

Destination Branding from Corporate Branding Perspective

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This paper presents how branding, and especially corporate branding, is utilized in destination branding studies. A range of online databases were searched to provide a comprehensive listing of academic journal articles on branding in tourist destination context. The articles were reviewed and classified by journal and by year of publication. 15 studies were chosen for further analysis in order to concentrate especially on studies utilizing corporate branding. The study is conducted in an abductive manner and the process was independently verified. It was found that although it is suggested that corporate branding issues may give new insights in tourist destination studies, it still is rarely utilized. The paper might be the first one to clarify this issue, and therefore it offers an important contribution especially to tourist destination studies. In addition, it gives new insights for tourism destination managers as well as may encourage corporate branding researchers to widen their perspective into other contexts.

In companies, brand architectures exist in three basic levels, namely 1) corporate, 2) business unit, and 3) product or service level (Muzellec, 2006). Of these, product branding is studied in marketing discipline over decades. Corporate branding, on the other hand, has become a buzzword of 2000s (Harris and de Chernatony, 2001) and is one of the most discussed phenomena both among academics and practitioners nowadays.

Since late 1990s, branding discussions have been adopted from marketing discipline to other contexts, for example to tourist destination context. Place branding, and especially its tourism-related subarea, destination branding, is widely accepted as a common approach to tourist destination promotion. However, in spite of growing academic interest or a trend of branding among tourist destinations, there still seems to be lack of conceptualization in the field. At the very least, there is still a need for the development of a commonly accepted framework for destination branding theory (Ritchie and Ritchie, 1998; Koneznik and Gartner, 2007). The focus of this study is on destination branding as a special case of place branding (c.f. Gnoth, 2007) and especially the novel approach of corporate branding to it.

Often, *corporate brand* is defined following product brand definition by American Marketing Association: a brand is “a name, term, sign, symbol or design or combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition”. However, recently it is recognised that corporate brand is more than that; it has meaning for all stakeholders, both internal and external. For them, a brand represents a set of values and promises and even a personality. (Daly and Moloney, 2004.) *Corporate branding*, on the other hand, can be defined as “a systematically planned and implemented process of creating and maintaining a favorable image and consequently a favorable reputation for the company as a whole by sending signals to all stakeholders and by managing behavior, communication, and symbolism” (Einwiller and Will 2002, 101).

According to Knox and Bickerton (2003), marketing perspectives towards branding have evolved from the principle of the primacy of customer demand. This views the brand as a strategic resource, which can be used to guide the business processes that generate brand value for customers (Urde, 1999). Early attempts at brand management concentrated on creating a positive brand image (Boulding, 1956) in the mind of customer. This idea was followed by the development of brand positioning in the minds of existing and potential customers (Ries and

Trout, 1982). The concepts of positioning and “unique selling proposition”, together with 4Ps, have been the main building blocks of product brand marketing since the early 1960s (cf. Knox and Bickerton, 2003).

Corporate branding studies also have multidisciplinary roots, where focus has been mainly in the organisation concentrating on the organisational processes of company image formation. (Bickerton, 2000; Knox and Bickerton, 2003) The multidisciplinary perspective has developed from corporate image (e.g. Abratt, 1989; Kennedy, 1977), corporate personality (e.g. Olins, 1978), and corporate identity (e.g. Balmer, 1998; Stuart, 1999) and turned towards corporate marketing (Balmer, 2001; Balmer and Gray, 2003; Balmer and Greyser, 2006).

When comparing to the traditional product branding, literature on corporate branding emphasizes the importance of brand values (de Chernatony, 1999; Tilley, 1999; Urde, 1999). According to Urde (2003) developing a brand is synonymous with developing the core values. Core value is dynamic, rather than an inactive description. Corporate branding has been identified as the way in which an organization communicates its identity (Kay, 2006). According to Urde (2003), a brand’s identity is developed as a continual and ongoing interaction between the identities of the organization and the customers. The core values summarize the brand’s identity (Urde, 2003). According to Balmer (2001), the core of the corporate brand is an explicit covenant, a promise, between an organization and its key stakeholder groups. This promise, or value proposition, is communicated via multiple channels, and is experienced through the services, products and staff (Keller, 1999; Balmer and Gray, 2003). The vision and culture of the company are part of the value proposition communicating the brand values (c.f. Balmer and Gray, 2003; Knox *et al.*, 2000; Knox and Maklan, 1998; Vargo and Lusch, 2004).

