description”, “brand strength” and “brand value”. What Wood emphasizes on this chain is that modification of brand strategy can be done by measuring brand strengths and values. This measurement will also help managers evaluate the performance of operations since management plays important role in brand equity. In addition, Aaker (2002, p. 8) details brand equity into four assets: “awareness”, “loyalty”, “quality” and “associations”. Aaker points out that managing these assets creates values for both supplier and customer sides. These values refer to diffusion of what the owners of brand offer to customers with satisfaction.

2.2 Brand Identity

2.2.1 The Concept

With respect to creating a strong brand, identity is crucial since it refers to the disposition regarding what the brand stands for (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000, p. 40). This disposition is for desired positioning instead of how the brand is perceived (De Chernatony and Riley, 1998, p. 421). Upshaw (1995, p. 12) relatively defines brand identity as a design that shapes consumers’ comprehensive opinion of a brand. Illuminating features of that design are ideas, images, words and associations. Thus, specifying brand identity covers several aspects (see Figure 2). Brand identity collectively means widespread aspects by sending messages across products, slogans and actions (Kapferer, 1998, p. 91). In case of any need for modification of these aspects, Perry and Wisnom (2003, p. 5) emphasize on brand identity that it is composed of “controllable elements” designed for services, products or organization.

As the notion of identity in branding is a current issue, many previous researches have been mutually conducted by academicians and practitioners (De Chernatony and Riley, 1998, p. 420). According to Kapferer (1998, p. 17), a brand can not merely be considered as a product; it reflects product meaning by defining its identity. Hereby, brand identity is crucial for value transformation to receiver. Drawing attention to the importance of brand identity, Perry and Wisnom (2003, p. 5) also claim that “image is nothing without strong identity”. Particularly, Kapferer (1998, p. 18) points out that real brand management’s main notion is brand identity, instead of brand image, due to need for concerning strategy and collaborative vision. Subsequently, it is significant to say that identity building is critical for prosperous branding efforts.

![Figure 2 – Aspects for defining brand identity](image)

*Source: Adapted from Kapferer (1998, p. 92)*
2.2.2 Identity Perspectives and Image

The role of a well-built brand identity is first to extend the concept of brand into several perspectives. However, the type and number of perspectives depend on the assistance for placing the identity in consumers’ mind so that each brand should deem what perspective(s) is/are needed. Underlying issue is that managers should think about all elements and patterns, which can facilitate elucidating, enriching and differentiating the brand identity (Aaker, 2002, p.78).

Aaker (2002, p. 78 - 85) formulated an elaboration about brand identity perspectives by designing them into four categories. The brand can have either one or more of those perspectives to reach the most suitable identification. According to this elaboration, managers should regard the brand as:

- **Product**: The focus is on product-related associations due to straight linkage across the disposal of preferences, decisions and the experiences. Implied associations are attributes, scope, consumers, consumption, quality and origin of product.

- **Organization**: Organizational attributes construct distinctive characteristics of a brand instead of product’s features. Those attributes are more substantial since they are hard to be duplicated, assessed and corresponded. They are also concerned with specific sets of product categories.

- **Person**: A brand can be root for connection with consumer by articulating his/her personality where as communication tool for deploying the attributes of product is fulfilled.

- **Symbol**: Concerning commitment and formation for the identity are implemented, e.g., visual imagery, metaphors and heritage. They are also the signs for emerging power of brand identity.

These perspectives are critical because they are sent to consumers under a complementary message (see Figure 3). The message is shaped as transmitted signals between supplier and consumer. Brand identity constructed by supplier side therefore precedes brand image perceived by consumers. These perspectives are shaded into dimensions of brand image, e.g., product attributes, benefits for consumers, user image, brand personality. Hosany, Ekinci and Uysal (2006, p. 639) clarify these dimensions as the conceptualization that generates accumulating concept of brand image. Therefore, the image refers to satisfactory termination or not in branding efforts.

The meaning of brand identity can be interpreted into different signs during communication process (Kapferer, 1998, p. 94). Constructing the identity and planning how to send it before building the brand or considering how it is received leads to have greater effectiveness in branding efforts. It is concerned with expressing correct message as a perception to the consumer. Since the message is sent, trying to alter perception with modified image devitalizes the strength of brand due to pre-obtained experience of consumer (Perry and Wisnom, 2003, p. 6).
2.2.3 Identity: Core & Extended

Prior to building brand identity, a deep understanding of the structure is important in order to enlarge the scope of identity. The brand identity is composed of “core identity” and “extended identity” (see Figure 4). The core identity amounts to sustainability when the brand launches new products or comes into new markets. The extended identity of a brand (covering the core identity), which elucidates texture and entirety, is a formation of whole elements of identity but steady and consequential classes are considered (Aaker, 2002, p. 86 - 89).

Ghodeswar (2008, p. 5) states that core identity predominantly incorporates performance and features of a product and attributes of consumers. Further, Ghodeswar underlines that extended identity, which surrounds brand identity, is formed by expressive sets presenting personality and relationship of a brand; and associations of powerful symbols. Brand identity, therefore, covers both principal and comprehensive elements of organization and its products.
or services. Moreover, feasible durability and continuity are provided by identical points of brand (Kapferer, 1998, p. 91). In case of any change or movement, imperative branding strategies are better conducted with deeper analyses of brand identity.

2.2.4 Marketing: Identity-Based

In current business environment, identity-based marketing serves revaluation of the organization all the way through having a good image by providing several contributions to the brand and its products (Maguire, 2002, p. 1). The identity-oriented marketing helps the brand management overlap the perspectives of brand owner (identity) and the perceptions of consumers about the brand (image). Therefore, consumer behavior is important to practitioners and researchers for deep understanding of what is/are demanded and why. Solomon (2002, p. 5) describes consumer behavior as a study concentrating on progression related to individuals’ or groups’ selection, purchase, usage or dispose of products, services and experiences. As consumer behavior is concerned with meeting needs and wishes, Solomon clarifies that there are effects on consumers prior to purchase. However, Alsem and Kosteljik (2008, p. 910) states that current marketing theory, where consumer behavior takes place, has essential inconsistency appealing to the absence of identity in case of hierarchical meanings adhering to marketing. For the aim of having desirable image with great confidence in consumer side, brand identity should also be managed and understood by serving the differentiation factors of the brand in the market (Maguire, 2002, p. 4).

In order to highlight driving effect of brand identity, Alsem and Kosteljik (2008, p. 911) introduced a “new marketing paradigm” with some adjustments (see Figure 5). Indeed, new paradigm is concerned with constructing a guide by representing how to balance among identity characteristics and consumer needs for building brand identity. Hence, they clarified “identity based marketing” into two essential standpoints: “supplier side” and “demand side”.

![Figure 5 – Marketing: Identity-Based](image)

**Sources:** Adapted from Alsem and Kosteljik (2008, p. 911)

Supplier side, which is main representative, has controllable features of resources. Therefore, measuring only attitudes and perceptions of consumers does not show the way of right concept in marketing (Alsem and Kosteljik, 2008, p. 910). Perry and Wisnom (2003, p. 23) even emphasizes on that positioning strategy of identity gets through both external and internal marketing mixes due to multidimensional characteristics of brand identity. Identity, therefore, should be taken into consideration as a driving concern, which also deals with consumer needs, in marketing science. Since a clear brand identity covers the perspectives of demand and supplier side, a good brand image with its loyalty will occur in the stage of end-
users (Maguire, 2002, p. 4). Thus, a detailed analysis of brand identity will strategically help the brand management to fit the correct identity with image.

2.3 Strategic Brand Analysis

On the purpose of being effective, a brand should be capable of separating itself from others in the market by reflecting its identity that needs to resound through customers. Indeed, current and forthcoming ability of organization should be considered in those of capability elements (Aaker, 2002, p. 76). In that case, Cravens and Piercy (2009, p. 298) proposed “Strategic Brand Analysis” which consists of “market and customer”, “competitor” and “brand” analysis. This analysis considers that analyzing the brand is crucial since a brand might have a particular product, several products, a product line or portfolio of product lines. As brand reflects all dimensions, the identity should be analyzed in strategic level.

Additionally, Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000, p. 44) established “Strategic Brand Analysis” (see Figure 6) which is emphasized a lot in branding studies (De Chernatony and Riley, 1998; Ghodeswar, 2008; Go and Konecnik, 2008; Pike, 2009). This analysis facilitates to figure out insights of the customers, competitors and the brand by covering needful aspects for building identity of a commercial brand. Compared to Cravens and Piercy’s framework, the authors of this thesis believe that Aaker and Joachimsthaler’s analysis is more suitable for conducting a research of identity in branding. First, the analysis is assumed as an initial step for brand identity planning and then the concern passes through development and implementation of identity. This issue makes the systematic approach visible in this analysis. Second, the analysis fits better in practical field because it encloses brand identity characteristics in well-structured way by considering possible perspectives - product, organization, person and symbol (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000, p. 44).

![Figure 6 – Strategic Brand Analysis](image)

*Source: Adapted from Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000, p. 44)*

In strategic brand analysis (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000), set of brand associations are analyzed in order to build up apparent and prosperous brand identity. According to Ghodeswar (2008, p. 5), those associations are significant because:
- Some customers might perceive different benefits so, obtaining emotional value help for differentiation in the rivalry,
- Brand associations are also related to understanding the competitors in order to see conditions,
- Measuring strengths and weaknesses of brand illustrates beliefs and values which are hardest to be duplicated by others.

2.3.1 Customer Analysis

Aaker (2002, p. 191) clarifies the analysis of customers into four categories: “trends”, “unmet needs”, “motivation” and “segmentation”. According to this categorization, understanding the insights and conceptions of customers is essential point for development of marketing strategy. As Cravens and Piercy (2009, p. 52) states, the existence of market happens if there are customers buying goods or services, which are provided to suit needs. This issue also indicates that building marketing strategy for competitive force should be concerned with focusing on customer needs. While the benefits of a product or service are valuable in the market, they should relatively contain the needs articulating demand (Cravens and Piercy, 2009, p. 52). Solomon (2002, p. 6) also emphasizes on that ensuring information about customers should be integrated into features of marketing plans. Hence, collected facts with reference to customers will help out.

2.3.2 Competitor Analysis

In marketing actions, the need for observing, understanding and countering to competitors has been crucial issue (Nwokah, 2009, p. 21). While the image and position of brand are related to serious subjects in case of present certainty, outstanding spots are also to face with prospect measures in the analysis of competitors (Aaker, 2002, p. 193): “brand image/identity”, “vulnerabilities”, “strengths”, “strategies” and “positioning”. Competing brands’ impact is now much more powerful due to higher substitutability and greater straight effects to the rivalry (Cravens and Piercy, 2009, p. 53). The focal point is now concerned with strengths and weaknesses of relevant competitors as well as acquired identity (Nwokah, 2009, p. 21).

2.3.3 Self-Analysis

In order to provide strong contributions to developing brand identity, organization and its own brand(s) should be internally analyzed. This analysis is conducted by measuring “existing brand image”, “brand heritage”, “strengths”, “organizational values” and “strategies” (Aaker, 2002, p. 196). The outcomes of self-analysis (or internal analysis) mainly present connected associations, the way of perception, differentiation and former knowledge. Organizational measurements concentrating on circumstances and meanings are also included in the analysis (Aaker, 2002, p. 197). The analysis can also elucidate several results for the assessment of brand portfolio, which pulls through conducting decisions with respect to altering or removing current products or launching new products (Cravens and Piercy, 2009, p. 298). Thus, self-analysis might provide modifications on existing brand strategies and forming new brands.
DESTINATION BRAND

2.4 The Description

For current consumer-travelers, preference for holiday destination is a major point, which is associated with hardly finding time for vacation and allocating earned money (Morgan, Pritchard and Pride, 2004, p. 4). This holiday destination can be a country, city or region. As cultural, political, commercial and social operations now exist in a single global market, all destinations have to compete in order to get concerning shares of those (Anholt, 2009, p. 6). This observation is supported by The World Tourism Organization since the development of tourism destinations will be the same as fashion products in 21st century (Morgan, Pritchard and Pride, 2004, p. 4). “How interesting the destination is considered to be” is crucial aspect for attractiveness of any place and such a strong brand for destination contribute to marketing efforts in tourism (Moilanen and Rainisto, 2009, p. 11).

Buhalis (2000, p. 97) states that destinations, which have set of suppliers and services, are now recognized as sort of brands by tourists. Public administrations now consider branding destinations as an essential phase (Hankinson, 2009, p. 97) since repositioning the destination in competition entails large investment and great amount of time (Pike, 2009, p. 864). Thereby, destination branding is comprised of supplementary marketing activities. Blain, Levy and Ritchie (2005, p. 337) define destination branding as a group of these activities by dividing into four components:

- “Supporting formation of a name, logo, symbol or word mark for suitable identification of destination and its differentiation
- Expressing the expectation based on tourist experience with exclusive associations of the destination
- Consolidating and reinforcing the relationship among the destination and travelers within suitable servings
- Concentrating on decreasing perceived risk and search costs of travelers.”

Pike (2009, p. 857) accordingly clarifies these marketing activities as destination branding’s involvement in both demand and supplier side perspectives. It is absolutely concerned with different products (supplier side) and sights (demand side) for creating a cohering source for destination (Ooi, 2004, p. 110). This source includes jointly pulling the destination, providing cooperation among several organizations and motivating tourists and tourism agencies (Ooi, 2004). In that case, destination cannot be considered as a single product. It is different from other products due to having set of several components, serving touristic attractions and entertainments, consisting of constant cultural values and natural environment (Morgan, Pritchard and Piggott, 2002, p. 337). Buhalis (2000, p. 98) also points out that the mixture of tourism products puts marketing and management of destinations in difficult position during production and development processes since a destination brand reflects local people’s interests in that area instead of belonging to visitors. Uniqueness is therefore distinctive element for a destination brand compared to corporate brand.
2.5 Examples of Destination Brands

Although destination branding is popular for countries, regions and cities, it is still a complicated subject. Presenting successful and unsuccessful practical applications, therefore, will contribute to deep understanding of destination branding (see Table 1):

**Spain:** The study of Gilmore (2002, p. 281-293) illustrates the success story of Spain as a brand through repositioning in a short period. Although the country was dealing with internal political problems around 30 years ago, Gilmore emphasizes on its fast transformation to the modernization of tourism. Further, Gilmore explains that younger countries can be successful in branding efforts through being unique due to their early stages of development.

Apart from political and economic improvements, underlying factors in this rapid change can be clarified by national promotional programs, continuous growth of Spanish global corporate brands and efficient brand management (Gilmore, 2002, p. 281-293). Moilanen and Rainisto (2009, p. 72) correspondingly describes branding efforts of Spain as a success coming from conducting branding program founded on correct image of the country.

**Singapore:** Ooi (2004, p. 242-260) describes branding operation of Singapore through detailing construction of new brand identity that involves regional vision and strategy. As the competition in South-East Asia brings many challenges to the countries, Singapore launched a master plan (1996) for repositioning of the country as a brand “New Asia – Singapore”. At that point, Ooi highlights the endeavor of Singapore for being capital and transit hub in South-East Asia. Due to having rich culture and different ethnic groups, Singapore successfully applied brand identity development with investments in tourism.

**Norway:** As Norway firstly started the branding efforts in 1998 and ended in 2003, Moilanen and Rainisto (2009, p. 31-37) summarized the pros and cons of these efforts. New identification process including establishing new logo and look with a strategic plan was successfully implied as an intention. However, strategic brand management and adjusting the identity, which should have suited with the image, was not successful. In that case, corporation between public and private sector; inconsistency among real life and values; management of groups; and financial challenges were some of the reasons which brought unproductive destination brand. Although first planning was not successful, Norway is now attempting to build a new destination brand in global tourism market (Moilanen and Rainisto, 2009, p. 38).

**Estonia:** Branding efforts of the country were shaped through the membership process for European Union. As Estonia was finalizing negotiations with EU in 2002, the government constructed a marketing project by cooperating with private sector in order to analyze how the country is perceived in European market. Identity building based on European consumers was the principal process of creating a new brand in European market and therefore, the identification and image were simultaneously constructed. The results of these efforts had many positive feedbacks in media, academic field and business environment (Moilanen and Rainisto, 2009, p. 66).
Table 1 – Logos, Slogans and Success Factors of Destination Brands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Logos</th>
<th>Slogans</th>
<th>Success Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>National promotional programme &amp; correct brand image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Spanish global brands and their effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Master plan for repositioning existing brand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Identity based brand development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cooperation between and public and private sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Constructing image and identification at the same time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 – Logos, Slogans and Success Factors of Destination Brands

Sources: Ministry of Industry, Tourism and Trade, Spain (2011); Singapore Tourism Board (2011); Estonian Tourist Board (2011)

2.6 Essential Destination Branding Studies

Great numbers of studies in theoretical and practical field have not presented well-built process of destination marketing and management (Blumberg, 2005, p. 45) although the rivalry among destinations has been increasing. Branding destinations were investigated as essential studies by some marketing and tourism researchers. To the best of the authors’ knowledge, essential destination branding studies are presented in Table 2.

