UNIVERZA V LJUBLJANI

FAKULTETA ZA DRUŽBENE VEDE

Antonija Bajec

Trženje turistične destinacije hrvaške Istre v digitalni dobi

Branding of Croatian Istria as Tourism Destination in the Digital Age

Magistrsko delo

Ljubljana, 2015

UNIVERZA V LJUBLJANI

FAKULTETA ZA DRUŽBENE VEDE

Antonija Bajec

Mentorica: izr. prof. dr. Urša Golob Podnar

Trženje turistične destinacije hrvaške Istre v digitalni dobi

Branding of Croatian Istria as Tourism Destination in the Digital Age

Magistrsko delo

Ljubljana, 2015

**Branding of Croatian Istria as Tourism Destination in the Digital Age**

The digital age has presented a great challenge for destination marketing organizations with the Internet becoming a powerful tool for destination branding and destination development. In order to gain position in the tourism market, destination marketing organizations (DMO) must have online strategies that are in accordance with new trends. DMO may create a positive destination image that is in accordance with destination identity, but there are also other 'indirect' sources that DMO cannot influence such as 'word-of-mouth' online or offline. Croatian Istria or 'Green Mediterranean' is the most developed and the most visited region of Croatia but is still unknown in most parts of Europe. Due to historical obstacles, Istria did not have time to develop and is still a young tourism destination that needs to be discovered. Although Istria has good online destination marketing there is still a strong influence from organic agents in creating destination image. In the case of Istria, the Internet is present in information research when awareness by organic agents is already created. The importance of the Internet in the case of Istria is growing as Anholt (2009) concluded, the future of a destination branding will be interactive and immediate; those destinations that don't embrace the opportunity of the Web in destination development will suffer from poor level of image and awareness among potential visitors.

**Key words:** digital age, DMO, branding, destination development, Croatian Istria.

**Trženje turistične destinacije hrvaške Istre v digitalni dobi**

Digitalna doba je postavila pred organizacije, ki se ukvarjajo z marketingom destinacij, veliko izzivov. Internet je postal pomembno orodje pri marketingu in razvoju neke destinacije. Da bi se uspešno pozicionirala na trgu, mora organizacija, ki znamči turistično destinacijo, razviti spletne strategije, skladne z novimi trendi komuniciranja na spletu. Vplivati mora na oblikovanje pozitivnega imidža destinacije, ki je v skladu z identiteto destinacije. Pri tem mora upoštevati, da obstajajo tudi »posredni« vplivi na oblikovanje imidža, na katere ne more neposredno vplivati, npr. govorice in spletne govorice. Hrvaška Istra ali „Zeleni Mediteran" je najbolj razvita in najbolj obiskana hrvaška regija, vendar v mnogih delih Evrope še nepoznana. Zaradi zgodovinskih ovir Istra ni imela dovolj časa za razvoj, zato jo lahko označimo kot mlado turistično destinacijo, ki jo je treba odkriti. Čeprav ima razvit spletni marketing, je pri oblikovanju imidža destinacije še vedno prisoten vpliv turističnih agentov. V primeru Istre je internet prisoten predvsem v fazi iskanja informacij, ko je zavedanje s pomočjo agentov že ustvarjena. Pomen interneta za znamko Istra raste in kot je zapisal Anholt (2009), bo prihodnost znamčenja destinacije interaktivna in takojšnja. Destinacije, ki ne izkoriščajo priložnosti na spletu, bodo trpele zaradi slabo razvitega imidža in nizke ozaveščenosti potencialnih obiskovalcev.

**Ključne besede:** digitalno doba, DMO, branding, razvoj destinacije, hrvaška Istra.

# TABLE OF CONTENT

# TABLE OF FIGURES

# TABLE OF TABLES

# 1 INTRODUCTION

Tourism destination branding in the digital age is very current and challenging theme. In today's digital age, when people are exposed to a lot of information, it is difficult to position the brand online by attracting potential visitors to come to a destination. It is important to understand that consumers in today's world are not only influenced by DMO promotion, but also by other sources of information. Online brand can be created by a destination marketing organization or by people-visitors of a destination (Michaelidou and others 2013). The findings of the basic article of Govers, Go and Kumar (2007) suggest that tourism promotion does not have a major impact on the perceptions of travellers and other sources of information have much greater bearing on the formation of destination image. Tourists mostly create their image before they come to a destination and this influences their behaviour regarding decision of travelling to certain destination (Govers and others 2007). Tourism destination image affects tourism destination selection. Namely, tourists normally have limited knowledge about a tourism destination that they have never visited, thus in this situation a tourism destination with a stronger, positive and recognisable image has higher chances of being chosen as a travel destination. Secondly, image affects tourist behaviour, specifically tourist satisfaction and their intention to re-visit the tourism destination. Thus it can be concluded that the role of tourism destination image is to both increase and maintain tourist attention (Križman-Pavlović 2008). In today's digital age this is possible only through maintaining a strong online presence.

In this thesis the influence of the Internet on tourism destination development is examined, in particular a case study of the Istria Region, as a tourism destination with large historical obstacles, is presented. Istria is the leading tourist region in Croatia with over 30% of all tourist overnight stays in the country yet still does not have a clear identity and is lagging behind famous tourist destinations. The biggest challenges of Istria's online branding are to create greater online visual identity and positive reputation (Tourism Master Plan of Istria

2004-2012) that can help marketers to improve its online branding and enhance the number of tourists choosing this as a destination. Researching the image of the tourism destination of Istria could help marketers to improve branding development strategies for Istria as a destination. The objective is to show all the contemporary possibilities of destination online branding, particularly to highlight Istria's DMOs' online marketing efforts and strategies in order to position the brand online.

The purpose is to show the influence of the Internet on Istria's destination image and destination development through the point of view of professionals engaged in Istria's tourism development agency and tourists, thus primary and secondary information sources will be used. Through the main research questions the influence of the Internet on Istria's destination development and positioning will be examined as it is believed that tourism destination image today is formed through the Internet. As tourism destination image is formed by many information sources, determining if tourism destination image is formed more by destination marketing organizations (DMO) or through a wider group of factors and information sources, will be subsequently examined. Focus will be placed on online DMO promotion because it is believed that tourism image is also formed online and thus affects tourist behaviour. Finally, the last research question will be focused towards the influence of the Internet on tourist buying behaviour and destination positioning, particularly if DMO online promotion or other sources of information influences their buying behaviour will be examined, and decision making processes will be described.

The first part of the thesis includes an introduction and the main definitions of tourism destination brand, with an explanation of its main elements: identity, positioning and image. The second part of the thesis explains the function of the Internet as the main source of information that affects tourism destination image formation, where the significance of Internet information in attracting visitors to a destination by destination promotion, social networks, blogs, search engines, online communities and other sources of destination marketing intelligence, will be explained. The third part is a case study of the Istria Region. Firstly, the research questions on which the research is based, the methodology of research in which are highlighted sources of information, research methods, sample of research etc., are explained. The following part of this chapter comprises a brief description of the Istria Region and a representation of information sources of the researched units (the main Istrian marketing organizations and authorities, Istria online presence and investigation of Istria's image). A

presentation and description of all secondary sources of information subsequently follows, and finally a presentation of primary research results, conclusions of the research and conclusions of the thesis.

# 2  BRANDING OF TOURISM DESTINATION

Branding of a tourism destination is a very broad term that will be explained in following chapters but is important to say that has three main elements: destination brand identity, destination brand positioning and destination brand image. There are many challenges that should be faced in order to effectively position a brand in the minds of consumers. In today's digital age, the main tool of tourism destination positioning is the Internet, but in order to understand this process, it is important first to understand what tourism destination brand and its elements actually mean. In this chapter will be given the main definitions of tourism destination brand, challenges of destination branding and detailed explanation of its main elements (identity, positioning and image), with focus on destination image because it is the ultimate result of DMO efforts and effects of destination development.

## 2.1 CONCEPT OF DESTINATION BRAND AND BRANDING

There are many definitions of destination brand but one of the most significant is that destination brand is a name, symbol, logo, word, mark or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates the destination: furthermore, it conveys the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; it also serves to consolidate and reinforce the recollection of pleasurable memories of the destination experience (Ritchie and Ritchie 1998).

These are some definitions of a brand brought by WTO – World Tourism Organization:
•   The term „destination brand" refers to a destination's competitive identity. It is what makes destination distinctive and memorable. It differentiates the destination from all others and it is the foundation of the destination's international competitiveness.
•   A destination brand represents the core essence and enduring characteristics of a destination. A destination can change its moods and the way in which it presents itself to

different market segments. But its core brand characteristics, like someone's personality, are essentially always the same.

• A destination brand represents a dynamic interaction between the destination's core assets and the way in which potential visitors perceive them. It really only exists in the eyes of others. It is the sum of their perceptions, feelings and attitudes towards the destination, based on the way in which they have experienced the destination or on how it has presented itself to them.

• A destination brand generally cannot be manufactured like a consumer product brand. It inherits its core assets: its landscape, people, culture and history. It exists in the way in which these assets are perceived by potential visitors and the emotional value they attach to experiencing them (Anholt 2009).

The brand must have an assurance of quality and to be unique and differentiated. A recognized brand is a promise to consumers who generally know what to expect from that brand and trust their expectations will be met (Blain and others 2005). For a destination is very difficult to assure quality because of the variance of products and services. DMO and destination stakeholders must share the same vision in order to satisfy the visitor expectations and ensure high quality of this destination. It is not enough just to promote cultural and natural heritage, a good destination branding requires a unique selling proposition that is sustainable, believable, relevant and hard to copy. So it can be concluded that differentiation of a destination is a key to be successful.

## 2.2 PROCESS OF TOURISM DESTINATION BRAND DEVELOPMENT

When developing a brand, the destination should focus on its core market segments. The perception of these segments will define the brand's core characteristics. Because of that the consumer image research is essential to understand. To identify the consumer perceptions of the destination, the most effective way is qualitative research. There is necessary to explore the people's psychological needs and travel motivation in sufficient depth to reveal their true motivation for travel, identify the experiences they are seeking and to understand what kind of destination would satisfy them. It is also important to make a deeper psychological investigation that can establish visitors „likes" and „dislikes".

In brand development, there should be involved also stakeholders (political, commercial, travel businesses and residents). Stakeholders are obtaining their buy-in to the concept and active participation as advocates of the brand in how they talk about the destination and how they behave toward visitors. It is important to enable the creative flexibility necessary to appeal to different market segments with still maintaining a coherent destination brand that is universally and recognizable (Anholt 2009). Brand architecture should contain national and sub-national brands this means that sub-national brands should reflect at least some of the national „umbrella" brand value and still differ from others. The personality of a destination brand is defined by several different and complementary values reflected by the marketing communication. It is important that this communication comes from the same place reflecting a destination brand values. Destinations also tend to refresh their brands and re-brand. This comes when a destination brand becomes comfortably familiar.

The following questions needs to be answered by potential visitors in order to build a successful brand (Anholt 2009).

- What are the main things I like about a destination?
- What sort of place is it?
- How does it make me feel?
- How would I describe it in one sentence?
- What makes it different from all other destinations?

In brand development also can help research agencies and specialist branding. They can provide independent analysis which can help to build a sustainable destination brand.

A sustainable brand must have certain success factors. Critical success factors are:

- Qualitative consumer research
- Understanding of destination's core market segments
- Understanding a destination's competitive position – its strengths and weaknesses
- Leadership and support for the brand from the very top (government, NTO, etc.)
- Brand management system
- Internal brand communications program
- Destination stakeholders' buy-in to the brand
- Communication with stakeholders that are involved

• Commercial and other brand stakeholders involved in marketing communications of the brand

• Constant monitoring of the brand's impact among key target segment

• Understanding that everyone is responsible for applying the brand in marketing communications and behaviour

• Long-term commitment in building a brand equity

• A mindset that positions the brand at the centre of all marketing communications

• Living the brand – Brand is not built only by marketing communications, the behaviour is critical by NTO and its staff, by stakeholders and by residents.

## 2.3 CHALLENGES OF DESTINATION BRANDING

The real challenges of destination branding bring the integration of tourism and tourism promotion into the overall nation brand strategy. Balanced representation of a country is the main challenge. Tourism promotion that gives some sense of the real abilities and real activities of the population it is considered to be more convincing to the population itself and it is setting up images of the country which clash up with its economic, political or industrial reality (Anholt 2009). Objectivity is the second challenge and also the most hardest to achieve. Objectivity is one of the most valuable challenges and creates a brand image. Good brands have the objective view and are seen from product inventors and marketers as the same way as the consumer. It is important to highlight that some countries have a greater identity than others, the cause might be that they have good history background, natural and cultural heritage etc. but this doesn't mean that countries that are smaller and do not have such strong stereotype and identity in the world, can build a strong and recognizable brand. For them is far better to identify their unique abilities and potential that really can differentiate them from other destinations. All countries can find something that is uniquely theirs and competitive (Anholt 2009).

## 2.4 TOURISM DESTINATION IDENTITY, POSITIONING AND IMAGE FORMATION

Brand identity represents values and essence of community in tourism destination: this is desired image about tourism destination on the marketplace and is focused on motivating and giving guidelines to shareholders. The brand image of tourism destination is a real image that

have consumers and that can also differ from that which determines brand identity. Main goals of any marketing strategy usually will be or making a new image or strengthening of the positive image that already exists in the target market. A theme of tourism destination image has become one of the leading subjects in tourism literature. The image of customers has a big role in the travel decision-making process and because of that it is important to understand the image that customers have about tourism destination (Figure 2.1).

**Figure 2.1: Brand identity, positioning and image**

**Brand identity**

Desired brand image

Mission/Vision Value

**Brand positioning**

**Brand image**

Real perception that consumers have
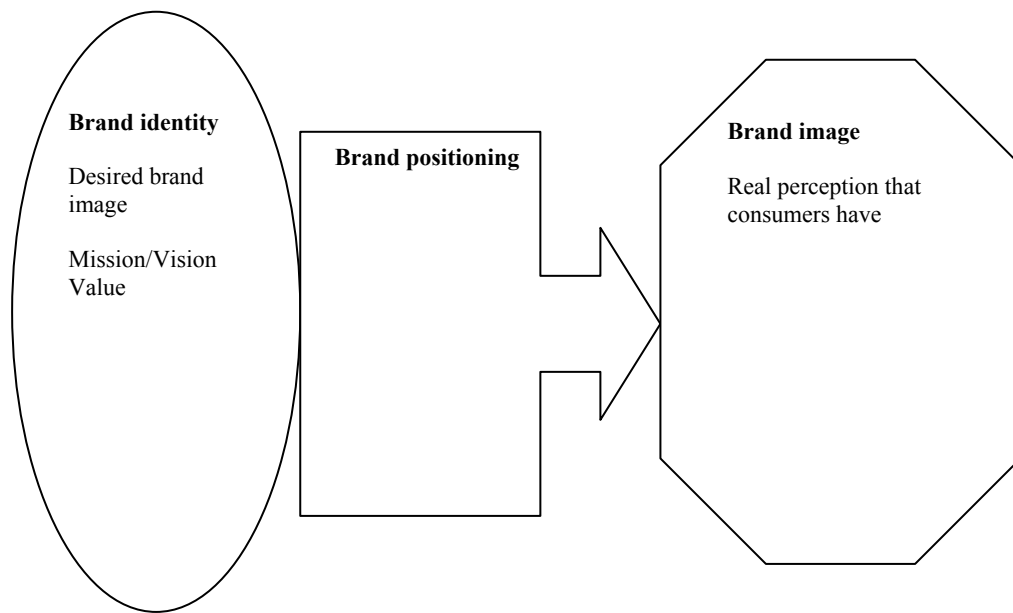
Source: Pike (2010, 272).

## 2.4.1 BRAND IDENTITY

The communication approach defines corporate identity as a »sum of all the factors that define and project what an organization is, and where is it going – its unique history, business mix, management style, communication policies and practices, nomenclature, competencies and market and competitive distinction (Podnar 2015). Tourism destination identity considers communication effort of tourism destination to present itself in public in the way that would like to be seen and remembered (Križman-Pavlović 2008). In building a destination brand, marketing communication can be an excellent tool in selling vacations and other products and services, but they can not manipulate with the national image. National image is build by international involvement, stakeholders, it is everything that one country does, says and makes. To build a strong brand one country, especially small countries that find themselves

competing every day against bigger countries, needs to reinforce the same story, the same values, the same personality, the same tone of voice. One country needs to learn how to be itself, and when this happens, it can start its influence and international reputation.

In order to build competitive identity, countries must create their images through six areas of activity (Anholt 2009):

1. Their tourism promotion and people's first-hand experience of visiting the country as tourists
2. Their exported products and services
3. The policy decisions of the country's government
4. The way the country solicits inward investments and recruitment of foreign entrepreneurs, workers, researchers and students
5. Cultural exchange, cultural exports and sport
6. The people of the country themselves: politicians, media and sports stars and population in general.

BRAND PERSONALITY

As tourism destinations become more substitutable due to increasing competition in global tourism markets, destination personality is seen as a viable metaphor for building destination brands and crafting a unique identity for tourism places. A distinctive brand personality can help to create a set of unique and favourable associations in consumer memory and thus build and enhance brand equity. A well-established brand personality influences consumer preference and patronage and develops stronger emotional ties, trust and loyalty with the brand. A distinctive and emotionally attractive destination personality is shown to leverage the perceived image of a place and influence tourist choice behaviour. In theoretical terms, product/brand personality reflects the "set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (Ekinci and Hosany 2006).

It evokes emotional links between brands and consumers (Landon 1974). The idea of product or brand personality can be traced back to its origins through the theory of symbolism. It is argued that consumers view their preferred products as an extension of themselves, and, therefore, their purchasing behaviour is motivated by the symbolic value of the product. Accordingly, when choosing among competing products, consumers assess the degree of

similarity between the personality traits communicated by the product and the personality they wish to project themselves. According to the familiarity theory, humans use themselves as models of the world because of their extensive knowledge of themselves. In other words, people use their own self-schema as source of labels and concepts by which to interpret the outside world. Countless studies have established that in interpersonal interactions, people are attracted to others of similar personality because similarity is considered to be emotionally rewarding. Consumers develop a relationship with brands based on their symbolic value (Ekinci and Hosany 2006). As a result, the brand becomes alive and is no longer a passive object but an active partner in the consumer's mind. Perceptions of human traits are inferred on the basis of a person's behavior, physical characteristics, attitudes, and demographic characteristics (Pervin in Ekinci and Hosany 2006, 22). Perceptions of destination personality traits can be formed and influenced by the direct and/or indirect contact that the tourist may have had with the destination (Plummer in Eknici and Hosany 2006, 25).

Personality traits can be associated with a destination in a direct way through citizens of the country, hotel employees, restaurants, and tourist attractions, or simply through the tourist's imagery, defined as the set of human characteristics associated with the typical visitor of a destination (Aaker 1997). In an indirect manner, personality traits can be attributed to destinations through marketing programs such as cooperative advertising, value pricing, celebrities of the country, and media construction of destination (Cai 2002). Product personality traits can be described as the symbolic consumption of the product through direct and indirect contacts. Aaker (1997) developed the Brand Personality Scale (BPS). The author extended on existing human personality research and found a brand personality to be multidimensional, consisting of five dimensions: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness. The authors' findings provide further evidence that brand personality adjectives may shift from one dimension to another depending on the culture (Ekinci and Hosany 2006). Destination personality refers to human personality traits associated with a destination. It has become an important construct, as tourism managers attempt to understand people's choices to find ways to differentiate their destination in an increasingly complex marketplace (Ye 2012). Tourism destination plays an essential role in the current tourism academic field because of intense competition in global tourism markets. The idea of utilizing destination personality as a core strategy to differentiate one destination from potential competing destinations has attracted increasing interest from researchers globally (Ye 2012).

## 2.4.2 BRAND POSITIONING

Positioning is a potential tool to create harmony between brand identity and brand image. Attractive tourism destination is the one that achieve recognisable position that springs to mind first (ToMA position) in the group of decisions of big group of tourists that have an intention to visit the destination in the certain timeframe, and has leading position according to features that determine tourism destination (Pike 2010).

Brand positioning refers to "target consumer's" reason to buy your brand in preference with others. It ensures that all brand activity has a common aim; is guided, directed and delivered by the brand's benefits/reasons to buy and it focuses at all points of contact with the consumer (www.managementstudyguide.com 2015).

Brand positioning must make sure that:
- it is unique/distinctive vs. competitors,
- it is significant and encouraging to the niche market,
- it is appropriate to all major geographic markets and business,
- is the proposition validated with unique, appropriate and original products,
- it is sustainable,
- it is helpful for an organisation to achieve its financial goals and
- is able to support and boost up the organisation (www.managementstudyguide.com 2015).

It is important to understand which criteria consumer will use in distinguishing tourism destinations that he took into the consideration. If some tourism destination differs from others on the basis of a particular feature, then this is the position that the Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) should research for mutual benefit.

In ideal situation campaign for positioning would support positive perceptions that facilitate consumer's decision-making process and would not try to change its opinions and standings. Effective positioning could be a source of competitive advantage of organisations in any activity in which exist middle replacement products (Porte in Pike 2010, 77). Successful positioning of the tourism destination in a group of tourism destinations that the consumer will maybe visit is the source of concurrent advantage for most concurrent places. Successful

positioning can be made by influence on the brand image and attractiveness of tourism destination. Brand positioning describes how the brand can effectively compete with a certain group of competitors on the certain market (Keller in Pike 2010, 77).

Positioning was defined as the procedure of establishing and maintaining recognisable position on the market for an individual organisation or/and its individual production offer. At the centre of this research for the recognisable place, there is recognition that marketing is a fight that is lead in the minds of consumers. These fights in the consumer's heads are lead on the evil and horrible places, places that are dark with a lot of unexplored territories and with deep traps that can catch them incautiously. Marketing fights are lead in people's minds. " Positioning theory is based on three claims. As first, we live in a society that is full of communication tools. Every day we are bombarded with information. As second, the brain developed defence system against many messages. As third, the only way to get to the consumer is throughout a variety of information's is through simple and precise messages (Ries and Trout 1986). The consequence is that lack of positioning strategy can lead to direct competition with stronger brands, than unwanted position with little demand, unclear position in which is not clear about which distinctive features is about or to the absence of position when for this product is not heard (Lovelock 1991). Porter (1980) warned that the most dangerous is "to be found in the middle" or not to have a recognisable position. Effective positioning offers benefits to consumers for resolving the problems on the way that is different from competitors. The key idea in positioning is the brand image although the positioning means more of just understanding what brand image means to consumers. The position of a product is determined by its results connected to specific features compared to competitors. Ries and Trout (1986) highlighted the need that marketing experts think about achieving the difference, not an improvement. This is very important in tourism because the only small number of touristic products is unique. Globalisation causes the increasing uniformity of most tourist places all over the world. In today's world is almost destroyed the possibility that tourists experience different attractions. As a consequence of this, the lands become replaceable with each other. No matter if the tourist is searching for good beaches, relaxing woods or old cities, to him is relatively unimportant where he will find this (Cohen in Pike 2010, 86). In order to isolate from a group, for any product might be achieved effectively differentiated positioning. The basic marketing challenge that are faced DMO's (destination marketing organizations) with is how to coordinate big and different span of products with needs of dynamic and heterogenic market. If the principle "who first comes to my mind" is an

indicator of sympathy generation, it can be concluded that this position offers to tourism destinations potential source of competitive advantage (Pike and Ryan 2004). The strategy should maximize the strong sides, minimize the weaknesses, reduce threats on the minimum and bring possibilities to the maximum. The sustainable concurrent advantage is achieved when consumers notice that successful feature exist over its competitors, and which persists to time. To achieve an advantage, this successful feature must be important criteria when purchasing. To consumer are not really important all distinctive features because they don't use all of them in decision making. For every product should be ideal that target market segment his important features perceives as positive. Deciding are standings across features that are closest connected to the creation of sympathies or concrete decisions about a purchase; remaining features or standings – regardless of how favourable they are – are not decisive.

Analysing more than 80 published researches about a picture of a tourism destination, in them 37 in the end states decisive features or factors which are summarized in 15 themes (Pike 2010):

- nature/landscape,
- local culture,
- price/value,
- good weather opportunities,
- infrastructure,
- friendly exhilarated local people,
- secure/relaxing environment,
- there is a lot to learn,
- accommodation,
- sports activities,
- bars/restaurants,
- historically important places,
- nightlife,
- availability and
- purchase.

A Huge number of features can be important in mark category. But from mentioned features, only one or few will be used in final brand selection. Positioning can help the destination

marketing organization to reach tourist on the markets that are crowded with promotional messages from their competitors. This requires precise determination of the focus  and balance establishment with regard on this that must be omitted from the statements about the value. Effective brand positioning may facilitate the consumer decision-making process. Tourists don't have time to consider advantages of all available products in the decision-making process and will, therefore, appreciate the statement of the value that is memorable, precise and attractive with respect to their needs. When the position is precisely determined, the elements that will represent the brand to a public needs to be chosen. For positioning tourism destinations, the most important elements are a place name, symbol and slogan (Pike 2010).

The approach to brand identity development requires effective identity positioning of a brand in order to achieve its desired image on the market. Positioning is the touch point between desired tourism destination image and real image that have consumers about tourism destination. Effectively positioning has mutual benefit for DMO's and for consumers-tourists. Although the consumers have unlimited number of tourism destinations from which they may choose, in the decision-making process, they will consider advantages of a small number of tourism destinations. The mode of positioning was proposed as source of competitive advantage for tourism destinations in which was evoked session of tourism destinations and "the first destination that comes to my mind" and those are the key indicators of attractiveness and competitiveness of certain tourism destination. Effectively positioning is the source of advantages for tourism destinations, but requires succinct, precise and consistent message, adopted to satisfy the need of target segments, to get throughout crowded, heterogeneous and dynamic markets. The key components of tourism destination positioning are a brand name, symbols, logotype and slogan (Pike 2010).

