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SOCIAL INTERACTION AND DESTINATION
IMAGE FORMATION

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Ph.D

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

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**SOCIAL INTERACTION AND DESTINATION
IMAGE FORMATION**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

June 2015

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Anna Pavesi

Social interaction and destination image formation

Abstract

This study investigates the role played by social interaction in the process of destination image formation in a group vacation travel context. Prior research largely neglected the investigation of destination image formation as a process, the dynamic nature of the phenomenon and the social context in which it takes place.

In light of the identified gaps, this study examines and reports the process of destination image formation in its development in a group vacation travel context; it determines what role intra-group social interaction plays in the destination image formation process; and finally, it suggests an integrated approach to further investigate the process of destination image formation in a group vacation travel context, which accounts for social interaction.

The social representation approach explains how groups and individuals as components of a group, understand and co-create reality. With this theoretical support the process of destination image formation is approached as an ongoing, dynamic and relativistic phenomenon, which is indivisible from its social context. The person-centered stance adopted in this study constitutes a drastic shift in perspective in comparison to the destination-centered research on destination image to date.

In order to grant the necessary flexibility, this investigation adopts a combination of qualitative data gathering methods: participant observation of a ten-day group tour was conducted in between two rounds of semi structured in-depth interviews. The selected group tour, composed of ten Italian participants, excluding the group coordinator, the local travel guide and the researcher, travelled together to Jordan, in the Middle East.

Findings show the role of social interaction at the roots and throughout the whole process of destination image formation. Evidence showed that individuals belonging to the same group do influence each other's destination image formation through verbal and non-verbal communication among themselves and in relation to the destination. Destination image

formation emerges as a social phenomenon indivisible from the social and physical environment in which it occurs. Finally, an approach for the investigation of destination image formation as dynamic and social, in a group vacation travel context, is proposed and explained.

The current study had primarily theoretical significance, although practical and methodological implications were also identified. The shift to a person-centered, sociological and dynamic approach deepens the understanding of the processes concurring to destination image formation revealing the influential role played by social interaction in the process. The approach aided to better understand some typical findings of destination image research, including the phenomenon of word of mouth and the inter-cultural variations of a same destination's images. Lastly, the introduction of collage creation, an original method of in-depth knowledge elicitation, displayed its potential in the investigation of complex tourism phenomena. Practical implications interest destination management organizations and tour operators and highlight the evident importance of a consistent and systematic tour guide training that includes people and group dynamics management.

Key words: Destination image formation, social interaction, group tour, Jordan, collage creation.

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1. CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Purpose of the study and background

This study investigates the destination image formation process in a vacation travel context; and examines what role social interaction in a group vacation travel context plays in the process. Destination image was recognized as crucial in travelers' decision making four decades ago when the concept of image was introduced in tourism research from the consumer behavior literature (Hunt, 1975). For the past forty years, destination image investigation has produced an extensive body of literature. Generally, the focus of these studies is the identification and measurement of destination image in view of different purposes (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001; Ryan & Cave, 2005; Wang & Davidson, 2010, just to mention a few). Destination image has been studied extensively in regards to travelers' behavior and destination choice (Gartner & Hunt, 1987; Ross, 1993; Coshall, 2000), and destination marketing and promotion (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a; Chon, 1991; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 2000); but also for the purpose of destination performance evaluation (Litvin & Ling, 2001; Chaudhary, 2000) and destination positioning (Ahmed, 1991; Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997).

This abundant body of literature adopted various perspectives and frameworks to determine destination image, test and verify its composition and identify what factors are influential and determinant in this construct. The main frameworks adopted include Oliver's (1980) expectancy disconfirmation theory, Importance – Performance Analysis (IPA) (Martilla & James, 1977), the Destination Attraction Management Model (DAMM) (Litvin & Ling, 2001), and Echtner and Ritchie's (1991, 1993) dimensional model.

The shared agreement at the origin of the studies is the important role that destination image plays in the success of a destination and its powerful ability to evaluate destination performance. The outcome of the studies consistently showed that destination image is a complex construct, which is challenging in its definition, conceptualization and measurement

(Gallarza, Saura, & Garcia, 2002).

A dominating preference for structured approaches is observed (Pike, 2002; Ryan & Cave, 2005; Tasci, Gartner & Cavusgil, 2007). Investigation increasingly focused on identifying the main components of destination image, their determinants and the relationships between them (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Baloglu, 1997; Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Jenkins, 1999). The study of destination image is largely centered on the destination as the object of the image and its characterizing features, or attributes. Destination attributes are understood as external stimuli, individually triggering a reaction by a subject i.e. the individual holding the image. The stimuli were operationalized in form of variables, measurable in terms of the subject's evaluation of pre-selected items (for example Ahmed, 1991; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001).

A limited number of studies opted for a more qualitative approach to the investigation of destination image. Reilly's (1990) free elicitation technique, in-depth interviews (Hanlan & Kelly, 2005) in combination with other methods such as collage (Prebensen, 2007), are a few examples. These methods were showed in their validity, yielding similar results to the more quantitative approaches (Reilly, 1990; Prebensen, 2007). However, they found limited application and are heavily criticized mainly for not being generalizable (Yarnal & Kerstetter, 2005; Prebensen, 2007).

With the sophistication of the measurement techniques and the increasing body of literature, two threads of investigation emerged for image conceptualization: one dimensional and one component-based. Within the former, Echtner and Ritchie's (1991, 1993) three-dimensional model (functional-psychological; attribute-holistic; common-unique) receives the largest approval among scholars as reflected in its conspicuous application. Echtner and Ritchie (1991) developed a methodological framework for the identification of these dimensions, with the purpose of standardizing destination image measurement. The component-based conceptualization thread proposes that the overall image of a destination is the result of the relationship between its cognitive and its affective components (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Frias, Rodriguez, & Castaneda, 2008; San Martin & Rodriguez del Bosque, 2008). When

investigation is approached from a behavioral perspective a third component is distinguished. Conative is thus the intentional component indicating the direction of the individual's stance or behavior towards the destination (Gartner, 1993; Baloglu, 1999).

1.2. Problem statement

In the abundant body of literature, limited efforts were made in a number of areas. The investigation of the destination image formation process, the dynamic nature of the phenomenon of destination image formation and the social context in which it takes place are believed to deserve attention and need further investigation.