According to former researches except the studies of Go and Konecnik (2008) and Pike (2009), destinations were mainly addressed through their images. Previous academicians analyzed the destination images in several dimensions. At first sight, managing and marketing the destinations can be assumed as prominent researches. Since image was the focus, demand side was determinative for the aim of each analysis. Moreover, the destination image development was investigated by many academicians in case of considering brand equity based on customers and destination personality. The term of destination was regarded as a city, region or country. Although some studies’ empirical fields were single cases, plural empirical fields with comparing different cases were considered as well in order to reach conceptualizing frameworks. Several academic efforts were fulfilled for examining the improvement of destination brand image. Therefore, it can be seen in the literature that analyzing the image is trendy subject for destination branding researches. However, destination brand identity has still been suffering from not being a remarkable research topic. Although many researchers emphasize on destination identity as further research, the literature still does not cover sufficient numbers of destination identity studies compared to destination image.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author, Year</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Research Method</th>
<th>Key Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dolnicar, Grabler and Mazanec, 2000</td>
<td>Destination images</td>
<td>Quantitative study</td>
<td>Perceptual Charting for the analysis of destination images. Segmentation based on perceptual structures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hem and Iversen, 2004</td>
<td>Destination brand image and destination brand logo</td>
<td>Quantitative and qualitative study</td>
<td>Conceptualizing a framework for building up logos for destinations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kozak, Bigne and Andreu, 2005</td>
<td>Destination loyalty and ensuring satisfaction</td>
<td>Quantitative study</td>
<td>Effecting factors for destination loyalty based on assessment of satisfaction by comparing repeat tourists and non-repeat tourists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ooi, 2004</td>
<td>Destination branding and its politics</td>
<td>Qualitative study</td>
<td>Analysis of several functions served by destination. Differences between corporate branding and destination branding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blain, Levy and Ritchie, 2005</td>
<td>Destination management organizations (DMOs) in tourism destination branding</td>
<td>Quantitative and qualitative study</td>
<td>Improvement of definition of destination branding. DMOs' destination branding practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blumberg, 2005</td>
<td>Management and development of tourism destination branding</td>
<td>Quantitative and qualitative study</td>
<td>Tourism destination marketing. DMOs and their roles in management and development of destinations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosany, Ekinci and Uysal, 2006</td>
<td>The link among destination personality and image</td>
<td>Quantitative study</td>
<td>Analysis of destination personality and image. Considering branding theories with applying to destinations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gartner and Konecnik, 2007</td>
<td>Customer-based brand equity in destination context</td>
<td>Quantitative and qualitative study</td>
<td>Role of image in destination branding. Underlying issues for evaluation of several brand dimensions in destination brand equity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go and Konecnik, 2008</td>
<td>Destination brand identity and empirical investigation</td>
<td>Qualitative study</td>
<td>Importance of supplier-side perspective in destination branding. Theoretical framework for analyzing destination identity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2 – Essential Destination Branding Studies*
2.7 Management and Marketing for Destination Brands

Currently, management and marketing of branding can be considered as an imperative duty for countries as destinations due to many reasons (Kotler and Gertner, 2004, p. 45). As destination brands are composed of several complexities, Buhalis (2000, p. 98) emphasizes on that marketing and management of destination brands have many difficulties due to various stakeholders’ effects on tourism products and tourists. Concerning point here is the diversity in these stakeholders, tourism products and tourists.

Managing and marketing destinations are correspondingly different from the cases of products, which only come out of a factory (Anholt, 2004, p. 35) after controllable progressions. Since regions, tourism products, tourism services and resources characterize experience of tourists, managing and marketing destinations have several complications (Buhalis, 2000, p. 98). Blumberg (2005, p. 46) also highlights that marketing a region has been a much debated question in terms of modern marketing. Further, he explains that there is still not a clear way of how a destination can accomplish desired goals through branding. It is, therefore, significant to analyze stakeholders of destinations, tourism products and challenges in order to understand management and marketing for destination brands.

2.7.1 Stakeholders

Although the attempts of destination marketing exist to sell the destination, sustainability is crucial for all stakeholders of a destination due to supplying quality of aliveness in entire tourism system (Jamrozy, 2007, p. 117). As marketing links all tourism stakeholders, it should ensure economic capability, social assets and environmental favors for the destination (Jamrozy, 2007, p. 126). Marketing of sustainable tourism is, therefore, important for the interests of stakeholders in a tourism destination.

Considering sustainable tourism in proactive and holistic views, stakeholders’ role both in short and long term is essential in tourism due to their possession and wish for higher quality (Hardy and Beeton, 2001, p. 168). In destination branding, which should be outcome of sustainable tourism, stakeholders’ function provides concerning insights of personal and professional people in the region (Buhalis, 2000, p. 98). Any prospective strategic framework for identification should include values, concerns and goals of stakeholders (Hardy and Beeton, 2001, p. 174) because insights of stakeholders contribute to decision making, involving possible responses and influences through establishing destination brand identity strategy (Go and Konecnik, 2008, p. 178).

In terms of describing stakeholders in tourism, Hardy and Beeton (2001, p. 179) divided them into four categories:

- **Tourist operators:** They are the ones who run businesses associated with tourism in the region.
- **Regulators:** They are in charge of supporting the destination management, e.g. governmental tourism organizations and their employees, consultants, marketing organizations.
- **Local people:** Permanent residents of the region where they live and work.
- **Tourists:** People who merely come to visit destination for touristic attractions.
While the management of these stakeholders is difficult, there can be also conflicts among several stakeholders caused by manipulating resources with the aim of getting short-range gains (Buhalis, 2000, p. 99). At this point, destination marketing/management organizations (DMOs) have important role. Managers of DMOs, who are different from professionals working for corporate brands, should provide objectivity since the region of local people is in the case of marketing instead of a single a product (Anholt, 2004, p. 35). Blain et al. (2005, p. 328) also express that DMOs are significant elements of tourism industry and they aim at marketing destination to prospective tourists for financial contributions to destination.

DMOs can have many members that are connected with tourism in a destination. Tour operators, governmental institutions or their organizations, restaurants, hotels, city officials, universities or any firm doing business in tourism industry might be counted as members of DMOs (Blain et al., 2005, p. 328). Existing as units of governmental or national authority, DMOs acquire both legislative and political control in an effort to deal with resources logically; and management of these resources is concerned with providing gains (depending on satisfying needs and desires) for stakeholders in advance (Buhalis, 2000, p. 99). Thus, being important source to stakeholders for DMOs is passing through efficient harmonization and expertise (Blain et al., 2005, p. 328).

2.7.2 Tourism Products

As tourism services and suppliers are substantial in destination branding, the image is perceived by tourists, who consume destination serving as an experience effected by players of those services and suppliers (Buhalis, 2000, p. 99). It is significant to promote the destination as a coherent product, which is exclusively selected by concentrating on attractive activities and services connected to brand values (Ooi, 2004, p. 111). All parts of service, product and experience provided by stakeholders refer to destination (Buhalis, 2000, p. 98), e.g., museums, historical architectures, transportation services, foods, natural environment, accommodations, theaters and shopping malls.

Destination may encounter unsuitable management that could lead do failures in advance, so it is necessary to fulfill “sustainable tourism” instead of “maintainable tourism”, because managing the quality of tourism products is important (Hardy and Beeton, 2001, p. 168). While branding a place includes many similarities to corporate brands, it also resembles protective trust with quality guarantee that contributes to preparing potential “sub-brands” (Anholt, 2004, p. 27). Sustainable tourism relatively helps create new tourism products of sub-brands in advance.

In order to develop strategies to examine tourism products and destinations (Buhalis, 2000, p. 104), destination life cycle (Butler, 1980) is a broadly used tool in tourism and marketing studies (Getz, 1992; Douglas, 1997; Agarwal, 1997). Researchers and managers adjusted the life cycle to different formats based on characteristics and problems of destinations. Buhalis (2000, p. 105) examined life cycle for tourism impacts on destinations in order to present how destination is influenced by tourism in different stages (introduction, growth, maturity, saturation and decline). The main concern in this analysis is to assist in building strategies up to demand and supply in different periods. The role of tourism products is also important for building these strategies because they are highly affected by stakeholders (Hardy and Beeton, 2001, p. 174). This lifecycle can be adapted into tourism products and destination branding efforts (see Figure 7). According to the lifecycle, destination products are measured in the same manner as corporate products because demand and supply rates are determining factors. Branding efforts oriented toward the identification process occur in early stages, while these
efforts advance toward image modification or changing products later on in life cycle. Thus, each stage needs particular branding efforts with appropriate marketing mixes in the life cycle (Buhalis, 2000, p. 104).

Figure 7 – Tourism Products Life Cycle in Destination branding

Source: Adapted from Buhalis (2000, p. 105)

2.7.3 Challenges

Understanding consumer behavior as a process, which involves different actors, (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard and Hogg, 2006, p. 6-8) leads to understanding the type of tourism that the country offers as well as who and why the tourists visit a country for specific reasons, such as environmental friendly tourists (Williams and Ponsford, 2009, p. 403). Building destination brand is therefore a challenging process regarding multidimensional aspects of a country. Countries should position themselves (Pike, 2005, p. 258) by defining assured actions and a storyline or slogan by taking into consideration both social development and how the country origin wants to be perceived (Brinkmann, 2007, p. 419-420).

Political instability is also an important challenge that has a direct effect and is significant in tourism planning and booming tourism development (Issa and Altinay, 2006, p. 376). It is also clearly visible in the case of Egypt where tourism season is closed until a political solution is achieved (Hunter, 2011). The sustainable development in tourism is correspondingly connected to political stability.

Additionally in developing countries, government is an important factor for providing sustainable tourism by developing policies and regulations in order to receive benefits from
the tourism market (Churugsa, McIntosh and Simmons, 2007, p. 469). Moreover, all sectors in tourism industry offer different working opportunities (Baum, 2007, p. 1392). As a result, government should create jobs by attracting and continuing development of human resources in tourism industry based on long-term strategic plans by considering the human capital capabilities and services offered. However, it is a challenge because there is a great need for programs that train human resources and local residents in managing and maintaining cultural heritage and available tourism resources (Liu and Wall, 2006, p. 165).

Implementing interaction and cooperation between different stakeholders is also a significant challenge due to the link between segmented tourism factors and stakeholder groups (Hardy and Beeton, 2001, p. 188). This link is also influenced by economic interests of all community members. Policies should concentrate on deriving closer interactions between tourism players and economic community goals, including the integration of all tourism community members, such as non-governmental organizations in decision making processes (A. Liu and J. H. Liu, 2009, p. 235-236).

According to Porter (2008, p. 85), rivalry among existing competitors is one of the forces shaping industry. Enormous competition between different companies is an example of multinational rivalry in this globalized world as such countries are also competing with each other for attracting tourists (OECD, 2000, p. 132-134). This high level of competition in global tourism brings many crucial challenges to emerging destinations.

Challenging tourism development is also related to the economic development of the country where there is a significant relationship between the GDP levels and tourism demands in destination contexts (Eugenio-Martin, Martín-Morales and Sinclair, 2008, p. 682). Meidan (1984, p. 74) explains these challenges by dividing them into three groups:

- **Foreign exchange regulations:** Restrictions in the amount of foreign currency expenses of tourists.
- **Government economic policy:** Taxes implied on tourism services and airports.
- **Inflation and recession:** Degree between prices and the amount of tourist expenses.

Lastly, fragmented offerings from countries to tourists are dependent on different attractions in order to satisfy the needs of every individual visiting the country, e.g., “leisure activities, entertainments, conventions, exhibitions, cultural motions, medical or social visits and sports” (Meidan, 1984, p. 168). Thus, destinations should segment their tourism products based on offerings for unmet needs of prospective tourists.
2.8 Conceptual Model: Strategic Brand Analysis in Destination Identity Context

Ooi (2004, p. 122) states that development of an identity-based analysis, which is special to destination branding, is needed because the literature does not prominently cover tourism marketing ideas that are different from commercial approaches. Although branding tourism destinations has similarities with branding corporate products, several concerns should be conveyed to destination identity context: “public space”, “particular identity characteristics” and “unique competitive edge in tourism” (Go and Konecnik, 2008, p. 177). Interrelated factors of these concepts were described and discussed in previous sections of this chapter.

Strategic Brand Analysis (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000, p. 44) introduced in Section 2.3 was proposed as a foundation of the theoretical framework (Go and Konecnik, 2008) for tourism destination brand identity development. According to Go and Konecnik (2008, p. 179-180), there are many reasons why the analysis can be adapted to tourism destination identity:

- Brand identity development can be a tough question due to many components of identity structure and several complicated theories, so that managers can easily follow this systematic model as a guideline.
- Managers’ strategic and visionary functions are enclosed in this extensive model and thus, the analysis is not just limited to tactical and reactive tasks of decision makers.
- The model is concentrating on strategic control of brand by covering all concerning elements (stakeholders, customers and corporation) for successful brand identity development.
- Decision makers and their impacts on formulating and implementing strategies are included.
- Strategy for destination brand identity is appropriately developed by considering capabilities of destination.

Go and Konecnik (2008) adjusted Aaker and Joachimsthaler’s (2000) model, also clarified in Figure 6, into destination branding concept by changing some features. Although initial model was developed for commercial brands, they only modified elements of three perspectives (customer, competitor and self-analysis) depending on their tourism destination analysis. However, destination brand identity has different characteristics compared to corporate branding (Pike, 2009; Ooi, 2004).

Although tourism products can be measured in the same life cycle of commercial products, special management and marketing objectives are needed for destinations (Buhalis, 2000, p. 100): “local people and their long-term prosperity”, “tourism impacts”, “economic benefits”, “socio-cultural costs”, “environmental costs”, “profitability of tourism organizations” and “satisfying tourists”. In practical terms, these objectives cover the whole subject characteristics of a destination brand including tourism stakeholders, conflicts, several interest groups in tourism and impacts on branding campaigns (Ooi, 2004, p. 107). Considering theoretical framework of strategic brand analysis, Go and Konecnik (2008, p. 187) emphasize on required improvements in the theoretical and practical level:

- “The theoretical framework for a tourism destination identity should be further reformed and improved
- Further empirical investigations are needed”
The authors of this thesis redefined this framework and developed a new conceptual model (see Figure 8), which was explored according to the literature reviewed and discussed in this chapter. Thus, proposed model “Strategic Brand Analysis in Destination Identity Context” has several new features. Proposed model is focusing on stakeholder and tourism competition analysis by analyzing what the owners of destination brand need to stand for establishing a strategy for tourism destination identity development in advance.

2.8.1 Stakeholder Analysis

Analyzing stakeholders together is relatively crucial because there are several interactions among local people, tourists, regulators and business enterprises. These interactions affect characteristics of tourism destination, such as destination image; tourist experience; the number of tourists; and impacts of all stakeholders on each other (Hardy and Beeton, 2001, p. 178). Apart from initial theoretical framework, stakeholder analysis, which covers both tourist and self-analysis, is divided into internal and external analysis due to stakeholders’ distinct interactions between each other and different sources of these interactions:

- **Internal Analysis** encloses analysis of stakeholders who belong to destination. Local people, regulators and all types of tourism organizations (commercial, non-commercial, private and governmental) are leading players for defining the identity of destination, because they are the ones who stand for all features of destination brand. The analysis is intended to examine existing brand image, tourism strategies and values of destination brand by finding out what the owners of brand conceiving those issues in terms of destination brand identity development.

- **External analysis** is concerned with tourists who have visited the destination or who desire to visit in advance. The analysis is planned to conduct based on what the owners of destination brand (local people, regulators and tourism organizations) can do in order to satisfy needs of tourists and attract more tourists as much as possible. Another concern is also how to segment prospective tourists for destination.

2.8.2 Tourism Competition Analysis

In tourism competition, all competitors shape their own identity in order to characterize their own perceived image in costumers’ mind and attract their targeted segment where the priority is sustainable tourism development due to existing challenges. Tourism competition analysis aims at measuring successful branding strategies of other competing destinations including their brand identities and images. As a result, it shows the ways of being successful and highly competitive in the market.

In the tourism market, each factor is important for identifying the derivation of the effectiveness of the competing economic system, which brings a gap in tourism competition as well. So, analyzing the competitors’ strengths and weaknesses regarding with their strategies, is a major factor in tourism competition analysis. In this case, identifying the gap in this industry leads the stakeholder to formulate a core strategy for developing tourism destination brand identity. Considering all main factors in this analysis, the authors think that tourism competition analysis is complementary to stakeholder analysis in order to establish and develop a destination brand identity.
Figure 8 – Conceptual Model: “Strategic Brand Analysis in Destination Identity Context”
2.9 Concluding Remarks

This chapter had reflected the concepts and theory related to brand, brand identity and destination brand and its development. Accordingly, these theories and concepts were applied in concern with tourism and identity formation of a country within inclusion of previous studies. Small summary will be provided as a conclusion of the chapter.