Many authors examined the emergence of brand positioning strategies in advertising that parallel the growth of the global marketplace. A new construct, global consumer culture positioning (GCCP), is proposed, operationalized and tested. This construct associates the brand with a widely understood and recognized set of symbols believed to constitute emerging global consumer culture. Study results support the validity of the new construct and indicate that meaningful percentages of advertisements employ GCCP, as opposed to positioning the brand as a member of a local consumer culture or a specific foreign consumer culture. Identification of GCCP as a positioning tool suggests one pathway through which

certain brands come to be perceived by consumers as "global" and provides managers with strategic direction in the multinational marketplace (Alden and others 1999).

## 2.4.3 IMAGE FORMATION MODEL

Reynolds (1965) describes the formation of image as the development of a mental construct based upon a few impressions chosen from a flood of information (Govers and others 2007). Echtner and Ritchie (2003) explained that the image will also be affected and modified based upon first hand experience. Often people mix image with a reputation, image is what people believe about destination while a reputation is what destination actually is – "the character of a destination". As tourism services are intangible, images become more important than reality, and the tourism destination images projected in information space will greatly influence the destination images as perceived by consumers. Destination positioning and buying behaviour are influenced by projected images. Image formation can be influenced indirectly through secondary interactions as media, literature, arts etc. It is clear that tourism promotion and advertising are not the only factor that are influencing tourist image. Many studies have investigated the relation between image and behaviour. The interactive nature of internet can add whole new dimensions to the possibilities of projecting these destination images, but these images must be in the line with tourism product although it can create a tourism development strategy gap (Govers and others 2007).

**Figure 2.2: Tourism destination image formation model**
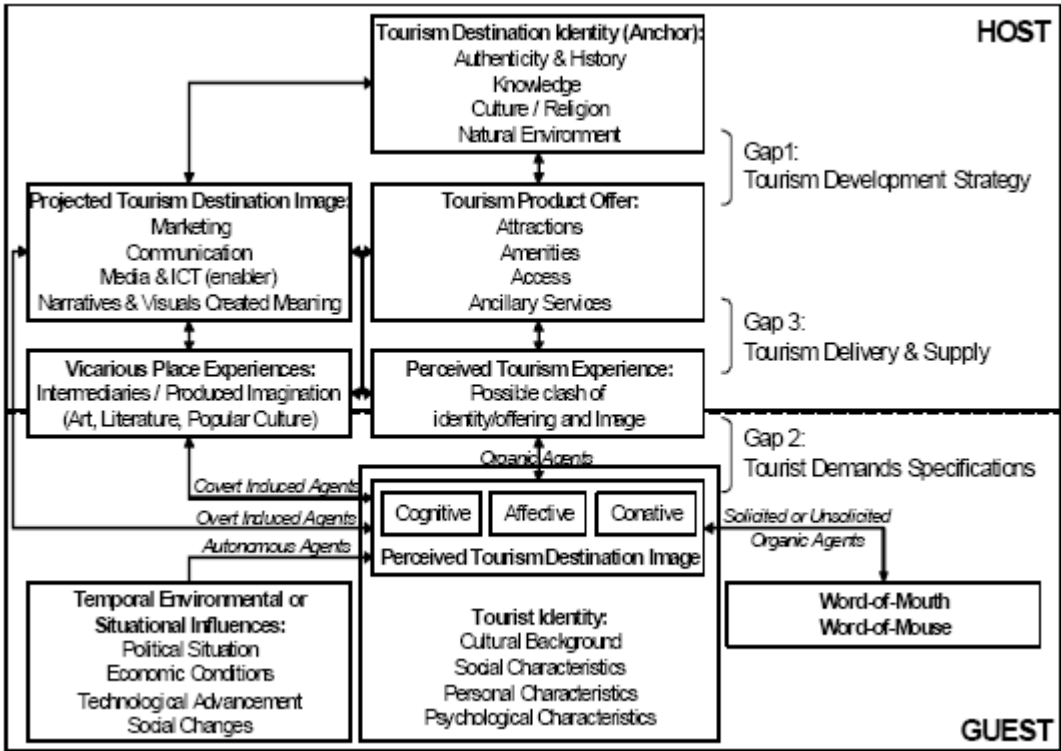


Source: Govers and others (2007, 16).

Figure 2.2 describes destination image formation model and identifies those elements that have a dynamic influence on how the perceived destination image is formulated in the mind of the consumer (Govers and others 2007). Hunt (1975) claims that the image that potential tourists have may influence on tourism destination development and it becomes the main principle on which are based other investigations. In the end, most tourism products are services can only compete with a picture that potential visitors have about them. Marketing experts of tourism destination must focus on questions of intangibility and risk, replacement, heterogeneity, inseparability and transience. The only physical proves about tourism destination can be found in brochures, on internet pages, photos of tourism destinations or at media. Expectations about tourism destinations become realizable only after purchase and

going on a trip. From this follows that intangibility enhances the risk in travel decision-making. Although all agree that picture about a tourism destination can have an important role in travel decision-making, determination of a picture about tourism destination and understanding its creation are not completely clear. There is a huge number of definitions in tourism literature and it can be said that picture about a tourism destination become marketing slang (Cossens in Govers and others 2007, 9). On the base of 15 kinds of research conducted between the year 1975 and 1990, Echtner and Ritchie concluded that most definitions are not clear, as the "perception of area". Jenkins (1999) discovered that the concept of tourism destination picture was used in different contexts, including the perception of individual, stereotypes of the groups and image created by DMO's. The questions that arise were: "Are the researchers really sure in the unique characteristic of tourism destination picture? Can the image be precisely measured (Govers and others 2007)?"

DEFENSIVE SYSTEM OF OUR MIND

Our mind is often fighting with too many commercials and other media. In this sense, there is too much possibility in order to choose tourism destination and a huge amount of commercial materials about tourism destinations brought increased confusion between potential tourists. Jacoby (1984) concluded that, although we could become overcrowded with information's, customers won't let this happen. Instead, they are developing mechanisms for resolving these problems. The need for simplified information processing manifests in the definition of a product image that suggests Reynolds (1965): "Mental image that the consumer acquires on the basis of a few chosen impressions between all impressions." According to this point of view, we gain simplified image by the creative process of filtration. For example, we chose what messages attracts our attention and what information will we keep in our memory. This selective filtration is the form of perceptive defence (Moutinho in Pike 2010, 89). Still is not completely explained how in the brains process cognitive material filtrates. The same can be said for the procedure of creating a picture of tourism destination (Baloglu and McCleary 1999).

**2.4.4 COGNITION, AFFECTION AND CONATION**

The point of view contains cognitive, affective and conative components. Cognition is that what is already known or what is meant about tourism destination and can be organic

conditioned or induced. This knowledge may or may not result from previous visits. Cognition indicates awareness. Affection indicates feelings that an individual has about something, and that can be favourable, unfavourable and neutral (Fishbein in Pike 2010, 84). Russel and colleagues have analyzed 105 general attributes that can be used to describe the environment and they made the diagram of affective reaction. Model (Figure 2.3) included eight attributes that are related to affection separated for 45 degrees.

**Figure 2.3: Diagram of affective reaction**
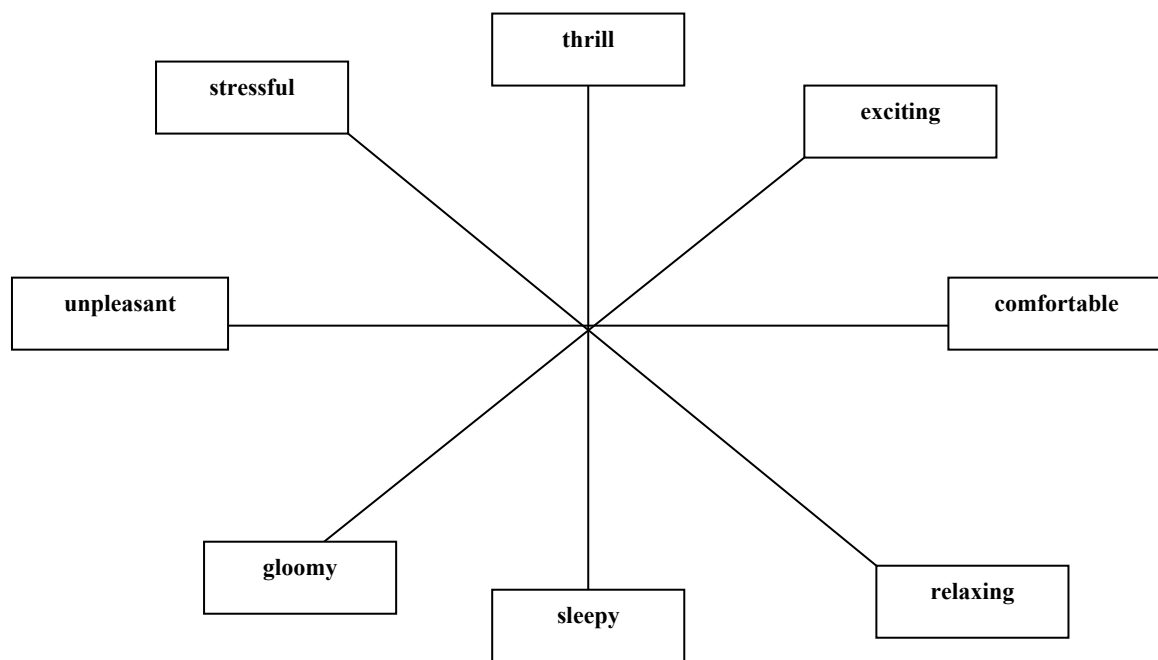


Source: Russel and others in Pike (2010, 81).

The assumption was that these dimensions of attributes are not independent of each other but are an interlaced model of affection. The horizontal axis is set arbitrarily and indicates "comfort" while the vertical axis indicates the level of "thrill". In this view thrill, that is itself a dimension, means a combination of exciting and pleasant, while stressful is a function of exciting and unpleasant. With help of four semantic different scales "comfortable/unpleasant", relaxing/stressful, thrill/sleepy and exciting/gloomy, Baloglu and Brinberg (1997) showed how the model of affective reaction can be applied on tourism destinations (Pike 2010). They used multidimensional scales in order to sort affective positions of 11 Mediterranean tourism destinations. It is considered that affection begins to work during the phase of evaluation in the process of selection of tourism destination (Gartner 1993).

Most investigations about tourism destination image are focused on the cognitive features. Pike (2002) claims that his analysis discovered that only in six from 142 published works about a tourism destination showed direct interest for affective notions. Only recently, the investigations about tourism destination were investigating cognition and affection together toward tourism destinations. It has been acknowledged that destination image has both cognitive and affective dimensions (Dichter 1985). Some studies have been confined to either affective or cognitive dimension, but this study seeks to incorporate both dimensions in its assessment of the destination image. There are four bipolar affective items: stressful/relaxing, gloomy/exciting, sleepy/thrill and unpleasant/pleasant. In order to capture cognitive images, there is a cognitive bipolar set of adjectives: accessible/isolated, friendly/cold, lively/stagnant, interesting/boring, quiet/noisy and overcrowded/sparse. Competitive tourism destinations show similarities in cognitive and affective image. Conative image is analogue to behaviour because it is a component that refers on intention or action. Intention refers on brand purchase probability (Howard and Sheth 1969). Conation can be understood as the probability of visiting a tourism destination in a certain timeframe. Figure 2.4 shows the relationship between a cognition/affection/conation in decision-making process. Myers (1992) recognized that this model doesn't have to go always in this direction because for creating sympathy, cognitive images are not necessary. Because of that the procedure can begin in any phase of a model. Lysonski and Woodside (1989) determined that the sympathy creation in decision-making process is based on a combination of cognitive and affective associations. Tourists may develop attachment to a destination because of its ability in fulfilling specific goals or activity needs and/or because of symbolic meaning and thus, destination attachment could be an important measure of tourist satisfaction and loyalty (Yuksel, 2010).

**Figure 2.4: Cognition/affection/conation**
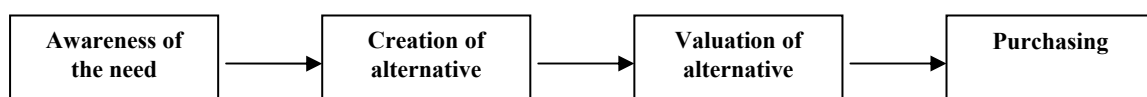


Source: Pike (2010, 260).

Despite its significance, only limited research has been conducted to determine the likely influences of emotional associations or meanings tourists attach to the places they visit on

their satisfaction and future behaviour (Yuksel, 2010). The tripartite classification of mental activities into cognition, affection and conation originated in the German faculty psychology of the eighteenth century, but was adopted by the association psychologists of the nineteenth century of Scotland, England, and America. Its influence extended into the twentieth century through the writings of William McDougall. It is proposed that the classificatory scheme is still useful in the assessment of contemporary emphases in psychology, such as the present prominence of cognitive psychology to the relative neglect of affection and conation (Hilgard, 1980).

## DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

With motivation begins the process of decision-making about tourism destination when appears the need that cannot be satisfied at home. Motives can be considered as psychological determinants of demand (Kotler 1999). Motivation in tourism is a relatively new field of research and researchers have consistently emphasized the lack of the term. Theories about a motivation in tourism in most of the cases have been conceptual, not empirical (Ritchie 1996). But, lack of theory is not peculiar only to the tourism business, in generally the question of a motivation is still not completely explained (Pike 2010).

### *The need for sun and ramble*

The desire for wandering the innate human need indicates temporarily leaving the familiar environment to experience different cultures and places. It is considered that individuals are learning all motivations for travelling except a birth need to investigate (Mayo and Jarvis 1981). For example, no one was born with the need for status. The sympathy across travel and behaviour of individual may change by learning the needs and motives during the life.

### *Factors of stimulating vs. factors of withdrawal*

Dann's work (1977) considered the push factors to explain the connection between motivation and choice of the tourism destination. It was considered that motivation "push factors" are logical previous of analysis of "pull factors" like features of tourism destinations. In a category of push factors, Dann introduced concepts of disorientation and feeding of the ego which he took from social psychology to explain the basic motivations in tourism. Disoriented tourist wants to escape from everyday life and home isolation to find an opportunity for social interaction. From other "ego feeding" requests reinforced self-recognition such as possibilities

of reconstruction of itself on the place where identity is not recognisable or travelling to local tourism destinations to confirm its status. Iso-Ahola explained push factors as the mental preparation for human activities and linked to an individual level of optimal arousal. Some common push factors in travelling found in many studies include escape from routine everyday life, relaxation, exploration, social interaction, relationship enhancement and prestige (Yiamjanya and Wongleedee, 2014). What makes an individual travel is not only the psychological push factors. Swarbrooke and Horner emphasized the importance of range motivators related to consumers in the tourism industry, which could be categorized into those motivating a person to take a holiday to a specific destination. It is essential for tourism marketers to investigate not only why individuals travel and what they intend to do on a holiday in relation with their internal drive but also on their motives related to tourist destinations those motives are called »pull motives« (Yiamjanya and Wongleedee, 2014).

One of the problems which are facing tourism researchers is that tourists alone should not really completely understand the motives to travel. Thanks to many interviews many of the respondents for the first time faced with motives that encourage them to go on vacations (Pike 2010). The reasons that people quote are not sufficient to explain motivation. Instead, Mill and Morrison followed Maslow's hierarchy of needs and claimed that the key explanations of motivation for travelling are the satisfaction of needs and wants: "Motivation comes when individual wants to satisfy the need" (Mill and Morrison in Pike 2010).  They thought that this understanding of motivation is actually the difference between the view on tourism destination as a group of attractions and view on tourism destination as a destination to satisfy the needs and wants". According to behavioural perspective, the trip begins with anticipation and planning and involves the movement to the destination, the on-site experience and activities, the movement back to the origin and the recollection and sharing of the experience. Many kinds of research have been made to describe the planning activities included in a trip and especially choice set development. The decision "net" model considers the decision to travel is a complex process which entails the solution of many sub-decisions or facets including destination, travel party, attractions, activities, timing and route and views information search as a non-linear, dynamic process in which the traveller interacts with the information available in the environment and makes contingent decisions. The behavioural perspective of tourism provides essential information necessary to define the context and boundary of the online tourism domain. The tourism domain includes web sites related to all

behavioural aspects of the travel experience including accommodation, activities, sightseeing, attending events as well as information related to prices and routing (Xiang and others 2008).

Sometimes one cannot influence individual decision making because individuals have established structures for making their decisions. However, one may have something useful to say to a group to increase their ability to work together and arrive at a generally accepted answer. Since a group does not usually have a single voice it is necessary to combine the judgements to get the final priorities of the group (Saaty 2007).

# 3 INTERNET AS THE MAIN SOURCE OF INFORMATION THAT AFFECTS TOURISM DESTINATION IMAGE FORMATION

The future of a destination branding will be interactive and immediate. A digital marketing gulf will appear between those destinations that embrace the opportunity of the web with its associated empowering mindset, and those that do not (Anholt 2009). Those that do not will suffer from a poor level of image and awareness from potential visitors. There is a virtual information marketplace online where potential visitors can share and exchange information, opinions and stories about the destination. Digital era has created an opportunity for people to obtain, exchange and create information on destinations and for destinations by presenting their attractions to potential visitors. A new way of sharing information's over the internet has enabled dialogue between potential visitors. It has also enabled useful information to all marketers and tourism organizations about visitors, their desires and their feedback about a destination. The internet is used by 1,5 milliard of users. Facebook is used by 10% of all Internet users. About 600 millions of people have their own e-Mail address. The number of Blogs all over the world grows rapidly.

The web is mobile, social, personal and local. The web is rapidly growing  (Glavović 2008):
•    1995 – 2005 World Wide Web, the main characteristics is "Approach: What can I find?" Availability, managing individual clients, brand determines the quality, tagging for better display

- 2005 – 2015 Web 2.0, the main characteristic is "Participation: How can I participate?" Programming, community management, the quality is determined by the group members, tagging for better human approach

- 2015 – 2020 Real World Web, the main characteristic is "Context: what should I know here and now" Proactively, managing identity/avatar, the need determines quality, tagging for better machine approach.

## 3.1 DESTINATION BRANDING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

A potential visitor can build easier a picture of a destination by communicating with people they have never met and from official sources of information - official tourism websites. DMO must understand the opportunities that the internet environment makes available to help drive visitors to them. But also must realize that cannot control the way their destination is perceived. Gunn (1988) thought that images are created on two levels: organic conditioned and induced. Organically conditioned image is acquired with the everyday assimilation of information's of one individual, and may include a wide span of assets from geography text in school to mass media and real visit. From the other side, induced image is created by the influence of tourism promotion that is lead by marketing experts, this is called advertising. The difference between organic conditioned and induced image refers on the level of influence that have marketing experts. Gunn (1988) considered that experts for marketing of tourism destinations should focus on changing the induced image because they cannot do anything to change organic conditioned image  (Pike 2010). In contrast from most of the products where the sources of information are mostly commercials, it seems that the picture about tourism destinations arises from a wide span of sources (Echtner and Ritchie 1991). There are two possible consequences: (1) individuals may have image about tourism destinations that had never visited; (2) according to this that image may change after a visit, it is important to distinct images that have visitors from the images that have non-visitors. The non-visitors actually are that ones that would like to visit the destination, but they still haven't visited because of different reasons. Image about tourism destination may improve by travelling to this destination. But, most investigations of tourism destination image didn't include that ones that decided not to travel to this destination. Gartner and Hunt (1987) have proven that in 13 years has come to the positive change of tourism destination image, but they

concluded that every change happens only slowly. There is an assumption that is difficult to change people's opinion and that is the easier marketing communication way to strengthen the positive image that already exists (Pike 2010).

Through multiple online networks, DMO must work with consumers who are empowered to reinforce or contradict a destination's brand image. DMO must create a virtual digital marketplace for information exchange, where people can exchange their opinions and experiences. DMO must also establish and provide a valuable, credible and reliable forum for potential visitors. It is also very important to highlight that the destination experience must match the brand promise and this enables unlimited communication, people can now communicate their positive or negative experiences through Facebook, Blogs, Forums, especially Twitter where people are sending "tweetpics" about their highs and low of their holiday (Anholt 2009). Destination brand must be expressed consistently in all marketing communications of one destination. This ensures stability to a destination whose messages are more powerful, positive and consistent. This creates a positive image of the destination in the digital world with all its values and assets. Destination brand in according to their values and essence must remain constant and the way in which is communicated through marketing activities and must consider the reality and opportunities of the digital age. This means endorsing the way in which Web empowers consumers, finding ways of using new applications to help potential visitors understand the essence of the destination and demonstrating through the techniques and communications methods it uses that the destination is forward-looking, customer-oriented and can deliver visitors expect (Anholt 2009).

## 3.2 PROMOTION BY TOURISM DESTINATION MARKETING ORGANIZATION

There is a lack of research and literature of how to use destination communications in a proper manner in order to build successful destination image. Gunn's (1972) pioneering "dimorphic theory" of image suggested that the image of a destination can be formed through either an actual visit or by externally received information from sources such as broadcast and print media and word of mouth. The image modification process is traveller's seven step image modification that travellers experience, from initial mental images of a destination to images formed by travellers experience (McCartney and others 2008). Destination marketing organization must create awareness of a place and project selected images to a particular

market segment. The destination image is a continuous process from the projection of images to a reception of these images by target travellers. Destinations are not equal, some have more resources than others and better comparative advantages. There were a lot of discussions in the literature if destinations are created or born. It was concluded that destination that is deficient in resources but uses the little in the more effectively way could be more competitive than a destination endowed with a wealth of resources. It is also concluded that "effective positioning requires a succinct, focused and consistent message (McCartney and others 2008).

In order to make positioning analyze, it is important to understand how a destination is perceived focusing on attributes that are important to the target market. It has been suggested that people's perceptions of a destination are a result of their own realities that motivate them to travel with the real attractions of less importance than the travellers' image of those attractions. Next challenge is to identify the attractions attributes that are considered sustainable, differential and cut the constant bombardment of communication messages with a convincing message to travellers through the selection of effective channels of communication deemed trustworthy and reliable by the traveller. Attributes of a destination can be divided on a pull and push attributes. Pull attributes are factors that are used to determine destination selection and include tangible resources (natural and cultural wealth of destination) and intangible (image perceptions of a destination, expectations). Push attributes are traveller's motives to visit a destination. Understanding these factors more strategic destination marketing program could be designed. A means-end approach is examining the relationship between destination pull attributes and higher levels of travel motives. Klenosky (2002) showed that pull factors may be in part a function of the same factors that push travellers to a destination, because people often identify with destination attributes (McCartney and others 2008).

To promote an area, destination marketing organization needs to present an integrated destination product that encompasses all tourist attractions and services provided by a location (Farias and others 2013). The desired image is pictured to offer a potential customer enough information and emotion to support the decision making during the purchasing process. According to Dooling (2002), tourism is an unusual product, it exists only as information at the point of sale and cannot be sampled before the purchase decision is made (Farias and others 2013). The content of tourism destination websites is particularly important because it influences directly on the perceived image of the destination and creates a virtual experience

for the consumer that is increased when interactivity is made present (Dooling 2002). The website design (physical appearance, colour, layout, graphic), interface and ease of use (functionality, usability, efficiency and reliability), including menus to organize information, can enhance the credibility of a website. Many authors highlighted that "website evaluations are required to facilitate continuous improvements as well as to judge the site performance against competitors and industry peers". Tourism destination websites are a window to portrait a desirable image of a country, state city or specific tourism attraction (Farias and others 2013).

### 3.2.1 BUILDING ONLINE BRAND PROFILE

Strong online presence is a powerful marketing technique and is accessible and cost-effective. In the following text will be explained the five tips that help to in building a strong online brand (Swift 2013):

1.  *Start by identifying the core values of your brand.*
Core values of a brand must be core values of destination brand and its philosophy. The concepts as sustainability, environmental friendless and community spirit must be embedded in the image. In the online world, every articulation of the brand sends a message.
The online content that is used must mirror the business values.

2.  *Integrate visual content across your online marketing platforms that are familiar and consistent with brand values.*
Photography has the significant role in tourism. Photographs and visual representations are used by marketers in brochures to promote destinations and create induced image. A number of studies acknowledge visitor photography as a key determinant of destination image formation. Scholars argue that destinations' images should be believable, simple, appealing, distinctive and should resonant with visitors experiences (Gilmore and others in Swift 2013, 17). The clever use of visual content such as images, video and music combined with informative, useful copy can deliver compelling marketing messages that will engage the target audience. It is important for marketers to consider the organic or modified-induced image that visitors hold of a destination when developing destination image promotional campaigns. Photographs can also represent and information experience when visiting destinations. Visitor-employed photography unveils both tangible and symbolic dimensions of the image. Visitor-generated photography can be combined with online research to

deconstruct destination image, and the extent to which such data may provide richer insights into visitors' holistic images and their emic representations of travel destinations (Michaelidou and others in Swift 2013). In order to capture the hearts of customers, the most successful brands use visual content and believe in their business. If the brand is communicated through the passion and if the brand is authentic, the tourists will also love it and have a good image. Images should be simple and consistent. It is important to highlight what it wants to be said about a brand with at-a-glance comprehension. It is important not to overload the online platforms with too much copy of visuals. It is also important what is doing competition, it is important to learn from them, go bigger and different from the competition. Online stock imaging sites can help to make the online presence more effective.

3. *Look beyond copy and still imagery to create new dimensions for your brand.*
 Videos need to look professional but do not need to be complex and expensive. Important tips before setting up the camera are:
- Purpose: What is the video for?
- Tone: It's not what you say it's how you say it.
- Audience: Will your audience relate to the video?
- Timeliness: Does your video tie in with your current marketing messages? Does it relate to existing trends or hot topics in your industry?
-  Value: How is the video educating your audience? What makes the content unique and interesting?