From brand management perspective, corporate brand equity and value are some of the oldest research issues in the field (e.g. Badenhausen, 1997; Gaines-Ross, 1997; Gregory, 1997, 1998). After that, several attempts to conceptualize corporate brand building process (e.g. Urde, 2003) have occurred. For example, different kinds of corporate brand management (Harris and de Chernatony, 2001; Simões and Dibb, 2001; Hatch and Schultz, 2003, Knox and Bickerton, 2003; Knox, 2004; Logman, 2004) and corporate brand building (Melewar and Walker, 2003) models have been created, including also e.g. internal brand building (Aurand *et al.*, 2005; Hardaker and Fill, 2005; Pappasolomou and Vrontis, 2006a, 2006b; Vallaster and de Chernatony, 2006) and corporate brand co-creation (Boyle, 2007) perspectives. Pitt *et al.* (2006) present an interesting perspective, namely open source perspective on corporate branding. They suggest that corporate brand is not owned by a company but it is co-created by the company and its stakeholders. Other quite new issues are corporate re-branding, which mainly concentrates on corporate name change (e.g. Daly and Moloney, 2004; Gotsi and Andriopoulos, 2007; Muzellec and Lambkin, 2006), alliance branding (He and Balmer, 2006) and corporate brand extensions (Laforet, 2007). From corporate brand communications perspective, the Internet is an extremely important medium (Stuart and Jones, 2004; Supphellen and Nysveen, 2001). Corporate branding discussions seem to be more and more utilised in other contexts as well. For example, they have operated as theoretical background e.g. in medical marketing (Moss and Schuiling, 2004), monarchies (Balmer *et al.*, 2006; Greyser *et al.*, 2006), place branding (Vitiello and Willcocks, 2006), and more specifically in country branding (Wetzel, 2006), and city branding (Parkerson and Saunders, 2005; Trueman *et al.*, 2004).

The destination branding discussions, in contrast, have often used classical product branding theories as a given conceptualization (e.g. Hall, 1999; Hankinson, 2005; Murphy *et al.*, 2007). In addition, according to empirical studies, practitioners in destination marketing organizations (DMO) have understood destination branding from product branding perspective, while rather narrow understanding of the brand as a name or a logo has emphasized the

discussions (Tasci and Kozak, 2006). Anholt (2002) first stated that country branding can benefit from understanding it from corporate branding perspective.

This study is the first systematic review of the destination branding literature, so far. The purpose of this paper is to execute a literature review on how branding is discussed in destination context and especially on how corporate branding is utilized in destination branding literature. The aim is to conceptualize the corporate branding phenomenon in the tourist destination context. The study will address suitable characteristics of corporate branding for destination branding. We are taking a critical approach identifying also those features not suitable for the destination context. First, a short overview to the current destination branding literature is taken. Second, the gathering of data for the literature review is described. Third, the results of an analysis of the current destination branding literature are presented. Fourth, closer analysis on corporate branding discussions in destination context is implemented. Thereafter, the benefits of corporate branding in this new context are evaluated and also critical aspects are addressed. Finally, future avenues for destination branding research are suggested.

Destination Branding

One of the most cited definitions for destination brand is that introduced by Ritchie and Ritchie (1998): “*A name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates the place; furthermore, it conveys the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the place; it also serves to consolidate and reinforce of pleasurable memories of the place experience*” (italics added). This definition delimits a brand being only a symbol of the place, but it clearly infers that ‘brand’ is related to differentiation and is something that happens in relation to competitors. The definition also clearly follows the streams of general marketing literature presented in the previous chapter.