The main concept of brand is related to differentiation of a good or service from the competitors’ ones. Brand is distinguished with its identity which lies at the core of it. This is associated with the significance of it and what makes it distinctive. As a result of high competition intensification in the market, brand identity should be taken in consideration in order to be inimitable and distinctive in a sense. Aaker and Joachmisthaler’s (2000) model for analyzing brand identity building was applied by Go and Konecnik (2008) in Slovenia’s context in order to develop its destination identity.

Parallel to goods and services, destination brand might be analyzed and developed related to heritages, geography, historical roots, stakeholders, competitors etc. Accordingly, all those characteristics help in the construction and analysis of destination brand identity. Several cases as examples of destination brand identity formation were presented in this chapter. Considering different theories relevant to brand identity and destination brand identity development, a conceptual model was developed. This conceptual model’s main focus is to conduct strategic brand analysis in destination identity context.

Consequently, the conceptual model, which was explored after the literature reviewed and discussed, will be used in the empirical study of this thesis. Empirical findings and analysis will help the authors evaluate or revise initially developed model by conducting in practical field. After observing empirical exploration of strategic brand analysis and destination identity context, the model will be discussed again in order to be finalized.
3 MARKETING ALBANIA AS A DESTINATION

In this chapter, empirical foundation of this thesis, Albania, is presented. First, it starts with historical background of the country and continues through describing global tourism in communism and in Albania. Then, branding efforts including the need for identity building for the country are detailed. Lastly, empirical research is exposed with concluding remarks.

3.1. Background

3.1.1 Historical Periods

Even though Albania has gained its independency in 1912, researches have revealed that this country has passed through different ancient civilizations and the antecedents going back to the middle and late Palaeolithic period (100000-10000 BC), Illyrian, Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman periods (Pollo and Puto, 1981, p. 1-4).

“To be ignorant of what occurred before you were born is to remain always a child. For what is the worth of human life, unless it is woven into the life of our ancestors by the records of history?”

Cicero ((106 – 43 B.C.), 1962, p. 395)

3.1.2 From Earlier to Present Periods

Illyrians are believed to belong to a group of Indo-European tribes settled in Balkans and this is assumed according to the prehistoric objects found in the cities of what is called Albania today. Illyrian civilization is assumed to start at the end of the third millennium B.C. regarding the discovery of ancient cities and fortified centers on tops of hills of mountains in cities, such as Shkoder, Vlore and Lisus. The civilization can be seen by establishment of federative states and urban civilization. There was also strong influence by Greek civilization where in the Apollonia called “City of Statues”, which had been found as sculptures and traditional works in Greek style (Pollo and Puto, 1981, p. 15-18).

The Roman Empire held large European and Mediterranean territories under its domination. One of its territories was also the Illyrian empire, which was occupied and fallen under Roman authority in 165 B.C. The Romans introduced their architecture in buildings and attitudes in ruling the state (Eckstein, 1994, p.395) until the sixth century, when the entire region was under the rule of Byzantine Empire (Jacques, 1994, p. 151). With the invasion of the regions by Byzantine Empire, Illyrian territories became the cultural and economic center (Countrystudies, 1994).

Regarding all those different civilizations that Albania got through, another important civilization is through Ottoman Empire’s conquering. It was during fourteenth century when Ottoman Empire was expanded including Albanian territories (Pollo and Puto 1981, p. 63-65). This was also one of the most vital periods where the oriental culture and western culture were mixed without clashes of civilizations that provided a preserve in historical heritages (Pulaha, 1966, p. 136-140).

Albania was announced as an independent state with the end of the Balkan war in 1912 and its formal borders were acknowledged during “London and Peace Conference” in 1913 and 1921 (Draper, 1997, p. 126-128). In several time intervals, the country had surpassed different
regimes from a short life monarchy to being a republic under Italian ruling (Pula, 2008, p. 574-574). The country turned into Socialist People’s Republic of Albania in 1945 and this regime was lasted until 1991 (Schwartz, 2009, p. 51-52), when Albania was part of the subgroup that communism was more strict in elsewhere of Eastern Europe (Griffith, 1963, p. 146). Transition of Albania in implementing a democratic regime initiated with the economic recovery in 1993 after a near collapse of communism in 1992 (Korovilas, 1999, p. 400-403). The democratic regime has also been growing stronger with the acceptance in NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2009) as well as being a potential candidate for European Union (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Albania, 2010).

3.2 Global Tourism and Communist Bloc

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>NR(millions)</th>
<th>% Annual Growth</th>
<th>US$ Bill</th>
<th>% Annual Growth</th>
<th>Tourism receipts as % of world exports of goods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>69.3</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>159.7</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>284.8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>102.4</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>288.8</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>104.3</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>286.8</td>
<td>-0.7</td>
<td>98.6</td>
<td>-5.4</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>284.2</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>98.4</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>312.4</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>109.8</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>326.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>334.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>138.7</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>361.2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>169.5</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>393.2</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>194.2</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>403.8</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>208.7</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>nd</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 - Global Tourism Growth Figures from 1950 to 1989

Source: Hall (1991, p. 23)

Drawing attention on Table 3 above, it can be seen that the growth of tourism through years and its effects in global economic development clarify tourism as one of the world’s largest industry. Hall (1991, p. 24) emphasizes on tourism development in different major structures. Accordingly, there was absorption of tourism activity within developed countries of Europe and North America. In addition, tourist flows were mainly focused on more intra-regional destinations and lastly longer-haul flows were predominantly from the USA. Considering the structures of tourism development and how they were patterned, Hall (1991, p. 26-27) highlights that tourism sector in Eastern Europe, including Albania, was considerably small in an overall global perspective. The characteristics of communist regimes and blocs in Europe were fundamental reasons. In these communist periods, organizations mutually arranged domestic and foreign tourism incomes by (Boniface and Cooper, 1987, p. 12):

- Acting as state airline agent
- Managing state owned tourist accommodation
- Organizing tourism transport system
- Arranging and managing guides and entertainment services
In order to target potential global customers, segmentation in an international market has been considered as a major issue in developing strategies (Steenkamp and Hofstede, 2002, p. 185). As a country should segment in tourism industry, targeting and positioning itself should also exist in a global context (Kotler and Gertner, 2004, p. 47). Hence, these strategic issues were even developed in Eastern Europe in these times. However, there were still poor exploitations of market segmentations based on these countries’ resources and organization formations for tourists due to the effects of handling tourism under a central ministry (Hall, 1991, p. 29-50).

### 3.3 Tourism Development under Communist Albania

In this period, tourism management was represented by Albturist established in 1951. It was a state owned organization arranging all tourist activities (Hall, 1991, p. 258-260). Although Albania was considered as one of the finest holiday environments in Europe, the politics of monopoly reduced the significant exploitation of the country’s tourism industry capabilities.

Considering tourism as a drive in the economy along with substantial effects on social and political context (Hall, 1990, p. 38-40), Albturist developed strategies for taking full advantages of economic gains. In order to attract different types of tourists, these strategies were shaped through dividing and classifying tourism areas in five segments as shown in Figure 9.

![Figure 9 - Classification of Main Tourist Centers in Albania](image)

*Source: Adapted from Hall (1991, p. 264)*

Accordingly, preserving and reducing undesirable effects on communist ideology were crucial for Albania. The country, therefore, laid down different regulations for any international tourist (Hall, 1991, p. 269):

- Group visa system subscribing two months before visit and reject the undesirable tourists.
- Tourists should adopt a proper dress code when visiting Albania according to the advice of appointed domestic tailors.
- Western literature was prohibited, especially political and religious nature literature.
- Foreign tourist should move around in groups and the contact with local citizens was reduced to minimum amount.
• Transportation, accommodation and journey were scheduled by Albturist and the opportunity of staying in Albanians homes was nearly impossible in contrast with the traditional view of hospitality.

While there were restrictions for incoming international tourists, domestic tourism was mainly focused on holiday centers for workers and children. However, gathering both domestic and international tourism statistics of these communist periods was impossible for the authors of this study. Presenting reliable statistical data is therefore not viable for these periods (Hall, 1991, p. 268) in order to constitute a deeper understanding of the political factors and economic system.

3.4 Tourism as a Major Economic Reconstruct in Post-Communist Development

Eastern and Western economies were in charge for developing the democracy and market economies by means of financial capital (Roberts, 2004, p. 61). Understanding tourism as an exchange is not just of financial capital, it is also a social capital (Hall, 1991, p. 273). Albanian tourism perspective, as both financial and social capital, began to change after the death of Enver Hoxha in 1985 since the dictatorship and centrally planned socialist regime came close to collapse. Albturist correspondingly initiated a gradual tourism reform system of governance (Hall, 1991, p. 273):

• Setting up a division of public-relations by being responsible for the role of marketing
• Infrastructure development (hotels) plan in different touristic zones and conversions of monasteries.
• Borders with Greece were opened.
• Day-tripping activities were allowed from Greece and Yugoslav coaches through country
• Albturist started its marketing efforts by designing first tourist map and new publicity brochures.
• Opportunity for individual tourists was a main point of discussion.
• Receiving Albanian visa at border gates for foreign citizens was started to administer.

After the change of regime in Albania with implementation of democratic system in 1991 (Background Note, 2011), the country has been facing with an increased emergency in managing cultural, natural and economic resources. It can also be considered as an endeavor for a rise along with creating and implementing sustainable tourism strategies (Hall, 2004, p.173). Indeed, it is a transition process of sustainable tourism that has an essential role for constructing the economic development. This transition process can lead many factors (Hall, 2000, p. 33) in case of Albania:

• Privatization and development of diverse service industries
• Competing in a global market
• Supporting country regeneration
• Convening multicultural dialogs leading to change in social lifestyle
• Assisting in free movement of citizens: domestic and international
• Recovering infrastructure – Attracting investments and getting financial benefits.

In the transition to market economy, Albania had passed through all the stages until the collapse of financial pyramids in 1997, when a great chaos happened (Hashi and Xhillari,
Transition from centrally planned economy, which is focused on heavy industry, to liberal market economy cannot prevent political and socio-economic instability at all. Unfavorable competitive position of heavy industry infrastructure led to development of Albanian service sector, including tourism industry that was untouched before (Ivy and Copp, 1999, p. 425). Accordingly, exploiting tourism industry by focusing on its potential covering historical and cultural heritage will assist in creating both a niche market (Hall, 2000, p. 42) and reconstructing the fragile economy of a country, such as Albania.

3.5 Actual Efforts of Constructing Destination Identity for Albania

The September 11 attacks upon USA in 2001 highlighted the importance of tourism industry in the global economy by affecting the incomes directly derived from tourists. These attacks damaged world tourism due to many reasons involving political issues, international relations and safety tourism procedures, which also put pressure on many countries to change their identity and image (Theocharous, 2004, p. 147). This tragic event raised the importance of tourism industry. According to the authors of this study, many countries “opened the eyes” for expanding their impact and achieving stability in global tourism market. Albania was also one of those countries.

Current global economy in the world assumes the factor of tourism industry as the engine of macro economic development (Torres and Momsen, 2005 p. 265). In order to acquire correlation between economic development and political stability, Albania signed Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) in 2003 with European Union (European Commission, 2003). SAA intends to bring many benefits to Albania, such as creating a functional democracy for the country; increasing investments in the infrastructure by offering positive effects for Albanian tourism industry; free trade agreements between Albania and members of European Union; strengthening the country’s position in the region; supporting sustainable economic development of the nation (European Commission, 2003). As steady integration of Albania in European Union is conclusive concern in SAA, establishing a clear strategy will help in re-constrcuting the identity and image of the country by changing from a post-communist system to functioning democracy.

Paying attention to those issues and the importance of Albanian tourism by reinforcing a destination brand identity and image, the government constructed first strategy for tourism development in 2003. Although there was a great consideration of the leftovers coming from communist government, the elements of this tourism strategy were essentially formulated toward asserting more efforts in creating and developing sustainable tourism development (Albanian Tourism Sector Strategy 2007-2013, 2008, p. 3). Main focus in this strategy is that every section in tourism industry should create its own local structure. Additionally, rearrangements of financial investments in tourism were indicated since the government perceived tourism industry as the most significant industry for further development of the country. The need for enormous investments in tourism infrastructure was accentuated as well. This strategy also concentrates on increasing investments in human resources, which is a principal factor for increasing capabilities and supporting the services offered via promotion and marketing of Albania (Albanian Tourism Sector Strategy 2007-2013, 2008).

While previous strategies of Albania were not concerned with the economic meaning of tourism in advance, Albanian government additionally developed three major strategies in 2006 (Albanian Tourism Sector Strategy 2007-2013, 2008, p. 2):
(1) Focusing on sustainable tourism development
(2) Increasing investments in developing long-term strategies for cultural tourism
(3) Supporting investments in knowledge for tourism industry

Table 4: The Number of Non-resident Foreign Tourist Arrivals into Albania

Source: Albanian Tourist Statistics (2010)

In addition to previous strategies and statistical evidences, there has been an increase in the number of tourists visiting Albania through years (see Table 4). It is also related to the governmental progress through advancement of political stability. Stabilization and Association Agreement with EU (April, 2009) can clearly be recognized as a crucial power for the nation (Albania and the EU, 2009). Moreover, Albania also signed membership of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 2009. Current national effort is now to reconstruct the country’s identity and image throughout world by aiming to be a peacekeeper and desirable tourism destination in Balkan region (Albanian Foreign Ministry Affairs, 2010). However, Albania has not fully created an advanced destination brand identity yet (Albanian Tourism Sector Strategy, 2008, p. 7). The authors of this thesis believe that “true differentiation” (Pride, 2004, p. 159) is essential for branding Albania. It can be done by developing correct destination identity since Upshaw (1995, p. 12) considers identity as an effective tool for changing opinions about the image. Kapferer (1998, p. 91) also underlines the identity in terms of sending precise messages. Although Albania has been suffering from wrong-known image coming from former periods, developed destination identity can contribute to better positioning of the country in tourism market.
3.6 Concluding Remarks

Before gaining the independence, Albania has passed through different important civilizations, from Illyrians, considered also as the antecedents, to Roman, Byzantine and lastly Ottoman Empire. In order to construct a clear view for future maturity, the understanding of different historical periods is significant due to diverse socio-cultural behaviors and historical heritages.

Albturist, the first development of tourism management industry, was established under communism regime in 1951. Due to the political situation, the main concern was regime’s ideology instead of economic growth even though segmentation strategy was developed in order to target different international tourists. The political ideology perceived international tourism with fanaticism directing to strict rules, which led to minimum exploitation of tourism industry. This situation destroyed image of the country and macroeconomic development.

Albturist initiated steady reforms for tourism development since political position of the nation started to change in 1985. Those reforms were mainly focused on development of infrastructure and border openings. Privatization and assistance in free movement of citizens were also important in those reforms. After the fall of communism in 1992, the transition from centrally planned economy to liberal market economy began with a new perception for measuring industries’ effectiveness. This also constituted a shift from concentration of Albanian economy in heavy industry to the development of service sector including tourism.

Along with the transition and instability of the country, the importance of tourism became obvious after attacks of September 11. Under those circumstances, Albania considered tourism strategy through outlining re-focus and re-segmentation of the market. The main differentiation factors in reconstructing the identity and image along with tourism strategy were including both privatization and human resource investments.

Illustrating progress stages of Albania, such as political and economic instability, drove the authors toward understanding the role of decision makers in forming and sustaining a destination identity that results a stable destination image in further. Integration of tourism development strategy is also a significant factor for achieving economic growth in macro-economic aspects. The authors of this thesis believe that developing sustainable tourism for Albania in current tourism market is possible with its identity formation that can lead to make the country a strong destination brand in advance. Additionally, all those factors are also related to decision makers in tourism policy, where their purpose is to derive economic benefits from integration of politics, culture, history, human resources with the unification of destination capabilities in identity construction.

Albania will be used as a foundation in the empirical study of this thesis. Applying the conceptual model “Strategic Brand Analysis in Destination Identity Context”, which was presented Chapter 2, will provide what Albania should need to stand for constructing a destination brand identity in advance. Moreover, empirical findings and analysis of Albanian brand identity will also let the authors evaluate and revise the model. As the specific attributes of Albania will be incorporated into this research, the applicability of the model will be measured and obtained in the research field of destination branding.
4 METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the authors will inform the reader about the methods and approaches used when collecting and analyzing the data. First, the authors will present the philosophical standpoints of this study and then, considered research method and the strategy with its design will be elucidated and discussed. Hereafter, how the data was collected and analyzed will be the next focus. Lastly, quality criteria and ethical concerns will be discussed.