4. *Become a brand storyteller.*
In recent year storytelling has gained increasing attention as global marketing trend in the tourism industry. Studies have shown that a real or fictive story about a destination can give the destination a unique competitive advantage and the tourist a more meaningful experience. Destinations can be viewed as storyscapes "commercial environments where narratives are negotiated, shaped and transformed through the interaction of procedures and consumers". Stories can act as a framework as they can communicate identified core values and attractions in a destination in an understandable and memorable way. Through the story, the destination can create desirable meaning in relation to their town, region, museum, restaurant or a specific event (Mossberg and others 2011).

The focus on so-called literary and film induced tourism is a branch of this general framework of storytelling and destination development. The story becomes a verbal and visual metaphor which shows the total tourism offering, but for that a good story needs to have an arena, characters, and a structure, centred on an unbroken story line. The development of storytelling concept necessitates close contact between a wide range of stakeholders: destination management organizations (DMOs), public administration at municipality or regional level, public and private attractions, various types of tourism-related service providers and actual storytellers. Uniting different interests and thereby ensuring commitment to the storytelling concept would seem an important first step towards managing stakeholder relations, just as providing the stakeholders with a means of mutual communication seems to be a second salient step. It can be concluded that storytelling helps destination development, respectively destination promotion and its better image (Mossberg and others 2011).

Online content must be engaging, authentic and useful. Before telling a story customers reaction must be identified by mapping out a storytelling plan that strategically communicates the core values that are identified as important. In order to be fresh and relevant, a story needs regular updates and creation of new content. Content must be connected with universal human desires and emotions and must be constructed through passion and attention. Use the visuals that inspire. It is not about expensive content, it is just important that it is unique, this kind of content attracts many more fans (Swift 2013).

5.  *Ensure your online presence is copyright compliant.*
When sourced and used correctly, video, images and music provide indispensable tools that can help organizations to tell their brand story online and engage with new customers. Tourist expectations are created in direct advertising from destination marketing organization or indirect by word of mouth, interactions on social networks, forums, blogs etc. A level of tourist satisfaction determinates on how tourists expectations about a certain destination were met in this destination, through their experience in the destination. Image is created through this destination experience (Swift 2013).

## 3.2.2 OPTIMIZATION OF THE DESTINATION WEBSITES

The best way to make one destination competitive is to create powerful brand reflecting the identity of the territory in a way that is appealing to potential consumers – tourists, investors

or residents – and which channels the countless, promotion efforts are made by public and private bodies in one direction (Fernandez-Cavia and others 2013).

Branding processes are an effective way of having a bearing on how humans perceive the realities for which the information's have been scarced. In the current age of globalization and mass access to information, websites have transformed into a key instrument for communicating destination brands and marketing a whole range of products and services related to them. Although it can be said that a website can not in itself be a guarantee of the success of the destination. There should be a coherent strategy for developing, positioning and promoting e-presence. The benefit can be achieved in knowing how to integrate a website into a destination's marketing and communications plans. In order to achieve it, the destination must identify values characteristic of a brand to place itself on the market and stand out from competitors (Fernandez-Cavia and others 2013).

Destination website, if needed, also may be turned into a successful communication channel. WTO (World Tourism Organization) in their Handbook on e-Marketing for Tourism Destinations (2008), put a series of recommendations for making an effective and quality website - "winning website" (Anholt 2009):

1.   Make accessibility the basis for website quality – website content must be well perceived and understandable to users, interface elements must be operable and content must be powerful enough to work with present and future new technologies.

2.   Follow research-based guidelines to create an easy-to-use website that builds trust and identity – to optimize the current site using the guidelines. The key for DMOs is to provide information with the maximum trust. Applications such as About us, Contact us, Privacy Policy and Terms of the Site help to convey security in a website. Keywords should be considered to produce a page 1 SEO result in search engines such as Yahoo and Google.

3.   Create a website that smoothes the path right through the "consumer journey" or "experience cycle" of the Internet user. Provide tools for planning trips and routes and offer customized travel guides that meet the needs and preferences of travellers and help to afford more dynamic, interactive user browsing.

4.   Think in the terms of services – delivered and fulfilled by the content and functionality. Destination website must present integrated service of – information, contact, transaction, entertainment, relationship etc.

5.   Make testing a part of the design and development process, as well as part of the evaluation of existing sites.

To assess tourism websites there are currently some techniques used by researchers. Law, Qi and Buhalis (2010) have identified from different studies five types:

1.   Counting methods – entails assessing the performance of the website or determining the wealth of website content.

2.   Automated methods (use of software systems).

3.   Numerical computation methods (use of mathematical functions).

4.   User judgment methods (assessment of user satisfaction and perceptions).

5.   Combined methods (combination of the above methods).

It is difficult to decide which method is the best one, based on the affirmations of other researchers, it seems that combine methodology  which in their view will be the best capable to provide useful and satisfactory results for all interested public groups (Fernandez-Cavia and others 2013). Tourism industry at present does not have, but urgently needs commonly agreed-upon website evaluation techniques that are repeatable and measurable and have a good potential for long term use (Law and others 2010).

### 3.2.3 SUCCESS FACTORS OF DESTINATION E-MARKETING

Web site evaluation measures have been proposed in many ways and various contexts over the past decade. Maintaining a high quality is crucial for Web sites in order to increase customer satisfaction and encourage customers to return.  Destination marketing organizations invest considerable amounts of money in the development of Web sites as part of their overall promotion efforts. With increasing pressure on their budgets, it becomes ever more important for these organizations to assess the effectiveness of their Web sites, evaluate the return on their investments, and derive feedback on necessary improvements (Park and Gretzel 2007).

Techniques of improvement (Glavović 2008):

1.   E-marketing

2.   Researching supported by Web 2.0

3.   Web analytics of  general experience

4.    Measuring the efficiency of experience

Today we can find four "BE": be found, be engaging, be relevant and be accountable. Relevant inspiration points of a brand are: dreaming, researching, booking, experiencing and sharing. The internet is the no.1 inspiration for travellers, 62% of travellers are searching online before they decide where and how will they travel. 85% are using the web for exploring or booking. Sharing inspires most of the dreamers, 41% is reading reviews of other travellers (Glavović 2008).

## 3.3 ONLINE COMMUNITIES, BLOGS, SEARCH ENGINES AND SOCIAL MEDIA AS POTENTIAL SOURCES OF DESTINATION MARKETING INTELLIGENCE

Induced image formation is created by marketing promotion and advertising. Organic images are publicity driven statements from newspapers and articles. Gartner (1993) recognized the connection between image formation and destination selection. The process starts from induced image formation, which includes paid forms of advertising, to the organic image. So it can be said that there are some controlled and uncontrolled forms of communication, controlled are paid forms of advertising and uncontrolled are propaganda and publicity that creates myth, nostalgia and notions of sacred or authentic (McCartney and others 2008). The value placed on knowledge about markets, competitors and the performance of the system itself can facilitate the identification of and penetration into new markets (Puhringer and Taylor 2008). Taylor's work was focused on internet based CGC – Consumer Generated Content. This content was found on the internet where are formed groups of people with the same interest - social networks, e-communities, forums and blogs (McCartney and others 2008).

## 3.3.1 ROLE OF INFORMATION SOURCES IN IMAGE FORMATION

For promoting a destination in media, there are many factors which are relevant. It depends on if the destination is emerging or mature. Several kinds of research have been made and it was concluded that in the promotion of emerging destinations can include basic information about a destination that is necessary, while mature destination needs something new – "fresh angels". Another factor is that for example movies can also influence on destination image and can create positive or negative image, for example the Lord of the Rings that was filmed in New Zeland created a positive destination image while Midnight Express had negative

impact and negative travellers perceptions of human rights in Turkey (McCartney and others 2008). Country crises also may have a negative image of a destination for example Bali bombing in 2002.

More and more international companies are focusing their promotional efforts on publicity and public actions, because they understand that their companies' reputation rely on not just on excellent products or services, but on the way others – customers, suppliers, employees, shareholders and stakeholders feel about them too. It is concluded that when considering both the costs and benefits of the publicity program compared to other forms of promotion such as advertising, it is clear that destination publicity programs can be extremely cost-efficient and effective. Direct experience and personal recommendations are often cited as the most credible sources of information on the destination. It can be concluded that exposure to various information sources can continue to play a role in creating destination image, even after the visitation of a destination. The use of Internet and Web sites continues to grow as an important source for travelers (Heung 2003).

Doolin Burgess and Cooper (2002) established a model of "Internet commerce adoption" to evaluate levels of destination Web site development focusing on levels of interactivity, innovative applications and other vale-added features. There have been many kinds of research of destination websites. There were mixed results that are depending if the traveller had been to the destination before or previously used the Web site, it was recommended that a destination Web site have different sections for first-time and repeat visitors (McCartney and others 2008). Selby and Morgan (1996) criticize the lack of research conducted into the effectiveness of the various marketing tools available for image management given the amount, source and objectivity of the various "projected" and "organic" images. An effective marketing and promotional mix can be understood only through a comprehensive understanding of the influence of the various sources of information. The biggest challenge for marketers is to isolate media (and messages) that cause changes in the traveller's image perceptions (Sonmez and Sirakaya 2002). There must be established an optimum of communication mix and "Communication Effectiveness Grid" (CEG) by integrating personal, public relations, marketing and advertising actions (see figure 3.1).

**Figure 3.1: Communication effectiveness grid**

Yes

| | 1 |
| | 0,9 |

**Excessive, nonrelevant communication**            **Effective communication**

0,8

0,7

0,6

1          1,5          2          2,5          3        0,5    3,5        4        4,5          5

Very unimportant                                                                    Very important

0,4

0,3

**More effective communication needed**

**Nonrelevant communication**                        0,2

0,1

No

0
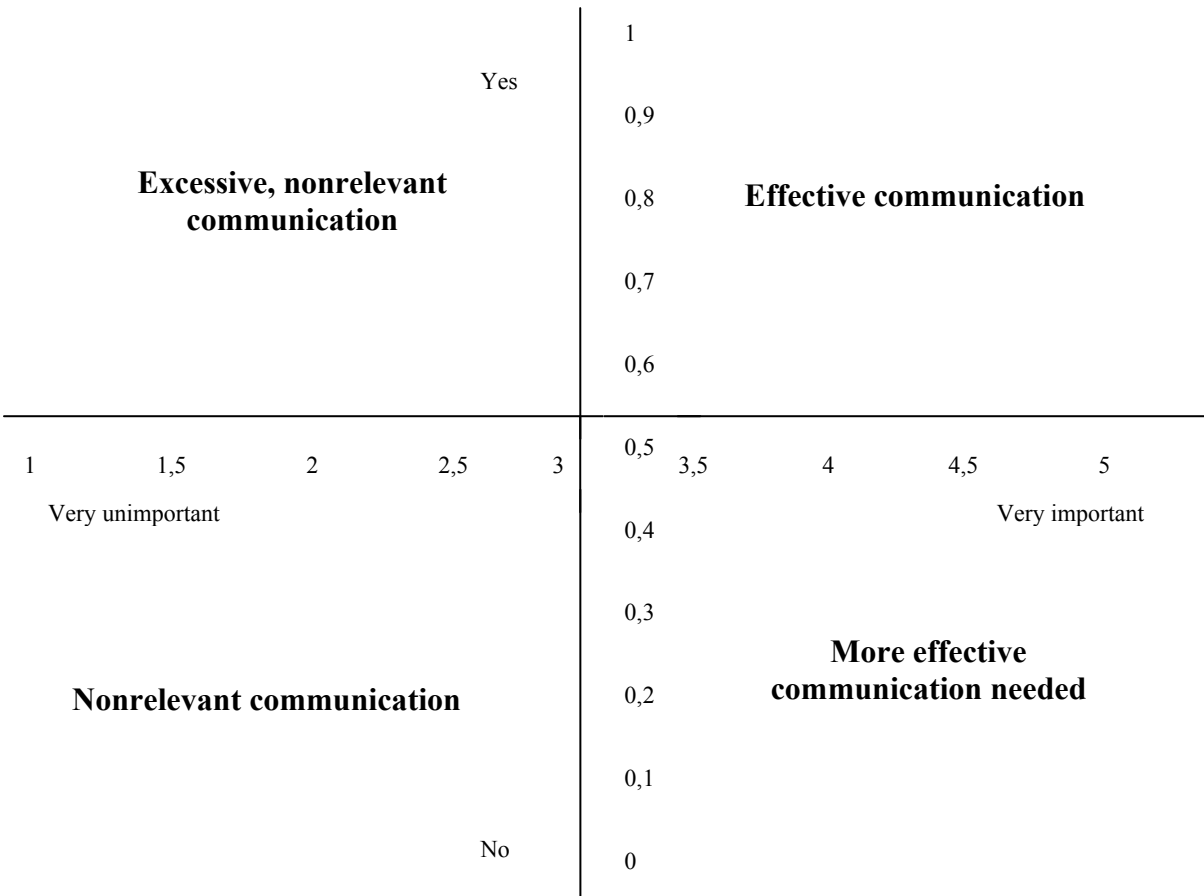
Source: McCartney and others (2008, 187).

The CEG split the communication portfolio into quadrants, highlighting the degree of importance that travellers place on each method of communication in making a decision to travel to a particular destination and enabling promotional resources to be more efficiently and effectively directed at tourism segments. The research is made in a way that asks

38

respondents if they have heard about the destination and from a particular source. In this way, the scale of sources importance is made. The "excessive, non-relevant communication" describes the importance of the message that was communicated by destination and received by the traveller is little or no important in the decision to travel to the destination. Marketing and promotions in this quadrant are received by travellers and are messages judged by the traveller as not related to travel or destination selection and make no contribution to image perception. DMO is therefore using an excessive amount of promotional resources that have no relevance to the travel decision. The "nonrelevant communication" quadrant reflects communications not only unimportant to the traveller but also not received. "More effective communication needed" shows that the communication is important to the traveller yet is not being acted on. The traveller is not receiving information from this source but judges this to be a source he or she believes and a source based on which he or she would make a travel decision. The DMO needs to invest more resources or have a clearer strategy to ideally move these communication media to the "effective communication" quadrant. The "effective communication quadrant" reveals communication that not only is important but also is being accepted by the traveller. The traveller is receiving information from sources that he or she finds credible and on which he or she will act and select a destination. Here is used the most effective and optimum marketing and promotional program that reaches the target market. Many kinds of research have been made in order to create a sustainable communication mix and have a greater effect on image formation process. Many findings also concluded that tourism promotion does not have a major impact upon the perceptions of travellers and that other sources of information have a much greater bearing on the formation of the destination image. Tourism authorities need to understand that successful tourism promotion is dependent on a broad range of external influences (Govers and others 2007).

### 3.3.2 ROLE OF ONLINE COMMUNITIES

Online communities often refer as "virtual communities" where people can provide and exchange information. Companies are using online communities to create value for the firm and their customers. Online communities can add value in several ways by: building brand awareness and image, providing access to the voice of loyal customers, increasing supplier commitment and generating revenue from new and existing customers (Kim and others 2008). Online communities are a key tool of a firm's internet marketing strategy and are helping firms in building brand loyalty, increase market penetration, boost revenue and create positive

word-of-mouth advertising. A study of over 50,000 websites confirms that online communities create substantial value for a firm (Kurikko and Tuomien 2012).

Because of that is necessary to explore the role of online communities. According to that research, Hence pointed some questions that need to be research:

1. What factors influence a participant's commitment to an online community?
2. Does participation in online communities influence a member's commitment behaviour towards a related product/brand?
3. Does membership in an online community impact the behavioural actions of consumers?
4. Are there differences in the brand commitment between members and nonmembers of online communities?

For a community to exist, members must have a shared feeling of belonging. Shared norms and values of the community are formed through the continuous interaction of participating members. Online communities are "social communities" where community members communicate with each other, agree upon shared norms and values and develop on-going relationships. This shared interest increases members' willingness to share information, creating what community researchers refer to as a "consciousness of kind" (Kurikko and Tuomien 2012). The ability to communicate with one or many members of the community at any time, and the repetitive sharing of similar beliefs, leads to consistent attitudes and behaviours across community members. Community leaders can also attempt to convert others to their way of thinking. They usually act as advocates of the shared interest leading the community members to change their tastes and behaviour (Kozinets 1999). One direct outcome of the social interaction and communication among community members is the development of a common language, the establishment of community members in the development of a common language, the establishment of community structure and status relationships, and the development of commitment to members of the community. Commitment can be defined as the "enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship" and is a necessary condition for developing an on-going long-term relationship. The members of the online community have to be committed to its online community. The advantage of online communities is that they exhibit stronger social ties and bigger relationships and they help to commit the community goals and expected norms and behaviour. Commitment has the role in

binding members in an online community but does not necessarily require a commitment to a brand (Kurikko and Tuomien 2012).

<u>PROCESS OF VALUE CREATION OF ONLINE COMMUNITIES</u>

The process contains four thematic practices: social networking, impression management, community engagement and brand use (Shau 2009). Social networking is focused on creating, enhancing and sustaining ties among brand community members and operates in the intangible domain of the emotions and reinforces the social or moral bonds within the community. Impression management is focused on justifying, creates a good will. Members of the online brand community devote time and effort to the brand, share the news of the brand and inspire to participate in the community. Community engagement practices reinforce members escalating engagement with the brand community, this include taking, milestoning and badging and mean that community members bring out brand experiences and proclaim openly that they are fans of a particular brand (Kurikko and Tuomien 2012). Brand-use practices are related to improving or enhancing the use of a brand.

### 3.3.3 BLOGS AS POTENTIAL SOURCE OF DESTINATION MARKETING INTELLIGENCE

Blogs, called also Web logs, are the particular interest of destination marketing organizations. Blogs are used to inform strategic marketing efforts and used by the consumer in their trip planning and purchasing decisions. Blogs are one forum of a suite of internet-based tools grouped under the descriptor of Web 2.0. People through blogs can give their opinions about specific topics. Blogs are virtual networks and can be defined as permeable structures without physical borders of separation from the environment, comprising a multiplicity of autonomous, interdependent and self-organizing actors that rely on the internet infrastructure to integrate and exchange value. One example of blogs is MySpace, that was before Facebook, one of the largest social network. Blogs are uniting users that have common interests. It is maintaining the social ties and formatting a new connection. At the same time, blogs have the potential to fulfil two important marketing goals for destinations, customer acquisition and relationship management (Puhringer and Taylor 2008).

Travel blogs can be defined as those forums and individual entries which relate to planned, current or past travel. Travel blogs can be defined as personal diaries and are written by tourists as a report about activities and experiences during the trip. Travel blogs (T-blogs) are hosted on provider sites, a growing number of which are tourism specific such as virtualtourist.com and tripadvisor.com. Blogs are a useful source of information for consumers, but can also be a challenge for those who are attempting to monitor their content.

Travel blogs include various information that can be useful to:

• Identifying and monitoring trends in traveller movements to and from the destination such as previous and future stopover locations

• Specific product evaluations and reviews or service standards

• Event evaluations

• Identification of product or infrastructure gaps

• Performance reviews of associated products or collaborators

• Competitor analysis

The usefulness of T- blogs is evident in providing DMO's the types of word of mouth about a destination. T-blogs content may have an impact on the decisions of other travellers because it contains recommendation, experiences and opinions of other people (Puhringer and Taylor 2008).

### 3.3.4 IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON DESTINATION BRANDING

Social media has become one of the major sources of online travel information (O'Connor and others 2008). With the development of social media as Facebook, Twitter and Youtube, methods of marketing communication had to change. Social media has made two-way conversation with consumers in development of destination brand, its identity and image (Lim and others 2012).

Social media provides "word of mouth", is a place where tourists share their opinions and experiences and can have positive or negative influence. According to Xiang and Gretzel (2010), social media sites are directed to those who look for travel information through search engines. Many DMOs have incorporated branding techniques with social media and are using social media to create destination brand identity and image by posting their branding activities

on Youtube and creating pages on Facebook (Lim and others 2012). Social media has made a two-way conversation possible with the consumer participating in the development of a destination brand identity-image. It can be said that DMO's are no longer the major controllers over their brands and messages and consumers are also creators and distributors of social media content. Especially the people born after 1970s (Y generation) are utilizing the internet and social media and have a high buying power. It is very important for destination marketers to understand whether CGV's deliver the same destination –brand identity/image as marketing organizations have traditionally delivered; if not, how does the destination identity and brand created by CGV's impact consumer choice? Thus it is important to answer the questions (Lim and others 2012):

• How do consumers perceive destination brands created by consumer-generated content?

• How do consumers perceive destination brand created by DMOs?

• How consumer's perceptions of a destination brand created by consumer-generated content differ from a destination brand created by DMOs?

Many DMOs use destination branding as their main strategy because a strong brand creates value added to the seller and buyer as it builds strong equity (Cai 2002). Destination brand refers to the marketing activities of DMOs and would influence awareness, choice, satisfaction, recommendation and loyalty. A number of destination branding success stories were introduced in Destination branding: creating the unique destination proposition. Consumers create a brand over social media by posting their own content which contains videos, words, sentences or essays on the brand. Buhhin (2007) the chief motivations of consumers for posting content on social media were found to consist of a hunger for fame, the urge to have fun, and a desire to share experiences with friends (Lim and others 2012).

The use of social media on the Internet has changed the information research and contributed to the five key marketing functions – promotion, product distribution, communication, management and research. Travellers use social media in order to find information's and social media influences in their decision making process, especially comments and recommendations have an impact on tourists. Word of mouth marketing (WOM) affects consumers purchase decisions and has no cost and a faster delivery than traditional marketing tools. WOM on social media has been significantly magnified in the marketplace because one consumer can easily communicate with hundreds or thousands of other consumers about a product. Also companies can communicate with their customers and customers can talk to

companies. It can be said that social media has been a driving force or a main vehicle for WOM marketing strategies. DMOs attempt to build its brand by creating advertisements and posting them on social media, while a consumer posts and shares his/her experience on a destination brand, both contents will compromise the destination brand. DMOs is monitoring the consumer-generated content and consumer perceptions on the content. Research of consumer perception of a destination on social media was made, the example was Las Vegas. The purpose was to investigate the differences of consumer perception of destination brands created by consumer-generated content and DMO content. Using textual data from an online social networking site, consumer comments were content-analyzed. According to words and comments used, there were similar across consumer-generated content and marketer-generated content, but the number of times the words were used varied across consumer-generated and marketer-generated content. In consumer-generated content more negative or provocative words were used. According to Qualman (2009), traditional advertisements have less trustfulness than opinions by peers to consumers. Also individuals are more likely to look up peer posts than posting by an online news site (Lim and others 2012).

It can be said that reviews on specific products and services posted in social media are more popular. The volume of page views and comments of consumer-generated content was much higher than those from marketer-generated content. Thus, it seems that consumer-generated content attracts more people than marketer-generated content. The study also showed that consumer-generated content does not seem to carry the same destination brand that marketer-generated content. Through social media and two-way communication, destination identity and image is being created by consumers. In order to influence consumers, marketers should develop effective ways: utilize consumer-generated content to deliver messages that marketers want to disseminate regarding their destination brand; regularly monitor consumer-generated content and comments of consumer sentiment and exploit consumer comments on consumer-generated content and marketer-generated content to drive product/service/brand development/improvement. Results show that consumer-generated content has a little positive impact on a destination brand because is a full of negative and provocative feedback. For marketers it is important to identify heavy and popular uploaders on social media and understand their motivations, then marketers can encourage them to post quality content on the destination and create destination brand desired by marketers (Lim and others 2012).

**3.3.5 REPRESENTATION OF SEARCH ENGINES**

Internet has changed the way in which consumers perceive and consume travel (Xiang and others 2008). Thus, search engine has become increasingly important in that about two-thirds (64%) of online travelers use search engines for travel planning (TIA 2005). In addition, with the growth of mobile computing as well as the so-called Web 2.0 applications such as virtual communities, geo-tagging, photo/video sharing and personal blogs, the Internet has been woven into the fabric of the travel experience (Gretzel 2006). Pan and Fesenmaier (2006), Wober (2006), and Xiang (2007) have argued that understanding the online tourism domain is essential in that it provides an important means for identifying new solutions to support the travel planning process. It is important to identify challenges that are facing the tourism industry and to improve strategies in order to support travel planning on Internet (Xiang and others 2008).

## 3.3.6 TRAVEL INFORMATION SEARCH PERSPECTIVE OF TOURISM

Travel information search perspective focuses on the search process and is based on the assumption that the online tourism domain is driven by the information needs of travellers.

There are three stages of information search activities:

1. the pre-consumption stage – information is used for planning, decision making, transaction, expectation formation and anticipation of the trip,

2. the consumption stage – information is establishing the connections with people, facilitate navigation, short-term decision making, on-site transactions etc., and

3. the post-consumption stage – information generated from the actual trip is documented, stored and shared with other people.

It is important to highlight that tourists create their image before they come to a destination, and perceiving a destination online can make a lot of effect on their decision making process (Xiang and others 2008). Tourists through websites, social media etc. create an emotion before they come to a destination. Search engines such as Google, Yahoo! and Ask collect a huge number of Web pages and serve as the "Hubble Telescope" with which people access and learn about the entire virtual "galaxy". Search engine consists of two components: an offline component that gathers Web pages and builds an internal representation of them and on online component that serves user requests by finding all matching documents and

ordering or ranking them with the goal of presenting the most relevant document to the user. A search engine plays an important role because the outcome of the traveller's information search will be influenced by the interplay between the traveller (his mental model) and the search results, often represented in the form of metadata of the retrieved websites including a hyperlink title, a brief summary and the other information about the web page. Based upon the query, the search engine retrieves and returns a number of search results that "match" the keyword string and displays them in a pre-defined format. Based on a search results, the traveller makes a series of decisions. Fesenmaier (2006) describes that the congruence between the traveller's mental model and the online information space is an important indicator of the "fitness" between the traveller's information needs and the information being searched. Result showed that if web page of tourism destination doesn't show up in the search engine, it is less likely that this destination will be visited, people also usually research first three pages of search result. With the capabilities to index and organize a huge amount of information, search engines are powerful tools in representing the virtual world and thus, the tourism domain (Xiang and others 2008).