Destination image formation is largely approached as a function of multiple variables. The studies examining the destination image formation process are limited in number (Gartner, 1993; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999b; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Tasci et al., 2007). A largely adopted approach consists in identifying destination image at different points in time and then measuring its variation through a gap analysis. Destination image is identified at specific points in time and within specific, pre-established criteria. Conclusions about the actual process of destination image formation are not conclusive, they are rather inferences based on differing results. Uncovering the process of destination image formation is necessary for obtaining information to modify it and influence its outcome (Gallarza et al., 2002; Beerli & Martin, 2004). Research and practice have showed that wrong interpretations and wrong methodologies leads to waste of resources (Tasci et al., 2007). Tourism is an experiential product, produced and consumed at the same time. This makes the image formation process particularly important at destination level for this industry, since there is no chance to try the product beforehand (Gartner, 1993). After purchase, the traveler is already experiencing the product and the process of destination image formation already begun. Since marketers cannot change the outcome after the image was created, it is important to understand its process of creation and modification, in order to be able to influence it appropriately and timely.

Despite the recognition of destination image as multidimensional, relative and dynamic in nature (Gallarza et al., 2002), a static approach to its investigation still appears to be dominant.

The one-time measurement repeatedly found in the literature, lead to a static approach, for which image is captured in one single moment and it is subsequently treated as a relatively lasting fact (Tasci et al., 2007). However, the question falls on what is it actually that is being measured. This approach poses a question on whether it is the process of destination image formation to be examined, or rather the outcomes of preceding processes.

The social context, or the social nature of the subject can be identified as an influential element transpiring through multiple factors determining destination image. Within the most explicit ones are word of mouth among the information sources and meeting people among the motivations for traveling. However, the social context in which destination image is formed and the social nature of the subject has not yet been considered as an autonomous element. The vast majority of research seems to have forgotten that a vacation experience most frequently includes the company of others (Yarnal & Kerstetter, 2005) and as such, this is an element which is deemed to have some influence. In fact inclination to socialization, also sociability is recognized as a salient dimension of human nature (Wolff, 1950). A change in perspective to the investigation of destination image formation may provide new insights and uncover new knowledge.

1.3. Definition of terms

Destination image is approached here as a dynamic, ongoing phenomenon. It is not a static multidimensional concept. Destination image consists of multiple and simultaneous influential forces that nourish its components through continuous processes. These are embedded in the social context of the subject identified with the physical and social environment in which these processes occur.

A few studies were identified reporting the relevance of social interaction, as the day-by-day, verbal and non-verbal unmediated communication, among people, and their contact with the environment. It can be observed that the majority of these studies take place in a group-type travel (Yarnal & Kerstetter, 2005; Quiroga, 1990) or in a backpacker type vacation which may include group travels (Murphy, 2001; White & White, 2008). In the present traveling

context a group can be defined as a gathering of individuals, who engage in frequent face-to-face interaction through communication, for a period of time of variable length and in the awareness of some significant commonality. For example, interest in the destination the individuals are traveling to.

The claimed lack of a solid conceptual framework, able to conceptualize the process of destination image and to guide research, has been constantly challenging scholars in the field (Gallarza et al., 2002; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Tasci et al., 2007). This study contributes to efforts in this direction. The theory of Social Representation is chosen to provide theoretical guidance. The theory of Social Representation explains the process through which societies make sense of what is part of their every-day reality. It maintains that reality exists only through peoples' representations of it, while representations inform peoples' behavior. The framework of interactive concepts forming representations envisages continuous development in time and space; this is informed by multiple information sources, including media, social interactions and direct experience. The initiation and evolution of social representation occurs through social interactions (Moscovici, 1963, 1984, 1988; Wagner, 1996). The theory was initially formulated for the investigation of the distribution of scientific concepts within the general public (Moscovici, 1963). It was subsequently employed as a framework to guide research in a number of fields and topics. A few examples are the understanding of diseases, such as AIDS (Markova & Wilkie, 1987), but also the representation of places in the field of urban psychology (Pailhous, 1984; Milgram, 1984). In tourism, it found application in the examination of host communities' understanding and attitudes towards tourism (Pearce, Moscardo, & Ross, 1996; Fredline & Faulkner, 2000). However, the application of the framework is limited in the destination image literature (San Martin & Rodriguez del Bosque, 2008). Studies adopting the social representation approach were seeking a perspective which allowed them a more in-depth and dynamic understanding and conceptualization of the object of investigation. For these reasons it is considered particularly suited for supporting the current study.

1.4. Research question and objectives

This study focuses on the process of destination image formation. It treats destination image as a dynamic concept, which is social for the subject constantly belongs to a social context. This study investigates the role of social interaction in the process of destination image formation in a group vacation travel context. The social representation approach provides a theoretical frame of reference for this work. The research question leading this investigation is:

What is the role of social interaction in the destination image formation process?

In order to answer this research question the following objectives are formulated:

- a) To examine and report the process of destination image formation in its development in a group vacation travel context;
- b) To determine how intra-group social interaction contributes to the destination image formation process; and
- c) To propose an integrated approach for the investigation of the destination image formation process in a group vacation travel context, which accounts for social interaction.

1.5. Significance of the study

The current study has primarily theoretical significance due to its exploratory nature. The main contribution is represented by the examination of processes for uncovering untapped pieces of the destination image formation puzzle. However, both methodological and practical implications emerged from this investigation. The former is related to the use of the elicitation technique of collage creation, relatively unknown in the tourism field, which proved successful in this project. The latter, interests the role of the tour guide. It appears that in the process of destination image formation the tour guide is not only invested of authority as the legitimate information provider, the guide also plays a key role in the social dynamics within the group. This dual role presents opportunities and challenges for destination management organizations.

Despite the vast body of literature that image enquiry can boast of, the lack of a solid theoretical framework has been repeatedly claimed (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Gallarza et al., 2002; Tasci et al., 2007). This work brings one step forward the understanding of the actual process of destination image formation by integrating its investigation with the neglected social context in which it occurs. This study represents a sharp shift in perspective in the destination image research panorama, from a static and unitary approach to a dynamic and social one. This work distinguishes itself from what has been mainstream in the literature so far by leaving aside the marketing/promotional, positioning and performance evaluation purposes to rather focus on the phenomenon itself. This stands in stark contrast to the static approach (Gallarza et al., 2002; Tasci et al., 2007) that isolated individuals and reduced their destination image to mechanical reactions to external stimuli.

Destination image is hereby treated as a dynamic and ongoing phenomenon indivisible from the physical and social environment in which and in response to which it takes place. This approach might shed some light on largely unanswered questions, e.g. how does image formation happen? How is information pieced together to form destination image? Why different culture groups hold different images of a same destination, while the same culture group holds somewhat homogeneous images of the destination? (Baloglu, 1997; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 2000).