4.1 Philosophical Standpoints

This study was exploration of redefining and developing theoretical framework of strategic brand analysis (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000) proposed to analyze tourism destination identity (Go and Koncencik, 2008). Instead of analyzing or testing existing framework, the researchers of this study seek to establish a new conceptual model “Strategic Brand Analysis in Destination Identity Context”. Moreover, the identity context of Albania was used to analyze and develop pre-established conceptual model in Chapter 2 by measuring how specific attributes of Albania can be incorporated into new strategic brand analysis framework. As the conceptual model and country context differ from Go and Koncencik’s (2008) study, new questions were established. Interviews were conducted with individuals who have lived through Albania’s history and who play role as a contributor or decision maker for marketing the country in tourism industry.

The work of this study began with scanning previous academic and practical studies in the field of branding, brand analyses and destination branding. “Strategic Brand Analysis” model proposed in a new concept for tourism destination identity context was considered as a new approach to the analysis of tourism destination for further identity development and implementation through destination branding efforts. Since the researchers of this study developed a new conceptual model in order to provide inference for generalization, empirical analysis will guide that how the model fits in the context and what if it needs to be revised.

The research process of a study is shaped upon three main approaches that the researcher needs to decide on either one or more of them: inductive, deductive and abductive logic. Inductive logic presents drawing conclusion from both observations and set of data by moving from the specific implication to the generality (Ormerod, 2010, p. 1210). However, in destination identity context, the inductive logic could not be used since it could only be used for developing theory for identity analysis or building after observation of tourism stakeholders and tourism competition in empirical field. In addition, deductive logic tries to test a theory in order to check if it is applicable to a specific case implication (Taylor, Fisher and Dufresne, 2002, p. 315). Considering this thesis as an exploratory study, where the authors of this study are developing a new framework, deductive logic was regarded as unreasonable.

When the aim of the study is to generate a new concept in configuration of new theoretical models where the presented framework can be changed according to findings, abductive logic is the most acceptable approach (Dubois and Gadde, 2002, p. 559). The abductive logic was relatively seen by the authors of this study as more suitable for the research process (see Figure 10). First, the authors developed a new conceptual model after the literature reviewed in the contents of branding, brand identity, destination branding and destination identity. The model was developed according to the theoretical examination and therefore, sufficient secondary data collection about Albania was fulfilled in order to see if the empirical field is
equivalent with theory or not. Consequently, the process followed with the empirical observation of Albania that led to assess and revise pre-developed conceptual model in order to provide the applicability both in theoretical and empirical field.

Figure 10 - Abductive research process of the thesis

Source: Adapted from Kovacs and Spens (2005, p. 139)

In order to disclose if the pre-developed conceptual model of “Strategic Brand Analysis in Destination Identity Context” fits in practical view, data collection was done from open-ended question interviews. Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007, p. 28) emphasize on interview method that it is a highly useful technique in collecting empirical data and limits bias in analysis by approaching to different actors from diverse perspectives. Therefore, building theory from this study can be indicated as explorative.

Considering that every reaction results from an action and following the realistic approach (Morgan and Smircich, 1980, p. 493), the authors of this thesis approached to the study with an objective point of view. The aim is attaining both how and what needs to be considered for “Strategic Brand Analysis” and “Destination Identity Context” by mainly developing a generalized conceptual model. The purpose of the study is therefore regulative. In addition to providing an integrative model, this research assumed the reality as symbolic discourse, where relations are established and kept through social actors and interactions. The interpretation of an action accordingly comes across with the capacity of the actors (Morgan and Smircich, 1980, p. 494). This issue also associates with the objectivist standpoint of this study since concluding concerns will be modified by the shared decisive position of participants in the empirical research.

Though the research cannot be completely free of subjectivity, the authors reckoned with epistemological approach that every action results in a reaction. The study correspondingly presumed the epistemology of realism understood from empirical analysis, which is concerned with the outside judgment by being confident for objective perceptions formed from the researchers of this study (Morgan and Smircich, 1980, p. 493). Next to the
methodological approach in consideration of how the authors searched the knowledge, two dimensions of philosophical structure were attached importance to the study:

(1) Hermeneutics - the subjective inquiry was disregarded as truthfully as achievable (Arnett, 2007, p. 31-32)

(2) Dialectics - the authors categorized different models materialized from respondents (Berniker and McNabb, 2006, p. 646).

This approach to methodology accessed that elasticity would be needed to comprehend respondents’ authenticity which lead to multiple method usage. Those methods were regarded as the best option in understanding different stakeholder’s views, perceptions and tourism competition for strategic brand analysis, which leads to identity formation in tourism industry. Consequently, those methods assisted in understanding the significance of supplier side analysis deriving to destination brand identity development and implementation.

4.2 Qualitative Research

There are two main research methods that are used in marketing research area, the qualitative and quantitative study. Silverman and Marvasti (2008, p. 22) explains that the research problem is the key factor for selecting either quantitative or qualitative research. Basically, quantitative research is based on numerical records assembled based on cases, variables and values before data collection and afterwards taking on measurement process which is quantitative in nature (Kent, 2007, p. 10). Quantitative research consists of deductive nature and has a positivist approach, seeing the process in an objective way (Kent, 2007, p. 49). Qualitative research, conversely, seeks to understand and explore people’s attitudes, perceptions toward problem(s), behavior(s) and motivation(s). It analyses words, reports, pictures consisting more in a qualitative nature. Qualitative research consists of inductive nature and mainly focuses on exploring the reality in natural setting (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). Denzin and Lincoln (1998, p. 3) correspondingly emphasize on the role of qualitative researchers that they try to catch the nature of reality by considering the research problem that they seek to answer and situational limitations that effect the inquiry. Further, they explain that the answers that qualitative researchers find out contribute to social reality with meaning.

In order to conduct exploratory study on strategic brand analysis for destination identity development, supplier side perspective is essential through developing an in-depth understanding of both tourism stakeholders and tourism competition. Inquiring qualitative research approach was therefore seen reasonable. In addition, qualitative research tries to understand, explore and interpret human nature (Morgan and Smircich, 1980, p. 492). It led the researchers of this study understand interactions between several players including stakeholders of the destination since the ontological assumption for this study was that different human beings provide different views for the same subject (Morgan and Smircich, 1980, p. 492). Main objective of this research was accordingly to identify the significant aspects shaping people's lives and their world by leading to an in-depth understanding of their actions in decision making (Fossey, Harvey, Medermott and Davidson, 2002, p. 730). Therefore, this study obtained what the owners of destination brand collectively stand for identity development and implementation.
4.3 Case Study as a Strategy for Inquiry

Several research traditions exist in qualitative research. Johnson and Christensen (p. 382, 2010) relatively concentrate on the diversity of these research traditions that consist of “phenomenology”, “ethnography”, “case study” and “grounded theory”. The case study is considered as the most appropriate by the authors of this study since Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007, p. 30) clarifies that case study submits relevant research strategy in building a conceptual model and developing theory among these different approaches. Moreover, Johnson and Christensen (2010, p. 383) detailed “the dimensions of case study” (see Table 5). The authors of the thesis considered these five dimensions and their characteristics as the basis for the case of this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Purpose</th>
<th>Disciplinary Origin</th>
<th>Primary data collection method</th>
<th>Data Analysis Approach</th>
<th>Narrative Report Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understand and describe the case(s) concentrated on the research question(s)</td>
<td>Business, political science, social science, education etc.</td>
<td>Interview(s), observation(s), document(s) etc.</td>
<td>Holistic perspective based on the case(s) Explorative theme(s)</td>
<td>In-depth study of case(s), issues and implications</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 – Dimensions of Case Study Approach

Source: Adapted from Johnson and Christensen (2010, p. 383)

Case study varies from other traditional qualitative researches for several reasons (see Table 4.1), which gave rise to apply the case study in this research. First, case study differs from phenomenology study because rather than interpreting, describing and finding the essence and meaning from experience, this approach develops an in-depth single case or multiple cases and builds up themes specific to the study (Johnson and Christensen, p. 384, 2010). Considering the goal of this research, which was to develop conceptual model for an in-depth understanding of supplier side role in building destination brand identity, case study approach was judged to be more suitable than phenomenology. Second, ethnography study was considered to be inappropriate since it is focused on rich interpretation of specific cultural group within a long period observation of participants (Johnson and Christensen, p. 390, 2010). Even though Albania was used to detect issues and for practical implication, this study was focused on developing wider theory rather than concentrating just a specific country. Third, regarding all traditional research approaches and their dimensions, the most difficult decision that the authors of this study took was choosing between grounded theory and case study. While grounded theory requires frequent systematic observations in the field that the research is being processed (Johnson and Christensen, 2010, p. 400), this research was restricted by several limitations including time, place and money. The researchers accordingly considered case study approach as much more appropriated.

Yin (2003, p. 123) details the case study method as “an empirical investigation that inquires current situation inside of a real context by using different sources since the connection or the developed frameworks between these two situations are not yet proved”. In order to find out connection between theoretical framework and aspects of destination brand identity, this study aims to develop a new conceptual model by considering supplier side perspective in
tourism industry. Because, the authors of this study observed that destination branding literature and past empirical studies still need more researches in terms of brand analysis and identity development. Although Go and Konecnik’s (2008) theoretical framework was instrumental in tourism destination identity development, they advised researchers to redefine, reform or develop the framework with further empirical investigations. Therefore, case study strategy helped the researchers of this study build theory from single case of Albania by gathering data from multiple respondents. Eisenhardt (1989, p. 546-548) correspondingly explains that building theory from case study is a research, where single or multiple cases are used, and it provides different perspective views and analyzable entities. Thus, this study intends to contribute to the research field of destination branding literature and empirical studies. Moreover, important sides of theory building in case study are “interesting”, “testable” and “accurate” (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 25-26). Selecting a proper single case study with multiple respondents for this research also provided interesting, testable and accurate results both in academic and practical fields.

Yin (2003, p. 5) portrayed that there are three general approaches for case study methodology design: “exploratory”, “explanatory” and “descriptive”. Each of those different approaches to case study can be developed as single or multiple cases. Kerlinger and Lee (2000, p. 586) relatively highlight exploratory studies into three purposes:

(1) To identify important variables in the study context
(2) To determine connection between variables
(3) To arrange the foundation for further study.

Subsequent stage of this research regarded the field of exploratory study, which accumulated important information from the key actors’ influences in terms of destination identity factors. In addition to obtained important variables (stakeholders and competitors) and the connection among them, a conceptual model for strategic brand analysis was developed from literature; and was analyzed via identity context of Albania. Empirical research assisted in revision of initial findings and the model. The results provided a foundation of strategic brand analysis in destination identity context, which can be considered as an exploration for marketing and tourism research field.

4.4 Data Collection

The nature of this research brought on selecting qualitative single case study by gathering primary data to conduct the exploration in the field of destination brand identity. In addition to obtained knowledge from the literature, documentation and practical sources; the empirical research pursued the framework of qualitative methods.

4.4.1 Interview Design and Method

The interview was established in the form of six open-ended questions and each question had a sub-question depending on the answers (see Appendix 1). The participants were free to respond in any preferred way since the depth-interview technique was applied. Nargundkar (2008, p. 39) clarifies that the open-ended questions in depth interview provide rich data due to depending on the face-to-face and semi-structured discussion with minimized restrictions.

The authors established the questions in English but presented them in Albanian too due to concerns for difficulties that might arise during data collection. Though, the interviewees in this study have a strong academic background and important positions in decision making.
Alongside, the actors in the study had the option to choose how they desired that the interview should be conducted. The English and Albanian questions had the same version without any change. To construct validity of the study except from using relevant concepts (Gibbert, Ruigrok and Wicki, 2008, p. 1466), the interview was conducted with an introductory explanation of the main terms like ‘brand identity’ and ‘destination branding’. In order to collect data without restriction from the interview questions, the last question was left open and free concerning the development of destination branding in Albania. The Albanian version of interview questions was translated by one of the authors and confirmed by translation bureau in order to obtain contributions to the validity of the study (see Appendix 2).

The questions were constituted regarding the formulated conceptual model. The actors were asked to define and describe what and how different factors should interconnect to develop destination brand identity; the competition in tourism industry and its effects that Albania should be concerned for. The last open question was to express their personal thoughts without limitations as well. All the interviews were recorded and the authors took notes during the interviews in order to highlight the main points, asked sub-questions and the reactions of the respondents. This method of data collection was applied by the authors since it assesses reliability of the data by transparency and replication (Gibbert, Ruigrok and Wicki, 2008, p. 1468). The authors had read other articles and theses, where the same type of interviews were conducted, and they reached in the many concluding examples that this type of interview had assessed both validity and reliability of the data in previous studies.

4.4.2 Participants in the Study

In this research study, ten semi-structured depth interviews were conducted. As the main purpose of the study is to develop a new theory (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007, p. 27), the theoretical sampling was seen reasonable by the authors. Accordingly, the respondents in the study were chosen according to their role in constructing and developing a destination brand identity in the case of Albania. The importance of selecting different respondents from different fields was conducted in order to give diverse perspectives to the research and to provide reliability and validity information to the research study (Johnson and Christensen, 2010, p. 149). Accordingly, the main objective of the interviews was conducting at least ten interviews, which is believed that they represent main population since they all have the background to touch all the topics of pre-developed conceptual model (see Table 6).

In the beginning, ten respondents were approached by phone calls and e-mails. Prior to travelling to Albania, the family of Albanian author also contacted all of the participants in order to arrange meetings for interviews. In the end, all of the respondents agreed to participate in this study.

The researchers have conducted interviews in the capital Tirana, where the main decision makers are based and the main companies are located, and in Shkodra, which is considered as an important destination where all different types of tourism can be developed. In both those cases, the respondents devoted to their time in order to help in collecting needed information. In the beginning of all interviews, the respondents were asked that either English or Albanian is preferred for the interview. Moreover, Albanian interview transcripts were translated into English by Albanian author. As Albanian was his native language, he was also supported by one official translation bureau in Albania. In all conditions, the respondents in this research found the study interesting and challenging and they gave a great contribution to the study with their knowledge and experience.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name, Surname</th>
<th>Profession/Occupation</th>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Interview Date</th>
<th>Preferred Language for Interview</th>
<th>Interview Place</th>
<th>Interview Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prof. Asc. Dr. Bashkim Lahi</strong></td>
<td>Archeologist and the author of several books</td>
<td>Academic Environment</td>
<td>2011-03-23</td>
<td>Albanian</td>
<td>Shkodra, Albania</td>
<td>50 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Djana Bejko</strong></td>
<td>Project Manager of Regional Environmental Center and Instructor in Department of Economic at University of Shkodra</td>
<td>Nongovernmental Organization</td>
<td>2011-03-23</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Shkodra, Albania</td>
<td>31 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prof. Dr. Mahir Hoti</strong></td>
<td>Instructor in the Department of Geography at University of Shkodra and the President of Albanian Forum of Shkodra Lake</td>
<td>Academic Environment</td>
<td>2011-03-24</td>
<td>Albanian</td>
<td>Shkodra, Albania</td>
<td>46 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shkelqim Tuzi</strong></td>
<td>President and Manager of AL-POL Travel Agency</td>
<td>Private Sector</td>
<td>2011-03-24</td>
<td>Albanian</td>
<td>Shkodra, Albania</td>
<td>20 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nikoll Lesi</strong></td>
<td>Deputy Minister of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports; Republic of Albania</td>
<td>Government (National)</td>
<td>2011-03-25</td>
<td>Albanian</td>
<td>Tirana, Albania</td>
<td>21 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ismail Beka</strong></td>
<td>Deputy Country Director of German Development Corporation (GIZ)</td>
<td>Nongovernmental Organization</td>
<td>2011-03-25</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Tirana, Albania</td>
<td>25 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alma Ferhati</strong></td>
<td>President and Marketing Agent of Pegasos Travel</td>
<td>Private Sector</td>
<td>2011-03-26</td>
<td>Albanian</td>
<td>Tirana, Albania</td>
<td>20 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Besnik Vathi</strong></td>
<td>President of Albanian Travel and Hospitality Services Company (ATHS)</td>
<td>Private Sector</td>
<td>2011-03-26</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Tirana, Albania</td>
<td>25 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ridvan Sokoli</strong></td>
<td>The Director of Development Office at Shkodra Municipality</td>
<td>Government (Regional)</td>
<td>2011-03-31</td>
<td>Albanian</td>
<td>Shkodra, Albania</td>
<td>24 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Luan Dervishej</strong></td>
<td>Senior Tourism Expert at German Development Corporation (GIZ), Program: &quot;Economic Development and Employment Promotion in Albania&quot;</td>
<td>Nongovernmental Organization</td>
<td>2011-04-06</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Tirana, Albania</td>
<td>30 min</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 6 - The List of the Participants in the Study*
4.5 Qualitative Content Analysis

Since the data was collected, it was entered to QSR NVivo 7 for empirical presentation, categorization and analysis. There were thirty pages of interview transcripts that were formed by ten participants’ responses to six main questions and to totally fourteen sub-questions. It is believed that the number and profession of interviewees fulfill the minimum sample size and characteristics that can represent the destination.