## 3.3.7 MEMORY WORK AND ITS IMPACT ON DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

Traditionally, tourism research has been studied by structured surveys, travel diaries, structured or unstructured interviews and observant participation. More recently, experience research has been extended to utilize the experimental sampling method and memory-work. Although memory-work originated from an analysis of social constructions, it is now generally used to examine and identify consumers' patterns of experiences. Memory-work uses memories as the initial data as the underlying theory is that subjective significant events, events which are remembered and the way they are subsequently constructed, play an important part in the construction of self.

There appears to be synergies between event marketing and destination, or place, marketing. Events, particularly mega event, have the capacity to create positive perceptions of a destination which will likely be associated with positive behavioural intentions to visit the destination in the future (Hede 2005). The qualitative method of experience research stresses the active participation of the individual, the collapse of the barriers between subject and object of research, and the elimination of the hierarchy between experimenter and subject such that the researcher becomes a member of research group and involves participants as co-

researches. When respondents recollect their experiences through storytelling to family and friends, they will influence the expectations of those who may be in the planning stage. Similarly, if respondents actually revisit the destination with others, it is likely that they will become on-site mediators who will directly impact everyone's overall experience (Pike 2010).

Conceptualization is mostly based on creation of associations. This model of memory is based on creation of network of associations and according to them memory is created of nodes and connections (Anderson in Pike 2010, 82). The node is stored information about certain term and is a part of a network of connections with other nodes. Until activation between the nodes comes or by processing external information's or when the information's can be found in the memory. When we remember the term that is placed in the node, the power of association will dictate the span of other nodes that will be activated from memory. The tourism destination brand is conceptualized and makes a node with whose are connected some associations from other nodes. The key consequences of this sort of memory are level of consciousness about tourism destination and the power and affordability of association about important features and benefits. The important term for units with more features as tourism destinations is overall image. MacInnis and Price described the process of image creation as the process of presentation of information's obtained on the basis of different senses in Gestalt psychology (Pike 2010).

Ajzen and Driver (1992) suggested that behavioural intentions are the immediate antecedent to actual behaviour. They argue that behavioural intentions capture the motivational factors that influence behaviour and concluded that behavioural intentions are indicators of how hard people are willing to try, of how much of an effort they are planning to exert, in order to perform the behaviour (Hede 2005). Aacker and Day's (1971) model of communication process identified that advertising has significant effect on both awareness and attitudes toward brands. McDaniel (2002), McDaniel and Chalip (2002) and Chalip, Green and Hill (2003) have initiated research on the relationships between mega- events, media consumption, consumers and tourism. These three studies go some way in developing the understanding of the nexus between the consumption of mega- event advertisements and tourism development (Hede 2005).

# 4 CASE STUDY – ISTRIA REGION

A concept of online branding in digital age will be examined on Istria Region. Mainly brand development of Istria will be examined and the impact of Internet on tourism destination development. Below are main research questions that are the basis of this research.

Destination image formation model identifies those elements that have a dynamic influence on how the perceived destination image is formulated in the mind of consumer. If the tourism product and the way it is communicated are not in line with the destination's identity, it can create a tourism development strategy gap. In the today's digital age the interactive nature of Internet can add whole new dimensions to the possibilities of projecting destination images (Govers and others 2007). A digital marketing gulf will appear between those destinations that embrace the opportunity of Web with its associated empowering mindset, and those that do not (Anholt 2009). Our first research question is: what kind of influence does Internet have on Istria's tourism destination image formation and destination brand development?

The formation of image has been described by Reynolds as the development of mental construct based upon a few impressions chosen from a flood of information. In the case of destination image, this "flood of information" has many sources including promotion, the opinions of others, media reporting and popular culture (Govers and others 2007). It seems that tourism promotion as part of the image building process does not stand alone, instead it is interdependent with many other available information sources that are often perceived to be the main influence of decision making concerning projected and perceived images (Govers and others 2007). Thus, our second research question is: is Istria's tourism destination image

formed mainly by DMO Internet promotion or rather with a larger group of factors and information sources?

By actually visiting the destination, the image will be affected and modified based upon first hand information and experience (Echtner and Ritchie 2003). Image is often used as equivalent to reputation, what people believe about a person or institution versus character, what the person or institution actually is (Govers and others 2007). Consumers are involved in an ongoing research for information (Leemans 1994). By collecting all of this information the consumer creates an image or "mental prototype" (Tapachai and Waryszak 2000). As tourism services are intangible, images become more important than reality and the tourism destination images projected in information space will greatly influence the destination images as perceived by consumers (Govers and others 2007). Our third research question, therefore, asks: are projected images on the Internet influencing Istria's destination positioning and ultimately the tourist buying behaviour?

Initially the basic research methodology and information resources of the researched units are highlighted. The Istria case study starts with a brief description of the Istria Region and then the information sources of the researched area are presented and analyzed.

## 4.1 METHODOLOGY

Sources of information's that are be used in this research are designated as primary and secondary. For the collecting of primary information the methods of interview and structured interview are highlighted.

Primary information sources are the result of a semi-structured interview conducted with IRTA's employee and expert, head of contact and sales department, and analysis of structured interviews with a small sample of tourists, engaged in the tourism in which we wanted to capture the destination image, are examined.

Secondary information sources are various documents on research conducted by, and scientific articles obtained in, IRTA (Istria's Tourism Development Agency) and documents presented on the official website of Istria Region - www.istra-istria.hr.

There are various methods to investigate different destination images. Except of surveys that measure cognitive and affective aspects of destination image, qualitative methods such as interviews, pictorial stimuli and tourists' own projected images have can also be used. Different methods yield different destination images and attributes which suggests that no single technique is completely successful in capturing all the dimensions of destination image (Echtner and Ritchie 2003). The literature concludes that images of tourism destinations are sometimes connected with storytelling and visual narratives and as result, researchers should rather use open-ended and free elicitation methods.

The method of research that is applied in this research was found in the article of Govers, Go and Kuldeep (2007) and was applied in researching Dubai. This was a survey research that was examining people that have had never visited destination. The main questions for the interview were:

*Imagine that next week you will visit Destination X for the first time. Tell us your story. What do you think your experience in destination X would be like? What images and thoughts immediately come to mind? What would you expect to see, or feel, hear, smell taste here? Without any research or additional information, kindly be spontaneous and share with us whatever thoughts come to your mind right now, whether positive or negative. Make your response as detailed or as brief as you like, there are no limits, but try to write in story format; using complete sentences, not just to loose words. If you know little about destination X, your story will probably be short. If you already have clear ideas about destination X, your story might be very long. But remember, there is no right, wrong or best model answer; simply express your own ideas about destination X, and NOT what you think we want to hear. The content of your response will have NO impact whatsoever on your chance to win the grand prize. Share your ideas about destination X with us right now, in the space below.* (Govers and others 2007).

*The ideas that you presented in your story must have come from somewhere. From where? Please list your sources.* (Govers and others 2007).

This research is applied to the Istria region and to tourists that are already there. Istria is not as famous in Europe as Dubai, so it is impossible to fully apply the same kind of questions that were used in a Dubai study for quantifying the image of Istria. Alternative questions are used from Pike's popular book: "Marketing of tourism destination" in which he explains how to capture cognitive and affective dimensions of tourism destination image.

In order to capture Istria's tourism destination image and information sources of this image, there are two parts to the structured interview. The first part of the interview is capturing the tourist's image by telling their story of Istria. The results show the main keywords that tourists were mostly using in text descriptions of the Istria region. The second part of the interview is about information sources and determining where they got all the information about Istria. Data type will be qualitative and quantitative.

To ensure better and easier analysis of the findings the computer software CATPAC is used. CATPAC is a self-organizing artificial neural network software package used for content analysis of text and is able to identify the most important words in a text and determine the patterns of similarity based on the way they are used in the text. CATPAC processes qualitative information, and analyses information sources and the amount of certain sources (Internet, newspapers, TV etc.) mentioned for a particular destination (Govers and others 2007).

From other analytics methods in this thesis are used: comparison, induction, analysis, descriptive method, proof method, etc.

SAMPLE

Those who participated were from countries which provide the majority of Istria's tourists. Interviews are held with tourists during the summer months from July to September. The generation that is examined is the Y generation or "Millennials".

Young adults known as Gen Y or Millennials (aged between 21 and 31 years old) is one of today's most coveted markets because it numbers approximately 80 million and it has greater spending power than its predecessor Gen X. The features of millennials are that they think in

terms of frequent, short-stay and inexpensive trips. Millennials are the generation of the early 1980s, technology, especially the Internet, is part of their lives, they have lower budgets and are less loyal. Destination online effectiveness is difficult to measure because many variables affect these peoples' opinions and decisions. Kaplanidou and Vogt (2006) reported that perceived Website usefulness was a significant predictor of intent to travel. One study identified nine factors of success, including information quality, ease of use, visual appearance, trust and interactivity (Park and Gretzel 2007).

Tourists that participated in the structured interview are students or workers that have higher education – university degrees. Tourists have different profiles and nationalities but are mostly from countries and Istria's target markets such as Italy, Germany, Slovenia, Croatia, Austria, Serbia, Hungary and Spain. The number of tourists that are interviewed is 17. Interviews are conducted between July and September as tourists mainly come in this period. As most of Istria's target markets are very close, tourists are not in Istria for the first time and they have many friends in Istria.

**Table 4.1: Sample of Istria's target markets**

| Europe | Nationality |
|---|---|
| Italy | 29,41% |
| Slovenia | 17,64% |
| Germany | 11,76% |
| Croatia | 11,76% |
| Serbia | 11,76% |
| Austria | 5,88% |
| Hungary | 5,88% |
| Spain | 5,88% |

**Age:**

Between 21 and 31

**Occupation:**

Students, employed and self employed

**Education:**

High (University degree)

Following interview is held with the expert of IRTA (Istria's Tourism Development Agency) and head of contact and sales department. He is an open-minded person with a lot of experience in the field of tourism development and has a great passion among creative projects in Istria. The personal interview with IRTA expert lasted approximately two hours. He sincerely explains his point of view image of Istria region, the actual state, development possibilities of the region and the efforts of IRTA in the field of online destination marketing.

Secondary information sources are obtained from IRTA director. IRTA (Istria's Tourism Development Agency) is located in the city of Pula and is one of the main institutions responsible for Istria destination development (www.irta.hr 2014). IRTA manages the following activities: business activities, destination portal, google promotion, hotspot Croatia, Istria bike & outdoor, Istria Inspirit, Istria call (contact) and sales centre. Destination web portal www.istra.com represents the reference web place for getting information about a destination and presentation and reservation of accommodation capacities. This means that it is positioned as an active marketing channel for local and foreign markets. IRTA, in co-operation with the Tourism Board of Istria, efficiently manages the portal. This comprises of control of posted content and adding new content and technical functionalities, optimization of content for search engines (SEO) and additional coordination of posted content with on-line Istria campaigns. Other secondary sources of information are obtained from the official web page of the Istria Region and the web page of the Istria Tourism Board (see table 4.2).

**Table 4.2: Units of analysis and information sources**

| Unit of Analysis | Information Source | Data Type |
|---|---|---|
| **Administrative Tourism Department of Istria Region** | Strategic Marketing Brief – Creating visual identity of Istria, Tourism Master Plan | By concluding: Repositioning and branding of Istria Region, defines Istria's main identity and further actions, programs, plans, strategies and documents |
| **Istria's Tourist Board** | Tourism Master Plan of Istria (www.istra-istria.hr) – strategic document in which is based action of Istria's Tourism Board | By concluding: Cooperation with Administrative Tourism Department of IR, impact on development on Istria as destination brand and online brand |

| IRTA – Istria's Tourism Development Agency | Interview with IRTA expert and secondary information sources provided by director of IRTA (E-marketing as a tool of consumes satisfaction, E-marketing of Istria Tourism, E-marketing of Tourism Destination, E-tourism, Empowering Inspiration) | By concluding: Impact on online development of Istria as a brand and online brand, using new marketing trends |
|---|---|---|
| **Istria's positioning on Internet as online destination brand** | Analysis of the Istria's official web site www.istra.hr, www.istria.com, Visit Istria – Istria on social networks, Istria in other online sources, E-marketing of Istria - document provided by director of IRTA | By concluding: Online branding and online positioning, impact on tourism destination image |
| **Tourist perspective – Istria's Destination Image** | Primary information research – structured interviews with tourists about their image of Istria as tourism destination and sources of this information's | By concluding: Impact of Internet on Istria's tourism destination image, buying behaviour and destination development |

Source: Based on our own research (2015).

## 4.2 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF ISTRIA

For better understanding, the recent phenomenon of online branding of tourism destination, the main example and field of research is an attractive Croatian tourist destination and region Istria. Istria is the biggest peninsula of the Adriatic and the most western region of the Republic of Croatia. Istria's administrative capital is Pazin and economic centre is Pula. The Istrian climate is Mediterranean and is one of the most important features of the Istrian peninsula. Istria has a lot of natural beauties one of the most interesting is Brijuni Islands, Učka and Ćićarija. Istria has a surface of 2.820 km2 and the population of 206.344 inhabitants

in the year 2001. Istria is the Croatian region with overall 2.7 million of tourist arrival and 18 million overnights, is taking part in the overall Croatian tourism traffic with approximately 30%. The number of 200.000 inhabitants of Istria is doubled during the summer season. Last few years investments in accommodation objects were approximately 130 million Euros while the indirect investments in tourism infrastructure are 150 million Euros. Istria is taking the leading position between Croatian tourist regions, and in the activities of destination marketing is definitely a leader. The knowledge and experiences of destination marketing of Istria are often used by tourism offices in Croatia and abroad.

## ISTRIA AS TOURISM DESTINATION

The concept of Istria as a touristic destination dates from the times of Roman Empire. Istria is the biggest Croatian peninsula known as a „Green Mediterranean" and now one of the leading tourist destination in Croatia with over 30% of all touristic overnights in the country. Thanks to good traffic connections, harbours, airport in Pula, natural and cultural heritage, chain of hotel, tourist camps, apartments and restaurants, Istria is each year visited by bigger number of domestic and foreign tourists. Except its huge historical, natural and cultural heritage, Istria's success as tourism destination owes to mild Mediterranean climate with hot summer's and lot of sunny days and mild winters.  Except „Blue Istria", the interior of Istria – „Green Istria" is known of it's agrotourism that offer authentic Istrian gastronomy and local culture.

## HISTORICAL OBSTACLES

Due to Croatian independence from Yugoslavia and Croatian war, Istria didn't have time and sources to develop its tourism brand image as other famous tourist destinations. The brand is something that is integrated with tourist mind and is connected with their emotions. Tourism product of Croatia in the ex-Yugoslavia didn't appear under its name and was not sufficiently designed and because of that insufficiently attractive for international tourism demand.  In tourism offer was the lack of representing natural and cultural heritage. Croatia didn't have its recognizable tourism identity and strategy of tourism development. In the year 1991 after its independence during the war, Croatia as receptive country designed its tourism product and become marketing oriented with the aim to achieve greater international tourism demand.

Today is Istria one of the main Croatian tourist destinations but due to its late development it is still not enough recognized in the world. Although Istria is known as an attractive tourist destination, it still has a lot of unexploited potentials and insufficiently developed brand identity. Istria has a good image as a tourism destination but still is not very well recognized in the world. Branding of Istria is today's world is a big challenge for the marketers of Istria Region. The main problem is to build stronger visual identity and destination reputation and this is a long term process (Tourism Master Plan of Istria 2004-2012).

Focusing on our three main research questions in which the impact of the internet on tourism destination image formation is highlighted, we first need to see how Istria's identity is built and on what is based. This is done with the help of the model of tourism destination image formation process and facilitates insight in the main factors that are influencing Istria's tourism destination image (Figure 4.1).

**Figure 4.1: Model of tourism destination image formation process**
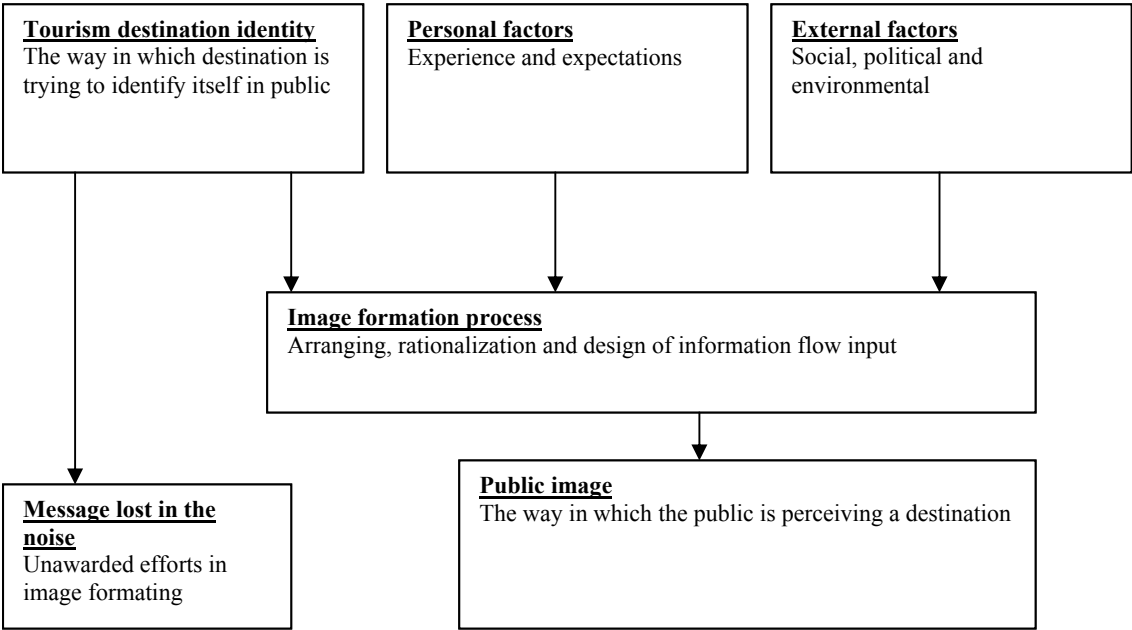


Source: Font (1997, 93).

From this figure and marketers perspective, it can be concluded that tourism destination image is formed by various factors: tourism destination identity, personal factors and external factors.

In the case of Istria destination identity is formed by all of these factors, while external factors may encompass historical obstacles within the country where in the case of Istria include war twenty years ago which slowed her development, lack of destination brand identity during the time of Yugoslavia, unexplored territory full of natural and cultural resources etc. Personal factors may be psychological, cultural, sociological or based on other characteristics of the individual. In the following chapter, we will focus on tourism destination identity and the way in which destination is trying to represent itself to the public. In order to answer the main research questions, it is necessary to see how Istria's marketers are forming destination brand and how they communicate its identity on the Internet (see figure 4.2).

**Figure 4.2: Marketers efforts in building Istria's online destination brand**

```
                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │ Administrative Tourism │
                    │   Department of IR   │
                    └─────────────────────┘
                   ↗                        ↖
      ┌──────────────┐    cooperation    ┌──────────────┐
      │ Istria Tourist│ ◄──────────────► │ Istria Tourism│
      │    Board      │                   │ Development   │
      └──────────────┘                   │ Agency (IRTA) │
                    ↘                     └──────────────┘
                      ┌─────────────────────┐ ↙
                      │  Istria as online   │
                      │  destination brand  │
                      │                     │
                      │   ┌─────────────┐   │
                      │   │Brand Identity│   │
                      │   └─────────────┘   │
                      │          │          │
                      │          ▼          │
                      │ ┌───────────────┐   │
                      │ │Brand Positioning│ │
                      │ └───────────────┘   │
                      │          │          │
                      │          ▼          │
                      │   ┌─────────────┐   │
                      │   │ Brand Image │   │
                      │   └─────────────┘   │
                      └─────────────────────┘
```
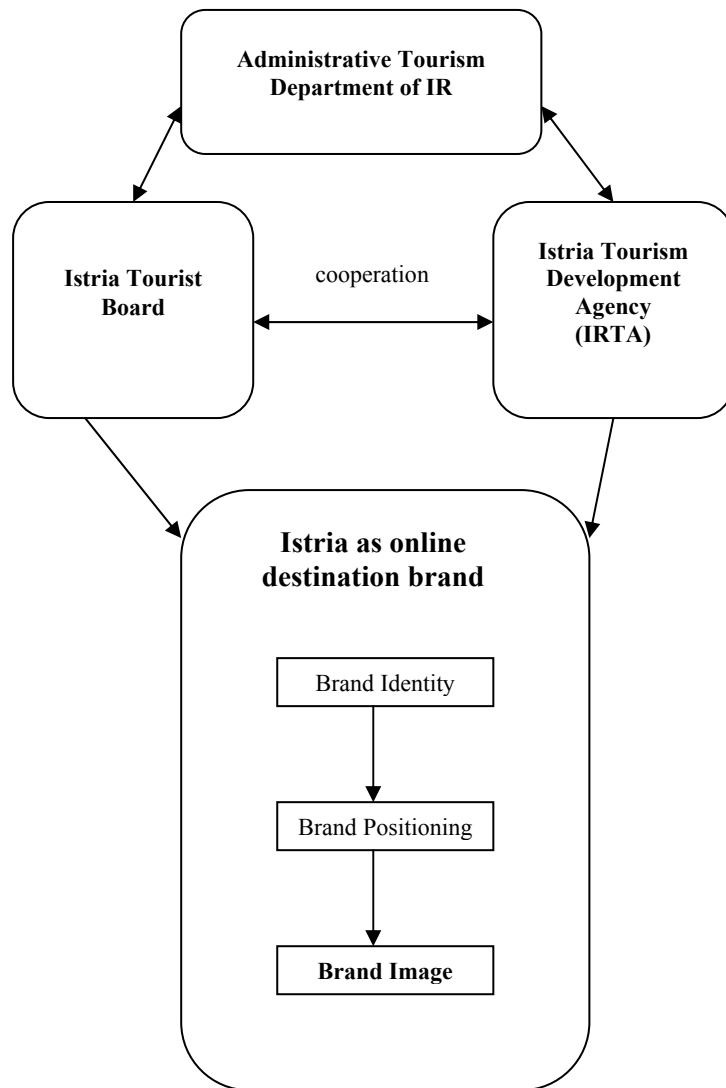
Source: Based on our own research (2015).

This figure shows how branding of Istria destination is conducted by Administrative Tourism Department of Istria Region, Istria Tourist Board and IRTA.

## 4.2.1 ADMINISTRATIVE TOURISM DEPARTMENT OF ISTRIA REGION – REPOSITIONING AND BRANDING OF ISTRIA REGION

Administrative Tourism Department of Istria Region coordinates all tourism activities in the Istria Region and defines its brand identity. The main activities of Administrative Tourism Department of Istria Region are: proactive follows, directs and coordinates overall movement

in tourism of Istria Region, follows and coordinates activities connected to development and implementation of Tourism Master Plan of Istria Region, encourages resolving the problems significant for tourism development in Istria Region. Especially advocates for development and realization of new (Greenfield) investment in tourism of Istria, encourages and coordinates cooperation with public and private tourism sector (horizontally and vertically), on local, regional, national and international level, suggests, initiates and participates in the process of development and implementation legislation and subordinate acts directly and indirectly connected to tourism activity in the Republic of Croatia, in the cooperation with UO for international cooperation and European integrations of Istria Region, encourages, develops and leads projects from the field of tourism co-financing from EU funds, cooperates with Tourist Board of Istria Region and system of Tourism Boards on the area of Istria Region in creating tourism promotion of Istria as tourism region and enhances and develops selective developing tourism projects (Istria Region 2015).

In the end of the year 2003 tourism stuff of Istria together with experts from the country and abroad made and adopted a document under the name "Master plan of tourism development of Istria for the period of 2004 until 2012. As it is known this is a strategic document for tourism development in Istria which is based on a few basic elements. These new elements of developing strategy contain new development model, a model of competitiveness, a new way of communication with the market, investment needs and possibilities and implementation plan. In the framework of this strategic document, it is anticipated that Istria as tourism destination should reposition and restructures. This is extremely complex and delicate process of organized positioning of a picture of destination in the minds of consumers. These pictures must be based on inherited and newly created identity. This is a new, systematic and well thought process of revival of Istria as a result of strategic repositioning and desire that Istria in the following five-year period imposes as recognizable, competitive and qualitative lifestyle destination.

*Our ambitions are focused exclusively on the quality of products and services, which will be able to offer to our guest's unique and unforgettable experiences and warm emotions. The new Istria's reality is trying to reach the quality of our established competition, which means that we actually have to deal with the definition of brand of Istria destination. Briefly that means that we are working on "reputation management" of Istria that is based on experiences and emotions.* (Istria Region 2015).

It is clear that this is a long-term process that represents a set of important strategic, economic and social compromises that generate general consensus about some idea. If they reach reputation that ensures brand name, than is even more important to keep permanently this status, because branding is extremely dynamic process and it is easy to fall out of the game if they satisfy with achieved. In their process of branding of Istria's developing tourism products, by reputation management, they must and permanently implement activities that will substantiate their status in the long term. Brand respectively mark in their opinion is not only the guaranty of quality, but created story that contains quality and functionality and transcends the term of success. First they wanted to transfer this commitment to themselves, adopt as a part of their defining and then share it with their guests. By the idea that Istria develops on harmonic way with creation of experience and emotions system, feelings of welfare of local people and tourists that visit Istria, the main mission in a new thinking and tourism development of Istria is long term and qualitative development on principles of sustainable and responsible development. In this context it is clear that it is not only about declaratory statements of sustainable and responsible development, but about all concrete projects that must be able to give responses and implement responsibility for managing sustainable tourism development. Implementing these strategic directions, the administrative tourism department of Istria Region and Tourism Board of Istria Region in the last years were together and work on the competitiveness strengthening and recognisability of developing tourism projects. It can be said that the common energy of developers and promoters of tourism projects created necessary synergy, in the way that the manuscript of developing projects is completely recognizable and picture of new Istria's tourism image is defined.