During the past years, the characteristics of the brand mentioned by Ritchie and Ritchie (1998) are repeated in the destination branding literature. Brands have been connotations of clear image, promotional tools used by destination marketers to gain distinctiveness and competitive advantage (Seaton and Bennett, 1996; Morgan and Pritchard, 2002), and are seen as acting an expression of a relationship between the customer and product (e.g. Hankinson, 2004). The brand creates the memorable and emotional bond between preferred travel markets and the destination (e.g. Morgan and Pritchard, 2002; Williams *et al.*, 2004). According to Hanlan and Kelly (2005), a brand promise and a travel experience that live up to the promise are valuable elements of destination branding. These definitions have their roots clearly in traditional product branding literature represented by, for example, Aaker, Keller, Joachimstahler and Kapferer.

Another feature related to destination branding is a long-term commitment that involves brand identity creation (Morgan *et al.*, 2002). More recently, destination brands are seen to convey core values that are linked to the destination’s ‘sense of place’ (Williams *et al.*, 2004). As Niinen *et al.* (2007) pointed out; branding is about giving more defined borders to ‘what was already there’. A recent, understandable notion is that images about a country in general and especially its people have a direct influence on the beliefs and evaluation of the destination (Nadeau *et al.*, 2008). Also, recently it is acknowledged that cultural and historical aspects of the place should not be overlooked in the destination branding process (Anholt, 2005; Morgan *et al.*, 2005; Koneznik and Go, 2008). These new ideas related to destination branding mirror the principles of fast growing corporate branding discussion (e.g. Urde, 2003; Balmer, 2001; Knox and Bickerton, 2003).

According to Pike (2008), most of the case studies on destination branding are written by practitioners who have been involved in the branding processes. He also pointed out that the

discussion has been mostly focused on brand development. According to Ooi (2004), the research on destination branding has mostly concentrated on communicating the brand message. Differences in branding places and commercial organizations and manufactured products or services are largely ignored (Ooi, 2004). In following sections, we will update these overviews by executing a literature review on current destination branding literature.

Data Gathering

Relevant material for the study was scattered across various journals during January 2008. The study was limited to online articles only. Consequently, the following online journal databases were searched to provide a comprehensive bibliography of the academic literature: ABI Inform, EBSCO (Academic Search Premier and EconLit), Emerald Fulltext, JSTOR, ISI Web of Knowledge, SpringerLink, Illumina, Oxford University Press Online Journals, and Google Scholar. These were chosen because of their wide access to most valuable academic business journals, and because of the researcher's online access into these. Therefore, of important tourism journals at least *Tourism Review* and *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing* are not included in the analysis.

In order to concentrate particularly on destination branding, terms "*destination brand*" and "*destination branding*" were searched both as a phrase and separately from article title, abstract, or keywords. In addition, the terms "*place brand*" and "*place branding*" were searched as well, since there was a possibility that these terms were used instead of destination brand (e.g. Gnoth, 2007). However, only those articles closely related to tourism research, and having branding as a central focus were included in the analysis. In addition, studies concerning tourism related firms like hotel or tour operator brands were excluded. The search was executed open-minded without any time limits in order to ensure that all essential articles were found. Even though practitioners' publications and reports contain a great deal of material on destination branding as well, these were not selected for inclusion in this study which specifically focused on academic publications. More specifically, the search was limited to academic full texts. Conference papers, masters' and doctoral dissertations, textbooks and unpublished working papers were excluded as well, because academics most often use journals for acquiring information and disseminating new research findings, and journals represent the highest level of research. For example, although the textbook "*Destination branding, creating the unique destination proposition*" by Morgan, Pritchard and Pride (2002 and 2nd edition 2005) has been widely cited, it was not included in the analysis, while the studies published in the book are mostly published also in the journal articles elsewhere.

Analyzing of the articles and formulating the theoretical background of the study was conducted in an abductive manner while corporate branding field as such is quite a wide issue that has been studied a lot. The abductive approach stems from the insight that most great advances in science neither followed the pattern of pure deduction nor of pure induction (Peirce, 1957; Taylor *et al.*, 2002). In addition, abduction leads to new insight about existing phenomena by examining these from new perspective. An abductive approach, in which the continuous interplay between theory and empirical observation is stressed, is fruitful if the researcher's objective is to discover new things. In this study, first we collected destination branding articles available in above mentioned databases. The search revealed 58 articles. Of those 58 we identified only 15 studies utilizing corporate branding in the destination context.