The researchers can apply to various qualitative methods in order to do research and evaluate gathered data. The selection criterion depends on the purpose that concerns with the logic of the study (Patton, 2002, p. 10). As the fundamental idea behind the abductive logic is to develop a new theory (Kovacs and Spens, 2005, p. 140), the qualitative content analysis is one of appreciable methods since it is used to establish a new conceptual model, system or map due to the aim of extensive description of data with conceptualization or categorization (Elo and Kyngäs, 2007, p. 108)

Qualitative content analysis is one of many approaches that the researchers have been considering in order to analyze qualitative data (Elo and Kyngäs, 2007, p. 107). According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005, p. 1278), qualitative content analysis refers to a research method that is used for the explanation of the content of a text by using the organized categorization progression through coding and describing themes. Patton (2002, p. 453) clarifies content analysis as the contraction of qualitative data with an endeavor for naming essential consistencies and meanings by using concerning amount of qualitative material.

In qualitative content analysis, there are three different approaches that the researchers can consider: “conventional”, “directed” and “summative” (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005, p. 1277). These approaches differentiate from each other depending on “coding schemes”, “code origins” and “fears about reliability” (see Table 7). Directed approach was reasonable for this study since Hsieh and Shannon (2005, p. 1281) describe this approach as enhancing a theory or theoretical framework by observing data in empirical field. This approach correspondingly fits with the aim of study that is to develop a new conceptual model for strategic brand analysis in destination identity context.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Conventional Approach</th>
<th>Directed Approach</th>
<th>Summative Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beginning of the study</strong></td>
<td>Empirical observation</td>
<td>Theory</td>
<td>Keywords</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Timing</strong></td>
<td>The researchers name the codes during analysis</td>
<td>The researchers name the codes before and during data analysis</td>
<td>The researchers name the keywords before and during data analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Codes’ (or Keywords’) Base</strong></td>
<td>Empirical Data</td>
<td>Theory &amp; Empirical Data</td>
<td>The researchers’ concerns or the assessment of literature</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7 - Approaches in Qualitative Content Analysis

Source: Adapted from Hsieh and Shannon (2005, p. 1286)
4.6 Quality Criteria

The principles of “reliability” and “validity” are still discussed by qualitative researchers to some extent due to claims through these concepts’ high concerns with quantitative traditions (Johnson and Christensen, 2010, p. 264). However, the quality criteria in qualitative researches can be fulfilled by application of these concepts (Kent, 2007, p. 277). In order to feel confident that the data was of quality, the concepts of “reliability” and “validity” were considered as the differences of quality in this study.

The authors made several processes to assure the validity, clarified by Elliot (2005, p. 22) as the research’s capability for matching with apparent reality. By considering chosen sample as the representative of population, generalizing the findings of research is external validity (Lucas, 2003, p. 236). Although Johnson and Christensen (2010, p. 270) claim the flaw of qualitative research as low level of external validity, Elliot (2005, p. 26) emphasize on exposed external validity in qualitative research as generalizability, where the reader is free to accept transforming presented results in related surroundings by considering how the verified data was provided.

The researchers of this study paid attention to the validity since ten interviewed participants are coming from academic field, government, private sector and nongovernmental organizations. Generalizability of the findings can therefore be claimed since the participants have crucial roles in Albanian tourism and their roles in decision making can prove their representativeness of supplier side. However, the decision was left to the reader in terms of either considering the results as general or not. Since it is impossible to directly assess theoretical perceptions and qualitative researchers should relate findings with theoretical perceptions by appropriate measurements (Lucas, 2003, p. 248), construct validity was taken under consideration. Even though Albania was the case in this research, subjective measurements were tried to be avoided. The researchers worked with various sources of data and set up the sequence of all gathered data for the purpose of gaining increased construct validity in this thesis.

In order to ensure the quality of qualitative research, another considered concept is reliability explained by Babbie (2010, p. 150) as the extent to measuring the data in one time by observation will provide as the same as in a new time by duplicated observation. The authors made numerous efforts with the aim of enhancing reliability of this research and reducing biases and errors. The interview transcripts derived from tape recordings were structured with situational events such as pauses and personal reactions of the participants during the interviews. According to Babbie (2010, p. 153), replication is crucial issue for high reliability and can be fulfilled by coding the content by several coders. Although the reader might comment on the number of coders in this study, both of the authors coded the content separately and reached to the associated codes after several times of group discussions.

4.7 Ethical Concerns

In the process of collecting information, selecting the interviewees and conducting the interviews, ethical concerns should be considered by the qualitative researchers. Indeed, defining “ethical” and “unethical” depends on what assents with correctness and incorrectness to whom it concerns (Babbie, 2010, p. 84). Accordingly, the researchers of this study considered the ethics in four stages “research question(s)”, “contacting and sampling”, “data collection” and “analysis” illustrated by Flick et al. (2007, p. 68).
The researchers established the research questions by considering many concerns to reach the goal of the study. As Flick et al. (2007, p. 71) emphasize on that as well, well-established research question helped in catching the degree of research and the participants were not disappointed or discouraged since all of them were informed about the goal of research. Although the researchers gave the choice of answering or not the questions to the respondents, none of them denied answering any question.

In the stage of contacting and sampling, the respondents were informed about the research and were asked either they are volunteer or not for the research. Therefore, this study does not suffer from the lack of informed consent clarified by Flick et al. (2007, p. 72) as informing the participants prior to doing empirical reach and having a mutual contract with the each of the participants. The researchers contacted with all of the participants before going to Albania and before conducting each interview, they showed their student cards confirming that the objective of the interviews was scholarly purpose.

Any sort of harm to the respondents should be kept away from every study (Flick et al., 2007, p. 73). As they were selected depending on their profession and role in Albanian tourism, they were asked about either they take risk or not by participating in this research. All of them appreciated the study and conveyed their wishes for the success of the thesis.

During data collection process, the researchers should acceptably force the respondents to gather rich data and should follow every response although some of them are not related to the data. Also, data analysis should be truthful and impartial for the ethics of research (Flick et al., 2007, p. 74). As the researchers were prepared with sub-questions, they asked some other questions if the response was not sufficient. They also did not behave of disregarding any response. In addition, the researchers believe in that using qualitative analysis by gathering support from QSR NVivo software increased accuracy of the analysis. As mentioned in previous section, systematic coding of the empirical results was performed for getting ahead of reliable research.
5 EMPIRICAL RESULTS

This chapter provides the findings from the results of empirical investigation. It completely includes the data gathered during the interview process in Albania.

The researchers of this study have gathered a great amount of data after conducting the interviews with ten participants who have crucial roles in Albanian tourism. All the sections will be presented based on the empirical findings. The design of the sections will follow the structure of pre-developed conceptual model since the interview questions were constructed according to the model as explained before in order to apply it in the identity context of Albania. The structure of empirical results is presented in Figure 11 on next page.

As this structure will help the reader follow gathered empirical data in appropriate way, specific attributes of Albania will also be observed based on the view points of the participants. Accordingly, the authors divided the data into six sections which will also contribute to the preparation phase for analyzing the content in “Analysis” chapter.

During the presentation of empirical data, except the first section which was about personal concerns, the authors did not identify the name of respondent in order to prevent keeping track of each person in this study. However, there were some classifications depending on professions and collective opinions in some sections to prevent repetition.

5.1 Personal Role in Constructing Albanian Identity in Tourism

The interviewees of this study are composed of ten participants from national government, local government, private sector, regional corporations and academic environment. Each participant explained his/her personal role in constructing Albanian identity in tourism according to his/her occupation, interests and beliefs:

Nikoll Lesi is Deputy Minister of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports; Republic of Albania. In terms of Albanian tourism, he is one of the most important decision makers. First of all, Mr. Lesi explained that his initial role is to change the law for tourism development because it limits the role of the ministry to establish the destination identity. Secondly, he emphasized on the government’s aim for sustainable tourism by solving the problems about environmental pollution in country context. In that case, overall investments for infrastructure and tourism services have been crucial focus for the ministry. Moreover, he told that the ministry is currently working for the segmentation of Albanian tourism in order to offer better products for incoming foreign tourists, such as cultural tourism and natural tourism. According to Mr. Lesi, main strategy for that segmentation is standing under the heritage of rich Albanian identity.
Figure 11 – The Structure of Empirical Results
*Prof. Dr. Mahir Hoti* is instructor and researcher in the Department of Geography at University of Shkodra, Albania. He is also the President of Albanian Forum of Shkodra Lake. Current work field of Mr. Hoti is now “Regional Development”, which includes mass tourism, natural tourism, eco-tourism and water management. As he is crucial and well-known academician in Albania, he considers different important roles in case of environmentally friendly tourism:

> “Me as a civil person living in this country have been organizing with volunteers for increasing the conciseness of decreasing the environmental pollution”

In practical field, his main tasks are to maintain the water management in desired standards and to discover particular features of Albanian geography in tourism:

> “Also water management, when I teach, it takes important role in Albanian tourism because we have a lot of water here, where different kinds of attractiveness can be formed for tourists. It is difficult to control this but my role is to manage and control this.”

*Prof. Asc. Dr. Bashkim Lahi* is researcher in the fields of archeology and cultural tourism. During the interview, he briefly explained his role as follows below:

> “I try to contribute to constructing Albanian identity by working on Albanian culture and historical heritages.”

Mr. Lahi is the author of several publications including the books about the culture and history of Albania. He worked as an archeologist in all territories of Albania and met almost all of the groups who came to Albania for cultural tourism. Hereby, he defends an opinion that:

> “It is me who explains Albanian culture!”

Moreover, he also clarifies that his works provide direct contribution to saving tourism value since he enlightens what the Albanian heritage has at all. Accordingly, the cultural tourism provides long term benefits attracting the tourists and Albania should work for it much more than current efforts.

*Djana Bejko* is Senior Expert in Management of Natural Resources and Project Manager at Regional Environmental Center; Shkodra, Albania. In Regional Environmental Center, she and her colleagues are working for the management of natural resources. Their role also includes providing public participation for planning and decision making processes in the field of eco-tourism in order to create a new Albanian brand. She also briefly explained the aim of Regional Environmental Center as follows:

> “We are trying to provide tourism which is familiar with environmental protection and reservation.”

*Alma Ferhati* is the owner of Pegasos Travel Company; Tirana, Albania. She is dealing with many businesses in Albanian tourism and is an entrepreneur due to searching for many alternatives to catch the tourism gap for the growth of Pegasos Travel. Although Ms. Ferhati is a business woman, she is giving part-time lectures at some specialized tourism schools in
According to her, different ideas coming from the young generation will improve Albanian tourism and she therefore explained that her main role for Albanian identity in tourism is the education of youth instead of business in such words:

“If I was just dealing with business in present, I will then forget the development of Albanian tourism in the future. Here with youth, I try to help them develop different ideas.”

**Ismail Beka** is Deputy Country Director at German Development Cooperation (GIZ); Tirana, Albania. In the field of Albanian tourism, GIZ is working for the development and marketing of Albania. GIZ has collaboration with national tourism organizations, national and private tourism associations, private businesses, tour operators and several other corporations. Mr. Beka and his colleagues are participating in several international tourism fairs and conferences as well. They are mostly working with the Ministry of Tourism and Albanian National Tourism Organization (ATA). Mr. Beka presented an example of the project that has been conducting since 2006, where the main deal is to enhance the conditions of poor areas in the country. With this project, they obtained significant results that positively influenced Albanian tourism:

“... We have achievement of good results. That also helped that last year the number of tourists was increased by around 10000.”

As the project supports the infrastructure and service sector, they found out a new segmentation in Albanian tourism: “Traditional Albanian Houses”.

**Besnik Vathi** is the President of Albanian Travel and Hospitality Services Company, Tirana, Albania. ATHS has a great experience in Albanian tourism since the company can be assumed as “the biggest tourism enterprise in Albania” in case of arranging different types of tours and facilities for foreign tourists. As Mr. Vathi explained, ATHS has an endeavor to present Albania as an ideal destination for tourists based on the needs and wants. The holiday can be blue tourism, natural tourism, cultural tourism or winter tourism. He specifies that Albania owns several varieties for tourism offerings and the most important issue here is how to promote them.

**Shkelqim Tuzi** is the owner and manager of AL-POL Travel Agency, Shkodra, Albania. He mainly deals with the tours for foreign tourists from Eastern Europe, especially from Poland since AL-POL has partnerships in Poland. According to him, he has a role of promoting and presenting the country as a desirable destination, which has several alternatives for tourists. Although he mentioned that his contribution to the identity construction is not so much, he explained that every Albanian has his/her own role for tourism development.

**Ridvan Sokoli** is the Director of Development Office at Shkodra Municipality; Albania. In order to contribute to constructing Albanian identity in tourism, he is managing the processes for formalizing the tourism market. As he said, the informality is a concerning problem in Albanian tourism market and his role is to decentralize up to the law as much as possible. In addition, the promotion of Shkodra region, where has important value for Albanian tourism, is his other role. These promotions are comprised of several festivals, conferences, touristic events etc. He states the connection between these events and identity construction as follows:
“These sort of touristic events help promote and construct the regional identity while we are concerned with enlarging festival days on abroad.”

Mr. Sokoli, as being a regulator, has also been working for green transportation, such as the efforts for increasing the number of bike riders. He is trying to arrange touristic events with a theme of green transportation in order to attract both domestic and foreign tourists.

Luan Dervishej is Senior Tourism Expert at German Development Corporation (GIZ) and is partly supporting Albanian Tourism Institutions. His personal role to construct Albanian identity refers to the efforts of marketing the country as a destination both in research and practical field. He emphasized on his previous supports for many press conferences, such as Albanian in ITB Berlin, helped the country develop through a destination brand in Europe. Moreover, his last participation in “The Regional Project for Supporting Western Balkan Countries”, which was established to promote group tourism in branding the Balkan Treasures, contributed to the destination branding efforts of Albania.

5.2 The Interaction between Local People, Regulators and Business Enterprises

The interaction between local people, regulators and business enterprises was perceived as a critical topic by all of the participants. They were also aware of that this interaction is essential for contributing to forming Albanian brand identity in tourism. Since the opinions were formed by the profession of respondents, the researchers of this study grouped the reactions into four categories: “Academic Environment”, “Private sector”, “Government” and “Nongovernmental Organizations”.

Academic Environment: Observable reaction was that Albanian tourism has the lack of combination and correlation between civil society, regulators and private businesses. Although Albanians are trying to get a new identity, the tourism actors play different roles depending on their interests and beliefs:

“... Albanian tourism exists in all these dimensions but there is not harmony and coordination of the work between these three dimensions!”

They were also emphasizing on their endeavor (researches, conferences and workshops) in order to express the correct way of being successful with a new identity in tourism but the government was not making a significant allowance for their works. Although the country has great historical heritage and nature that are important for the tourism, the government does not invest a lot both in infrastructure of touristic regions and academic researches:

“The government is not investing too much in academicians in order to analyze the heritage that Albanians represent them in a good way, like Apolonia and Butrint. Right now, in Apolonia, we only know 25 % of the region. If there are more investments, the region will be amazing archeological heritage side.”

Moreover, all the academicians emphasized on that many business enterprises do not follow proper ways of tourism investments because they are interested in short-term profits instead of long-term profits and it damages the development of sustainable tourism.
**Private Sector:** The business enterprises’ initial complain was insufficient role of regulators (government) in tourism. First of all, the government should fulfill more efforts to control and to manage the market, e.g. standards for the quality of services, restrictions and formality procedures for the tourism agencies. Especially, one respondent emphasized on that this weakness damages current identity and will damage again further identity if it still exists. Secondly, there was a critic made about the low level of interaction and the integration as follows:

“The local people and the role of society is considerable high... But there is still a weakness in development of the integration and interaction of all players in Albanian tourism industry.”

Thirdly, the investment level of the government for the infrastructure was criticized by all the respondents. Accordingly, Albanian identity will not achieve sufficient results if the infrastructure is not improved like other touristic destinations such as Montenegro and Croatia. In addition, private enterprises invest more than the government but many investments of those are for short-term gains. According to the business enterprises, this matter again proves the weak integration between the tourism actors.

**Government:** The local government and regional governments are following the national tourism strategies and master plans, which are particular to each region. As they are the regulators of the tourism industry, their main consideration is to establish strategies for the development of Albanian tourism. They defend that the infrastructure and the quality in services have been getting better year by year but there are still a lot of things to do in advance. Therefore, the regulators have been trying to understand the views of civil society and business enterprises in order to establish more cohesive projects that will increase the interaction:

“The government has its own macro politic policies.... We as a regulator are trying to create interaction and relation between the private sector and local government, especially for the development of the infrastructure.”