Such a perspective shift brings along a methodological choice in relation to data gathering and analysis which is also atypical in the methodological homogeneity observed in the field (Gallarza et al., 2002; Pike, 2002). The methodological contribution encourages to reconsider the one method-fits-all methodological approach.

The renewed importance of the tour guide is important for destination management organizations as well as for tour operators. This study highlights the dual nature of tour guides' influential position, i.e. provision of information and group dynamics' management. A reassessment of the tour guides role and training would be beneficial to destination management organizations for destination image management and to tour operators for product improvement.

1.6. The organization of the report

Chapter 1 introduced the current work. The research problem, with the identified gaps were outlined, followed by the purpose of the study and the objectives established in order to answer the main research question.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the relevant literature. Destination image literature is reviewed in its development and advances and the neglected areas are highlighted. Subsequently, the social representation approach is presented as the perspective for tackling these gaps. Its strong similarities with the conceptualization of destination image formation to date are highlighted, and the additional insights it contributes with are identified.

Chapter 3 defines the paradigm which guides this investigation, it explains and visually displays the research design and it reports the methodology employed to carry out the investigation. Particular attention is dedicated to assessing its trustworthiness.

Chapter 4 presents the study findings in three interrelated parts. It starts with introducing the study participants; it presents participants' social and individual destination images; and finally it presents the findings emerging from the intra-group social interaction in relation to the formation of participants' destination image in this group vacation travel context.

Chapter 5 discusses the relevance of the presented findings in two parts. The first part discusses the study findings as they compare to prior destination image formation literature and to the social representation approach. The second part discusses how these findings take shape in an integrated approach to the investigation of the process of destination image formation in a group vacation travel context, which accounts for social interaction.

Chapter 6 concludes this report. It first draws the conclusions of this work; it presents the theoretical, methodological and practical contributions of this study. Finally, it explains its limitations and it concludes with recommendations for future research.

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2. CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Chapter introduction

In this chapter the literature on destination image and its formation in tourism is reviewed, and the social representation approach is presented as a valuable investigation perspective for addressing the identified gaps. In reviewing the extensive body of literature about destination image, special attention is paid to the conceptualization of its formation process. This is discussed through an analysis of the various approaches and frameworks that informed investigation. The main components, dimensions and influential factors agreed upon by the scholars are identified; a synthesis of the efforts in investigating destination image formation is visually represented.

A number of neglected areas are identified, including the limited efforts in uncovering the process of destination image formation, the static approach to its investigation prevailing in the literature, and the isolation of the individuals from their social environment. The discussion of the literature and the gaps identified lead to the formulation of the research question guiding this study

An approach is proposed on the basis of a discussion of the theory of social representation and the added value it contributes to the conceptualization of destination image formation. The theory of social representation originally introduced in sociology, represents an innovative and dynamic approach to investigating destination image formation as a process, which accounts for the social context of the individual.

2.2. Destination image literature

Table 1 Definition of terms

Term	Definition
1. Destination image	A dynamic and ongoing phenomenon. It consists of continuous processes embedded in and indivisible from the social context and physical environment in which it takes place.
2. Social interaction	Day-by-day, verbal and non-verbal unmediated communication among people, and their relation with the physical environment
3. Group (in a traveling context)	A gathering of individuals, who engage in frequent face-to-face interaction through communication, take one another into account in the awareness of some significant commonality and for a period of time of variable length.
4. Social representation	The shared understanding and meanings of the objects constituting the world of a group, which provide the basis for communication and behavior for the group members

Sources: developed from 1. Yarnal and Kerstetter (2005), Echtner and Ritchie (1993), Nicoletta and Servidio (2012), Ahmed (1991), Beerli and Martin (2004), Gallarza et al. (2002), Tasci et al. (2007) and Pons (2003). 2. Fridgen (1984), Yarnal and Kerstetter (2005), Pons (2003) and Wearing and Wearing (2001). 3. Yarnal and Kerstetter (2005), Wolff (1950), Crompton (1981), Moscovici (1984), Lett (1983), Bagozzi (2000) and Wagner (1996). 4. Moscovici (1963, 1984, 1988, 2000, 2001), Duveen and Lloyd (1993), Pearce et al. (1996), Purkhardt (1993), Wagner (1996) and Wagner et al. (1999)

Image is a well-known concept to the marketing literature; its introduction into the discipline of tourism is attributed to Hunt (1975). He applied it to tourist destinations in the 1970's in the understanding that image played a crucial role in product selection and thus possibly in tourist destination selection. The shared agreement on the influential power of image in costumers' decision making for product purchase constituted the common starting motive of researchers engaging in destination image investigation.

Destination image studies vary in the aspect they wish to investigate, the perspectives they adopt and the methods they employ. The vast majority of the studies wish to identify or measure destination image (Ross, 1993; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Coshall, 2000; Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001; Hsu, Wolfe, & Kang, 2004; Ryan & Cave, 2005; Prebensen, 2007; McCartney, Butler, & Bennett, 2009). Destination image was investigated in the context of

costumer behavior, especially destination choice and decision making (Gartner & Hunt, 1987; Ross, 1993; Baloglu, 1999; Coshall, 2000; Ryan & Cave, 2005; Wang & Davidson, 2010); some researchers took a marketing or promotional perspective (Chon, 1991; Dadgostar & Isotalo, 1995; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 2000; Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001; Prebensen, 2007). Some other studies focused on the investigation of destination image as a tool for destination evaluation (Chaudhary, 2000; Litvin & Ling, 2001; Hsu et al., 2004; Hui & Wan, 2003; O'Leary & Deegan, 2005) and positioning (Gartner, 1989; Ahmed, 1991; Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Baloglu, 1997).

In this extensive body of literature, a number of different methodological approaches are identified. Structured approaches to image investigation are generally preferred over unstructured or qualitative approaches. The latter, when used, constitute a preparatory stage for the design of a structured method or data collection exercise. The preferred data collection tools appear to be self-administered questionnaires, organized in Likert scales - as evaluation scales, or rating scales - and occasionally some ranking exercise. Whereby for data analysis, a number of high order statistical analysis are preferred: popular are analysis of means such as t-tests or ANOVA/MANOVA, factorial reduction and cluster analysis and regressions. Pike (2002) examined destination image literature in the period between 1973 and 2000 with special attention to the context, the methods and the main focus the studies were conducted from. He reported that out of 142 papers, 114 employed structured techniques to investigate destination image, and only about 63 employed qualitative methods involving the actual costumers, or travelers, at any point of the research. Overall the most popular analytical choices were factor analysis, followed by t-test, perceptual mapping and analysis of means (Pike, 2002).