*We are left with the not less important process of building a competitiveness of developing tourism products so it can be in following, as short as possible period implement clear and measurable indicators in practice. In the framework of Competitiveness plan, we created the basic assumptions for improvement of overall competitiveness of every single developing tourism product, offering detailed description and planning this actions that will enable improvement of cluster value system with the aim to satisfy customer experience. In the projection of development every single tourism project, the main mission and idea was to revitalize our most attractive resources, ennoble and put in a function of tourism development.* (Istria Region 2015).

STRATEGIC MARKETING BRIEF – CREATING VISUAL IDENTITY OF ISTRIA

Strategic marketing brief is a document of Istria Region that describes the creation of Istria's visual identity. Expected results are creation of Istria brand strategy with aim of increasing brand awareness, significance and importance of differentiation:

• create a powerful symbol of mark/brand of Istria
• create basic slogan application/visual identity of Istria


Creation of new brand system has advantages for all shareholders and target markets.

For Istria destination:

• a powerful image of the destination in the perception of potential customers
• strong differentiation vs. competition
• increased levels of communication

For potential consumers:

• the quality or "premium" of a mark
• personalization of destination

For Tourism Board of Istria Region:

• clear defined directions of communication for all target groups
• recognition of tourism destinations through strong brand
• Innovative and competitive picture of tourism organization

For local private firms and commercial intermediaries in the emissive market:

• the brand will act as common power for all sector
•  all communicational activities that conduct tourism shareholders will have the advantage from powerful Istrian brand: they will currently be recognizable as Istrian, a unique Mediterranean destination that offers a rich experience of travel and services.

Communication strategy must be attractive and likeable and through communication campaign of Istria it is communicated:

• Come and discover the soul of Istria
• Come and enjoy in unique experience of travel
• Come with your partner, family or best friend/s
• Share your time, share your life, share your feelings……feel Istria!

SYSTEM OF ISTRIA'S BRANDING

Istria has its central identity and expanded identity (see figure 4.4).

**Figure 4.3: System of Istria destination branding**
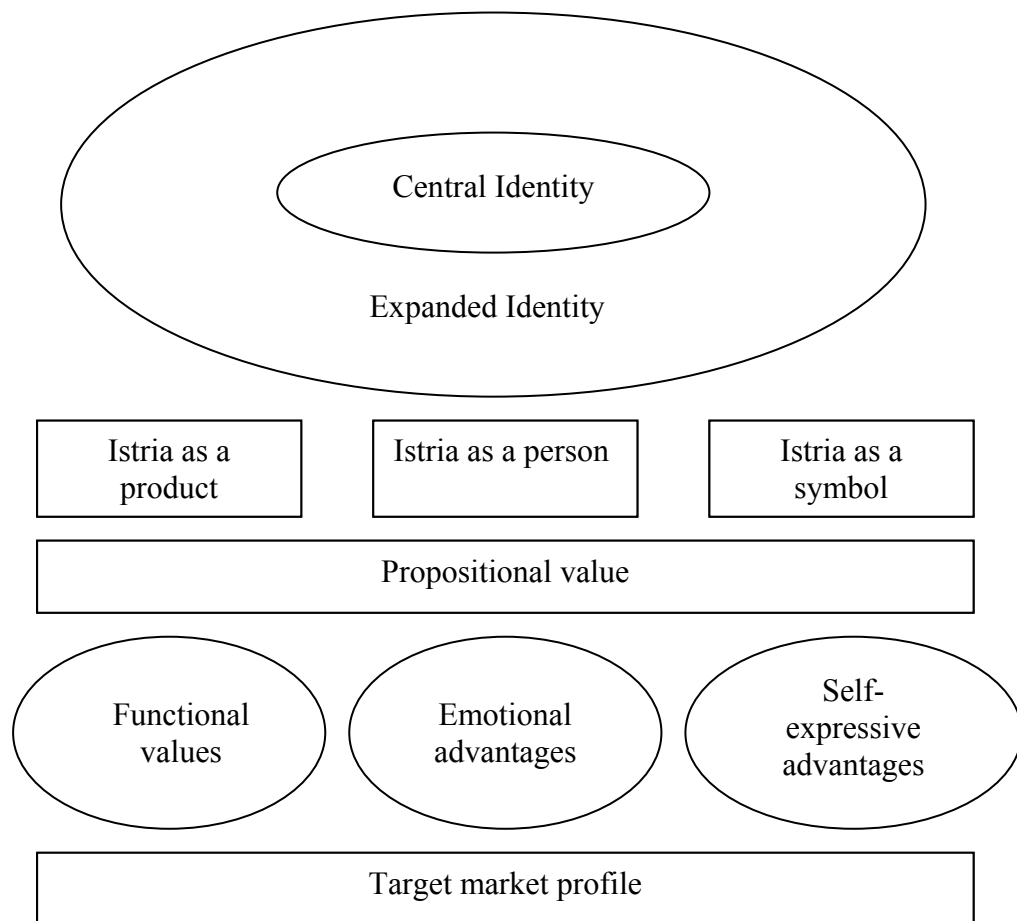


Source: Official tourist website of Istria (2014).

Sing (symbol) of Istria itself, consist from stylized drawing of a goat (with extremely "handmade" character – drawing is spontaneous, irregular, no geometrical, emotional) and two painted fields – upper field is blue and lower field is green (motive of official flag of Istria Region). Conceptual, the sign is an interpretation of already historically established the visual identity of Istra (goat particularly Capricorn recorded as a symbol of Istria that dates from the time of Roman Empire). Why is the visual identity created with the goat motive?

Because that motive has numerous qualities: historically is founded and is the indispensable part of identity of Istria for centuries, goat motive is generally accepted code of local people and is descriptive, likeable and is memorable, continues already established identity of region and respects till now created communication, communicates visual identity of Istria and its offer and offers wide possibilities of visual identity implementation.  Goat motive has a series of positive associations: it communicates patriotism, freedom, tradition, region, consistency, pride, nature, landscape diversity, health, active vacation, gastronomy, tradition, rural environment, non-contamination of environment, charm, spontaneity, immediacy and closeness. Goat is more powerful symbol to local people and potential foreign guest than the goat actually means, but identity is formed in the manner that brings powerful emotion and communicates to with all its elements, not only with goat symbol. Goat has series of the positive situation, artistic is affordable, and that is an important factor of communication.

Following table 4.2 shows the main Istria's central and expanded identity described by Istria's marketers. This data will serve in the future investigation of the brand strength namely coordination between marketers representation of brand identity and the brand image perceived by tourists.

**Table 4.3: Identity of Istria**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Central identity:**<br><br>**"Green Mediterranean hideaway"** | - Original Mediterranean culture and nature heritage,<br>- historical mosaics: Romans, Byzantine, Venice, Austria-Hungary,<br>- coexistence of tradition and modern world surrounded by untouched nature,<br>- destination that is waiting to be discovered,<br>- numerous discoveries outside of traditional summer vacation,<br>- richness of unforgettable experience and adventures, the source of inspiration,<br>- discovering Istria is discovering of own feelings and energy,<br>- preservation of untouchable natural heritage and true Mediterranean spirit and<br>- uniqueness of colours, sensations and |

| | |
|---|---|
| | feelings. |
| **Expanded identity:**<br><br>**"Istria brand as product"** | - Product range:<br>- destination of sun and sea,<br>- rural vacation houses,<br>- excursion/cultural routes,<br>- city break,<br>- gastronomy: routes of "tastes" – wine, olive oil, truffles,<br>- diving,<br>- water sports and sailing (traditional/yachting),<br>- boat excursions,<br>- fishing,<br>- bicycling,<br>- middle size groups/team building travels and<br>- historical heritage. |
| **Product characteristics** | - True Mediterranean fishing cities surrounded by deep green and blue sea,<br>- middle age and small authentic villages, surrounded by untouched<br>- Mediterranean nature,<br>- islands intersperse in crystal clean sea,<br>- mild climate,<br>- wide range of activities in natural environment,<br>- rich millenary history that needs to be discovered and<br>- excellent local cuisine. |
| **Statement of quality** | - Value for money. |
| **Brand of Istria as a person - Brand identity** | - 40-year Mediterranean woman, that looks younger, active and full of joy,<br>- authentic and cultivated but modern: bohemian chic,<br>- decisive and polite in environment protection,<br>- protectress of human cultural heritage,<br>- unconscious of submarine attractions,<br>- naturally modern with savoir faire, was travelling all over the world, speaks foreign languages and<br>- gentle but strong, with inner strength as |

| | heritage of centuries-old culture. |
|---|---|
| **Relationship with client** | - Spirituality is not defined by its outside appearance,<br>- wants to share its secrets, show the best places and taste the most delicious tastes,<br>- leaves the track of "feeling comfortable" (kindness),<br>- closely but with respect,<br>- loyal, personal and romantic and<br>- creates to a tourist "feeling of uniqueness". |
| **Istria as symbol** | - Istria has natural beauty,<br>- Istria has taste and smell,<br>- Istria has the characteristics of Rome, Greece, Venice, Italy and Austria,<br>- Istria is Mediterranean: Green and blue, yellow and gold-brown,<br>- Istria is modern (it wants to say to the world that has changed), but the history is integral part of Istria,<br>- coastal cities that emerge from green-blue sea,<br>- fishing ships and their signs,<br>- "goat" is historical symbol of Istria,<br>- blue/green colour (blue: sky, sea; green: the interior of Istria; flag and coat of arms of Istria Region) and<br>- wine producers and their symbols, and also truffles and olive oil. |

Source:  Official tourist website of Istria  (2014).

## 4.2.2 TOURIST BOARD OF ISTRIA REGION AND ITS ACTIVITIES

Istria Tourist Board is a legal person and was founded in December of the year 1994 in the touristic Istrian centre Poreč. Istria Tourist Board cooperates with Administrative Tourism Department of Istria Region and Istria Tourism Development Agency in destination brand development and Istria as an online brand. The rights and obligations of the tourist board are

regulated by the Act on Tourists Boards and the Promotion of Croatian Tourism and by the Board's statute. The tourist board has the status of a legal person from the day of its registration in the Register of Tourist Boards which is maintained by the Ministry of Tourism. The main task of the Istria Tourist Board is to support, maintain, improve and promote of all country's existing tourist resources and potential and to create a strong and recognizable brand for Istria (Official tourist website of Istria 2014).

TOURISM MASTER PLAN OF ISTRIA – THE MAIN ISTRIA'S TOURIST BOARD DOCUMENT AND THE BASE OF ITS ACTIVITIES (Istria Region 2014)

Ten years ago the group of people in Tourist Board of Istria Region, realize a need to reform the image of Istria, destination of mass tourism where was the attempt to make a shift from sun and sea product, and from coastal area to the interior of the peninsula. In this time, some projects were defined and began to with the development of the products which are today in the focus of interest of marketing plans. The accent on the development of agrotourism and encouraging the development of accommodation capacity in the interior of the peninsula, development of bicycle tours, wine roads, gastronomy etc. These initiatives were converted in Master plan, a strategic document from the year 2003, which defined future guidelines of the development of tourism of Istria for the period 2004 - 2012. Maser plan included vision, future strategy of portfolio, positioning and strategy of Istria's tourism development: Vision defined the strategy of sustainability on growing tourism demand and financial returns with, at the same time, enhancing the quality of guest experience and quality of life of local people. Istria was divided on clusters (zones) from which each zone had a clear positioning and is expressed the need to promote unique tourism destination Istria. The destination was positioned through its main identity "Green Mediterranean Hideaway". With the strategy of development through the eight-year period, the restructuration and repositioning of existing accommodation capacity was defined. The planned growth of accommodation capacity was 18%, with reduction of less qualitative accommodation capacity (camps and private accommodation) and increase of accommodation units in hotels and apartments. Master plan is a strategic document where the action of Tourist Board of Istria Region is based and through operative Marketing plans.

Marketing plan of Istria defines long-term objectives:

• to enhance the concurrent advantages of destination with continuous innovations of the offer (new ways of communication, development of a product and improving quality),

• an emphasis of defined positioning of Istria as Green Mediterranean Hideaway and the destination for all year and target group of middle higher and higher income, and additionally positioning of the clusters (zones) as different experiences,

• positioning of Istria in the circle of famous touristic destinations as Provence, Tuscany, Scotland or Tirol,

• strengthening the market position in higher and low season and

• a drift of destination image intended to lower provisioning segment of consumers and orientation to the middle higher segment.

## MARKETING ACTIVITIES OF ISTRIA TOURISM BOARD IN BRANDING OF ISTRIA REGION

Tourist Board of Istria is based on the intensive cooperation of private and public sector, the main Istria's hoteliers and systematic Tourist Board (local, regional and national). Pooling of resources the budget of Tourist Board of Istria is almost doubled. The cooperation is mostly held through promotional activities, respectively through advertisement campaigns. In Marketing plan of Istria are highlighted three main activities in which Tourist Board of Istria Region is directed: advertising, PR and electronic marketing and product development. Other programs, particularly projects, mostly serve as a support in performing the above-mentioned activities. In the part of promotional activities, stress is on advertising in print media. Through creative elements of advertising, Istria is communicating itself as a comprehensive destination and is positioned through slogan "Green Mediterranean Hideaway". The web portal of Istria is highlighted in advertisements and the further communication is focused on destination web portal. Lately, the higher amount of sources is spent on online advertising. Online promotion is taking increasing part in overall advertising, thanks to characteristics of the target group and importance of the internet in choosing a destination. In order to gain potential customers and higher reliance on internet media, in last few years Istria did necessary actions and created a qualitative destination web portal.

The deficit of financial sources that are necessary for the organization of qualitative media campaign on Istria's interesting markets aims to be replaced with PR activities, particularly bringing foreign journalists in Istria. With these activities, the noticed results can be achieved

and with small financial resources. Istria is every year visited by 200 newspaper teams that include print and electronic media. The main focus of communication, that as an object has enhancing the publicity in foreign media and increasing awareness of Istria as desirable destination mainly focused on areas of attraction of overall destination, natural beauties and existing products. In this actions it can be seen that Istria's Tourism Board is making a lot of effort in the building a cognitive image of Istria namely creating awareness about Istria destination on national and international level, trying to position in different marketplaces.

## E-MARKETING OF ISTRA TOURIST BOARD

Priority segment of Tourist Board of Istria, in last two years, were activities of e-marketing. As support in building of an Istria brand, at the beginning of the year 2007, was put into operation a new web page that become referent portal for informing about a destination and equal marketing channel. Tourism web portal of Istria is a key marketing place on which the promotion of a destination is focused. Second referent place of marketing communication is Info and the selling centre. With annual visits of 1.5 million visitors of web portal Istria, are created the conditions for starting destination info and the selling centre. Through call centre, e-mail communication and post, there will be additional channel of communication with potential visitors and creating a system of e-sale respectively starting a sale centre of Istria, and in this manner will be created the overall e-marketing system for Istria. Destination Info and call centre of Istria are representing the first project of this type in Croatia.

## ACHIEVEMENTS AND FUTURE POTENTIALS FOR ISTRIA BRANDING

Last ten years in the frame of Tourist Board of Istria, the products are systematically developed, what resulted in an extremely wide offer of the destination. Istria is today recognizable of its products-leaders as Gourmet, Bike, Vine roads or Olive oil roads. The intention is to continue developing existing products and gradual adding a new products with the intention to the commercialization of the products indulge to DMC that will cooperate with Tourist Board of Istria Region. Tourist Board of Istria Region would give the marketing support in developing products while DMC partner would the same products place in the market. In this text were only mentioned the main activities of Tourist Board of Istria. As mentioned before, Tourist Board of Istria is taking the leading position in the part of destination marketing of Croatia. Operation of Tourist Board is facilitated with existing

document (Masterplan), which defined vision and directions of development of Istria's tourism and activities of destination marketing. On the other hand, regardless of the responsibility of the local tourism boards toward regional doesn't exist and is not prescribed by law, prevailed narrow local interests from powerful financial and influential local tourist boards and appeared the necessity of common activity, not only through the system of tourist boards but in the whole process were involved leading hotel companies that brought to successful operation of Tourist Board of Istria. With strengthening the financial position of tourist boards and promotional activities, Istria could make successful positioning and become concurrent on the European level.

## 4.2.3 ISTRIA'S TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AGENCY - IRTA

IRTA or Istria's Tourism Development Agency is managing the Contact and Sales centre of Istria destination and cooperates with Istria Tourism Board in building the online brand. Strategic goals of activities are:

• Enhancing the quality of destination service (reliability, speed, competence, accessibility, helpfulness, communication with user, credibility, safety, personalization).
• Improving and determining destination image as tourism leader in a region.

Contact and sales centre are working together and share the same infrastructure. They have the common telephone number, fax and e-mail for all area of Istria and the unique name on social networks – VisitIstria.

Activities of Contact and Sales centre are: researching of information and giving the general information's about cities, giving the general information's and researching of availability, prices, conditions and communication with others in call centres of Istria.

There was developed the brand of Contact and sales centre "Halo Istria" that associate on:
- Tourism information's (variety of tourism information's, all tourism information's are at one place, all about Istria, Istria's tourism encyclopedia…)
- Specialist for a destination (Istria, Istria's tourism, Istria's quality, vacations in Istria…)
- Velocity of service (quickly finding the information's, quick answering the phone, quick answering the e-mails…)

- Quality of service (disposed of/services/polite agents of call centre, knowledge of numerous languages, professionalism…)
- Resolving the problem (information and booking on the same place, all that I need, always available, helping in a "trouble"…).

Except these activities, one of the famous project of IRTA, Istria Tourist Board and the Region of Istria is Istria Inspirit, the important product of cultural tourism in Istria.

## 4.2.4 ONLINE POSITIONING OF ISTRIA DESTINATION BRAND

Istria's online destination brand is built together with Istria's Tourism Board and Istria's Tourism Development Agency (IRTA). They both represent the main DMO (Destination Marketing Organization) of Istria. In order to capture tourism destination image and see its relation with destination identity namely strength of Istria's online brand, there is a need to show Istria's DMO efforts to build online identity and Istria's online brand. Technologically aware destinations have defined e-marketing strategy and proactive approach in attracting, understanding and fulfil wishes of their on-line clients (Krešić 2011). Systematically are developing their on-line identity (brand) and are using web 2.0 functionalities in their promotional activities. They enable e-commerce or possibility of reservation and purchasing of tourism products over the Internet, are using new technologies, are investing a huge amount of their income on e-marketing and are following the success of their e-marketing activities (Krešić 2011).

The strategy of e-marketing of Istria is a connection of strategy of marketing and possibilities that offers informatics technology for achieving defined goals. It is designed to exploit possibilities that offer's informatics technology to the business subject and to achieve planned goals. Istria's DMO is following new trends.

Cycle of consumers in the new environment
- Dreaming – searching for inspiration: The internet as the main source
- Researching – web search engine
- Booking – on-line and mobile booking
- Experiencing – searching and booking continues during the travel

- Sharing – sharing: bigger/crucial role of social networks;
- The web becomes more mobile;
- Four "BE": be found, be relevant, be engaging, be accountable
- Searching and booking continues during the travel. The main goal is the systematic development of on-line identity and influence on the positive reputation of the brand of Istria.

The function of online promotion is "Push" messages (Thematic of advertising) during the whole year. Managing the content on the web and social networks. On-line campaigns: AdWords, Banners, Advertorials, Facebook, Twitter and Youtube. Themes of advertising: Gourmet, Wellness, Bike, Diving and Istria. Countries: avio destinations, Slovenia, Italy, Germany, Austria, Netherlands and other countries.

*Official tourist website of Istria destination www.istra.hr*

Is managed by Tourism Board of Istria and IRTA (Istria's Tourism Development Agency), and represents official and direct communication.

- Portal with double function: informative and promotional sale (30% in EU).
- Coordination of information's with Touristic communities of Istria Region, local Touristic communities, hoteliers, renters and agencies.
- Content: more than 6.600.000 viewed pages, time of remaining on the page less than four minutes.
- Seven language versions of the portal: Croatian, English, German, Italian, Slovenian, Russian and Dutch.

Page is divided on: „Accommodation", „Regions and Towns", „Planning Your Travel and Stay", „Attractions and Activities", „About Istria" and „Press". „Accommodation" contains hotels, Tourist Villages, Campsites, Private accommodation, Special offers, Online booking and Domus Bonus. „Regions and Towns" contain information's about: Umag/Novigrad, Poreč, Vrsar/Funtana, Rovinj, Pula/Medulin, Labin/Rabac and Central Istria. „Planning Your Travel and Stay" contains Hello Istra!, Travel to Istria, Travel agencies, Useful information, Nautics, Brochures and Istria on mobile phones. „Attractions and activities" contains Arts and culture, Natural attractions, Coast and beaches, Food and wine, Children and family, Sport, Wellness and Events. „About Istria" contains: About Istria, Where are we, History, Blue

Istria, Green Istria, People and customs, Croatia and Panorama of Istria. „Visit Istria" is a popular destination brand on social networks: Facebook, Pinterest, Flickr, Youtube, Foursquare and Twitter. It also has the call centre, brochures, newsletter, share and the possibilities of online booking. „Fly to Istria" is an option where tourists can search all flights that connect their country to Istria region. „Multimedia" option contains Mobile, Brochures, Video, Photo and Istria info. Page www.istra.hr also highlights praises from abroad to Istria from world's popular media. As media may be one of the creators of tourism destination image and influence on tourism destination selection as induced agents, in the main Istria's web page are highlighted the popular descriptions and promotion of Istria in the popular world's media. In this media Istria is mostly promoted as an enogastronomic region, that as the best and interesting destination, a destination with fabulous beaches, festival destination, romantic destination, the best destination for retirement etc. Page functionality and e-marketing efforts on the Istria's official web page are measured by Google analytics.

In the year, 2012 was conducted analysis and benchmarking of European destination sites. WEBBING RANK is an indicator in the study Webbing that using comparative method measures quality, quantity and efficiency of regional or government institutional tourism portals, comparing different strategic and practical approaches to info-commerce and e-commerce. The analysis contained 22 institutional European tourism portals. Timeframe of analysis was September and October of the year 2012 and the comparison with last two years. This was comprehensive and detailed analysis of 6 fields and 87 indicators: communication strategy, the strategy of interaction and the web 2.0, content and services, mobile applications, positioning and statistics and selling strategy. Istria's official destination portal www.istra.hr was on the 7th position in the year 2011 and with rank 30 in the year of 2012. According to this tools, Istria trend was 3 and had the best rank in Croatia. Istria's web portal can be compared with Madeira (Portugal) and Tuscany (Italy) that both had a trend of 2.5 in the year of 2012. Destination portal of Istria is recently placed in benchmark analysis regional/national tourism destination portals "Webbing" and took the first place of 10 in EU.

*Social network marketing*

In the year, 2010 society goes out from the time of information (Google) and enters in the time of buyer (Apple, Facebook). In this time, influence arises from the interaction with empowered buyers (Forrester research 2011). Communication with visitors becomes two-way direction. In the year 2012 is developed the strategy of positioning Istria under the name

"Visit Istria" on social networks. These social networks are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Foursquare, Flickr and Pinterest. On one of social network's Facebook, there is over 55.500 likes and daily communication is present. Application "Discover Istria" is based on emotions and communicates emotions.

In this chapter can be concluded that marketers of Istria Region are making a lot of effort in building Istria as a brand and online brand, by strengthening its online visual identity, following world's trends of online positioning and measurement of effects, engaging on all levels through info, sales and call centres etc. According to the "webbing rank" analysis Istria's official website always took a good position through European sites, this means that marketers are doing a great job in the branding of Istria Region. In the following chapter image of Istria Region is researched and the impact of Istria's DMO activities on its formation.

# 5 RESEARCH OF ISTRIA'S DESTINATION IMAGE

After analyzing all the secondary resources about Istria's destination marketers' efforts in building Istria as a brand, primary resources that include an interview with a professional and expert of IRTA (Istria's Tourism Development Agency), and structured interviews with

tourists are presented in this chapter. Results of this primary research are compared with secondary resources and will serve as a basis for discussion and drawing conclusions regarding the main research questions.

In order to answer the first research question and determine the impact of DMO efforts there was a need to research Istria's destination image and its coordination with destination identity. The following table represents words in a text that first come to the minds of tourists (Y generation) when they think about Istria as a destination.

**Table 5.1: Main key words from text research**

| Key words | Number of the word in a text | Mentioned by |
|---|---|---|
| Food | 18 | 64,70% |
| Sea | 15 | 52,94% |
| Nature | 14 | 52,94% |
| Nice people | 11 | 41,17% |
| Beautiful | 8 | 41,17% |
| Towns | 7 | 29,41% |
| Beach | 6 | 29,41% |
| Sun | 6 | 23,52% |
| Fish | 4 | 23,52% |
| Stone houses | 3 | 17,64% |
| Hills | 3 | 17,64% |
| Tradition | 3 | 17,64% |
| Wine | 5 | 11,76% |
| Without mass tourism | 2 | 11,64% |
| Wonderful | 2 | 11,64% |
| Green | 2 | 11,64% |
| Untouched nature | 2 | 11,64% |
| War | 2 | 11,64% |

The main key words are food, sea, nature, nice people, beautiful etc. From this it may be seen that the image of Istria is similar to that in global popular media posted on official tourist website of Istria.