One respondent laid emphasis on that the government organizes symposiums to increase the interaction between all the players in Albanian tourism. Moreover, there was a criticism from national government that some regional authorities do not respect the law and it harms the national tourism.

**Nongovernmental Organizations:** According to the reactions of the managers and experts, pre-established tourism strategies do not deliberate regional characteristics, such as people, values and local governments’ priorities. The strategies should concentrate on all the regions because people in this country are those who have history, culture and tradition; and their attributes should construct the identity of Albania in tourism industry:

“... By principle this interaction plays an important role... This interaction is not organized or based on a common theme or strategy in order to create an agreed or wished brand identity...So until now the sum of interactions can result in a non-cohesive brand or identity communication.”

In operational field, these imbalances in strategy building also drive inadequate investments in the regions. For example, some municipalities and local regulators still cannot catch environmentally friendly standards in service sector and this absolutely damages the natural
resources. These sorts of problems cause arguments between the civil society and government.

5.3 Important Strategic Factors for Developing Albanian Brand Identity

The respondents elucidated several important strategic factors for developing Albanian brand identity. The authors summed up all these factors without any subjective interpretation in the content:

- Country differentiating strengths and comparison of market perception can be used as driving sources for attracting more and various tourists.
- New segmentation based on historical heritage, geographical position and natural beauties will contribute to Albania in terms of reputation, financial gains and international connections.
- Transferring the identity with respect and protection into current time can provide unique identity elements for the destination.
- The usage of various communication channels in tourism market should be considered to reach to more tourists.
- Long-term strategies with action plans are needed.
- Repressive laws are required for the raise of environmentalist movements in order to protect the natural resources such as lakes and rivers.
- Direct governmental supports for sustainable development of tourism are crucial since many private business enterprises act different based on concerning interests in the market and it damages the national tourism.
- As regional projects with neighbor countries will raise the market share, more practical implications of the projects should be fulfilled by government.
- The infrastructure should be improved by the investments of national and regional governments.
- Superior education of tourism might present professional integration of the youth with the tradition and culture.
- Desired quality in services should be considered as an initial tourism effort of the destination.
- The government should encourage private entrepreneurs to invest in tourism.

5.4 Albania as a Desirable Destination

The respondents detailed many reasons with important foundations for Albania as a desirable destination in tourism industry. The discussion of this theme was shaped upon four main subjects by considering all the viewpoints. These subjects are “history”, “culture”, “natural beauties” and “geographical position”.

“History of Albania” was emphasized as a supportive reason by eight respondents. Archeological heritage was the main concerning issue in that context. One respondent clarified this heritage in such words:

“Albania has been a bridge, here you can see very old archeological stuff and what more beautiful is this archeological stuff! You can feel them without any difficulty and spending a lot of money.”
Although the occupation and interests of the respondents were differing, archeology was emphasized as a common element for Albania as a desirable destination. In that case, one of the respondents considered archeological heritage as a prospective source of segmentation strategy for the inter-development of Albanian tourism. However, there was a warning from one respondent to the government:

“The historical objects are not properly saved and some of them are damaged.”

In addition, “Culture of Albanian Society” was mentioned as a combining factor with history by half of the respondents, who are academicians, nongovernmental coordinators and private enterprises. In other words, cultural tourism was counted as a crucial reason. One respondent summarized Albanian culture that Albanians are the people coming from Ancient Empires and it is what Albania has to promote in tourism. Moreover, this rich cultural heritage was emphasized by one respondent in these words:

“The immaterial cultural heritages are unique language, customs, traditions and its own historical path. They are also tourism assets.”

Every respondent stated that Albania is still an unexplored touristic destination that has several “Natural Beauties” compared to other destinations. These can be detailed as Albanian Alps (Bjeshket e Namuna), long coast along Adriatic Sea, and many rivers and lakes. In that case, main consideration was the blue tourism for the tourists visiting Albania. One respondent emphasized on that as follows:

“What the nature has given to Albania cannot be found in everywhere because it has 28 000 km² landscape and 400 km seaside.”

In that case, one academician explained that Albania has also geo-diversity and geo-complexity in tourism. It means that the country has many natural attractions for tourists but the problems still exist in practical field. Nonetheless, the nature and climate make the tourism available for twelve months of year, such as winter tourism and summer tourism. “Geographical Position” of the country was measured as a basis by academicians and regulators. While the geographical position provides several natural beauties and historical heritage, the country is close to many touristic destinations in Balkan and Mediterranean region. According to their opinion, Albania has close connections with Kosovo and Macedonia and therefore, the country has already been a powerful destination brand for the tourists coming from these countries. The government has been investing in road infrastructure that connects Albanian touristic attractions with these countries as well. Additionally, this geographical position presents diversification for Albanian tourism. One respondent illuminated this issue in these words:

“You can pass to mountains from seaside in a short time.”

5.5 How the Tourists Perceive Albania as a Destination

Another issue concerning the pre-developed conceptual model was also to understand how the tourists perceive Albania. In this case, the participants tried to explain the issues regarding demand side but in supplier side standpoints. All the opinions indicate that the tourists have various perceptions of Albania as a destination. The image of Albania perceived by tourists
was explained by each respondent in a subjective way according to his or her interests, beliefs, experience and profession. The authors grouped the data into four perceptions based on the overall discussion in order to prevent repetition since some respondents had same opinions:

❖ **Unexplored**

In the case of Albania, according to respondents, being a post-communist has its own advantages and disadvantages. By considering the tourists’ viewpoints, all respondents argued that this was seen as an advantage related to the strict rules getting in Albania at that period. Consequently, there is a lot of information which could be collected from different providers but the difference still exists when there is no personal exploration:

“For a long time, I have been working in tourism industry and what my experience shows that it is something different by hearing about Albania and something is completely different by touching and feeling Albania. People who came to touch and feel Albania changed their idea about Albania in positive way.”

“I think that every tourist, who comes here, creates much better image compared to before because it is general conclusion that the image of Albania is different compared to reality here. In this case, they find positive signals here but Albania needs to have tourists for the second time! The tourists come here for the second give other expectations to Albania. The expectation is an important thing show reality here to the people!”

❖ **Non-managed**

Tourism industry above all other industries in the country was seen from the collection of the empirical data as the main industry for the future. However, each industry should be properly managed in order to be profitable. Prerequisite in this case was finding the method which will be proven as effective in changing the behavior of all representatives towards the managerial influence. Therefore, main concern of the respondents was poor management of the country as a destination and slow practical implications of tourism strategies:

“To be a touristic destination, it is not only necessary of what you offer. In my opinion, you need marketing, promotion and image for the moment. It is the only level we must have! It is missing: the necessary marketing, necessary promotion from Albanian government.”

“We are slowly trying that the tourists do not only enjoy the blue tourism but at the same time, they will enjoy historical, cultural and archeological tourism. So what we are trying to do is to make an inter-development between different types and segments of tourism. The Butrint amphitheater is amazing! If you haven’t been there yet, I strongly recommend you to go directly there! In this case, this is the big strategy that we have been considering for different segments of tourism. This shows the antic values of our country.”

“These people come twice and bring new people as well. ‘Difference’ is the reality that Albania is presented in the world and ‘Difference’ is the reality that exists in Albania.”
**Under developed**

Different countries have different issues regarding the development of tourism in advance. Albania is a country where the transition is still in process and there are several issues unsolved regarding tourism industry. One of these issues raised from our respondents was also the lack of infrastructure development:

“...On the other side, the image of Albania that people think is also linked to the infrastructure of tourism which is missing”

In addition, the respondents emphasized on that each factor affecting tourism industry development should be analyzed and solved immediately in order to transmit a positive identity. In this view, another matter was raised concerning the presentation and that was environment pollution:

“Before coming to Albania, the tourists expect to see something beautiful. Since they pass the border, they are facing with a sort environmental pollution like trashes near the roads. The government always mentions about doing something for preventing this pollution but there is still nothing done yet.”

“For example, in Velipoja, the massive tourism is developing and there is no switch water system, there is no waste management system, which is something very important for tourism.”

**Attractive**

The product varieties that are offered to tourists are important in satisfying their needs. Accordingly, in order to satisfy different needs of tourists, tourism sector in Albania is divided in different segments. The respondents focused on explaining that tourism should not be developed just in one segment of it, but should be developed also in other segments too in order to present different resources. Because Albania has a great potential in terms of attracting the tourists:

“Here, you find a calm reality and a beautiful nature. In addition, you also find the hospitality... Tourism is like the business. In order to attract the customers, you should offer what is the best and is different...”

“Tourists perceive Albania as an attractive destination. I can illustrate it with an example: a Polish tourist, who is a teacher, came to Albania as an individual without any support of tourism agency in order to do hiking on the Alps of Albania. When I met with him with a coincidence, he started to explain how he had perceived before coming to Albania and how his perception was changed after his time in Albania.”
5.6 The Competitors of Albania and Differentiating Features

In the aggregate, the respondents sorted four main destinations, which are the competitors of Albania in tourism industry. The competitor destination, the number of respondents and the reasons why the destination is competitor of Albania, can be found in the Table 8 below. As the authors grouped all the destinations, they inserted all obtained reasons without any interpretation and any intent resulted from pre-analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competitor Destination</th>
<th>The Number of Respondents</th>
<th>The Reasons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Montenegro             | 7                         | Neighborhood  
Developed touristic destination  
Infrastructure  
Interconnected types of tourism  
Investments for historical and cultural attractions  
Aggressive tourism strategies |
| Croatia                | 6                         | Neighborhood  
Capabilities  
Brand image  
Infrastructure  
Quality in services |
| Greece                 | 4                         | Neighborhood  
Historical heritage  
Aggressive tourism strategies  
Better promotions |
| Turkey                 | 3                         | Capabilities  
Cheaper prices and better promotions  
Brand Image  
Great level of investments  
Geographical position |

Table 8 – The Competitors of Albania in Tourism Industry
6 ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the purpose is to analyze the empirical data. “Frame of References” in Chapter Two will be used to compare and evaluate the data. The analysis will begin with ‘Internal Stakeholders’ and then, it will continue with ‘External Stakeholders’. After ‘Tourism Competition’, the analysis will be concluded with the ‘Revision of Conceptual Model’ by incorporating specific attributes of Albania.

In this study, the empirical data was planned to be analyzed by qualitative content analysis as explained before. As any researcher can use content analysis without inflexibility (White and Marsh, 2006, p. 23), the authors analyzed the qualitative data according to the fundamental procedures of qualitative content analysis (White and Marsh, 2006, p. 35-36):

- **Objective**: Meanings, subjects of messages and important factors were found and realized and the route was designed for presentation (Altheide, 1996, p. 33).
- **Nature of Data**: Data was gathered only for this study by investigating interview transcripts.
- **Selection of Data**: Subjective selection of purposive meaning unit for the analysis of data was fulfilled (White and Marsh, 2006).
- **Categorization**: In order to recognize relevant concepts, categorization was prepared (White and Marsh, 2006). The process was based on the main concepts, which were established in pre-developed conceptual model (Internal Stakeholders, External Stakeholders and Tourism Competition).
- **Coding**: The authors analyzed entire text and totally found out twenty eight codes which both present the aspects built from the literature before and the aspects referring to specific attributes of Albania (see Appendix 3). The frequency of each code was considered to increase the validity but was not presented for not quantifying the results. The codes were grouped under each category.
- **Argument**: Deep analysis of data with description and discussion of concerning concepts were done according to the codes (White and Marsh, 2006). As the frequency of each code was a partly supporting factor for analysis, reviewed literature was considered as well for finding parallelism and detailing the metaphors (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 88) in order to develop the conceptual model.
- **Software**: The researchers used “QSR NVivo 7” for categorizing and coding the data and finding connections about the aspects.

6.1 Internal Stakeholder Analysis

It was pointed out in the literature that the role of stakeholders in a destination is crucial in terms of their possession and wish for higher quality (Hardy and Beeton, 2001, p. 168). For the analysis of internal stakeholders, the authors have found six aspects according to reviewed literature in Chapter Two: “local people” and “tourism strategies” (Buhalis, 2000, p. 100); “regulators” and “existing brand image” (Hardy and Beeton, 2001, p. 178); “local enterprises” and “values” (own elaboration). All these aspects were identified and discussed in the literature review. According to gathered empirical data, while the aspects built from the literature were acknowledged and argued, new six prospective aspects representing specific attributes of Albania were found (see Table 9).
The researchers of this study again classified all these aspects based on empirical data and literature since some aspects have connections and close meanings. At the end, four fundamental aspects were established and deeply analyzed with combining aspects: “local people”, “local enterprises”, “regulators” and “existing brand image”.

### 6.1.1 Local People

As discussed in the literature, the analysis of local people is crucial since they and their role should be considered both for the management and marketing of the destination (Buhalis, 2000). During the interviews, the participants concentrated on this issue in high level. It was observed that the term of “local people” refers to the source of hospitality which is reputation of Albania. In this case, long-term values of local people are important since they and their role can contribute to forming the identity of destination. Anholt (2004, p. 35) discussed this issue in the literature that destination brands differ from corporate brands because local people of the destination is one of the reasons why the destination does not have a particular tourism product. As the hospitality was found as a crucial value of the society, unique language and welcoming attitudes towards tourists can be assumed as some of other values in Albanian identity.

### 6.1.2 Local Enterprises

There were concerning critiques for local enterprises, which can also be said as private business enterprises in other words. Main stream of these critiques were shaped through their insufficient contributions to the national tourism. As Buhalis (2000, p. 99) correspondingly
emphasized on possible conflicts between stakeholders due to short-term earnings in the literature, underlying complains came to a conclusion that Albanian business enterprises’ main interests are only for profits, which will not serve long-term benefits to the destination. One respondent clarified their investments as the ones just have been done for financial gains and it damages the values of destination. Many participants also stated that Albania needs a strong autonomy controlling private business enterprises in tourism. The most important issue arose from various opinions that private enterprises do not consider environmental concerns and natural resources and beauties are devitalized. Hence, collective analysis of local enterprises, values and environmental concerns is needed for the development of destination identity (see Figure 12).

![Figure 12 - Local Enterprises and Combining Aspects](image)

### 6.1.3 Regulators

According to the theory, regulators are completely responsible for the management of the destination (Hardy and Beeton, 2001, p. 179). Churugsa et al. (2007, p. 469) clarify this responsibility as a crucial element of sustainable tourism since regulators should work on long-term benefits for tourism market. Except the participants coming from the government, every participant examined regulators. What observed during the discussions are annoyances, disappointments, complaints and faithfulness about the regulators, who are operational mechanisms of the government. Main considerations regarding governmental aspects incorporated from the discussions were “tourism strategies”, “tourism education”, “tourism infrastructure”, “environmental concerns” and “political stability/instability”. According to the frequency of coding these aspects (see Appendix 3) in QSR NVivo, different criticism levels were found as shown in Figure 13 below. These levels indicate the significance of each combining aspect in order to analyze regulators.

![Figure 13 - Criticism Levels for Regulators based on Combining Aspects](image)
- **Tourism Strategies:** Indeed, insubstantial tourism strategies of the government can be indicated as first combining aspect in that case since A. Liu and J. H. Liu (2009, p. 236) emphasized on tourism policies which sustain the integration of all tourism players. Accordingly, it can be said that Albanian government is implementing the tourism strategies without enough integration of local people and business enterprises. The governmental disinterest can be mentioned although the participants from the government were indicating different. Therefore, integration of “tourism strategies” into “regulator” analysis can present better results through establishing an advanced destination identity.

- **Tourism Education:** In the literature, Liu and Wall (2006, p. 165) signified the challenge of preserving proper tourism education, which has effective aid for tourism management and marketing tourism offerings. Critical aspect found in the empirical investigation that Albania has been suffering from inadequate tourism education. This aspect should be analyzed together with regulators since the government is only actor in charge of tourism education. For instance, several respondents complained about few numbers of tourism schools and it proves many threats for forthcoming national tourism.

- **Tourism Infrastructure:** It was observed that tourism infrastructure is one of hot topics for Albania. Almost every argument was started and ended with disapproving the infrastructure of the destination. Some of what the participants considered in this issue refers to the problems with utility services, inferior investments for infrastructure, insufficient capacity of hotels etc. In fact, brand identity has “controllable elements” for services, products or organizations (Perry and Wisnom, 2003, p. 5). The empirical data show that tourism infrastructure can be counted in these controllable elements because, the regulators, who are coming from both national and regional government, are exclusively authoritative for implicating regional and national projects. It was also emphasized by all the participants from the government that the government is aware of the problem and has been working on tourism infrastructure development.