Among the very few examples of works employing qualitative techniques as main methodology, some engaged in identifying destination image (Hanlan & Kelly, 2005; Ryan & Cave, 2005), others intended to evaluate different qualitative methods for destination image identification (Prebensen, 2007). The techniques employed for data collection included free elicitation, different types of visual stimuli, e.g. collage creation and pictures association and words association. Data analysis focused mostly on theme and content analysis.

In this vast body of literature, there are limited efforts in the conceptualization of destination image formation. These have become more popular recently in the attempt of synthesizing previous efforts and provide destination image research its empirically grounded theoretical framework. These studies have been increasingly refining the destination image construct, starting from pre-visitation image formation (Gartner, 1993; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999b) moving on to models that include visitation and post-visitation image formation (Beerli & Martin, 2004). More recently Tasci et al. (2007) proposed an interactive theoretical model explaining the composition of image. However, from the review of the relevant destination image literature it emerged that conceptualization efforts were following a common path. The mainstream studies focusing on marketing, promotion, evaluation, positioning, and consumers' decision making, channeled the focus of investigation on the destination and its characteristics. The social context which the image beholder, or the subject, is embedded in is largely neglected (Gartner, 1993), although it is argued here, it might be an influential element in destination image formation.

The following section focuses on a detailed review of the destination image literature organized in major themes. These include the mainstream destination image definitions and conceptualizations and influential factors of destination image formation; following how knowledge has evolved in the field, the generally accepted image components and more recent conceptualizations of the construct are also explored. A discussion of the role of social context in the destination image formation process introduces the need for a perspective shift. This leads to the presentation of the social representation approach.

2.2.1. Definitions and Conceptualizations

The first definition of image in a tourism context dates back to the 1970's when Hunt (1975) examined image as a factor in tourism development. In his study, he refers to image as the impressions held by a person or persons, about an area or a place in which they do not reside. Since then, destination image has become one of the most largely investigated fields in tourism and many attempts have been made to comprehensively defining the concept. However, the task has shown to be rather challenging.

The definition of image has been subjected to continuous reviews. However, for approximately 20 years, the most agreed upon definition and the most adopted by scholars was Crompton's (1979). The author maintained that "an image may be defined as the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a destination" (p.18). Echtner and Ritchie (1991) built on research in psychology, human information processing and consumer behavior literature and suggested that image is the composition of the perception of the destination as a whole and the perceptions of its individual features or attributes. MacKay and Fesenmaier (1997) examined the effect of promotional visuals on destination image. They explain that the compilation of beliefs and impressions is produced by a variety of sources; information from these is accumulated and processed over time. The result of such information processing is an individual's mental construct. Differently from previous definitions this one takes into consideration the dynamic nature of the process of destination image formation. In the same study destination image is further specified as "a composite of various products (attractions) and attributes woven into a total impression" (MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997, p.538). Jenkins (1999) highlighted the more emotional nature of image, also recognizing some degree of sharing of a destination image within a group. Thus, destination image can be referred to as a formulation of cognitive elements, presumably objective, and all the perceptions, preconceptions, imaginary and emotive components that a particular place is invested with by both individuals and groups.

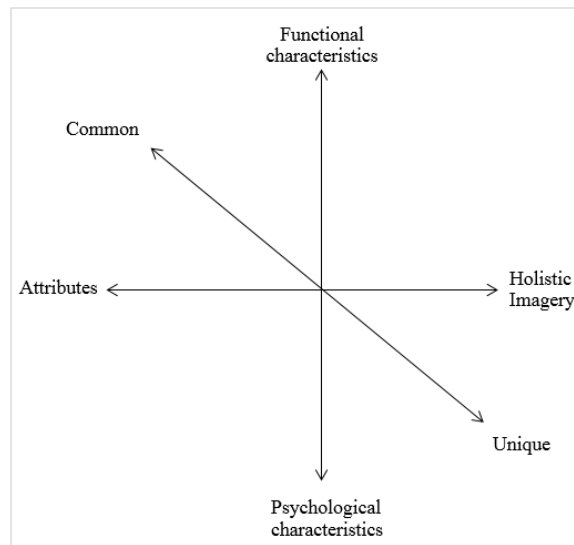
With the progressive maturation of image research, definitions came to embrace a more complex structure. In the attempt to identify its main components, two major threads of destination image conceptualization can be identified: one dimensional and one component-based, which is the most largely adopted.

The dimensional thread

The dimensional thread, is characterized by the identification of dimensions presented as continua (Gartner, 1989; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Ryan & Cave, 2005; Grosspietsch, 2006). In the attempt to identify destination attributes from a product positioning perspective, Gartner (1989) identified two dimensions of destination image interpreted on two continua. These

defined the types of activities available at the destination ranging from ‘natural resources based’ to ‘cultural based’ depending on the activity’s environmental context; and ‘in-group social’ to ‘out-group social’, which Gartner (1989) labelled social interaction dimension. The latter continuum represent activities involving a high level of interaction among one’s own group at one end, or rather provide the conditions for interaction with members of other groups, at the opposite end.

Echtner and Ritchie (1991), suggested three continua (see figure 1) identified as attribute/holistic, functional/psychological, and common/unique. Echtner and Ritchie (1991) presented destination image as a composition of the evaluation of individual elements, or attributes of the destination, for example climate, facilities, and friendliness of locals; but also of more holistic impressions or imagery. The destination features, could present functional characteristics, which are tangible and thus measurable; or rather psychological characteristics, which are more abstract and challenging to measure. The third continuum indicates that images of destinations can also be defined by more ‘common’ characteristics or by distinctive ‘common’ characteristics or by distinctive



Source: Echtner & Ritchie (1993)

Figure 1 The dimensional model

or ‘unique’ traits, events, feelings and auras (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991, 1993). Echtner and Ritchie’s (1991, 1993) three dimensional model found wide application in the literature; it provided a framework especially in studies concerned with destination evaluation, development and marketing (Chen & Kerstetter, 1999; Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001; Hui & Wan, 2003; O’Leary & Deegan, 2005; Grosspietsch, 2006; McCartney et al., 2009).

Finally, Ryan and Cave (2005) aimed at identifying the destination image of Auckland, New Zealand, by means of qualitative methods, through theme analysis of conversational data. Data interpretation presented a conceptualization of image based on two bipolar dimensions:

exciting - relaxing and friendly – threatening (Ryan & Cave, 2005). The dimensional conceptualizations presented do not exclude understanding destination image as the result of interactive components.