Results Of The Literature Review

In Table 1, the 58 destination branding articles of this literature review are presented. Our review begins from the year 1999. From the literature we know that the first article was published in 1998 by Pritchard and Morgan. However, we did not have access to that specific article. In recent four years, the amount of the articles has grown and in 2007 we faced an enormous growth. Interestingly, in addition to tourism journal; *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, the more general journals; *Journal of Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* and *Journal of Brand Management* have published several articles. A research setting, a place to be branded, in the articles were most often country/state (27 articles), following city (10) and region (10). In the analyzed articles, brand management and image approaches were emphasized.

TABLE 1. Published destination branding articles in the time period 1999-2007.

	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	TOTAL
Journal of Vacation Marketing	3	-	1	-	1	2	-	2	1	10
Journal of Place Branding (and Public Diplomacy)	-	-	-	-	-	1	2	4	3	10
Journal of Brand Management	-	-	-	5	-	2	-	1	-	8
Journal of Travel Research	-	1	1	-	-	-	2	1	2	7
Tourism Management	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	4	6
Tourism Analysis	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	5
Annals of Tourism Research	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	2
Scandinavian Hospitality and Tourism	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	2
CoDesign	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
e-Review of Tourism Research	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
Journal of Services Marketing	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
Journal of Product and Brand Management	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
Journal of Business Research	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
Multinational Business Review	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
Journal of Promotion Management	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
The Journal of Corporate Communication	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
TOTAL	3	1	3	6	3	9	7	10	16	58

Note: the complete list available from authors.

The literature review revealed that destination branding has adapted several perspectives from marketing literature, especially from branding literature. For example, Aaker's (1992) brand personality scale (e.g. Ekinci and Hosany, 2006) and de Chernatony's and McWilliam's (1990) Brand Box model (Caldwell and Freire, 2004) are tested in destination context. In addition, effect of nation's brand (identity) on company brands is studied as well (Jaworski and Fosher, 2003). Recently, country-of-origin discussion has been combined to destination branding discussion (e.g. Fan, 2006). Brand loyalty (Oppermann, 2000), customer-based brand equity (e.g. Koneznik and Gartner, 2007) and communicating the brand (e.g. Pitt *et al.*, 2007) are also handled in the destination context. However, evaluating brand image has been a dominating issue in destination context, so far (e.g. Hankinson, 2005; Hosany *et al.*, 2006; Prebensen, 2007).

Surprisingly for the authors, corporate branding discussion was very limited in the articles. 15 articles used ideas and concepts familiar from corporate branding literature and these were analyzed more closely. In fact, of these, according to reference lists, only two utilized versatile corporate branding discussion. Moreover, among these 15 articles appeared at least three articles, which were not pure destination branding but place branding articles. In Table 2, these 15 articles are presented and categorized. After Anholt's (2002) encouraging article, interestingly, only a few researchers have applied corporate branding in destination context. As in all destination branding articles, also in these utilizing corporate branding perspective, the most

common research setting was a country. However, in contrast with other destination branding articles, instead of image, the brand management seems to be the most common approach to study destination branding from corporate branding perspective. Most of the articles (10) are conceptual papers and most of them are uncertain of applying branding into destination context. “Unmanageable place brands” (Blichfeldt, 2005) seem to be not an easy task to conceptualize. In next sections, we try to clarify this “hard-to-manage” concept.

TABLE 2. Destination branding articles utilizing corporate branding concepts and ideas.