- **Environmental Concerns:** Another issue with the regulators is exiguous environmental investments for protecting natural resources and touristic attractions. As it could be in the same category of “tourism infrastructure”, the respondents separated this issue during their discussions. Environmental pollution in Albania causes problems both in operational and strategic fields. Some of the critiques were related to insufficient waste management systems and switch water management systems, which damage tourism products such as lakes, rivers, etc. Environmental concerns relatively indicates that if the government do not build up effective strategies are soon as possible, the destination life cycle of Albania will not be pleasant. As mentioned in *Chapter 2*, the destination life cycle (Butler, 1980) examined by Buhalis (2000, p. 105) has five stages: “introduction, growth, maturity, saturation and decline”. Although Albania is still in introduction stage, current environmental pollution might accelerate reaching to the decline stage. Therefore, the analysis of “environmental concerns” and “regulators” in the same category can submit solid results.

- **Political Stability/Instability:** Although Albania and EU signed “Stabilization and Association Agreement” in 2009 (Albania and the EU, 2009), the country is still suffering from political instability. As Albanian economy had been centrally planned until the beginning of 1990s, the problems about instability are still visible even tough free market currently exists. It was found out that political instability impairs national tourism as well as destination identity and image. This also comes into line with what Ivy and Copp (1999, p. 425) was concentrating on the difficulties touching on post-communist countries’ development. In this manner, the authors of this study suggest that the “political
stability/instability” should be associated with the assessment of regulators for obtaining clearer picture of the destination identity.

6.1.4 Existing Brand Image

The respondents described various images of Albania in tourism industry: “unexplored”, “mysterious”, “cultural richness”, “unique history”, “attractive” and “natural beauty”. Additionally, there were negative issues conveyed regarding the analysis of Albanian image: “under developed”, “non-managed”, “post-communist” and “bad reputation”. However, the respondents, who indicated these issues, considered them for criticizing the government and private sector. The authors have already touched many points regarding these negative issues in previous sections, “Local Enterprises” and “Regulators”. As the analysis of existing brand image is to understand considerable elements for identity development, it was classified into two combining aspects “geographical capabilities” and “historical heritage”. In addition, Figure 14 below presents the significance levels of these two aspects according to the analysis of empirical data by coding in QSR NVivo. Although the importance of these combining aspects is different (see Appendix 3), the authors suggest the analysis of existing brand image via both of those.

Figure 14 - The Aspects of Existing Brand Image and Significance Levels

-Geographical Capabilities: It was observed that Albania has great level of capabilities in terms of its geography. They can be integrated with coherent product of destination brand as Ooi (2004, p. 111) clarified in the literature. The respondents listed these capabilities like Albanian Alps for winter tourism, Adriatic coast for summer tourism, several rivers and lakes for natural tourism etc. Also, the tourists who have visited Albania before have a perception merged with geographical capabilities of the destination. In addition, as many respondents mentioned, the geographical position can also be included in these capabilities since the country is located near important destinations, e.g., Greece, Montenegro and Italy.

-Historical Heritage: In the literature, Buhalis (2000, p. 98) illustrated that a touristic destination exists with all elements of stakeholders including historical and cultural attractions. Fragmented offerings and their importance in tourism were also concentrated by Meidan (1984, p. 168). As mentioned by all respondents, Albanians were ruled by Illyrians, Romans and Ottomans. In case of Albanian image, historical heritage should be considered as an important aspect since many tourists prefer to go Albania in order to see historical attractions, e.g. archeological facts, monuments, museums etc. While this heritage contributed to the identity and image of the country, the cultural richness can also be counted as a historical heritage according to the opinions of all participants.
6.2 External Stakeholder Analysis

Hardy and Beeton (2001, p. 188) have already indicated probable challenges of interaction among stakeholders in tourism. In that case, external stakeholder analysis was believed to be crucial since it can help match the identity with the image as much as possible. When the authors suggested the analysis of external stakeholders at the closing of Chapter 2, the intent was to gain knowledge of what internal stakeholders (local people, local enterprises and regulators) of a destination can do to cultivate destination brand image for external stakeholders (tourists). Therefore, the analysis is mainly related to the transmission of identity to the image and the aspects are based on what and how the owners of destination brand consider.

In reviewed literature, there were four aspects found and discussed: “trends in tourism” (Go and Konecnik, 2008, p. 177); “needs and satisfaction” (Buhalis, 2000, p. 100); “segmentation” (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000, p. 44); and “tourist behavior” (own elaboration). In addition to the aspects built from the literature, the empirical data present additional four aspects that might be used for the analysis of external stakeholders (see Table 10).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 2</th>
<th>Second Component) - Strategic Brand Analysis in Destination Identity Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>External Stakeholder Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-category</td>
<td>Aspects built from the literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Codes</td>
<td>Trends in Tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tourist Behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Needs &amp; Satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Segmentation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10 - Coding Scheme for External Stakeholder Analysis

According to the empirical results, the image of Albania is so fragile and many tourists do not perceive the country as an entirely satisfying destination brand. However, this fragile image has two dimensions of “before the departure” and “after the visit” (see Figure 15). In the first dimension of “before the departure”, the image is perceived different that the respondents were complaining about. Even though unique characteristics of the destination drive the tourists into favorable thoughts, negative perceptions easily lead to generate an inaccurate image before the departure. The responses transmit several reasons coming from recent history of the country, infrastructure, the tradition of tourism management and national tourism policies, which were also analyzed in previous section, Internal Stakeholder Analysis. However, the second dimension of “after the visit” presents positive image and affirmative
feedbacks. Thus, the perception of the destination, which leads to establish the image in tourist’s mind, fits with the identity after the visit.

![Diagram showing inaccurate image before the departure, the image changes during the visit, and the image matches with the identity after the visit to some extent]

**Figure 15 – Fragile Image of Albania: Before & After the Visit**

In *Chapter 2*, the transmission of brand identity to brand image was elaborated and illustrated in *Figure 3* based on the theory (Kapferer, 1998; Aaker, 2002). It was found that an advanced brand identity constructed by suppliers turns into accurate brand image with efficient transmitted signals. However, fragile image of Albania indicates that the destination is perceived by tourists within improper process because the image should have fit with the identity prior to the departure. In order to establish accurate and strong image, especially before the departure, the message should be sent with proper identity in a well-organized system. As the effect of pre-obtained experience was already explained in reviewed literature, the brand weakens if the image is attempted to be changed following first perception (Perry and Wisnom, 2003, p. 6). Hence, the researchers have categorized prospective aspects for the analysis of external stakeholders. Subsequent aspects were categorized and clarified depending on suggested system of transmitting the identity to the image (see Figure 16) because external stakeholders consume destination as a cohesive product. According to this system, the analysis of “trends in tourism” formed via “needs & segmentation” can be added to gather extensive offered value. Following step is to send this offered value in a correct message, where the analysis of “communication & promotion” is needed. After the message is sent, positioning the brand in tourist’s mind results with an image, which can be analyzed as “destination image vs. satisfaction”.

![Diagram showing brand identity, trends in tourism, transmitted signals, communication & promotion, offered value, positioning, brand image, destination image vs. satisfaction]

**Figure 16 - Suggested System for External Stakeholder Analysis**
6.2.1 Trends in Tourism

According to the empirical results, segmentation in global tourism market is seen as a major issue while developing marketing strategies. This segmentation assists in fulfilling diverse potential customers’ needs by creating similar groups of customers (Steenkamp and Hofstede, 2002, p. 185). This helps the targeting process in understanding, analyzing and developing specific strategies for specific group of tourists. Respondents also stated that identity is a concept that is continuously changing and never static. Therefore, understanding trends in tourism will lead to effective resource consumption and ability of finding new opportunities. Accordingly, following and analyzing the trends in tourism becomes a must in order to offer desired value before and while transmitting brand identity.

6.2.2 Communication and Promotion

A reliable communication strategy is significant in order to transmit the right signals to build and reach the desirable identity (Morgan and Pritchard, 1998, p. 147). There should be coordination between communication and promotion with the Tourism Products Life Cycle in Destination Branding (Buhalis, 2000) presented in Chapter 2. Therefore, different communication strategies should be followed in accordance to each period depending on life cycle. In the empirical investigation, the participants stated that even though Albania is promoted different in media, there is still a lack of awareness for the destination. It means that responsible representatives of the country should exert stronger influence with different communication channels. Those transmitted signals are decisive for brand positioning and how it will be perceived by tourists.

6.2.3 Destination Image vs. Satisfaction

The authors of this study have carefully described the formation of brand image in Chapter 2. Only the analysis of communication and promotion following the trends in tourism is not sufficient in constructing how the country wants to be perceived. There should be coherence between the transmitted signals, offerings and the ability of satisfaction in order to have accurate image with efficient positioning. This can also be found in collected data that ensures Internal Stakeholder Analysis, where the satisfaction of tourists is a process that is built from the coordination of all contributors. Commitment of all contributors in increasing satisfaction level and how much this is achieved refer to the importance of understanding the constructed brand image. This will define the level of the desired brand image positioned in tourists’ mind.

6.3 Tourism Competition Analysis

In the reviewed literature, the role of competing brands is presented as high considering the rate of substitutability. The authors of this study have presented four important aspects while conducting tourism competition analysis; “brand identity and brand image” (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000, p. 44), “capabilities” (own elaboration) and “tourism gap” (Go and Konecnik, 2008, p. 177). These crucial factors while developing the conceptual model as their role in literature were seen substantial. Notwithstanding, four more important aspects were found from collected empirical data presented in the Table 11 supporting and advancing in a deeper analysis of the competitors. As this analysis is intended just for destination competitors, empirical results assured that two main classifications with combining aspects are reasonable for tourism competition analysis: “brand identity” and “brand image”.
6.3.1 Brand Identity

Understanding competitors through their weaknesses and strengths while developing a marketing strategy has been presented in the literature review as a conclusive matter (Nwokah, 2009, p. 21). Brand identity was considered in the literature review as an important issue for a brand, related to more how it presents itself rather than how it is perceived (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000, p. 40). The comprehending of brand identity is built through different signals transmitted by considering brand as a product, organization, person or symbol constructed from the supplier side (Kapferer, 1998, p. 94).

Analyzing competitors’ brand identity is crucial in developing a destination branding strategy. This brand identity passes through different stages while its construction. According to respondents, tourism industry should have its own managerial team in order to analyze and develop strategies for building brand identity. Accordingly, needed aspects in analyzing tourism competitors’ brand identity are clearly definable for their competitive advantages. The authors suggest that there is one fundamental aspect that should be analyzed, “tourism management”, which was measured in empirical data and can also be considered as a main connective aspect of “investments”, “capabilities” and “natural resources” in analyzing priorities of competitors’ brand identity (see Figure 17).

Table 11 - Coding Scheme for Tourism Competition Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Aspects built from the literature</th>
<th>New aspects built from the empirical investigation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand Identity</td>
<td></td>
<td>Competitors’ Strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Image</td>
<td></td>
<td>Investments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capabilities</td>
<td></td>
<td>Natural Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism Gap</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tourism Management</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 17- Identity Aspects of Competitors
-Tourism Management: The increasing competitiveness in tourism industry, regarding as it is one of the fastest growing industries (Pike and Ryan, 2004, p. 333) and for various countries is the main industry, had led to the establishment of tourism management for the countries. This unit helps in deep understanding of trends and travelers’ behaviors by collecting information leading to planning and management of tourism and its characteristics. The tourism management aspect was identified also from the respondents as a focal point of the competitors and how they characterize their competitiveness by well tourism management and therefore, a deeper analysis of this aspect is significant.

-Investments: Already recognized and well positioned destination brands by tourist have created their own set of supplier and service integrations (Buhalis, 2000, p. 97) through market analysis and investment. Deep market analysis is required by considering the fact that repositioning involves high level of investment (Pike, 2009, p. 864). This aspect was found in empirical data significantly decisive in building a destination brand such as developed infrastructure. Accordingly, recognizing “investment” of competitors in constructing or developing “brand identity” is a crucial factor while conducting tourism competition analysis.

-Capabilities: Effective brands in the market come as a result of differentiating itself from other competitors while transmitting its identity. The components creating this differentiation are the capabilities (Aaker, 2002, p. 76). However, these capabilities are not the core elements in constructing brand identity of competitors, they are important enough to help in developing an analyzing. This will lead to a future understandability of competitors focus in constructing, shaping or redefining their brand identity. Consequently, the capability aspect should needs a special place in brand identity construction.

-Natural Resources: As it was mentioned in Chapter 2, the factor of natural resources helps in shaping tourist perceptions by feeding their satisfactory level. Poor management of resources leads to poor segmentation of touristic capabilities. According to the collected empirical data, each destination has its own resources when it comes to show own offer so the brand identity is formed through those resources when transmitting the signal. Thus, the including of this aspect is essential in achieving an effective analysis.

6.3.2 Brand Image

In Chapter 2, the authors have explained the difference between brand identity and brand image according to proper references. Related to that, destination brand image was understood how tourists perceive a destination in this study context. Tourists have already the image for a country in related perspective. When there are almost same touristic offerings, the image that helps them make a choice. Substantial time and money are needed to build a positive image in customers mind as it develops from one step to another. This positive development of a positive brand image occurs when both standpoints of supplier and demand side are matched (Maguire, 2002, p. 4). Accordingly, new aspects built from the empirical data collection, “competitors’ strategies” and “tourism gap”, were seen reasonable in combining with “brand image” due to meanings and concerning connections (see Figure 18).
-Competitors’ Strategies: Differing from several factors in measurement of competitors analysis according to Aaker (2002, p. 193) is also strategy, concerning the image and the position of a brand. Collection of empirical data shows that there can be several differentiation aspects of a country but the most successful competitive strategies are those that focus on core aspects. Respondents stated clearly that the foremost aspect in developing a destination brand is differentiation which derives from deep analysis of particular aspects of competitor’s strategies.

-Tourism Gap: Each factor of competitor’s analysis has its significant value which possibly can lead to finding a gap in competitor’s tourism industry. The participants in the study identified that tourism plan and management should continuously be related to the trends, environmental issues and need of tourists otherwise there is a tourism gap created. This tourism gap is related to the present development and future development of tourism industry regarding fast growth and changes of effective world situation. Recognition of tourism gap will result in opportunity identification, increasing the analysis importance of this aspect.

Figure 18 - Combining Aspects of Competitors’ Image
6.4 Revision of the Conceptual Model

In the beginning of the research, the authors of this study were mainly inspired by Go and Konecnik’s (2008) theoretical framework of strategically analyzing destination brand identity based on brand identity planning model (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000). According to further theoretical findings, conceptual model of strategic brand analysis in destination identity context was presented at the closing of Chapter 2. The findings were derived from the theory and the authors analyzed and assessed the model in empirical field by considering the identity context of Albania. Empirical data was analyzed with theoretical data and specific attributes of destination were detected. In that case, similarities and differences among implied findings in the conceptual model and empirical results were found. The results illustrate that analyzing a destination brand identity can be divided into two main sections as the same in the model: “stakeholder analysis” and “tourism competition analysis”. The differences between the characteristics again separate stakeholder analysis into “internal” and “external”. However, the aspects considered in two main sections and two sub-sections differ from pre-developed conceptual model. The authors will now discuss and explain these differences.

**Internal Analysis of Stakeholders** is suggested through four main aspects with combining aspects. According to the picture, the order of analysis refers to “local people”, “local enterprises”, “regulators” and lastly “existing brand image”. Internal analysis is correspondingly expected to bring central elements to core identity that was discussed by Aaker (2002) in the literature.

Local people and values are combined together on account of the role of values in the construction of destination identity. Following analysis of local enterprises has two combining aspect consisting of environmental concerns and values in relation with their capabilities of saving and presenting them. Analyzing the regulators, on the other side, consists of five combining aspects crucial for internal stakeholders: tourism strategies, tourism education, tourism infrastructure, environmental concerns and political stability/instability. Moreover, it mainly focuses on the role of internal analysis in macro level. Lastly, evaluating existing brand image outlines the importance of considering the aspects, geographical capabilities and historical heritage, while conducting internal analysis.

**External Analysis of Stakeholders** in the pre-developed model presented in Chapter 2 consisted of four aspects to be analyzed. However, empirical investigation submitted that the analysis can concentrate on three main aspects: “trends in tourism”, “communication and promotion” and “destination image versus satisfaction”. In addition, analyzing the trends in tourism can be conducted by focusing on both needs and segmentation.

As the sequence of analysis depends on transmission of identity to image, it contributes to the enlargement of identity which can also be said as extended identity (Aaker, 2002) as illustrated in Chapter 2. All these three aspects are supposed to define the route of the owners of destination brand in order to attract more tourists.

In the section of Tourism Competition Analysis, initial conceptual model was constructed based on four aspects: “brand identity”, “brand image”, “capabilities” and “tourism gap” in order to develop a comprehensive exploration complementary to stakeholder analysis. After analysis of the empirical data cohesive with literature review, the main aspects composed with this section were decreased to “brand identity” and “brand image”. Brand identity’s major
combining aspect is tourism management that comes from the analysis of three other sub-aspects: “investments”, “capabilities” and “natural resources”. Brand image formed as a result of this analysis is integration and interaction of both “tourism gap” and “competitors’ strategies”. Accordingly, tourism competition analysis will result in deeper evaluation and understanding of successful competitor destinations in tourism market.