The component-based conceptualization thread

According to the components-based conceptualization thread, image is an overall concept with at least two main components cognitive/perceptual and affective (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Baloglu, 1999; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999b; Frias et al., 2008; San Martin & Rodriguez del Bosque, 2008; Pan & Li, 2011). Where cognitive/perceptual refers to the knowledge, or interpretations of knowledge and beliefs of an individual in relation to a place and its attributes. The affective evaluation is the emotional response of the individual to both the external stimuli and the cognitive response to them. These interactive components form an overall construct which is the individual's image of the destination.

Tasci et al. (2007) describe destination image as “an interactive system of thoughts opinions, feelings, visualizations, and intentions toward a destination” (p.200). Adopting a consumer behavior perspective, researchers pointed out that there is a connection between the cognitive and affective components, and tourist behavior. Especially focused on destination selection, it was confirmed by research that image plays a crucial role in predicting consumers' or travelers' preference towards a destination (Gartner & Hunt, 1987; Ross, 1993; Baloglu, 1999; Gartner, 1989; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Grosspietsch, 2006; Wang & Davidson, 2010). This connection was then understood as the conative component (Stepchenkova & Mills, 2010).

This conceptualization was criticized for presenting just the same structure identified for the concept of attitude, recognized as having a cognitive, an affective and a conative component (Ryan & Cave, 2005). However, there is large theoretical agreement in the tourism literature on this conceptualization of destination image. Individuals evaluate the object cognitively, this evaluation triggers affective responses; resulting from the causal relationship between these two components the overall image of a place is formed (Baloglu 1999, Baloglu & McCleary, 1999b; Beerli & Martin, 2004; San Martin & Rodriguez del Bosque, 2008). On the basis of

such causal relationship the traveler makes the choice of a specific destination (Gartner, 1993; Tasci et al., 2007; Prebensen, 2007). This theoretical assertion is confirmed in a number of studies that tested the relationships between these components. Both the cognitive and the affective components directly affect overall image; and the cognitive component affects image also indirectly through the affective component (Baloglu, 1997; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Ryan & Cave, 2005; Chen & Tsai, 2007; San Martin & Rodriguez del Bosque, 2008)

According to some researchers (Milman & Pizam, 1995; Beerli & Martin, 2004), overall image brings an intrinsic either positive or negative evaluation of the destination. However, Ryan and Cave (2005) maintained that individuals can hold simultaneously positive and negative evaluations: the destination can be of poor appearance, but at the same time exciting (Ryan & Cave, 2005). Moreover, such evaluation is relative and contextual (Hu & Ritchie, 1993; Baloglu, 1997). For example Baloglu (1997) focused on destination image variations due to trip characteristics and found significant differences in respondents' evaluations depending on size and composition of their traveling party. Results showed that who was traveling alone had a more positive image compared to couples and families. It was found that even between dyads and triads, the former had more positive images.

The most distinctive trait between the two threads, dimension-based and component-based, is their conceptualization focus. The core of the former is the definition of image as the end product. The main purpose of the studies adopting this perspective is image measurement aimed at inter-destination comparison (Gartner, 1989; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Ryan & Cave, 2005; Grosspietsch, 2006). The component-based conceptualization investigates what are the interacting constructs that result in destination image formation (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Baloglu, 1999; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999b; Frias et al., 2008; San Martin & Rodriguez del Bosque, 2008; Pan & Li, 2011).

In the current literature review it is observed not only that destination image definitions vary by the purpose of the study, but also that many are the authors who do not state any definition in their research. This poses some questions on what is it exactly that is being

measured and investigated. In relation to this trend, Tasci et al. (2007) raise two major questions, one theoretical and one operational. From a theoretical perspective, the non-adoption of a definition causes the risk for the study to lack a theoretical support. At the same time the definition adopted influences the methodology employed (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991, 1993; Tasci et al., 2007). Therefore from an operational perspective the biases introduced by potentially inappropriate measurement methods are maybe more concerning (Tasci et al., 2007). Ultimately, it emerges that the most adopted approach is the components-based conceptualization. Albeit Echtner and Ritchie's (1991, 1993) dimensional operationalization was widely adopted in the literature by scholars of either perspectives.

Before destination image research matured any sort of framework for the conceptualization and measurement of the construct, a variety of frameworks were adopted from other fields of research. In the following section the most common frameworks and approaches which informed these studies are outlined. This review constitutes an important basis for understanding the background to the current conceptualization that neglects the dynamic and social aspects of a destination's image.

2.2.2. Most common frameworks and approaches

The concept of image was introduced in a tourism context from a product development and marketing perspective (Hunt, 1975). This approach is mirrored in the methods and frameworks dominating the literature. The most widely used methods employ pre-determined attributes scales that the respondents are asked to rate either on a Likert scale or a semantic differential scale. In this section, firstly an outline of the frameworks most frequently employed is provided. The frameworks are in decreasing order in frequency of application and how they fit together in the process of methodological sophistication in destination image research. The first frameworks with their related methodologies were directly imported from other disciplines, namely customer behavior (Oliver, 1980) and product evaluation (Martilla & James, 1977). With the increasing number of studies and research, methods were combined and sophisticated in search for more accuracy (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Coshall, 2000; Litvin & Ling, 2001).

Frameworks

The early studies used to treat destinations as products and as such research was primarily concerned with product performance and evaluation (Chaudhary, 2000; Litvin & Ling, 2001; O'Leary & Deegan, 2005), identification of strengths and weaknesses (Baloglu, 1999; Hsu et al., 2004) and 'product' positioning (Gartner, 1989; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999b). In this framework, borrowed from consumer behavior research, Oliver's (1980) expectancy disconfirmation theory is frequently employed.

Oliver's (1980) expectancy disconfirmation theory

A number of studies measuring image variation due to visitation (e.g. Pizam & Milman, 1993; Chaudhari, 2000; Wang & Davidson, 2010), attempted to provide a framework to such investigations employing Oliver's (1980) expectancy disconfirmation theory. From a consumer behavior perspective, Oliver (1980) explained that consumers, build expectations in relation to the product they are about to purchase or consume. Once they have direct experience with the product, its performance can either meet expectations, i.e. confirm expectations, or it may differ from the previously created expectations, i.e. disconfirm expectations. Expectancy disconfirmation can either be positive or negative. Therefore, when destination performance exceeds expectations, the customer experiences positive disconfirmation which usually leads to satisfaction; vice versa, when performance is poorer than expectations, the customer experiences negative disconfirmation, most likely resulting in dissatisfaction (Oliver, 1980). The framework provided by this theory, aided the explanation of travelers' behavior on the basis of a well-established theory. The results yielded with these studies contributed to refine the measurement techniques, and also to further the theoretical conceptualization of the construct. For example information sources, motivations and previous experience were identified as major determinants of the image construct (Gallarza et al. 2002, Tasci et al., 2007).