Year	Journal	Author	Research setting	Approach	Methods
02	Journal of Brand Management	Anholt	Country	Clarifying concepts	Conceptual
02	Annals of Tourism Research	Cai	Region	Brand management	Case study +survey
02	Journal of Brand Management	Gnoth	Country	Clarifying concepts	Conceptual
02	Journal of Brand Management	Olins	Nation / country	Brand management	Conceptual, case examples
03	Journal of Vacation Marketing	Morgan, Pritchard, Piggot	Country	Brand management	Case study
04	Journal of Vacation Marketing	Hankinson	----	Clarifying concepts, network	Conceptual
04	Journal of Place branding	Kavaratzis	City (in general)	Communicating the brand	Conceptual
04	Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism	Ooi	Country	Clarifying concepts, brand management/politics of branding	Case study
04	Journal of Corporate Communication	Truemann, Klemm and Giroud	City (in general)	Communicating the brand	Case study
05	Place Branding	Blichfeldt	----	Brand management/resident-tourist relationships, internal branding	Conceptual
05	Place branding	Parkerson and Saunders	City	Brand management, network	Case study
06	Place branding	Wetzel	Country (in general)	Brand management, umbrella brand internal marketing	Conceptual, case example
06	Place Branding	Vitiello and Willcocks	City	Communicating the brand	Conceptual paper, case examples
07	Tourism Analysis	Gnoth	----	Brand management, values of destination	Conceptual
07	Journal of Place Branding and Public Diplomacy	Widler	Country	Critical approach	Conceptual

Novel Approach of Corporate Branding To Destination Branding

In destination context, many ideas of corporate branding are discussed during the years. However, the conceptualization and identifying the roots of discussions has often been weak. Next, some notions of the analyzed articles are presented.

First, due to a quite novel research topic of destination branding, utilizing branding to the destination context in general was discussed in the analyzed articles (e.g. Anholt, 2002;

Blichfeldt, 2005). The tourist destination is often considered as a product, although a complex one, consisting of several services and firms (e.g. Morgan and Pritchard, 2003). Thus, it is debated, should product or service branding be applied to a destination context (e.g. Anholt, 2002). According to Balmer and Gray (2003), corporate-level brands can also apply to countries, regions and cities. However, this has been a rare approach in tourist destination literature. Corporate brands have a multi-stakeholder, rather than a customer orientation, and they differ fundamentally from product brands in terms of disciplinary scope and management. (Hatch and Schultz, 2001; Balmer and Gray, 2003; Knox and Bickerton, 2003). As a single “tourist product” is a service, service branding most probably fits to it. Service branding shares important similarities with corporate branding: it involves multiple interfaces (Bitner *et al.*, 1994), employees are central to the process (Harris and De Chernatony, 2001), and the company becomes the primary brand (Berry, 2000; Vargo and Lusch, 2004). However, according to authors, for a tourist destination, corporate branding suits better, while it involves a larger entity with multiple stakeholders.

Second, common discussion in the articles was brand management: destination brand building (Cai, 2002), internal branding (e.g. Blichfeldt, 2005) and cooperation and relationships in branding (e.g. Cai, 2002; Hankinson, 2004) were discussed. Traditionally, the responsibility for the brand is assumed to reside totally with the marketing department (Davis, 2002), when the focus becomes more tactical and reactive than strategic and visionary (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000). Corporate branding is increasingly recognized as a strategic tool that can generate and support value creation, and this clearly is a senior management concern (Urde, 1999; Balmer and Gray, 2003; Knox and Bickerton, 2003). According to Hatch and Schultz (2001), corporate brand is formed by the interplay between strategic vision, organizational culture and the corporate images held by its stakeholders. Corporate brand is a historical and perceptual resource (Balmer and Gray, 2003), a symbol of the company’s heritage and articulates the vision of the leaders having a much broader temporal base than does a product brand (Olins, 1989). Corporate branding requires organization-wide support; integration of internal and external communication and core effort will involve closer cooperation between different departments (Hatch and Schultz, 2001; Balmer, 2001). In a destination context, this means not only internal co-operation in DMOs, but also co-operation between all stakeholders. Co-operative branding of rural destinations introduced by Cai (2002) was an effort towards this approach. Also Morgan, Pritchard and Piggot (2003) and Hankinson (2004) call for stakeholder relationships in every level.

Third, core values emphasized in corporate branding literature can also be identified in the destinations (e.g. Gnoth, 2007; Morgan *et al.*, 2003). Obviously, they should represent true and essential characteristics of the destination. The problem may arise if there is no consensus on who defines these values. In destination context, it is also important how the DMOs match the brand with values held by other destination community stakeholders (c.f. Williams *et al.*, 2004). The complex nature of the destination with several attractions, and service providers, customers as co-creators of an experience and a vast amount of stakeholders set the consistent brand promise to a demanding position. It is assumed that the wider the destination is geographically, the more demanding is the branding task.