Regarding all the changes coming from reviewed literature and empirical investigation, revised conceptual model (see Figure 19) is on the next page. While this model, “Strategic Brand Analysis in Destination Identity Context”, is suggested as an initial step for constructing or developing destination identity, the authors believe in that the results are applicable for the analysis of destinations in global tourism market.
Figure 19 - Revised Conceptual Model

Note: Individual components and processes of the model were discussed in Figure 12, Figure 13, Figure 14, Figure 16, Figure 17 & Figure 18.
7 CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, the authors will present the conclusions of the research. Theoretical and empirical contributions will be clarified and then the limitations of the study and recommendations for further research will be explained.

As the authors of this study explained, the absence of identity based analysis in tourism market regarding the development of commercial approaches was evident. A theoretical framework (Go and Konecnik, 2008) for strategic brand analysis (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000) in the field of destination identity was already developed but the framework should has been improved or reformed with further empirical investigations as Go and Konecnik (2008) recommended.

The purpose of this research was to develop a new conceptual model for strategic brand analysis in destination identity context and to apply this conceptual model in the identity context of Albania to enhance the findings from the literature by fulfilling investigations in empirical field with incorporation in specific attributes of the destination. In terms of providing theoretical and practical contributions, the authors achieved this purpose by intensive review of the literature and collecting substantial amount of data in Albania and analyzing it with qualitative content analysis.

The initial conceptual model was developed by finding and analyzing different aspects of strategic brand analysis in the context of destination identity according to the theory. However, the completion of the conceptual model was accomplished after the analysis of empirical data. The revised model presented at the end of Chapter 6 changed from initially developed model according to the definition of importance factors by differentiating before and after the collection of empirical data.

As clarified in Introductory Chapter, the research questions are interrelated because the first question is related to measure the extent of analysis and the second question is concerned with specific attributes of Albania that can be integrated with the analysis. Consequently, the authors will answer the research questions.

What is the extent of applying strategic brand analysis in destination identity context in the field of destination branding?

How can specific attributes of Albania be incorporated into strategic brand analysis in destination identity context?

Frame of references developed in Chapter 2, presented secondary data about Albania reported in Chapter 3, collected primary data and conducted analysis allowed the authors to finalize the conceptual model presented in Figure 19. This model determines the extent of applying strategic brand analysis in destination identity context in the field of destination branding. The specific attributes of Albania were also found and incorporated into the model. The outcome of this research study goes along and explains the importance of “Stakeholder Analysis” and “Tourism Competition Analysis”, as already presented in the research.

“Strategic Brand Analysis in Destination Identity Context” model constitutes from the adaptation of aspects which were presented in previous studies and some aspects are related with the country context of Albania. This model defines that there should be several aspects
which should be taken in consideration as the initial step towards destination identity development. Accordingly, it is an analyzing process that should be considered from the supplier side and decision makers to develop marketing strategies of a touristic destination for identity formation. Therefore, this model is not suitable for specific touristic destinations in specific conditions because it can be generalizable for all destinations aspiring for an identity building. By incorporating specific attributes of Albania, the authors will outline the analysis. As the first analysis refers to “Stakeholder Analysis”, it is divided into two other subcategories; “Internal Analysis” and “External Analysis”:

**Internal Analysis** of stakeholders includes “local people”, “local enterprises”, “regulators” and “existing brand image” as four main aspects concerned with the effect that they are asserted in “Stakeholder Analysis”. This analysis should be conducted in the presented order of the revised model since this order was defined according to the contribution value and the connection criteria in terms of destination identity. The specific attributes of Albania were incorporated in this analysis. In pre-developed conceptual model, “tourism strategies” and “values” were considered as main aspects for analyzing internal stakeholders. After the empirical research, the “values” was inserted into the analysis of “local people” and “local enterprises” as a combining aspect. The “tourism strategies” was seen reasonable as initial combining aspect of analyzing “regulators”. Moreover, all of the main four aspects were detailed in terms of combining aspects and analysis processes in **Figure 19**.

Suggested **External Analysis** of stakeholders should be conducted based on founded main aspects in following order: “trends in tourism”, “communication & promotion” and “destination image vs. satisfaction”. This constitutes from the effect of each aspect presented and their mutual effects on the ability to transmit the identity to image. These aspects were mainly found depending on the identity context of Albania and suggested system illustrated in **Figure 16**. This analysis mainly differs from the aspects and process of initially developed system based on theoretical issues. The “needs” and “segmentation” were converted as combining aspects of “trends in tourism”, which is first step for analyzing external stakeholders. The “communication & promotion” was found out as an important connecting step, which influences “destination image vs. satisfaction”. Indeed, the process of entire analysis was considered as the system of transmitting the identity to the image. Consequently, the analyses of internal and external stakeholders are central to the generation of the finalized “Stakeholders Analysis”.

Second part of the analysis consists of **“Tourism Competition Analysis”**. Based on the reviewed literature and collected empirical data, the authors can determine that this part of analysis is accomplished through analyzing the main aspects, “brand identity” and “brand image” of competitor destinations. Conducted empirical research in Albania changed the system of analysis compared to pre-developed conceptual model presented in *Chapter 2*. Each of these aspects consists of combining aspects regarded as principal in conducting an assessment of competitors. Analyzing brand identity of competitors refers to the evaluation of “tourism management” by considering combining aspects of “investments”, “capabilities” and “natural resources”. As described in previous chapter and clarified in **Figure 17**, the sequence and effecting schemes of these aspects were again designed by considering Albanian identity. The next step continues with analyzing the brand image of competitors by examining interaction and integration of “tourism gap” and “competitors’ strategies”. Primary empirical data obtained in Albania mainly designated mutual relationships between these two combining aspects and their linkages with brand image. **Figure 18** in previous chapter exhibited the structure of this analysis as well.
7.1 Theoretical Contributions

Considering the issues discussed in the chapters of introduction and reviewed literature, academic researchers should examine brand identity construction and development in order to present theoretical improvements compared to existing theories in the literature (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000; Alsem and Kosteljik, 2008; Go and Konecnik, 2008; Pike, 2009). Destination brand identity can also be considered in that research gap since destination branding should be analyzed for generating comprehensible basis for a destination (Buhalis, 2000; Pike, 2009; Ooi, 2004).

The authors of this study believe that establishment of strategic brand analysis by considering destination identity context is propitious for theoretical contribution to the literature. While the analysis is useful to provide initial results for identity development of destination brands, suggested processes and aspects are assumed to be useful and beneficial in terms of marketing destinations in tourism industry. Hence, the authors systemized that the way of what and how the owners of destination brand should perform in order to position the destination as a strong brand in tourism market. Moreover, the efforts on improving identity-based marketing (Alsem and Kosteljik, 2008) for destination branding can also be considered as another contribution due to research efforts of this study for trying to manage the balance between supplier and demand sides.

7.2 Empirical Contributions

As Albania was empirical foundation of this study, the authors initially presented and discussed several issues of the country by considering secondary data. Extensive empirical research was also conducted to obtain primary data for analyzing the destination with suggested theory. While the country is an emerging destination in tourism market (Linstead, 2011; Lonely Planet, 2010), the government has been trying to develop tourism strategies in order to keep and to strengthen current position of the destination (Albanian Tourism Sector Strategy 2007-2013, 2008). In terms of empirical contributions, according to the authors of this study, this research offers a range of insights for Albania since it was the first research on the subject of Albanian identity in tourism. The destination identity was strategically analyzed as a brand in tourism market and the findings presented initial elements for identity construction of Albania. As the country can complete first step to reach to a well-developed identity by considering these results, sustainable tourism development and better positioning in tourism market can be fulfilled by partly support of study findings.
7.3 Limitations

This research study has some issues concerning limitations. The first limitation is in relation with the language. Even though that the interviews were conducted on the desired language by respondents (Albanian or English) and the explanation of the main concepts to the extent of understandability was provided, some shortcomings are believed to occur. The authors also accept that there could be some limitations with the translation of interview questions although additional support was taken from translation agency. Another limitation is concerned with the inability of collecting tourism data in communist period, in order to provide the scale of tourism development between years.

The time constraint was a big issue when collecting empirical data, although the authors spent two weeks in Albania for conducting interviews. This is in relation with the available time of the respondents related with their occupations and the limited time of the study. Moreover, the Albanian context as a country which is still in transition limits the study in some ways.

The authors showed great effort not to raise a conflict between non-governmental and governmental groups during data collection. Thereby, everyone was free to answer the questions raised. Even though each response was clear, the authors cannot guarantee the opinion of each respondent as own precise thought. Furthermore, the data was collected in two regions of Albania because respective groups in these regions were considered as the most important representatives. The addition of other representative groups and regions and even different countries in the study could assistance in providing stronger support for the research results.

Although ten representatives in the study were selected from each group affecting tourism, the authors think that a larger group of representatives should be taken in consideration since it will be supportive for the generalizability. Nevertheless, the authors understand that developing a new model should not only be focused on Albania context but in wider one. Thus, the model should be analyzed in different contexts for confirmatory purposes.
7.4 Recommendations for Further Research

The aim of this research study was to develop a new conceptual model in destination identity formation as the first generation step. Therefore, the need for more respondents from each representative group is obvious in order to consolidate the model more. Accordingly, a need to cover more countries is essential. Based on this, there is a necessity to apply the presented model in global context to understand the generalizability. In this way, the suggested model can be discarded, revised or accepted. There is also a need of more explanation to define the difference between identity and image relating to the existing confusion between these two concepts. Moreover, the suggested model is understood as the initial phase of identity development and therefore, studies related with the second phase of it can be conducted.
Reference List

Articles


**Chapters in Edited Books**


**Books**


Newspaper Articles


**Annual Reports**


**Speeches & Lectures**


**Web Pages**


Appendix 1: Interview Questions in English

We are Master students in department of Marketing and we are investigating what features in the strategic point of view Albania should take in consideration and how will these features help in developing its destination brand identity in tourism industry. The main purpose of this study is to contribute in theory of the studied field and practical application for Albania.

By brand identity, we mean the main elements of brand (in a country context this case Albania: heritage sites; historical and cultural, social aspect, coasts, mountains, political situation, DMOs etc.) that together identify and differentiate the brand in consumers’ mind.

By destination branding, we mean selecting all above mentioned elements of a brand and analyzing them and choosing the main elements or interact all of them in order to identify and distinguish a destination (Albania) through positive image building in tourism industry.

Main Questions

1- In your opinion, why can Albania be a desirable destination for tourists?
2- How do you think tourists perceive Albania as a destination?
3- Who are the competitors of Albania in tourism industry and which features differentiate Albania from them?
4- In your opinion, how does the interaction between local people, regulators and businesses contribute to forming Albanian brand identity in tourism?
5- What is your role in constructing Albanian identity in tourism?
6- In your personal observation, could you please highlight important strategic factors in case of developing Albanian destination identity in advance?

Sub-questions

○ What do you think about private business enterprises?
○ What about the capabilities of Albania?
○ What do the tourists prefer to visit in Albania?
○ What do you think about the education for the tourism industry in Albania?
○ Which segment is more demanded?
○ What do you think about the civil society?
○ Is Albania telling its identity good or bad?
○ Can we say that Albania needs to introduce itself on abroad much better?
○ Should the government support the tourism much more?
○ What do you think about the Albanian identity in tourism?
○ Do you think that the government should decentralize the autonomy?
○ What do you think about the specialties of Albanian people?
○ What do you think about the tourism trends for Albania?
○ What is the gap in Albanian tourism?
Appendix 2: Interview Questions in Albanian

Ne jemi student në MSc Marketing dhe jemi duke hetuar se çfarë pikash karakteristikë dhe duhet Shqipëria të marre ne considërë dhe se si kto karakteristikë do te ndihmojnë ne krijimin e nje market të identifikueshte në destinacionin turistik se industries se turizmit. Qellimi kryesor i ketij studimi është të kontribuoje ne teorinë e fushë dhe zbatimin praktik per Shqipërinë.

Nga marke e identifikueshem kuptojme, elementet kryesore të nje marke (ne kete kontekst ne rastin e Shqipërisë: trashigimë kulture, historike, aspektin social,brigjet, mallet, situatën politike, organizatat e marketingut ne destinacion etj) qe sebashku te identifikojme dhe dallojme marken ne mendjen e konsumatorit.

Nga marke destinacioni kuptojme, zgjedhjen e te gjithe elementeve te lartpermendur të nje marke dhe analizimin e tyre duke zgjedhur elementet kryesore apo ndërveprimin e ktyre elementeve ne menyre qe te identifikojme dhe dallojme nje destinacion (Shqipërine) duke ndërtuar imazh pozitiv në industrie e turizmit.

Pyetjet Kryesore

1- Sipas mendimit tuaj, pse Shqipëria mund të jete nje destinacion i deshivueshem për turistë?
2- Si mendoni se turistët e perceptojne Shqipërinë si destinacion?
3- Cilet jane konkurrentet e Shqipërisë në industrie të turizmit dhe çfarë karakteristikë dallohe Shqipërine nga ato?
4- Ne opinionin tuaj, si kontribuoni ne formimin e identitetit të Shqipërisë bashkëveprimi i popullit vendas, regulatorve të tregut (politikat) dhe bizneseve?
5- Cili eshte roli juaj personal ne krijimin e identitetit te Shqipërisë?
6- Në vëzhgimin tuaj personal, ju lutem mund të nxirrni në faktorë të rëndësishëm strategjik në rastin e zhvillimit ne te ardhmen identitetit ne destinacion te Shqipërisë

Pyetje Nën

- Çfarë mendoni per bizneset private?
- Po ne lidhje me aftesitë e Shqipërisë?
- Çfarë preferojne turistet te vizitojne ne Shqipëri?
- Çfarë mendoni per rolin e edukimit në industriat e turizmit në Shqipëri?
- Cili segment ka kerkesë me te madhe?
- Po ne lidhje me shoqerine civile ne Shqipëri çfarë mendoni?
- A eshte Shqipëria duke shfaqur nje identitet me mire apo te keq?
- A mund të themi se Shqipëria duhet të perfaqesoje veten me mire e nxirrni në pah faktorë të rëndësishëm strategjik?
- A mendoni se qeveria duhet të ndihmojë ne shume biznesin?
- Cifare mendoni per identitetin e Shqipërisë në turizem?
- A mendoni se qeveria duhet të decentralizojë autonominë?
- Cifare mendoni per vlerat dhe aftesitë e popullit Shqiptar?
- Cilet jane trendeti turizmit Shqiptare?
- Cili eshte boshkëku ne turizmin Shqiptare?
Appendix 3: Aspects that participants think are significant for "Strategic Brand Analysis of Albania"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Aspects</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1) Local People</td>
<td>x x x x x x</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) Local Enterprises</td>
<td>x x x x x x</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) Regulators</td>
<td>x x x x x x x</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4) Existing Brand Image</td>
<td>x x x x x x x</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5) Tourism Strategies</td>
<td>x x x x x x</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6) Values</td>
<td>x x x x x x x</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(7) Tourism Education</td>
<td>x x x x x x</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(8) Geographical Capabilities</td>
<td>x x x x x x x</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(9) Historical Heritage</td>
<td>x x x x x x x</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(10) Environmental Concerns</td>
<td>x x x x x x</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(11) Political Stability/Instability</td>
<td>x x x x x x</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(12) Tourism Infrastructure</td>
<td>x x x x x x x</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>(13) Trends in Tourism</td>
<td>x x x x x x</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(14) Tourist Behavior</td>
<td>x x x x x x</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(15) Needs &amp; Satisfaction</td>
<td>x x x x x x</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(16) Segmentation</td>
<td>x x x x x x x</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(17) Communication</td>
<td>x x x x x x</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>(18) Transportation</td>
<td>x x x x x x</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(19) Destination Image</td>
<td>x x x x x x</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(20) Promotion</td>
<td>x x x x x x</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(21) Brand Identity</td>
<td>x x x x x x</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(22) Brand Image</td>
<td>x x x x x x</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(23) Capabilities</td>
<td>x x x x x x x</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(24) Tourism Gap</td>
<td>x x x x x x</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(25) Competitors Strategy</td>
<td>x x x x x x x</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(26) Investment</td>
<td>x x x x x x</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(27) Natural Resources</td>
<td>x x x x x x</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(28) Tourism Management</td>
<td>x x x x x x</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>I Internal Stakeholder</td>
<td>8 9 3 9 8 6 8 8 9 7</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>II External Stakeholder</td>
<td>4 4 4 4 5 6 5 6 6 4</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>III Tourism Competiton</td>
<td>5 5 7 8 6 7 6 5 4 6</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>