According to the main Istria identity described in its Strategic Marketing Brief, the desired destination image and true destination image are similar. According to the expert of IRTA, the image of Istria is similar to the Istria identity in the Strategic Marketing Brief. In his opinion

Istria evokes warmness and warm emotions. Further, he feels that Istria also evokes a sense of admiration because of its preserved nature, beautiful beaches, kind local people and hosts. His image of Istria was described as pure warmness and magnetic attraction. He believes that Istria is still "innocent" as it was from the beginning while he also sees a lot of development potential in the region.

> *As I was born in Istria, I can not be objective but I can say that Istria evokes in me and my friends something that is positive, good, multi-cultural in the sense of tolerance, a feeling of being distanced from all Balkan countries. In a sense Istria is more tolerant that the rest of Croatia although in developmental terms we lag behind Europe. We are at the beginning and we can do a lot of things. For example we have untouched nature and virginity, we are still "innocent" in many segments and we have unexploited potential. Istria is holding on to me, motivating me and is a kind of inspiration for me.* (IRTA expert 2014).

The tourist image is a little different because of the placing of food in first place which is similar to the image from global popular media that mostly classifies Istria as an eno-gastronomic region, with the exception that its beautiful beaches and its popularity as a festival destination are also highlighted.

Asking tourists if their associations about Istria are positive or negative, most answered that they are positive and that is in accordance with the opinion of IRTA expert who also thinks that Istria evokes positive emotions. He believes that associations about Istria are positive since Istria is a positive and wonderful place thanks to its people. He also believes that the future development of Istria is in the hands of young, open-minded, creative and positive people that remember experiences abroad and bring these experiences back to Istria.

It can be concluded that Istria as a brand is strong, its identity is similar to its image and Istria is well positioned in the tourist minds. However, as was highlighted in the theoretical part, the future of tourism destination brand development will be possible only if the destination embraces the opportunity presented by the Internet. More and more purchasing processes today are carried out online and the Internet has become present in all aspects of our lives, with younger generations such as the Y generation considering the Internet as a part of their lives. Tourism destination development in the future will depend on online positioning, with

tourism destinations participating in a continuous online race just as will Istria as a tourism destination.

Now it is important to see the way in which Istria is being positioned, particularly if and in what way the Internet has influence on its brand positioning, namely brand development. The next part of the interview was based on information sources from presented ideas. Tourism destination image can be formed by: overt induced agents (marketing, communications, media & ICT, narratives & visuals, created meaning), covert induced agents (intermediaries/produced imagination – art, literature, popular culture), autonomous agents (political situation, economic conditions, technological advancement, social changes), organic (perceived tourism experience) and solicited or unsolicited organic agents (word of mouth, word of mouse) (see chapter 2.4.3). This stage is needed in order to answer the main research questions to determine if Istria as a brand is formed by the influence of the Internet. First resrarch question is*: what kind of influence does Internet have on Istria's tourism destination image formation and destination brand development?* The results are presented in the following tables.

**Table 5.2: Information sources of presented ideas**

Information Sources

| | Agents | Mentioned by |
|---|---|---|
| Experience | Organic | 29,41% |
| Friends | Solicited & Unsolicited Organic | 29,41% |
| TV | Covert Induced & Autonomous | 29,41% |
| Internet | Covert Induced, Autonomous & Organic | 5,88% |
| Imagination | Organic | 5,88% |

**Table 5.3: Information sources of information research**

Information Sources

| | Agents | Mentioned by |
|---|---|---|
| Random on Google | Covert Induced, Autonomous & Organic | 64,70% |
| TV | Covert Induced & Autonomous | 23,52% |
| Friends | Solicited & Unsolicited Organic | 5,88% |
| Destination website www.istra.hr | Overt Induced | 5,88% |

From the presented results it can be concluded that the Internet does not represent the main influence in creating awareness of a destination, rather organic agents as experience, solicited and unsolicited organic as friends and covert induced and autonomous as TV play the primary role. The Internet still has a low percentage in the process of Istria destination awareness creation. The second table shows that the Internet has an influence on the information research process when awareness of a destination is already created.

The second research question is related to the previous results: *is Istria's tourism destination image formed mainly by DMO Internet promotion or rather with a larger group of factors and information sources?*

**Table 5.4: Knowledge of Istria's official destination web site**

|            | Mentioned by |
|------------|--------------|
| No - 13    | 76,47%       |
| Yes - 4    | 23,52%       |

Istria's DMO promotion is mainly based on its official web site www.istra.hr. The results show that tourists have a low percentage of knowledge of this page. In the interview questions Visit Istria on social networks was also mentioned, but no one found this relevant.

IRTA expert thinks that tourists inform themselves on the official site www.istra.hr because of its comprehensive content and also according to Google analytics data that IRTA uses to test the efficiency of the web site. IRTA is following global trends and, according to the research conducted, they were online pioneers. Istria's official destination web portal was one of the first that had online booking and is getting closer to American destination web portals, only more elegant and less commercial. IRTA is also using the concept of storytelling as a strategy for positioning and is trying to stimulate people to come to a destination through these stories, e.g. interacting with tourists through the stories by posing questions such as: *do you want to experience Istria in a creative way?*

> *In positioning, from the aspect of a virtual world, we are following global trends. I was conducting the research, we were online pioneers. We have online booking and we were one of the first that implemented that on the destination portal." We are not perfect, we are still far from our goal and there is still a need to progress. IRTA is working very*

*well and all that it is doing is designed for the long term. I have real goals. When you see how storytelling looks in America, Switzerland and Austria than you get a vision how this should look like. According to the virtual world I think that we are not that far from other countries.* (IRTA expert 2014).

Tourists, after creating awareness of a destination, begin to research information on the Internet – randomly on Google as results showed. The official web site www.istra.hr is translated in four languages (Italian, German, English and Croatian), and IRTA's professionals are managing well the SEO and SEM of the site. Typing the name "Istria" as the entry to main Istrian tourism market on Google (www.google.de, www.google.it, www.google.at, www.google.si etc.), after Wikipedia, the main web site of Istria appears from second to fifth position on the first page of the Google search returns. Although only 5,88% of tourists claimed to have researched information on www.istra.hr and 64,70% searched for information randomly on Google, it is certain that more tourists inform themselves by Istria's official web page as well although they perceive it as random Google research.

The third research question posed was: *are projected images on the Internet influencing Istria's destination positioning and ultimately the tourist buying behaviour?*
Image formation process has three stages: cognitive, affective and conative (see chapter 2.4.4). Brand strength can be measured by comparing cognitive and affective image. Their similarity shows if the destination is competitive. Awareness creation or cognitive image is represented in the following table.

**Table 5.5: Results from cognitive image research**

| Cognitive items | Mentioned by |
|---|---|
| Friendly | 58,82% |
| Lively | 29,41% |
| Interesting | 5,88% |
| Quiet | 5,88% |

The cognitive image of Istria, or the first step in image creation, is mostly friendly and lively. The second phase of image creation, affective image of Istria or creating emotions, is represented in the following table.

**Table 5.6: Results from affective image research**

| Affective items | Mentioned by |
|---|---|
| Pleasant | 35,29% |
| Relaxing | 35,29% |
| Exciting | 23,52% |
| Thrill | 5,88% |

The cognitive image "friendly" and affective image "pleasant" are both positive and show similarity between cognitive and affective brand image. Thus it can be concluded that Istria destination brand is competitive. In the opinion of IRTA expert Istria is relaxing so the results are similar. The following figure represents the image formation process.

**Figure 5.1: Image formation process**
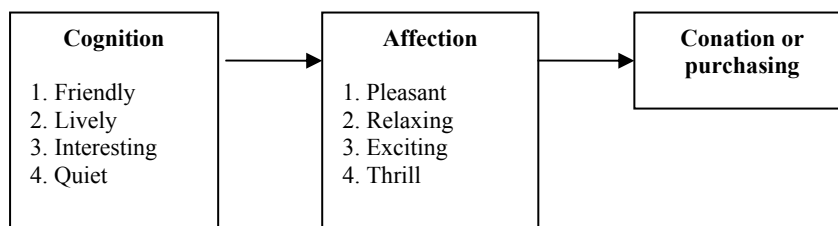


Source: Based on our own research (2015).

The decision making process is described in chapter 2.4.4, namely the relation between cognition, affection and conation. The model includes four main stages: awareness of the need, creation of alternative, valuation of alternative and purchasing. Although this model doesn't always have to go in this direction and the procedure can begin in any phase of the model. The following table shows what information sources influenced destination selection according to tourists.

**Table 5.7: Main sources of information's that influenced destination selection**

| Information Sources | Agents | Mentioned by |
|---|---|---|
| Friends or family | Solicited & Unsolicited Organic | 58,82% |
| Other | / | 29,41% |
| Google research | Covert Induced, Autonomous & Organic | 5,88% |
| Other media (TV, radio) | Covert Induced & Autonomous | 5,88% |

Solicited and unsolicited organic agent friends of family (word of mouth) had the greatest influence. Applying the results on the decision making process model (see chapter 2.4.4), it can be concluded that awareness (first stage) is created mostly through organic agents (experience), solicited and unsolicited organic agents (word of mouth) and covert induced and autonomous agents (TV). Creation of alternative (second phase) is created mostly through Google research (covert induced, autonomous and organic agents) and valuation of alternative (third phase) is influenced by solicited and unsolicited organic agents (friends or family). It may be concluded that awareness is created mostly through word of mouth, while the Internet is present in the second phase when tourists are researching alternative and valuation of alternative is affected by friends or family. After creating an emotion (affection) about a destination, conation or purchasing (fourth phase) follows. However, this model, as previously stated, can begin in any stage of the process.

## 5.1 DISCUSSION – INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS AND CRITICAL REVIEW

In order to answer the main research questions, both primary and secondary information resources are analyzed and related to the previous theoretical part. Secondary information (documents, data about Istria's DMO and its activities etc.) are presented to give a clear idea

of how Istria's DMO is structured and how branding of Istria is conducted. Primary research comprised of an interview with a professional and expert of IRTA, and structured interview research with tourists. The interview questions with tourists are structured in a way that the first part included destination image research and information sources of perceived image were subsequently examined.

1. RQ: *What kind of influence does Internet have on Istria's tourism destination image formation and destination brand development?*

It is concluded that destination identity and image of tourists which were surveyed are similar. The only difference is in perceiving central and expanded identity. The most mentioned word in a text was "food" and that is part of the expanded identity of Istria (see chapter 2.4.1). The image of Istria in global popular media is similar to that of the tourists, namely they mostly classify Istria as a gastronomic and enogastronomic region. Below are presented some of the tourist images of Istria.

> *I have heard a lot about Istria, the land of good wine, prosciutto and olive oil... I like good food so I expect a lot from Istria. Sun, a town on a hill, stone houses immediately come to my mind. If the food is as good as people told me, it should be positive.* (Interviewee A 2014).

> *Relaxing in some nicely decorated vacation house, good food and wine.. Food, wine, Motovun, truffles immediately come to my mind. I expect to feel probably a sense of historical times, tradition and nature. Associations are positive.* (Interviewee B 2014).

> *I will settle in one of the old towns with narrow streets and cute coffees and restaurants. Every morning I will have my coffee on one of the terraces with a perfect sea view and wait to get warmer, for the refreshing swimming in the crystal blue water. Thoughts that Immediately come to my mind: white boats floating on the water, me daydreaming on the beach a lot of sun, clear water, the sound of the waves crashing on the cliffs, smell of the sea, salt and fish and delicious seafood. Associations are positive.* (Interviewee C 2014).

> *I think it will be a wonderful experience knowing all the beauty Istria and Croatia has to offer. I can imagine the wonderful sea and old little Istrian towns, as well as the*

*beautiful nature of mainland Istria. I think it would be great experience knowing the friendly nature of the people there. Rovinj, Pula I expect to see the beautiful towns and cities in Istria as well as the islands of Brijuni. I expect to eat some nice seafood close to the sea and maybe some pizza. I would also like to visit the little mountainous towns. Very positive! Nice friendly people and beautiful nature!* (Interviewee D 2014).

According to the overall results of the interview with tourists, the subsequent most mentioned words are: sea, nature etc. which is the part of central identity and is in accordance with the main identity of Istria. IRTA expert in his interview sees Istria in accordance with its central identity. The public image of Istria is more "Istria as a product" or expanded identity of Istria, while marketers of Istria see Istria more as a "Green Mediterranean Hideaway", the central identity of Istria. This also shows the main problem as highlighted in the main document of the Istria Region – Tourism Master Plan that Istria needs to strengthen its visual identity and strategic marketing brief in which the expected results are: creation of Istria brand strategy with the aim of increasing brand awareness, significance and importance of differentiation: create a powerful symbol of the mark/brand of Istria and create a basic slogan application/visual identity of Istria. IRTA expert thinks that the image of Istria Region is positive and admired. Below are some of the information sources of presented ideas of the tourists and facts that show that Istria has to strengthen its online image.

*My presented ideas came from my friends that were already there and some even live in Istria.* (Interviewee A).

*My presented ideas came from primary school, high school and documentaries.* (Interviewee B).

*Recommendations from friends.* (Interviewee C).

*Those ideas came from Internet and travel.* (Interviewee D).

*My ideas came from www.istra.com /www.istra.hr.* (Interviewee E).

*Because I know people from Croatia, I have friends there and friends at home who come from Istria.* (Interviewee F).

*My ideas came from Magazines, TV or stories told by friends.* (Interviewee G).

According to the overall results of the interview with tourists, Internet does not have a major influence on Istria's tourism destination image formation, as destination image is formed more by organic agents (experience), solicited and unsolicited organic agents (friends) and covert induced and autonomous (TV). The Internet in this question has a low mark of 5,88% and indicates more a forming a destination image in the process of information research when awareness of a destination is already created. The question about information research shows that random Google research (64,70%) has the highest percentage of being mentioned and TV (23,52%). Therefore it can be concluded that the Internet is one of the creators of tourism destination image and one of the factors that affects destination development, yet doesn't have the major influence on image creation and destination development of Istria as a destination.

While IRTA is making a lot of effort and is following global trends in the online marketing positioning of Istria, indeed may be considered an online pioneer.

> *In positioning, from the aspect of a virtual world, we are following global trends. I was carrying out research, we were online pioneers. We have online booking and we were one of the first that implemented that on the destination portal. IRTA is working very well and all that it is doing will bear fruit in the long term. We are also using the concept of storytelling and trying to stimulate people to come to a destination through the stories. There is no need to invent stories because they are already exist.*

> *According to the virtual world I think that we are not lagging behind other countries, and I think that we know how to tell our story through the Internet. TotalSplit is an internet page created by an American, a journalist that is looking at the region through his own eyes and giving hints to his own countrymen (what to do, where to go etc.). This is like Tripadvisor but on a personal level; in a way it is kind of like selling your own dream. Comparing the destination web sites www.istra.hr and www.visitflorida.com, the latter is particularly noteworthy because it is focused on sales. European sites are getting closer to American ones, only that the American ones remain more commercial. European sites are more "elegant", hidden behind a story as "Do you want to experience Istria in a creative way?" and then you create a story and come with your ideas on how to experience Istria. We should give a framework to people.* (IRTA expert 2014).

Due to historical obstacles however, Istria has remained a very young destination and needs time to position itself on the marketplace. According to destination identity IRTA expert thinks that Istria should bring back all the things from ex-Yugoslavia. Istria as a part of Yugoslavia was a brand of mass tourism that had a wide palette of offers, from cheap to expensive, but now Istria is distancing itself from all of that and, in his opinion, this is very bad for Istria's positioning. Istria should strengthen its identity by always looking for something greater, present things that it actually has, bring more documents as part of Istria's Tourism Master Plan and first develop on a local level.

Istria has had many historical obstacles and this was the reason for the poor coordination between Istria's identity and image. Although the most developed region in Croatia, Istria is still young destination and has started too late with its development so now it needs to learn a lot and create greater awareness among potential visitors which requires time. Istria is still largely unknown to the European market but by strengthening its identity on all levels (online and offline), the Internet will have a major influence on its destination development.

2. RQ: *Is Istria's tourism destination image formed mainly by DMO Internet promotion or rather with a larger group of factors and information sources?*
From the second research question the results showed little knowledge of Istria's official web site. The tourism web portal of Istria is a key marketing place on which the promotion of a destination is focused and Visit Istria on social networks was not found to be relevant to the tourists. IRTA expert said that tourists are mostly gathering information on Istria's official web site because of its informative content, according to Google analytics which is testing web page efficiency and which SEO&SEM are managing, Google Adwords and translation of the web page in four main languages of Istria's target market which impacts on its effective positioning on Google. The connection between these two statements is probed in the first question of the interview with tourists: "Where did you research information about Istria?" Tourists claimed that they mostly carried out research randomly on Google. Typing "Istria" on the Google pages of Istria's main markets (www.google.si, www.google.de etc), Istria's official destination website appears from second to fifth place, so it is certain that many tourists came to this page although they perceived it as random Google research. According to IRTA expert, IRTA is using contemporary strategies to influence the emotional or affective part (storytelling, interaction with tourists through the platforms Visit Istria, Discover Istria etc.). Istria's DMO understands the cycle of consumers in the new environment: dreaming –

searching for inspiration and the Internet as the main source, researching – web search engine, booking – online and mobile booking, experiencing – searching and booking continues during the travel, sharing – sharing: bigger/crucial role of social networks, web becomes more mobile, four "BE": be found, be relevant, be engaging, be accountable, searching and booking continues during the travel. The main goal is the systematic development of on-line identity and influence on the positive reputation of the brand of Istria. The function of online promotion is "Push" messages (thematic of advertising) during the whole year. Managing the content on the web and social networks. On-line campaigns: AdWords, Banners, Advertorials, Facebook, Twitter and Youtube. Themes of advertising: Gourmet, Wellness, Bike, Diving and Istria. The official web site of Istria as a destination was a pioneer in Europe. It can be concluded that Istria's DMO and its strategies influences both the cognitive and affective tourist image. In the information research process, when awareness is already created from other sources, DMO's online promotion, rather than other information sources, influences destination image formation and its importance will grow in future destination marketing. In the opinion of IRTA expert Istria needs time to develop as a brand and there is still much to do, and he sees potential in young and creative people and in online and offline marketing promotion. He feels that the Internet influences Istria's tourism destination image formation and brand development, but as Istria is still a very young destination, due to historical obstacles, it still needs time to develop as a brand and an online brand.

*Development should be based on enthusiasts, experts and young people that are willing to change something, but I would not exclude older people because they have wisdom and caution which can help balance the enthusiasm of young people and this creates an ideal equilibrium. There is a huge space to advance." "When I was travelling through Europe I said we are perfect. I like to give a chance to other people that see potential in us. A place is made of people, but our people are in a "deep sleep" and they should "wake up" or someone should "wake them up. We are Mediterranean people and we should preserve our authenticity, to work in a more relaxed way yet in our organisation we should emulate the west. It is very important not to fall asleep again and holding the thread online and offline because one day will be a change of generations.* (IRTA expert 2014).*
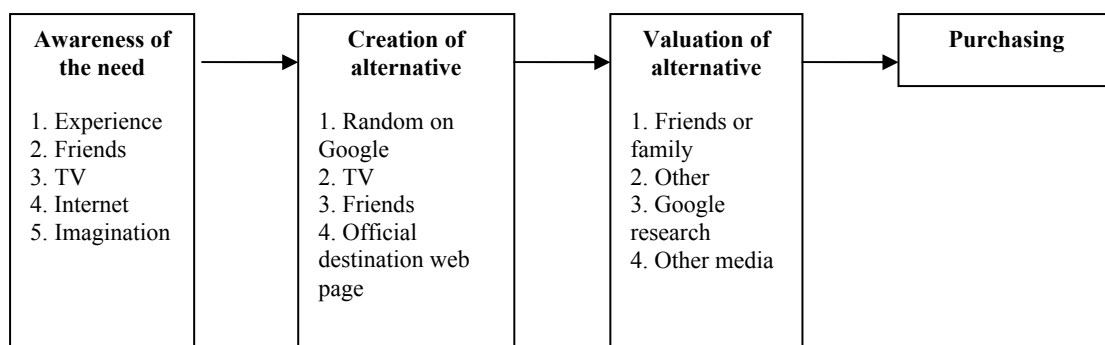
As mentioned before Istria's destination marketing organization should work on both the online and offline level. In the case of Istria's destination awareness creation, sources of

information other than the Internet are more represented. The Internet is present in information research when awareness of a destination is already created and thus Istria's DMO will have more and more importance in future destination development.

3. RQ: *Are projected images on the Internet influencing Istria's destination positioning and ultimately the tourist buying behaviour?*

In the third research question, the cognitive and affective destination images and factors which influence the decision making process are investigated. Results showed similarity between cognitive and affective images which means that Istria destination as a brand is competitive. The next model which was analyzed was the model of connection between cognition, affection and conation, namely the decision making process. This question is related to the first one, so the results are presented in the following figure.

**Figure 5.2: Applying the results to the decision making process**

| **Awareness of the need** | **Creation of alternative** | **Valuation of alternative** | **Purchasing** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Experience<br>2. Friends<br>3. TV<br>4. Internet<br>5. Imagination | 1. Random on Google<br>2. TV<br>3. Friends<br>4. Official destination web page | 1. Friends or family<br>2. Other<br>3. Google research<br>4. Other media | |

Source: Adapted scheme by Pike (2010, 260).

From the conducted research projected images on Internet might influence tourist buying behaviour. Although they are not the main factors that influence tourist buying behaviour, Istria's buying behaviour, according to research, could more be influenced organically by experience, friends or word of mouth or TV. It is important to highlight that the factors of destination selection are still unknown in the tourism and marketing literature, so these conclusions are based only on research conducted in Istria. The explanation of this figure is supported by the statements of marketing professionals:

> *Although all agree that a picture about a tourism destination can have an important role in travel decision making, determination of a picture about a tourism destination*

*and understanding its creation are not completely clear.* (Pike 2010). *There is a huge number of definitions in the tourism literature and it can be said that a picture about a tourism destination becomes marketing slang.* (Cossens 1994).

The Director of Istria's Tourism Development Agency (IRTA) and marketing expert also stated - *The image formation process and decision making process of tourism destination is the least explored area and it is almost impossible to understand how tourists are making their decisions about travelling to a certain destination.* It can be concluded that in the case of Istria the Internet is not the main tool of image creation, but is one of the factors that influence destination image and is helping in Istria's destination positioning. Tourism destination image has both a cognitive and affective part and the Internet influences both tourists' cognitive and affective image. In this research exploration of the information source of cognitive image was more emphasized, especially as it is very difficult to say how and when affective image is created. Affective image could be created in any stage of the decision making process.

As Istria is still very young and unknown it needs time to become recognizable and to create awareness among travellers. Istria is mostly positioned under the umbrella brand Croatia and people mostly discover it through personal experience when they visit Croatia or through friends and family experiences. The Internet is present only in the information research process when awareness of Istria destination is already created. Professionals of IRTA think that Istria only needs time to develop as a brand, because they are following global trends in online destination branding. IRTA expert claimed that not only must the online aspect be sufficient, but offline too. IRTA expert said:

*It's a shame that the number of fairs is lower, all are focused on online although offline is a very important segment because one is in direct contact with people, and then you pass or you don't pass. I wouldn't agree with the policy of reducing interaction with people, it makes a difference because you became friends with them and in the future they could be a guarantee for you. According to older generations, they are completely deprived of online promotion. We don't differ from the rest of the world's trends - in some things we are also pioneers, but I don't agree with the 'copy-paste' approach from others.* (IRTA expert 2014).

Although Istria is making a lot of effort in online branding, the offline component would also help to reach other markets. Istria destination professionals should be more present in the most important international tourism fairs, conferences, professional tourism meetings, tourism forums etc. While the online component is very important, Istria's professionals should try other strategies in parallel to create awareness among potential tourists. According to target market and one of the long-term objectives of the Istria Tourist Board, Istria's DMO cannot be exclusively oriented towards the middle higher segment according to IRTA expert. He said*: Istria is still a destination in development and cannot promote itself as an elite destination when she don't provide or satisfy the required conditions*. He feels that Istria should copy the strategy of Yugoslavia such that offers for all segments should be considered and in this way create a strong brand.

Considering the main theme of this master thesis, the digital age that we now find ourselves in and with the new generations that are coming, the Internet will have an increasingly greater impact on Istria's destination positioning and development. While Istria is slowly progressing, it is a requirement that Istria's DMO, namely the Istria Tourist Board and IRTA, constantly work on her online branding, include all market segments and have real, achievable goals, use new strategies, follow global trends and constantly undertake research to measure brand strength. Though slowly, changes will happen for sure although it has to be emphasized that much effort in needed in offline approach, and even more so online branding because soon it will become the most important tool for positioning and creating destination image worldwide.

Destination image formation process and decision making process is still an unexplored area. Many marketing professionals claim that it is almost impossible to understand why tourists choose a particular destination. This area is not only marketing science but is related to other sciences and there is still only a small amount of published scientific research. Namely, there are some methods of consumer behaviour research, but it is very hard to understand the mindset of particular individuals and the decision making process and to ensure that every research model is applicable to different samples of tourists. In this research was not conducted statistical analysis of the tourist buying behaviour so it is difficult to argue about their decision making process. Thus, this represents one of the limitations of this master thesis. Some theories may show how the consumer perceives destination online and then makes his purchasing decision, as the director of IRTA said. These and other theories of the

decision making process are not sufficiently developed and thus still cannot be held entirely relevant. The research conducted in this master thesis is based on several scientific models and theories, yet this field is still largely unknown to marketing professionals and scientists.

# 6 CONCLUSION

Online branding is the future of every tourism destination that wants to become successful. We live in a time that tourism destination image, at least the image of globally famous destinations, is created online and because of that the Internet is a powerful tool for

destination positioning and destination development. Tourism destinations are more and more developing new online strategies in order to position themselves on the market. As tourism destination image has cognitive and affective components, today one of the most famous concepts of DMO promotion is storytelling, namely tourism destination promotion through the story that is influences peoples' emotions (affection) and buying behaviour. There are also other strategies of online positioning: through social networks, search engines, blogs, forums etc. Apart from DMO promotion, there are also some other sources of information, known as 'word of mouth', that cannot be changed by DMO and that indirectly influence the tourism destination image and tourism destination positioning. For DMO it is important to know how to transmit tourism destination identity, namely the desired image of the tourism destination so that it can be easily integrated into the minds of tourists.