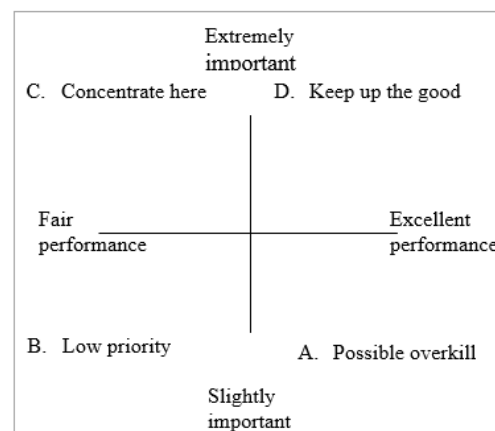
Studies employing this theory usually chose a methodology based on the gap analysis between the pre- and post- visitation assessments of destination image. Measuring image either pre- or post-consumption, or visitation, provides only limited information (Oliver's, 1980). Measuring only pre- visitation image is not common practice. In fact it would only provide

partial and limited information without the comparison of such data against a post- visitation image. Pre-visitation image provides the picture of where marketing efforts and destination-related news positioned the destination in the visitors’ source markets and explains the expectations of travelers. Comparison with post-visitation image shows destination performance and the matching or mismatching with the pre-visitation image. This information provides more accurate data for destination and promotional efforts evaluation as well as a base for identification of destination strengths and weaknesses (Pizam & Milman, 1993; Chaudhary, 2000; Wang & Davidson, 2010). Therefore this approach is a powerful tool for practical implications at an early stage of development strategies. The next framework explained follows these lines.

Importance – performance analysis (IPA)

When a destination is overall positively evaluated, only the performance of the measured attributes is captured. There is no indication of which one of the attributes carries more weight in leading decision to travel to that destination in the future (Litvin & Ling, 2001), nor whether the better rated attributes are the drivers of satisfaction in relation to expectations (Martilla & James, 1977; Joppe, Martin, & Waalen, 2001).

Importance/performance analysis is a technique from marketing research introduced by Martilla and James (1977). Applied to tourist destination image, the IPA enables to evaluate attributes’ performance while identifying salient attributes of the destination and their relative importance to the respondents. The outcome shows destination’s strengths and weaknesses. Results can be visually displayed on a bi-dimensional grid, as displayed in Figure 2. The vertical axis measures the degree of importance, ranging from slightly important to extremely important; the horizontal axis indicates performance, from fair performance to excellent performance. The mean scores corresponding to



Source: Martilla & James (1977)

Figure 2 Importance - Performance analysis

importance and performance for every measurement item are plotted on the grid constituted by four quadrants.

The ease of consultation of the grid makes it an effective management tool. It easily and graphically indicates what should be considered priority. Every quadrant suggests marketing or management actions. When an item is rated high in importance and high in performance (quadrant 1), the management team should keep up the good work since the item is considered important for the traveler, who is satisfied with the quality of the attraction or service the item indicates. Reallocation of resources should be considered for items performing high, but not rated as important in order to avoid waste of resources (quadrant 2). If the item is rated relatively low on the importance continuum and its performance is also low, it might deserve some attention, however its priority is also low (quadrant 3). Marketers and managers should focus efforts on the salient attributes that rated high in importance, but scored low on performance (quadrant 4). Developing on this framework Litvin and Ling (2001) argue that a more comprehensive model can be employed and proposed the Destination Attribute Management Model.

Destination attribute management model (DAMM)

Litvin and Ling (2001) argued that in addition to the gap analysis between visitors and non-visitors, as equivalent to pre- and post-visitation, two additional gaps can be investigated. These would provide more detailed information by further sub-dividing tourists' groups for analysis. Visitors were divided into one-time visitors and repeat visitors; individuals who had not visited the destination were distinguished between prospective visitors, i.e. who already decided to travel to the destination, and potential visitors, i.e. individuals who simply had not travelled to that destination. The researchers maintain that the gap analysis between pre- and post- visit image and visitors' and non-visitors' image, yielded only partial information. Litvin and Ling (2001) suggested that the two additional gaps should be considered in order to better understand and evaluate destination performance. The comparison between potential visitors' and prospective visitors' image, also called 'expectation gap' provides information about the mismatching between the image of whom did not consider the destination as a vacation choice,

and the image of whom was traveling there. This gap analysis may be useful to infer what factor is determinant of the choice to travel. The gap between one-time visitors and repeat visitors or 'loyalty gap' can explain the leading factors to repurchase.

The outlined methods were based on pre – selected attribute lists, and Echtner and Ritchie (1991) argued that a strictly structured methodology is not able to capture the actual image held by respondents, since these are not given the chance to express their own personal perceptions and understanding. Thus Echtner and Ritchie (1991; 1993) developed a method for capturing destination image, with the objective of making it a more comprehensive tool, but also a standardized one which allowed inter-destination comparison.

Echtner and Ritchie (1991, 1993) dimensional framework

Echtner and Ritchie observed that studies attempting to measure the image construct were not conclusive in their measurements. Most works conceptualized destination image as a list of attributes identified at the destination and pre-selected by the researcher. Echtner and Ritchie (1991, 1993) maintained that attributes list are an incomplete tool for capturing image. Echtner and Ritchie (1991) concluded that the structured methods employed in previous works, proved effective in capturing the common and attribute-based dimensions, but failed at identifying the more unique and holistic features. In order to capture these characteristics, Echtner and Ritchie (1991) proposed and tested (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993) a structured mix methodology including attribute evaluation as well as open-ended questions. In addition to evaluating pre-selected attributes on a Likert scale, respondents were asked three open-ended questions, namely, (1) What images come to mind when thinking of the destination X as a vacation destination? (2) How would you describe the atmosphere or mood experienced at the destination X? (3) What distinctive features or unique attractions can you think of at the destination X? The questions were designed for capturing respectively, the more functional-holistic, psychological-holistic and unique dimensions' determinants missed with a traditional attribute list evaluation. Echtner and Ritchie's (1991) conceptualization was largely embraced (MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997; Baloglu, 1997; Chen & Kerstetter, 1999; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 2000; Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001; Hui & Wan, 2003; O'Leary & Deegan, 2005; Grosspietsch, 2006; McCartney et al.,

2009). Its employment yielded information which proved consistently relevant in the context of destination evaluation, positioning and in the identification of strengths and weaknesses of the destination under investigation. Their work represents an important contribution at both theoretical and methodological levels.