Fourth, interestingly, the articles representing the approach of communicating the brand (Kavaratzis, 2004; Truemann *et al.*, 2004; Vitiello and Willcocks, 2006), were maybe the most general place branding articles having tourism only as one part of the research focus. Moreover, their views on communication differed from each others, when Truemann *et al.* (2004) emphasized the coordinated communication and Vitiello and Willcocks (2006) recommended finding a balance between coordination and spontaneous details in communication.

Finally, place branding is about to co-ordinate brand relationships (Hankinson, 2004; Parkerson and Saunders, 2005), to work with and often to change existing perceptions of place (Williams *et al.*, 2004). However, as Urde (2003) pointed out brand building is an evolution not a revolution. A successful brand have strong marketing heritage, is consistent, but at the same time evolve and appear continually contemporary and fresh (Morgan and Pritchard, 2005).

Discussion

According to Park and Petrick (2006), destination branding strategies may work only under certain conditions. We propose that by adopting corporate branding approach to destination branding and understanding a brand as co-created, DMOs may act in strategic and proactive manner.

As Gnoth (2007) pointed out, the shape of a destination brand is more like a corporate or umbrella brand rather than a product brand. There is no obvious owner of the destination brand but there are number of stakeholders involved. Many of the studies (e.g. Blichfeldt, 2005; Gnoth, 2007; Wetzel, 2006) emphasized the values of the destination's people in destination branding. Branding a destination means offering place values for tourist consumption. Cultural, social, natural and economic values are transformed into capital on which the promises of the brand must be based. They form the core for the uniqueness of the place (Gnoth, 2007). However, one of the main criticisms towards especially the nation branding (e.g. Widler, 2007) is that nation branding does not allow for citizens to play a significant role in the branding process. This issue is approached in other way when speaking about "unmanageable place brands" (Blichfeldt, 2005). The question is, should the destination brands be managed and who defines the core values. The amount of brand management articles among the 15 with corporate branding perspective indicates that by utilizing corporate branding concepts, new solutions for the "management problem" have been discovered. The corporate branding discussion suggests that the brand is clearly senior management concern, although the stakeholders are involved (e.g. Urde, 1999). Arguably, the values of the destination's people, its history and culture are the basis for the branding, but all stakeholders and also the values of destination marketing organization itself have to be involved. Thereby the destination brand can be seen in a wider scope, and for instance all stakeholders and temporal aspects can be taken into consideration. Corporate branding approach allows us to see a destination brand as a dynamic entity which changes over time.

Moreover, the identity aspect of corporate branding discussion may be fruitful in destination context. Urde (2003) presented the interaction between different identities in corporate brand development. In destination context, we can add here also the identities of other stakeholders (e.g. tourism firms, local DMOs, politicians) than customers, and identity of a destination marketing organization. The interaction between identities can occur, if there is cooperation between different parties and (network) relationships between stakeholders (e.g. Cai, 2002; Hankinson, 2004). However, the interaction is not always planned but emerges in different levels. According to e.g. Morgan, Pritchard and Piggot (2003), there are challenges related them like again, little management control and underdeveloped identities of the destination.

Emerging consensus exist on the crucial role of the consumer in the brand creation process (Boyle, 2007). Managers have to monitor the response of consumers to their branding activities (McEnally and de Chernatony, 1999), and consider them as co-creators or co-producers of the brand. Especially, in the context of *experience product* this becomes an important point of view. Consumers most arguably participate in the creation of their experience, and the brand.

Every brand exists by virtue of continuous process whereby managers specify core values, and these values are interpreted and redefined by customers (Kay, 2006). If managers

utilize brands to manipulate meanings, rather than adopt co-creation strategies, brand values may be at odds with consumers (Kay, 2006). One of the challenges of implementing core values is that they can be interpreted and communicated in different ways (Urde, 2003). When brands are introduced to new cultural contexts, brand meanings are reinterpreted and change. This is especially challenging in the tourist destination context where “the consistency” (Kay, 2006) has to be reached in the perceptions of tourists from different cultural backgrounds.