In the case of Istria this is very difficult because of historical obstacles that Istria experienced 20 years ago, and it is still a largely unknown tourism destination in Europe. Istria's DMO (public sector, mainly IRTA and Istria Tourist Board) is working hard on her online brand development and is defining in the document "Tourism Master Plan of Istria" (Administrative Tourism Department of Istria Region) the main problems and strategies that need to be achieved, namely greater visual identity and reputation management based on experience and emotions. Istria is already on a good path, the DMO is making a lot of effort in her online branding, it has an official web site that is, according to previous investigation, one of the best in Europe, and concept 'Visit Istria' that is present more on social networks. However, it is still very young on the tourism market and needs more time and effort in order to become a recognizable destination. Although we live in the time of the digital age where the Internet is one of the main sources of information, Istria's historical changes and obstacles that happened twenty years ago are still strongly present and the Internet is still not the dominant tool of image creation. The target markets of Istria are several European countries where knowledge about the history of Croatian territory is high and the Internet is helping them and potential tourists to modify and to improve the picture that they already have about Istria and to search for information about Istria if the awareness of a destination is created by friends and family or other 'word of mouth'. Istria is attracting tourists mostly because it is still innocent and untouched and for most of the tourists it is still a 'new' tourism destination that needs to be discovered. They mostly hear about Istria from other sources rather than the Internet, or discover this beautiful region accidently by visiting Croatia. Interviews with many tourists from different countries of Europe (Germany, Spain, Italy, Austria, Slovenia, Hungary,

Croatia), show that they mostly create awareness about this region through 'word of mouth' (friends or family) or through their own experience which is effected by organically and induced agents (as Google research) which have an important role when tourists are searching for information about Istria. DMO promotion and other sources of information are both important in the image formation process, although DMO is more important in information research when awareness of a destination is already created. The importance of DMO promotion and using new marketing strategies has a tendency of growth in the future. According to tourist behaviour and destination positioning, again 'word of mouth' might have greater influence. In the image formation process, cognitive image is affected through DMO promotion, 'word of mouth', experience and other sources, where emotion or affection are the key factors and precursors of destination selection and purchasing, and is created during the entire process of image formation. Although the results in this research showed that tourists might be influenced more by 'word of mouth' in the decision making process, professionals of Istria's DMO and marketing professionals worldwide claim that tourist behaviour and decision making processes is still a largely unknown and unexplored area so it cannot be precisely said why people decide to choose a particular destination.

Istria has huge potential as a tourism destination, it has a great position as a bridge connecting the east and the west of Europe and is close to the main target markets. Online branding is the future of Istria destination development. More and more potential tourists from Europe are getting to know about Istria through many sources, although mostly 'word of mouth' or personal experience. IRTA expert also said "Istria is still a very young destination and needs time to be discovered." Istria's DMO (Istria Tourist Board and IRTA) need to put more effort to built its brand, where online and offline components are both important. In the digital age the future of destination branding will be interactive and immediate, with those tourism destinations who don't embrace the opportunity of the Internet presents will suffer from low awareness among potential visitors. In the case of Istria DMO efforts with respect to online branding will be the key factor in her future development.

# 7 TRŽENJE TURISTIČNE DESTINACIJE HRVAŠKE ISTRE V DIGITALNI DOBI - POVZETEK

Trženje turistične destinacije je v digitalni dobi nadvse aktualna in izzivalna tema. V današnjem času, ko so ljudje pod vplivom različnih informacij, je težko postaviti online

znamko in na ta način pritegniti potencialne obiskovalce turističnih destinacij. Pomembno je razumeti, da potrošniki v današnjem svetu niso samo pod vplivom promocije destinacijske marketinške organizacije (DMO), temveč tudi drugih virov informacij. Online znamko lahko ustvari marketinška organizacija ali posamezniki, obiskovalci turistične destinacije. Znamčenje turistične destinacije je zelo širok pojem in pomembno je poudariti, da je sestavljen iz treh glavnih elementov: identitete turistične destinacije, umeščanja turistične destinacije in njenega imidža. Identiteta turistične destinacije predstavlja njene vrednote in bistvo, to je želeni imidž, usmerjena je na motiviranje in dajanje smernic vsem interesentom. Umeščanje je orodje za ustvarjanje skladnosti med identiteto in imidžem turistične destinacije. Imidž turistične destinacije je resničen imidž, ki ga imajo obiskovalci, in ki se prav tako lahko razlikuje od identitete turistične destinacije. Lahko vsebuje tri komponente: kognitivno, afektivno in konativno. Kognicija je tisto, kar je že znano in kar se misli o turistični destinaciji, lahko je organsko pogojena ali inducirana. Kognicija je pravzaprav zavest o turistični destinaciji. Afekcija se nanaša na posameznikove občutke do nečesa, ki so lahko ugodni, neugodni ali pa nevtralni. Konacija predstavlja verjetnost obiska turitične destinacije v določenem časovnem obdobju.

Digitalna doba označuje prejemanje, izmenjavo in ustvarjanje informacij o destinaciji in predstavljanje njihovih znamenitosti potencialnim obiskovalcem. Potencialni obiskovalec si skozi komunikacijo z ljudmi, ki jih ni nikoli spoznal, in preko uradnih informacij, kot je poslovna spletna stran destinacije, lažje ustvari predstavo o njej. DMO mora razumeti prednosti, ki jih nudi splet, da pritegne obiskovalce, prav tako pa mora razumeti, da ne more nadzirati, na kakšen način destinacijo dojemajo. Organsko pogojen imidž se ustvarja z vsakodnevno asimilacijo informacij in lahko vključuje različen razpon izvora informacij, od šolske literature, množičnih medijev do dejanskega obiska destinacije. Inducirani imidž se ustvarja zaradi vpliva turistične promocije, ki jo izvajajo marketinški strokovnjaki z oglaševanjem. Razlika med organsko pogojenim in induciranim imidžem kaže na stopnjo vpliva marketinških strokovnjakov. Destinacijska marketinška organizacija mora ustvariti zavest o kraju in projicirati izbrani imidž določenemu marketinškemu segmentu. Ustvarjanje imidža turistične destinacije je kontinuiran proces, ki se začne z njegovim projiciranjem in zaključi s sprejemanjem celotnega trga.

Online prisotnost je močna, lahko dostopna in donosna marketinška tehnika. Online skupnosti, ki jih pogosto imenujemo tudi »virtualne skupnosti«, predstavljajo kraj, kjer ljudje

nudijo in izmenjujejo informacije. Blogi prav tako predstavljajo velik pomen za destinacijsko marketinško organizacijo. Z razvojem socialnih omrežij kot je Facebook, Twitter in Youtube so se spremenile tudi metode marketinške komunikacije. Socialne mreže so ustvarile dvosmerno komunikacijo s potrošniki, nudijo tako imenovani »word of mouth«, to je mesto, na katerem turisti izmenjujejo mnenja in izkušnje, kar ima lahko pozitiven ali negativen učinek na znamčenje turistične destinacije. Splet je popolnoma spremenil način, na katerega potrošniki dojemajo in uživajo potovanja, zato so tudi online iskalniki precej pridobili na pomenu.

Študijski primer tega magistrskega dela je hrvaška Istra, kjer je raziskan koncept online brandinga v digitalnem času, razvoj znamke destinacije in vpliv interneta na razvoj turistične destinacije. Istra je največji jadranski polotok in najzahodnejša pokrajina Republike Hrvaške. Upravno središče je Pazin, ekonomsko pa Pulj. Koncept Istre kot turistične destinacije izhaja še iz časa Rimskega cesarstva. Istra je znana kot »Zeleni Mediteran« in je trenutno ena izmed vodilnih turističnih destinacij na Hrvaškem, z več kot 30 % turističnih nočitev v državi. Zahvaljujoč dobri prometni povezavi, pristaniščem, letališču, naravnemu in kulturnemu bogastvu, verigam hotelov, turističnim kampom, apartmajem in restavracijam, je Istra vsako leto bolj obiskana s strani domačih in tujih turistov. Razen svojih mnogih zgodovinskih, naravnih in kulturnih bogastev je za Istro značilno blago mediteransko podnebje s toplimi poletji in velikim številom sončnih ur ter blaga zima, kar prav tako prispeva k uspehu Istre kot turistične destinacije. Poleg »Modre Istre« je znana tudi njena notranjost, »Zelena Istra« zaradi svojega turističnega kmetijstva, ki nudi avtohtono istrsko kuhinjo in stik z lokalno kulturo in domačini. Kljub mnogim naravnim in kulturnim bogastvom je imela Istra določene zgodovinske prepreke, ki so upočasnile njen razvoj. Zaradi odcepitve Hrvaške od Jugoslavije in hrvaške Domovinske vojne Istra ni imela dovolj časa in sredstev za razvoj svojega imidža, kot so to med tem naredile ostale znane turistične destinacije. Znamka je nekaj, kar je integrirano v um turista in je povezano z njegovimi čustvi. Turistični proizvod Hrvaške kot turistične destinacije se v bivši Jugoslaviji ni pojavljal pod svojim imenom in ni bil dovolj izoblikovan, zato ni bil dovolj atraktiven za mednarodno turistično ponudbo. V turistični ponudbi je bil prisoten primanjkljaj predstavljanja naravnih in kulturnih sredstev. Hrvaška ni imela svoje prepoznavne identitete niti strategije razvoja turizma. Po osamosvojitvi leta 1991 je med vojno Hrvaška kot receptivna država izoblikovala svoj turistični proizvod in postala marketinško usmerjena s ciljem doseganja večjega mednarodnega turističnega povpraševanja. Danes je Istra ena izmed glavnih destinacij na Hrvaškem, vendar zaradi svojega poznega

razvoja v svetu še vedno ni dovolj priznana. Istra je atraktivna turistična destinacija, vendar ima še vedno veliko neizkoriščenega potenciala in nezadostno razvito identiteto. Ima dober imidž turistične destinacije, ki še vedno ni dovolj priznan v ostalih državah sveta. Znamčenje Istre kot turistične destinacije je v današnjem času velik izziv za marketinške strokovnjake Istrske županije. Glavna težava Istrske županije, izražena v načrtu »Master plan Istarske županije 2004-2012«, je ustvarjanje močnejše vizualne identitete in izgradnja slovesa destinacije, vendar to predstavlja dolgoročen proces. V nadaljevanju so predstavljena raziskovalna vprašanja te raziskave.

Model oblikovanja imidža turistične destinacije izpostavlja tiste elemente, ki imajo vpliv na to, kako se percipirani imidž destinacije oblikuje v umu potrošnika. Če turistični proizvod in način komunikacije nista skladna z identiteto destinacije, lahko nastane prepad v turističnem razvoju. V današnji digitalni dobi lahko interaktivna narava spleta nudi nove dimenzije in možnosti projiciranja imidža destinacije. Sklepamo lahko, da se bo digitalni marketinški prepad pojavil med tistimi destinacijami, ki uporabljajo spletne možnosti, in tistimi, ki jih ne. Iz tega sledi prvo raziskovalno vprašanje: kakšen vpliv ima splet na ustvarjanje imidža Istre kot turistične destinacije in na razvoj njene znamke?

Oblikovanje imidža strokovna literatura opisuje kot razvoj mentalne konstrukcije, ki temelji na nekaj vtisih, izbranih iz velike količine informacij. V primeru imidža turistične destinacije ta velika količina informacij izhaja iz mnogih izvorov, kot je turistična promocija, mnenja drugih oseb, masovnih medijev in popularne kulture. Turistična promocija kot eden od temeljev v izgradnji imidža sama ne vpliva na njegovo oblikovanje, temveč je v soodvisnem razmerju z mnogimi drugimi dostopnimi viri informacij, za katere pogosto menimo, da imajo glavni vpliv pri odločanju. Iz tega sledi drugo raziskovalno vprašanje: ali je imidž Istre kot turistične destinacije oblikovan predvsem z DMO spletno promocijo ali z veliko količino faktorjev in informacijskih sredstev?

Ob aktualnem obisku destinacije se bo imidž spremenil na podlagi informacij iz prve roke in izkušenj. Izraz imidž pogosto razumemo kot sopomenko za sloves, to je tisto, kar ljudje verjamejo o osebi ali instituciji glede na karakter, torej tisto, kar oseba ali institucija pravzaprav je. Potršniki neprestano iščejo informacije. S tem ko jih zbirajo, ustvarjajo imidž ali »mentalni prototip«. Turistične storitve so nematerialne in zato postaja imidž pomembnejši od realnosti. Imidž turistične destinacije, projiciran v informacijskem prostoru, bo vplival na imidž destinacije, kot ga dojema obiskovalec. Iz tega sledi tretje raziskovalno vprašanje: ali

projiciran imidž na spletu vpliva na pozicioniranje Istre kot turistične destinacije in na potrošniško obnašanje turistov?

Viri informacij, ki so se uporabljale pri raziskovanju, so primarni in sekundarni. Sekundarni viri predstavljajo različne dokumente raziskav in znanastvena dela, pridobljena v Istrski razvojni turistični agenciji (IRTA) ter dokumente, predstavljene na uradni spletni strani Istrske županije in spletni strani »Turističke Zajednice Istarske Županije« (Turistična zveza Istrske županije). Upravni oddelek turizma Istrske županije koordinira vse aktivnosti turizma in definira identiteto znamke turistične destinacije. Glavne aktivnosti upravnega oddelka turizma Istrske županije so: proaktivno spremlja, upravlja in koordinira vse turistične poteze Istrske županije, spremlja in koordinira aktivnosti, povezane z razvojem in implementacijo »Master Plana Turizma Istarske Županije«, spodbuja reševanje problemov, značilnih za razvoj turizma v Istrski županiji. Strateški marketinški »brif« je dokument Istrske županije, ki opisuje ustvarjanje vizualne identitete Istre. Pričakovani rezultati, razvidni iz dokumenta, so ustvarjanje znamke Istre s ciljem povečati zavest o znamki, pomen in pomembnost diferenciacije, torej ustvarjanje močnega simbola znamke Istre in ustvarjanje temeljnega slogana, t. j. vizualne identitete Istre. Turistična zveza Istrske županije pri razvoju destinacijske znamke in pri razvoju destinacije Istrske županije kot online znamke sodeluje z Upravnim oddelkom turizma Istrske županije in z Istrsko razvojno turistično agencijo – IRTA. Skupaj predstavljajo glavno destinacijsko marketinško organizacijo – DMO – Istre in upravljajo uradno spletno stran destinacije www.istra.hr.

Pri zbiranju primarnih informacij sem uporabila metodo intervjuja in strukturiranih intervjujev. Opravila sem semistrukturirani intervju z zaposlenim strokovnjakom Irte, ki je zadolžen za vodenje prodajnega in kontaktnega oddelka. Strukturirane intervjuje sem izvedla z majhno skupino turistov, na kateri sem želela preučiti imidž destinacije. Uporabljene metode raziskovanja temeljijo na znanstvenem raziskovanju in znanstvenem članku Goversa, Go in Kuldeepa (2007). Da bi preučila imidž destinacije in vire informacij, je strukturirani intervju sestavljen iz dveh delov. Prvi del preučuje imidž turistične destinacije tako, da turisti navedejo svojo zgodbo o Istri, kasneje pa se iz njihovih odgovorov analizira ključne besede. Drugi del intervjuja preiskuje vire informacij tega imidža.

Udeleženci strukturiranega intervjuja so bili turisti iz glavnih držav, od koder najpogosteje prihajajo: Italije, Nemčije, Avstrije, Slovenije, Hrvaške, Srbije, Madžarske in Španije.

Intervju sem izvedla v poletnih mesecih, od julija do septembra, saj je to obdobje turistične sezone v Istri in jo takrat številni turisti najbolj množično obiskujejo. Izprašana je »generacija Y«, ker je tehnologija, in s tem tudi splet, del njihovih življenj. Turisti, ki so sodelovali v intervjuju, so študentje ali zaposleni, skupna jim je visoka stopnja izobrazbe – univerzitetna. Naslednji intervju sem opravila s strokovnjakom Istrske razvojne turistične agencije. Izrazil je svoj odnos in mnenje o istrski županiji, aktualno stanje, možnosti razvoja regije in prizadevanja Irte na področju online marketinga destinacije. Da bi odgovorila na glavna raziskovalna vprašanja, sem analizirala primarne in sekundarne vire podatkov in jih povezala s teoretičnim delom.

Prvo raziskovalno vprašanje: kakšen vpliv ima splet na ustvarjanje imidža Istre kot turistične destinacije in na razvoj njene znamke? Na podlagi analize rezultatov sklepam, da sta identiteta in rezultat imidža podobna. Razlika je le v dojemanju centralne in razširjene identitete. Najpogostejša ključna beseda turistov je bila »hrana«, kar sicer predstavlja del razširjene identitete Istre. Imidž Istre v globalnih priljubljenih medijih je podoben imidžu turistov – Istra se načeloma doživlja kot gastronomska in enogastronomska destinacija. Ostale najpogosteje omenjene ključne besede so bile morje, narava itd. Na podlagi intervjuja s strokovnjakom Irte lahko sklepamo, da je imidž marketinških strokovnjakov v skladu s centralno identiteto Istre. Javni imidž Istre je bolj »Istra kot proizvod« ali identiteta Istre v širšem smislu, medtem ko marketinški strokovnjakividijo Istro bolj kot »Zeleno zatočišče Mediterana« ali centralno identiteto Istre. Tudi to kaže na glavno težavo, izpostavljeno v glavnem dokumentu Istrske županije, »Master Planu Turizma« – Istra mora okrepiti svojo vizualno identiteto in v Strateškem marketinškem brifu, v katerem so pričakovani rezultati: ustvarjanje strategije znamke Istre s ciljem povečati zavest o njej, pomen in pomembnost diferenciacije; ustvarjanje močnega simbola znamke Istre in ustvarjanje temeljnega slogana oz. vizualne identitete Istre. Irtin strokovnjak meni, da je imidž Istrske županije pozitiven in cenjen. Irta veliko vlaga v sledenje globalnim trendom in v online marketinško umeščanje Istre in jo lahko upravičeno imenujemo »online pionirka«. Kljub vsem naporom Irte in ostalih marketinških strokovnjakov je zaradi zgodovinskih preprek Istra ostala zelo mlada destinacija, ki potrebuje čas, da se umesti na trgu. Glede na identiteto destinacije Irtin strokovnjak meni, da bi si Istra morala povrniti vse, kar je imela nekdanja Jugoslavija. Kot del Jugoslavije je bila znamka masovnega turizma in je imela široko paleto ponudbe, od cenene do drage, sedaj pa se od vsega tega oddaljuje, kar je po njegovem mnenju slabo za njeno umeščanje. Svojo identiteto bi morala okrepiti tako, da bi vedno težila k višjemu cilju, predstavila, kar že ima,

vzpostavila več dokumentov kot je »Master Plan Turizma Istre« in da bi se najprej morala razviti na lokalnem nivoju. Zgodovinske prepreke v Istri so vplivale na slabo koordinacijo med njeno identiteto in imidžem. Čeprav je najbolj razvita pokrajina na Hrvaškem, je še vedno mlada in prepozno se je začela razvijati, zato sedaj potrebuje čas, da se čim več nauči in se umesti med ostale priljubljene turistične destinacije. Glede na rezultate drugega dela intervjuja s turisti lahko sklepamo, da splet nima najpomembnejšega vpliva na oblikovanje imidža Istre. Oblikoval se je predvsem z organski agenti (izkušnjami), zaželenimi ali nezaželenimi organskimi agenti (prijatelji) ter skrivno inducirano in samostojno (televizija). Rezultati raziskave kažejo, da ima splet nizek delež vpliva, le 5,88 %; uporablja se bolj v procesu oblikovanja imidža destinacije, torej v procesu preiskovanja informacij, ko je zavest o destinaciji že ustvarjena. Odgovori na vprašanje, ki se je nanašalo na raziskovanje informacij, so pokazali, da ima najvišji odstotek naključno Google iskanje (64,7 %), sledi mu televizija (23, 52). Zato lahko sklepamo, da je splet eden izmed virov ustvarjanja imidža turistične destinacije in eden izmed faktorjev, ki vplivajo na njen razvoj, nima pa glavnega vpliva na ustvarjanje imidža destinacije in razvoj Istre kot destinacije. Irtin strokovnjak je izjavil, da je Istra še vedno zelo mlada destinacija in da zaradi svojih zgodovinskih ovir še vedno potrebuje čas, da se razvije. V pretežnem delu Evrope je Istra najverjetneje še vedno neznana destinacija, vendar bo s krepljenjem identitete na vseh ravneh (online in offline) splet pridobil glavni vpliv na razvoj Istre kot turistične destinacije.

Drugo raziskovalno vprašanje se glasi: ali je imidž Istre kot turistične destinacije oblikovan predvsem z DMO spletno promocijo ali z veliko količino faktorjev in informacijskih sredstev? Po rezultatih raziskave lahko sklepamo, da turisti slabo poznajo uradno spletno stran destinacije. Tudi Visit Istra, DMO promocija na socialnih omrežjih, se ni iskazala kot relevantna za turiste. Irtin strokovnjak meni, da turisti zbirajo informacije predvsem z uradne spletne strani zaradi njene informativne vsebine. To kažejo tudi testiranja učinkovitosti strani, ki se izvajajo z Google analizo, SEO&SEM upravljanje, Google Adwords in prevod strani v štiri glavne jezike Istrinih ciljnih trgov, kar vpliva na učinkovito umeščenost na Googlu. Povezava med tema trditvama je v raziskovalnem vprašanju intervjuja s turisti »Kje iščete informacije o Istri?« Turisti so odgovorili, da jih najdejo naključno na Googlu. Če v Google iskalnik ciljnih trgov Istre vpišemo »Istra« (www.google.si, www.google.de itd.), zaseda glavna spletna stran destinacije drugo do peto mesto, in tako turisti prav gotovo prebrskajo informacije na tej strani, čeprav to dojamejo kot naključno iskanje na Googlu. Po mnenju Irtinega strokovnjaka uporablja Irta sodobne strategije, s katerimi vpliva na čustveni oz.

afektivni vidik turistov (»storytelling«, interakcija z drugimi turisti preko platforme Visit Istra, Discover Istra itd.). DMO Istre razume cikel potrošnika v novem okolju tako: sanjarjenje – iskanje navdiha, v katerem splet predstavlja osnovni vir; raziskovanje – preko spletnih iskalnikov; rezervacija – online, rezervacija preko mobilnega telefona; doživetje – brskanje in rezervacije se odvijajo ves čas potovanja; deljenje – večja vloga socialnih omrežij, splet postaja vse bolj mobilen, ločimo štiri »biti«: biti najden, biti pomemben, biti privlačen in biti odgovoren. Glavni cilj je sistematičen razvoj online identitete in vpliv na pozitiven sloves znamke Istre. V online promocijo spadajo »push« sporočila (tematsko oglaševanje) skozi vse leto in upravljanje vsebine spletne strani in socialnih omrežij. On-line kampanja vključuje: AdWords, Banners, Advertorials, Facebook, Twitter in Youtube. Oglaševalske teme so: Gourmet, Wellness, Bike, Diving in Istra. Tudi uradna spletna stran destinacije je bila pionirka v Eropi. DMO Istre s svojimi strategijami vpliva na kognitivni in afektivni imidž turistov. V procesu iskanja informacij, ko že obstaja zavest o destinaciji, vpliva DMO online promocija na proces oblikovanja imidža bolj kot ostali viri informacij, njena pomembnost pa bo v prihodnjem razvoju marketinga destinacije zagotovo narasla. Kot je poudaril strokovnjak Irte, potrebuje Istra čas in veliko truda, da bi se razvila kot znamka. Potencial vidi v kreativnih mladih ljudeh ter offline in online promociji. Prav tako meni, da splet vpliva na oblikovanje imidža destinacije in razvoj znamke, a ker je Istra še vedno mlada destinacija, potrebuje čas, da se razvije kot znamka in online znamka. Dodal je, da bi se moral DMO Istre izpopolnjevati tako na online kot offline nivoju. V fazi ustvarjanja zavesti o destinaciji so drugi viri informacij bolj zastopani od spleta. Ta je prisoten v procesu iskanja informacij, ko zavest o njej že obstaja, in bo zato imel DMO Istre večjo pomembnost v prihodnosti njenega razvoja.

Tretje raziskovalno vprašanje se glasi: ali projiciran imidž na spletu vpliva na pozicioniranje Istre kot turistične destinacije in na potrošniško obnašanje turistov? S tem raziskovalnim vprašanjem sem ugotavljala kognitivni in afektivni imidž destinacije ter faktorje vpliva na proces odločanja. Rezultati kažejo na podobnost med kognitivnim in afektivnim imidžem, kar pomeni, da je Istra kot destinacija konkurentna. Naslednji model, ki sem ga analizirala, povezuje kognicijo, afekcijo in konacijo. t. j. model procesa prinašanja odločitev. Iz raziskave sklepamo, da projicirani imidž na spletu lahko vpliva na potrošniško vedenje turista, čeprav ne predstavlja glavnega faktorja vpliva. Glede na raziskavo je verjetno, da je potrošniško vedenje turista pogojeno z organskimi faktorji, kot so izkušnje, prijatelji, »word of mouth« ali televizija. Poudariti je treba, da so faktorji izbire destinacije marketinškim strokovnjakom še vedno relativno neznani in da v strokovni marketinški in turistični literaturi niso dovolj

zastopani. Zato zaključki te raziskave temeljijo izključno na rezultatih raziskav, izvedenih v Istri. Direktor Irte in marketinški strokovnjak je še izjavil, da je proces oblikovanja imidža turistične destinacije najmanj raziskano področje in da je skoraj nemogoče razumeti, na podlagi česa se turisti odločajo glede izbire turistične destinacije. Sklepamo lahko, da v primeru Istre splet ni glavni faktor, ki vpliva na ustvarjanje imidža in na odločanje, temveč je eden od mnogih faktorjev, ki vplivajo na soblikovanje imidža destinacije in pomagajo k boljši umestitvi Istre kot turistične destinacije.