However, this measurement does not display the relative importance of the attributes already provided, nor the ones disclosed by respondents. O'Leary and Deegan (2005) are the one example suggesting one way for combining three methodological strategies: open-ended questions were asked to respondents in the preparatory phase in order to find the attributes depicting destination image; these attributes were organized in a scale for importance rating and subsequently for performance evaluation. This measurement tool was applied in combination with pre- and post- visit assessment. Lastly, the mean of each attribute was plotted on the IPA grid. The methods combination proved efficacious for finding attributes important to the French market for choosing Ireland as a vacation destination. The analysis also captured the attributes' performance evaluation based on visitation. One more framework highlighting the importance of letting respondents display their own understanding of image is the repertory grid approach.

The repertory grid approach (RGA)

The repertory grid approach is based on the theory that the cognitive constructs used by individuals are finite in number and bi-polar in nature (Kelly, 1955). This means that every construct is based on relationships of contrast or similarity, so that when describing the characteristics of an object, in this case the destination, these are understood in comparison to another destination's. The method was proposed as a tool for identifying destination image-defining constructs as understood by the travelers, as opposed to being pre-selected by the researcher. The constructs are thus the product of respondents' elicitation and identify similarities and contrasts among three elements, i.e. a triad. For example, in a triad of country destinations, Greece and Italy are found similar in contrast with Switzerland (Pearce, 1982). The repertory grid is based on the individual assessment of a triad of objects. The respondent is asked to indicate in what way any two members of the triad are similar to each other while

different from the third one. In this way the researcher only influences the process by forming the triads. The constructions of image of the destination are revealed by the individuals and so the bias constituted by the researcher's selection of attributes is avoided. This method found appropriate application in positioning studies and competitors' analysis.

The relatively unstructured data collection method required by the RGA, still allows for statistical analysis of the results (Coshall, 2000), but also qualitative analysis. For example, Ryan and Cave (2005) examined Auckland's, New Zealand, image as a tourism destination for both domestic and international visitors, based their methodology on Kelly's (1955) personal constructs theory and the RGA. The researchers analyzed conversational data elicited via open-ended questions. Proceeding from the RGA participants were asked to compare Auckland with Wellington and Christchurch. The data analysis was conducted with theme analysis.

The last two sections drew an overview of the main frameworks and approaches employed in destination image studies. The next section deals with the determining elements recognized as the most influential to destination image formation.

2.2.3. Destination image determining elements: attributes and sub-constructs

In this section the measurement scales and items commonly found in destination image studies are discussed. These measurements led to the identification of sub-constructs contributing to the determination of the main components acting towards destination image formation. Therefore, following this order, the sub-constructs are discussed next. Firstly, the elements involving a direct or indirect relation between the individuals and the destination are presented, i.e. familiarity, information source, destination proximity, visitation and change over time or due to extra-ordinary events. Secondly, the personal factors of the traveler are presented, namely, socio – demographic characteristics and traveling motivations.

Attributes and measuring scales

In order to identify and measure destination image and its components a variety of studies have created and employed attribute- scales. Beerli and Martin (2004) conducted a study intended to propose an empirically validated model with solid explanatory ability of post-

visitation image. The researchers reviewed a number of previous studies' scales of attributes intended to capture destination image. They concluded that there was a lack of homogeneity and that very few of the studies, i.e. Echtner and Ritchie (1993) and Baloglu and McCleary (1999b) tested the reliability and validity of these scales. Beerli and Martin (2004) reviewed the scales of approximately fourteen studies, according to the works they referenced. These ranged from early studies, such as Hunt (1975) and Echtner and Ritchie (1993), to more recent ones such as Baloglu and McCleary's (1999b).

The objectives and the focus of these studies were diverse. Some early studies, focused on assessing activities at a destination (Hunt, 1975; Gartner & Hunt, 1987; Gartner, 1989), while including a few other attributes (e.g. temperature, receptiveness and cities). Baloglu and McCleary (1999b) engaged in synthesizing previous studies in order to design and test a pre-visitation destination image formation model. Echtner and Ritchie (1993) belong to a large pool of other studies testing the appropriateness of attributes lists. The still relatively small number of scales available at the time and the venturing nature of such scales justifies the researchers' conclusion of finding lack of homogeneity in the scales. However, from this review of the literature which comprises a larger number of studies (*around 60*) some agreement is noticeable.

It can be observed that the majority of the studies have a section dedicated to the assessment of destination attributes. Depending on the perspective from which the study is conducted attributes may be more tangible or include some more psychological, less tangible elements. The nature of the destinations being assessed varies. Some works focused on state destinations (Crompton, 1979; Chon, 1991; Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Chaudhary, 2000; Baloglu & Mangaloglu, 2001; Awaritefe, 2004; Hsu et al., 2004), some on specific cities or locations (Dadgostar & Isotalo, 1995; Litvin & Ling, 2001; Hui & Wan, 2003), some others on regions (Milman & Pizam, 1995; Chen & Kerstetter, 1999). Attributes scales are adapted to the specific destination and the purpose of the study. Nevertheless, the scales reflect some general agreement of the research community upon the macro-areas to be included.

One possible categorization identifies eight areas, namely natural environment, cultural

environment and man-made attractions, social environment, political and economic panorama, facilities, leisure and entertainment, accessibility and lastly atmosphere, mood and lifestyle.

This categorization is displayed in Table 2 below.

Table 2 Attributes categorization

<p>Natural environment: weather& climate, scenery& landscape, sun& beaches & sea, parks/forests/lakes/mountains and other natural resource, variety, quality (unspoiled, etc.), rural areas & countryside, wildlife,</p>	<p>Cultural environment and man-made attractions: Cuisine, Costumes, man-made landmarks, monuments, artcrafts, museum/art galleries, historical heritage and sites, events, cities, architecture,</p>	<p>Social environment: receptiveness of locals, Nature of the locals (e.g. hospitable & friendly, honest...),</p>	<p>Political and economic panorama: political stability life conditions, economic stability.</p>
<p>Facilities (and general conditions): roads airports& other transportation, facilities, hotels/resorts/accommodation in general, variety of choice, quality restaurants, bars/pubs, cleanliness& litter free environment, medical facilities, tourist centers (leisure &</p>	<p>Leisure and entertainment: active outdoor activities opportunities, shopping, nightlife entertainment, seasonal sports, family-friendly/activities for children, social participation (only very few studies –e.g.</p>	<p>Accessibility (financial, physical and communication): distance/relative location, cultural distance or similarity, value for money, prices& costs, language barrier/ease of communication, safety& security, terrorism, steeling, pickpockets, etc., physical, personal offence/aggressions, hygiene,</p>	<p>Atmosphere, mood and lifestyle: Adventure, relaxation/peaceful calm/tranquility, crowdedness, novelty/discovery, exciting, escape,</p>

tourism amenities)	Dadgostar & Isotalo, 1995; Nicoletta & Servidio, 2012)	development/urbanization, fuel/gas availability, immigration/visas/currency.	
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Certainly measurement items can be grouped in a variety of ways and categories. The macro-areas identified and the attributes reported are the most consistently found in the literature and provided the basis for this categorization. These works led to the identification of some crucial elements part of destination image formation which were found able to influence the process. These are presented in the following section.