Some critical aspects towards corporate branding in destination context have been occurred. According to Ooi (2004), first, unlike a firm where managers can fire employees if they do not toe the company’s line, destination branding authorities, cannot “get rid of” those citizens who do not embrace the official destination branding, nor can the authorities normally close sub-national tourism authorities and private enterprises if they refuse to cooperate with the branding campaign. Second, politicians and local residents may not be supportive of changing their country so that it can attract more tourists. The relationship between a destination and its tourists is not identical to that of a firm and its customers; tourists may not be welcomed by all in a destination, while the aim of a commercial firm is to serve as many customers as possible. Third, commercial firms are profit-maximization entities and they are not expected to carry heavy social and cultural responsibilities in a society. However, in the branding of e.g. countries, state-supported tourism authorities and its agendas are closely tied to the domestic social, cultural and political issues (Ooi, 2004).

Finally, one threat in corporate branding is the communicating of core values. It is not possible to create or choose a core value if it is not already established in the organization, or in the destination, otherwise they are just empty words. A core values should not be regarded as slogans and they are not intended to be used directly in the external communication, but rather unique communication and interpretation of core values are needed (Urde, 2003.)

Conclusions And Further Studies

This study presented how corporate branding is utilized in the tourist destination context. Even though it is suggested that corporate branding could be used in this context (Anholt, 2002), the studies are extremely rare. Only 15 articles of 58 destination branding articles found in the systematic literature review were utilizing at least in minor aspects the corporate branding concepts. Arguably, corporate branding discussion itself is an emerging research topic and applying it into other fields follows the development of the more general discussions. In the articles utilizing corporate branding, the brand management discussion was the most common indicating that the novel ideas for handling “the unmanageable place brands” (Blichfeldt, 2005) are discovered. It was interesting that some other issues important in corporate branding, e.g. identity (Bronn *et al.*, 2006; He and Balmer, 2007; Wilkinson and Balmer, 1996), visual identity (van den Bosch *et al.*, 2006), integrated communications and coherency (Einwiller and Will, 2002; Kitchen and Schultz, 2003; Morsing and Kristensen, 2001), image (e.g. Piña *et al.*, 2006) and reputation (Argenti and Druckenmiller, 2004; Kitchen and Laurence, 2003) aspects were not used in these studies very often. On the contrary, in other destination branding articles, image evaluation was the most common approach. Most of the studies were conceptual papers and the most common research setting was a country. Interestingly, there was not any discussion about the relationship of the research setting and branding approach among these 15 articles. These distinctions are all in all rare. However, Caldwell and Freire (2004) have suggested that country and other destinations should be branded differently. An interesting research topic in the future could be the suitability of different branding approaches to different research settings. All in all, more empirical studies are needed, although an access to cases might sometimes be difficult.

Tourist destinations are widely studied from image and identity perspectives. Other new corporate branding related research area in tourism context might be discovering whether corporate brand identity, image, and reputation studies could be utilized in tourist destination context (c.f. Ahonen *et al.*, 2007). Also, the possible alliance branding (He and Balmer, 2006) in tourism context could be studied. Furthermore, it could be discovered have any tourist destination been re-branded (e.g. Kaikati, 2003; Daly and Moloney, 2006; Muzellec and Lambkin, 2006) and, how similar tourist destination re-branding process is to corporate re-branding process? Communications approach, e.g. Internet and integrated marketing communications perspective to branding could be studied more detailed. When having values in the focus of the destination branding discussion, it would be suitable to study, how to define and measure destination brand equity (e.g. Koneznik and Gartner, 2007) and value. Finally, it could be studied whether the tourist destination branding/brand building process is similar to corporate branding/ brand building process (e.g. Urde, 2003). Especially this last suggestion is interesting, because there are only a few process models that encompass the destination brand building process (e.g. Cai, 2002; Hankinson, 2004; Niininen *et al.*, 2007; Koneznik and Go, 2008). Mostly they are normative “should be” models. We feel that these advantages of the modeling still do not describe the branding process in the destination clear enough and moreover, they do not take into consideration the co-creation view of the brand.

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