Ker ima imidž Istre kognitivno in afektivno komponento, lahko sklepamo, da splet vpliva na kognitivni in afektivni imidž turistov. V tej raziskavi bolj izpostavljamo raziskovanje informacijskih virov, ki vplivajo na oblikovanje kognitivnega imidža, saj je težko sklepati, zakaj in kako se ustvari afektivni imidž. Afektivni imidž lahko nastane v kateri koli fazi procesa odločanja. Istra potebuje samo čas, da postane bolj prepoznavna in da poveča raven zavesti v umu potencialnih turistov. Umeščena je pod krovno znamko Hrvaške in vglavnem jo ljudje odkrivajo skozi lastno izkušnjo in izkušnjo družine in prijateljev. Splet je prisoten le v procesu brskanja za informacijami, ko je zavest o Istri kot turistični destinaciji že ustvarjena. Strokovnjaki Irte sledijo svetovnim trendom v online znamčenju in zato menijo, da Istra potrebuje samo čas, da se razvije in ustvari prepoznavno znamko. Čeprav vlaga velike napore v online znamčenje, predstavlja tudi offline komponenta velik pomen pri umestitvi in pritegnitvi ostalih trgov. Marketinški strokovnjaki bi morali biti bolj prisotni na pomembnih turističnih sejmih, konferencah, strokovnih turističnih zborih, turističnih forumih itd. Medtem ko online komponenta velja za pomemben element, bi morali marketinški strokovnjaki Istre vzporedno z online umeščanjem uporabljati ostale strategije, da bi pri potencialnih turistih ustvarili zavest o Istri. Glede na ciljni trg in dolgoročne cilje »Turističke Zajednice Istarske Županije« DMO Istre ne more biti usmerjen samo na sestavne dele večje plačne moči. Istra je še vedno destinacija v razvoju in se ne more promovirati kot elitna destinacija, vse dokler ne nudi in ne zadovoljuje pogojev za to. Po njegovem mnenju bi Istra morala kopirati strategijo nekdanje Jugoslavije, tako da okrepi široko paleto ponudbe za vse segmente in tako okrepi svojo znamko.

Medtem ko Istra počasi napreduje, je naloga DMO-ja Istre konstantno delo na njenem online znamčenju, vključevanju vseh tržnih segmentov in zastavljanje stvarnih in dosegljivih ciljev, uporaba novih strategij, sledenje svetovnim trendom in konstantne raziskave, s katerimi merijo moč znamke. Čeprav počasi, se bodo spremembe zagotovo zgodile. Poudariti je treba,

da je potrebno vložiti veliko truda tako v online kot v offline pristop. Online znamčenje bo kmalu postalo najpomembnejše orodje za umeščanje in ustvarjanje imidža Istre kot turistične destinacije širom sveta.

Proces oblikovanja imidža destinacije in proces odločanja je še vedno neraziskano področje. Številni marketinški strokovnjaki trdijo, da je skoraj nemogoče razumeti, zakaj turisti izberejo določeno destinacijo. To področje ni samo marketinško, temveč je povezano z drugimi znanostmi in najdemo zelo malo objavljenih znanstvenih del. Čeprav obstajajo metode raziskovanja obnašanja potrošnikov, je zelo težko razumeti mentalni konstrukt posameznikov in njihov proces odločanja. V tej raziskavi nisem izvedla analize obnašanja potrošnikov, tako da težko govorimo o procesu odločanja. To tudi predstavlja omejitev te raziskave.

Istra kot turistična destinacija poseduje velik potencial, nahaja se na odlični poziciji v bližini svojih ciljnih trgov, povezuje vzhod in zahod Evrope in zato si vse večje število potencialnih turistov ustvarja zavest o Istri preko različnih virov informacij. V današnji digitalni dobi bo nastal prepad med destinacijami, ki razumejo in uporabljajo možnosti spleta in tistimi, ki takšnih strategij ne izvajajo. Glede na glavno tematiko tega magistrskega dela lahko zaključimo, da bo znamčenje preko spleta imelo vse večji vpliv na umestitev in razvoj Istre kot turistične destinacije.

## 8 REFERENCES

1. Alencar de Farias, Salomao, Edvan Aguiar Cruz, Michelle Helena Kovacs and Sales Melo. 2013. Destination Image on the Web: Evaluation of Pernambuco's Official Tourism Destination Websites. *Business Management Dynamics* 2 (10): 35−48.

2. Alden, Dana L., Jan-Benedict E. M. Steenkamp and Rajeev Batra. 1999. Brand positioning through advertising in Asia, North America and Europe: The role of global consumer culture. *Journal of Marketing* 63 (1): 75−87.

3. Anholt, Simon. 2009. ***Handbook on tourism destination branding*.** World Tourism Organization. Madrid. Spain.

4. Blain, Carmen, Stuart E. Levy and J. R. Brent Ritchie. 2005. Destination branding: Insights and Practices from Destination Management Organizations. *Journal of travel research* 43 (4): 328−338.
   Available at: http://jtr.sagepub.com/content/43/4/328  (5 March, 2014).

5. *Brand positioning – Definition and concept*. Available at: http://www.managementstudyguide.com/ (2 April, 2015).

6. *Creating visual identity of Istria – Strategic marketing brief.*
   Available at: http://istra.hr/.app/upl_files/strateska_marketinska_podloga_slogan.pdf (16 November, 2014).

7. Collins, Dan, Jim McGough and Benjamin Hill. 2009. *How to launch and sell products and services online.*
   Available at: IRTA (25 July, 2014).

8. Edelman, C. David. 2010. Branding in the digital age. *Harvard Business Review* 63−69.

9. *E-marketing of Istria.* Available at: http://www.ida.hr/uploads/media/7.E-MARKETING_TURIZMA_ISTRE.pdf  (8 March, 2014).

10. Fernandez-Cavia, Jose, Pablo Diaz-Luque, Assumpcio Huertas, Cristofol Rovira, Rafael Pedraza-Jimenez, Maria Sicilia, Lorena Gomez Puertas and Maria Isabel Miguez Gonzalez. 2013. Destination brands and website evaluation: a research methodology. *Revista Latina de Comunicacion Social* 68: 622−638.

11. Font, Xavier. 1997. Managing the tourist destination image. *Journal of Vacational Marketing* 3 (2): 125.

12. Glavović, Nataša. 2008. *E-marketingom do zadovoljnog kupca.* Calisto d.o.o. Gartner Adriatic. Available at: IRTA (25 July, 2014).

13. Govers, Robert, Frank M. Go and Kuldeep Kumar. 2007. Promoting of tourism destination image. *Journal of travel research* 46 (1): 15─23.
Available at: http://jtr.sagepub.com/content/46/1/15 (5 March, 2014).

14. Gretzel Ulrike, Daniel R. Fesenmaier, Sandro Formica and Joseph O'Leary. 2006. Searching for the future challenges faced by destination marketing organizations. *Journal of travel research* 45 (2): 116─126.
Available at: http://jtr.sagepub.com/content/45/2/116  (5 March, 2014).

15. Gretzel Ulrike, Yu-Lan Yuan and Daniel R. Fesenmaier. 2014. Preparing for the new economy: Advertising strategies and change in destination marketing organizations. *Journal of travel research* 39 (2): 146─156.
Available at: http://jtr.sagepub.com/content/39/2/146 (5 March, 2014).

16. Hede, Anne Marie. 2005. Sports-events, tourism and destination marketing strategies: an Australian case study of Athens 2004 and its media telecast. *Journal of Sport Tourism* 10 (3): 187─200.
Available at: http://faculty.mu.edu.sa/public/uploads/1357377541.900620504491.pdf (24 March, 2015).

17. Hilgard, R. Ernest. 1980. The triology of mind: cognition, affection, and conation. *Journal of the history of the Behavioral Sciences* 16: 107─117.

18. Interviewee A. 2014. Personal interview with the author. Pula, 15 July, 2014.

19. Kneesel, Erin, Seyhmus Baloglu and Michelle Millar. 2010. Gaming destination images: Implication for branding. *Journal of travel research* 49 (1): 68─78.
Available at: http://jtr.sagepub.com/content/49/1/68  (5 March, 2014).

20. Keller, Kevin Lane. 2009. Building strong brands in a modern marketing communications environment. *Journal of marketing communications* 15 (2–3): 139–155.

21. Kotler, Philip. 1999. *Kotler on Marketing – How to create, win, and dominate markets.* The free press. New York.

22. Krešić, Damir. 2011. *E-marketing turističke destinacije.* Institut za turizam. Zagreb. Web: strategija X. Available at: IRTA (25 July, 2014).

23. Križman Pavlović, Danijela and Alen Belullo. 2007. *Internet – an agent of tourism destination image formation: Content and correspondence analysis of Istria travel related websites.*
Available at: http://eknjiznica.unipu.hr/1570/ (5 March, 2014).

24. Križman Pavlović, Danijela. 2008. *Marketing Turističke Destinacije.* Sveučilište Jurja Dobrile u Puli. Odjel za ekonomiju i turizam Dr. Mijo Mirković. Mikrorad d.o.o. Zagreb.

25. McCartney, Glenn, Richard Butler and Marion Bennett. 2008. A strategic use of the communication mix in the destination image-formation process. *Journal of travel research* 47 (2): 183–196.
Available at: http://jtr.sagepub.com/content/47/2/183 (1 March, 2014).

26. Michaelidou, Nina, Nikoletta-Theofania Siamagka, Caroline Moraes and Milena Micevski. 2013. Do marketers use visual representations of destinations that tourists value?. Comparing visitors' image of destination with marketer-controlled images online. *Journal of travel research* 52 (6): 789–804.
Available at: http://jtr.sagepub.com/content/52/6/789 (5 March, 2014).

27. Mrndže, Joško. 2011. *E-turizam: Ciklus ponašanja potrošača u novom okruženju.* Available at: IRTA (25 July, 2011).

28. *Official tourist website of Istria.* Available at: www.istra.hr (8 March, 2014).

29. Park A., Young and Ulrike Gretzel. 2007. Success factors for destination marketing web sites - A qualitative meta-analysis. *Journal of travel research* 27 (1): 46−63. Available at: http://jtr.sagepub.com/content/46/1/46 (5 March, 2014).

30. Pike, Steven. 2010. *Marketing turističnog odredišta - Pristup integriranih marketinških komunikacij*a. Zagreb.

31. Pike, Steven, Samantha Murdy and Ian Lings. 2011. Visitor relationship orientation of destination marketing organizations. *Journal of travel research* 50 (4): 443−453. Available at: http://jtr.sagepub.com/content/50/4/443 (5 March, 2014).

32. Podnar, Klement. 2015. ***Corporate communication. A marketing viewpoint.*** Routledge. New York. Available at: Google Books.

33. Rheem, Carroll. 2012. *Empowering inspiration: The future of travel search.* Available at: IRTA (25 July, 2014).

34. Saaty, Thomas L. 2007. *Fundamentals of decision making and priority theory – With the analytic hierarchy process.* RWS Publications. Pittsburg.

35. *Strategic Marketing Brief – Creating visual identity of Istria.* Available at: http://www.istra.hr/.app/upl_files/strateska_marketinska_podloga_slogan.pdf (18 August, 2014).

36. *Story Center.* Available at: http://storycenter.org/what-we-offer/ (12 April, 2014).

37. *Storytelling Institute.* Available at: http://www.storytellinginstitute.org/07.html (12 April, 2014).

38. *Tourism Master Plan of Istria Region.* Available at: http://www.istra-istria.hr/masterplan/okvir.htm#3 (11 April, 2014).

39. Qirici, Eleina, Oriola Theodhori and Liliana Elmazi. 2005. E-marketing and ICT-supported tourist destination management. Implications for tourism industry in global recession. *International Journal of Management Cases* UK 152−158.

40. Xiang, Zheng, Gretzel Ulrike and Daniel R. Fesenmaier. 2008. Semantic representation of tourism on the internet. *Journal of travel research* 47 (4): 440−453. Available at: http://jtr.sagepub.com/content/47/4/440 (1 March, 2014).

41. Ye, Sheng. 2012. The impact of destination personality dimensions on destination brand awareness and attractiveness: Australia as a case study. *Tourism* 60 (4): 397−409.

42. Yiamjanya, Siripen and Kevin Wongleedee. 2014. International tourists' travel motivation by push-pull factors and the decision making for selecting Thailand as destination choice. *International Journal of Social Education* 8 (5): 1315−1320. Available at: http://waset.org/publications/9998199/international-tourists-travel-motivation-by-push-pull-factors-and-the-decision-making-for-selecting-thailand-as-destination-choice (2 April, 2015).

43. Yuksel, Atila. 2010. Destination attachment: Effects on customer satisfaction and cognitive, affective and conative loyalty. *Tourism Management* 31 (2): 274−284.

# ANNEX A: Interviewee A

*Interview with IRTA expert*

### 1. What emotions evoke Istria? How do you see Istria? Tell me your story.

I see Istria through my prism, as a patriot, I look at her more through emotions because Istria as a region evokes warmness and warm emotions. When I am in contact with people from abroad (faraway destinations such as Vietnam and Cambodia) they have an image of Istria as something that is very positive. Istria evokes admiration because of its preserved nature, beautiful beaches, kind local people and hosts. The image of Istria as seen through my prism

is that of pure warmness and magnetic attraction. Most of my friends from abroad would like to stay in Istria and spend their retirement here. As I was born in Istria, I can not be objective but I can say that Istria evokes in me and my friends something that is positive, good, a multi-culturalism in the sense of tolerance that is far removed from all Balkan countries. When people come here, they feel good, uninhibited, although I think that in Pula we can make more things, provide more content for tourists and there are a lot of things to do in order to improve our image. Regarding the inner image, local people are busy with existential problems, there are no jobs, people are going to work abroad as there are not sufficient opportunities for young people, although that is not only a problem in Istria, but is a problem of all society. Istria is an extremely tolerant region unlike neighbouring regions, although in developmental terms we lag behind Europe. We are at the beginning and we can do a lot of things. For example we have untouched and unspoiled nature, we are still "innocent" in many segments and we have unexploited potential.

2.   **What are the associations about Istria? Are they positive or negative?**

As I said before, associations about Istria are positive. Sometimes people from abroad see more potential than the people that live in Istria. People from abroad already have a vision of how Istria could look as a tourism destination and they see this potential. For example I had a friend from Argentina that could visualize Argentinian restaurants here, increasing the diversity on offer. Young people should go abroad, gain experience and come back to Istria. However, sometimes the people that are going abroad no longer want to return and start all over again, mostly because of bureaucratic reasons and other problems. To me the people make a place. I am surrounded with people that are positive and we have a similar way of thinking, so for me Istria is an awesome place. In interacting with people it has happened to me many times that something that has been lost was reawakened in me, and this gave me great motivation to go on. Regarding those people that were a little bit laid back, I saw progress from the perspective that if they didn't have a specific dream of their own, they were open to you sharing your dream with them, they would then dream with you and they will work hard to achieve that. In my opinion sharing is necessary, because people from Istria don't share. The more you share, the more returns back to you and in my case this was multiple. In order to change a place, a region and a country, we must first change ourselves and our way of thinking. We are still not aware of how beautiful and attractive we are, and all the unexploited potential around us. We also don't have natural population growth so as the population ages the nation is dying, the state is getting older as are all other Balkan countries. Unfortunately, young people are living in a virtual world and they are becoming alienated. However, they should live in the real world and create a life.

3.   **Which online marketing strategies are you using in order to make Istria's online destination positioning effective?**

In positioning, from the aspect of a virtual world, we are following global trends. I was carrying out research, we were online pioneers. We have online booking and we were one of the first that implemented that on the destination portal. We are not perfect, we are still far from what we need to achieve and there is still a need to progress. IRTA is working very well and all that it is doing will bear fruit in the long term. I was working in the human resources department and the worst thing was when someone at a job interview said that will accomplish the results in one year. In my opinion this is a lie and an impossible mission. I have real goals. It's a shame that the number of fairs is low, and that all are focused on online although offline is a very important segment because its based on direct contact with people,

and then you succeed or don't succeed. I wouldn't agree with the policy of reducing interaction with people as it makes a difference because I made friends and in the future they could be a guarantee for you. According to older generations, they are completely deprived of online promotion. We don't differ from trends in the rest of the world, although in some things we are also pioneers, and I don't agree with a "copy-paste from others" approach.

I am leading the info and booking centre, I organize events such as bike races throughout Istria. We are also using the concept of storytelling and trying to stimulate people to come to a destination through the stories. There is no need to invent stories because they are already exist. When you see how storytelling looks in America, Switzerland and Austria then you have a vision of how it should look like. According to the virtual world I think that we are not lagging behind other countries, and I think that we know how to tell our story through the Internet. TotalSplit is an internet page created by an American, a journalist that is looking at the region through his own eyes and giving hints to his own countrymen (what to do, where to go etc.). This is like Tripadvisor but on a personal level; in a way it is kind of like selling your own dream. In my opinion this is a good blogger story and a good way to promote a destination. Most of the people today live in virtual worlds and we need to adapt. Comparing the destination web sites www.istra.hr and www.visitflorida.com, the latter is particularly noteworthy because it is focused on sales. European sites are getting closer to American ones, only that the American ones remain more commercial. European sites are more "elegant", hidden behind a story as "Do you want to experience Istria in a creative way?" and then you create a story and come with your ideas on how to experience Istria. We should give a framework to people. I love people with passion, I am creative, Istria is holding me, motivates me and is a kind of inspiration for me, but only thanks to the environment that I created during my lifetime. I've seen a lot of the world, from Thailand to Ireland, but I was living as a sailor and I wanted to come home. The first thing when I returned from my travels was to see if the amphitheatre Arena was still there. I see Istria through my "rose-coloured glasses" although I think that we still have to work hard on ourselves and the people that hold us. The key to success is the environment of every individual. You can only change yourself and adapt yourself to the people that have the same perspective.

4. **Do you think that the identity and image of Istria as a tourism destination are coordinated? How is the brand of Istria positioned?**

You always have to do something more, something greater. We, as Yugoslavia, were a brand of mass tourism. Yugoslavia created a great image and we are now distancing ourselves from all of that, and this is very bad in my opinion. We have to strive to achieve the segment of greater tourism; we have to appreciate ourselves more, although considering what we offer we are still not on this level. We have a million things that we have to develop on a local level, we cannot have a five star hotel and represent ourselves as an elite destination, there has to be variety and something for everyone, from cheap to expensive arrangements. Those were the things that Yugoslavia had and which we don't have any more. Yugoslavia was then a force and you could compare Yugoslavia with Italy, but today Croatia as a brand is not the same as in the past and not even Istria as a sub-brand.
We think that we are doing this very well and we have development strategies and, in my opinion, we are on the right path, but we cannot out-do Italy that historically didn't have such bigger obstacles to development in such a short period of time. We are still young, we started too late with the development on a regional level and we need a lot of time to become a recognizable brand. We are still far from this. For example when Caroline of Monaco visited Brijuni, she had an image that Istria was an undeveloped region, primarily due to the war, and

that the place and people were primitive. It is difficult to free ourselves from this perception because we are always being viewed through the prism of war that was on this territory. I believe that in the future this will change, indeed it is now slowly changing, but this doesn't happen over the night so we have to work on this constantly. There is still a lot of work to do. The only thing that we have in Croatia is tourism so we should work hard and bring its development to a higher level. The main target markets are strong and relatively wealthy countries in Europe. We should take all that was good from ex-Yugoslavia and apply it, namely coordinate the two concepts, and don't try to re-invent something that we already have. I am not for socialism, but the most socialist countries are Norway and Sweden, nothing is wrong with them, so some things we should copy. The problem is in local people from Istria, they are not satisfied with the things that are happening to them so I can say that we are depressed as a people. We need to bring tourism to a higher level and do not ignore other segments. In my opinion we should be authentic and we are going in this direction. I support documents such as the master plans as they are, in my opinion, very commendable. I believe it is also good to make mistakes, as anyone who has succeeded has also made mistakes, because in this way we learn. The rest of Croatia lags behind this region; we have some background and we are the leaders and they should look to us as an example. I don't say that Istria is the smartest, but I think that we are most agile in following global trends. According to some investigations that we made in IRTA, when we compared our web site with other web sites in Europe, we realized that we are the leaders although we still have a lot to do and to learn. We should also work on our demographics policy, because we are, as a nation, growing older and have a low birthrate. I support all creative projects. Society should be more open and more positive, but in comparison with the rest of Croatia, Istria is more prosperous. The mentality and historical circumstances are different. We experienced an economic decline because we were indirectly in a war and we suffered emotionally but, in my opinion, we are different from the others. We were the main harbour of ex-Yugoslavia and the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. We are multi-cultural and we were under the Austro-Hungarian government, then Italy. Opatija was the first tourism city on the Adriatic, and Czechs were our first tourists. We were the only ones (with the Primorsko-Goranska region) that voted for gay marriages. I am very proud of our people and their willingness to accept differences. I am proud to be Istrian! But as I said we still have a lot to learn and we are still unspoiled and innocent. According to statistics we are a mix of all these nations and there is a lot of mixed marriages. In ex-Yugoslavia we were neither the west nor the east, we were something in the middle and in that time this was ok. I am satisfied that I live in Istria although I cannot experience her too objectively because I like her. Although I try to be critical regarding a region in order to improve her, I look on this as my own task and Istria motivates me because I love all the people here. We will be leaders one day. In my opinion politics shouldn't involve itself so much in the all development processes of the country and the region. Development should be based on enthusiasts, experts and young people that are willing to change something, but I would not exclude older people because they have wisdom and caution while the young have enthusiasm and this can be an ideal connection. There is a huge space to advance. We don't have one thing in our region of which I should be ashamed. Local people always think that it is better abroad, but I think that the beauty of Istria becomes apparent in people's minds only after going abroad. When I was travelling through Europe I said "We are perfect". I like to give a chance to other people that see potential in us. The place is made of people, but our people are in a "deep sleep" and they should "wake up" or someone should "wake them up". The only thing that is important is to know how to dream your own dream. If you have a vision and you know how to dream your own dream, this is a guarantee of happy people. We are Mediterranean people and we should preserve our authenticity which will allow us to work in a more relaxed manner but with respect to putting in place organizational structures

we should focus on the west. It is very important not to "fall asleep" again but maintain the thread both online and offline because one day will be a change of generations and they have to carry on where we leave off.

5. **Where on the Internet are tourists informing themselves about Istria as a destination?**

From destination web sites I can highlight www.istra.hr and www.istra.com. Those sites have informative content, although in my opinion there is a lot to do on the web sites of natural parks or national parks that are not very well exploited, regional sites should consolidate and work more interactive because every village has its own politics. I hope that this could change with a new law. They should synchronize, work and plan together, because in the end we are small and we spend a lot of money if we don't find a way in which to bring all of this together. In this area we are still far from our goals and we have to improve. Istrian tourism boards should cooperate together knowing their common goals, and coordinate together more often. We should all come together because of identity since without that there is no progress. There is a need to make a new law for tourism boards, from top to bottom.

6. **In the diagram of affective reaction where would you place Istria? Please choose one: stressful - relaxing; thrill - sleepy; exciting - gloomy; comfortable – unpleasant.**

Istria is not so exciting; we are stressful although in a positive way. I would consider Istria as relaxing!

## ANNEX B: Questions for the interview with tourists

### 1. <u>PART: Capturing destination image</u>

1. Imagine that next week you will visit Istria as a destination for the first time. Tell us your story. What do you think your experience in Istria as a destination would be like?
2. What images and thoughts immediately come to your mind?
3. What would you expect to see, or feel, hear, smell, taste there?
4. What are your associations about Istria? Are they positive or negative?
5. Describe Istria using one item from each diagram (affective/cognitive).
   a) Affective items are: stressful/relaxing, gloomy/exciting, sleepy/thrilling and unpleasant/pleasant (Pike, 2010).

b) Cognitive bipolar set of adjectives: accessible/isolated, friendly/cold, lively/stagnant, interesting/boring, quiet/noisy and overcrowded/sparse (Pike, 2010).

## 2. PART: Information sources

1. The ideas that you presented in your story must have come from somewhere. From where? Please list your sources. If it is from the Internet, which Internet pages?
2. Where do you search for all necessary information about Istria?
   a) Trip Advisor,
   b) Lonely Planet,
   c) National Geographic,
   d) Facebook,
   e) Twitter,
   f) Youtube,
   g) Pinterest,
   h) Flickr,
   i) Foursquare,
   j) Official destination web site www.istra.com/www.istra.hr,
   k) Visit Istria on social networks Facebook, Twitter, Youtube,
   l) Forums/blogs/online communities,
   m) Random on Google,
   n) Other internet pages, or
   o) Other
3. Have you ever visited Istria's official destination page www.istra.hr/www.istra.com?
4. What sources of information influenced your destination choice?
   a) Official destination web site www.istra.hr/www.istra.com,
   b) Visit Istria-official destination group on Facebook, Twitter, Youtube,
   c) Forums,
   d) Blogs,
   e) Lonely Planet,
   f) National Geographic,
   g) Facebook,
   h) Twitter,
   i) Youtube,
   j) Pinterest,
   k) Flickr,
   l) Foursquare,
   m) Random on Google,
   n) Other internet pages,
   o) Friends or family,
   p) Books/newspapers/movies,
   q) Other media (radio, TV), or
   r) Other

Nationality:_____
Age:_____
Occupation:_____
Education:_____