Sub-constructs

The vast majority of the studies measuring destination image, especially within the framework provided by the component-based conceptualization, focused on investigating the impact of sub-constructs as determinants of one or more of the main components. The most common and consistent among these sub-constructs are familiarity with the destination, through information sources and previous experience, and personal factors such as demographic characteristics, motivation and vacation experience.

Familiarity

Familiarity with a destination is extensively investigated since it identifies subsequent stages of image development. Familiarity can be understood as a continuum ranging from ‘not aware’, when an individual has never heard or considered a place as a vacation destination to ‘very familiar’, defining multiple-times repeat visitors. Milman and Pizam’s (1995) work is exemplary in this regard. The researchers examined whether, awareness and familiarity with a destination such as Central Florida, was influential on respondents’ destination image, as well as on their intention to revisit. Based on consumer behavior literature, Milman and Pizam (1995) maintained that awareness is the first necessary condition for destination selection; the second necessary requirement is a positive image. Thus pre-visitation destination image is a reflection of tourist’s destination awareness. Results showed significant difference between both non-aware or aware respondents and those reporting a higher degree of familiarity. Destination image was shown to improve, and intention to revisit increased with higher degree

of familiarity. However, no significant difference was found between the non-aware stage and the awareness stage. Therefore, awareness does not necessarily imply interest or positive inclination to destination selection, it rather provides the necessary condition for the initiation of curiosity in increasing the degree of awareness, leading eventually to action (Milman & Pizam, 1995). It is widely acknowledged that familiarity is a determinant variable of destination image (Gartner & Hunt, 1987; Milman & Pizam, 1995; Baloglu, 2001; Carneiro & Crompton, 2009).

It was also consistently found, with very few exceptions (Chaudhary, 2000) that an increase in familiarity, results in a more positive image of the destination (Baloglu, 2001; Milman & Pizam, 1995; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997). However, it was tested that it is rather a more accurate image of the destination what is presented by the respondents, which positively influenced (re) purchasing intentions (Milman & Pizam, 1995). As MacKay and Fesenmaier (1997) explain, familiarity can be both a positive as well as a negative influence on destination image. It creates a more realistic and detailed image of the destination, especially when familiarity is fed by visitation. By reducing uncertainty, visitation positively influences destination image and increases perceived destination attractiveness. However, beyond a certain degree of familiarity, the trend tends to be reversed, so that excessive familiarity with a destination would decrease attractiveness and establish a negative relationship with destination image (MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997).

The concept of familiarity is a broad one and it is mostly operationalized as a dichotomous variable, i.e. whether the traveler had previous experience at the destination or not (Pearce, 1982; Ahmed, 1991; Chon, 1991; Hu & Ritchie, 1993; Chaudhary, 2000). However, familiarity can be defined as the amount of the individual's previous destination-related experiences. In fact, Baloglu (2001) understood familiarity "as a combination of amount of information and previous experience, including multiple visits."(p.128). Therefore, information sources (Baloglu, 1997, 2001; Vogt & Andereck, 2003; Hanlan & Kelly, 2005), respondents' country of origin (Chen & Kerstetter, 1999; Joppe et al., 2001; Hui & Wan, 2003) and visitation (Ahmed, 1991; Chon, 1991; Hu & Ritchie, 1993; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a; Hanlan & Kelly,

2005) can be placed under the umbrella of familiarity. In fact these are all elements determining the degree of familiarity of a traveler with a destination (Prebensen, 2007).

Information sources

Since the first conceptualization of tourist destination image formation, information sources are considered one crucial determinant (Gunn, 1972). The amount, type and frequency of exposure to sources of information influence the individual's knowledge and degree of familiarity with the destination (Gunn, 1972; Gartner, 1993). Gunn (1972) and Gartner (1993) explained the image formation process featuring different stages of information accumulation. Focusing on travel experience, Gunn (1972) described a circular model whereby the individual starts with gathering mental images, goes through visitation and continues to gather information upon return. Gartner (1993) examined the agents, or sources of information involved and defined them as either covert, i.e. unknown or overt, i.e. known. They can also be identified in relation to the degree of control promoters have on the information: this can be induced, i.e. high control, or organic, i.e. low control.

The amount and type of information individuals are exposed to and gather is a determinant of destination awareness. In this regard, Milman and Pizam (1995) found that the frequency of exposure to advertising and promotional material related to the destination was significantly higher for respondents with higher degree of familiarity, compared to either non-aware or aware respondents (Milman & Pizam, 1995). Whereas, Wang and Davidson (2010) observed that package-tours travelers dedicated considerably less time to destination-related information search, relying more on the already fixed nature of the trip and the high perceived level of certainty. Thus, this type of travelers tended to hold more induced rather than organic images.

Therefore, degrees of familiarity depend on exposure to information related to the destination whether promotional, i.e. induced, or sought by the individual, i.e. organic (Gartner, 1993). Other studies verified the influential power of information sources on destination image formation and what were the sources travelers relied upon (Baloglu, 2001; Hui & Wan, 2003; Hanlan & Kelly, 2005; Prebensen, 2007; Nicoletta & Servidio, 2012). Gartner and Hunt (1987) investigated destination image's role in destination choice, and examined the determinants of

image change over a twelve year period. In their study conclusion, the authors accepted that advertisement and promotional material together with conversations with acquaintances, were agents of image change. The majority of the studies found that it is the nature of information, both visual and non-visual, and the exposure to them which is influential. O'Leary and Deegan (2005) engaged in determining the image of Ireland for French travelers and the relative importance of the destination attributes. The researchers maintained that direct experience and personal recommendations by family and friends were the most accredited sources of information. Indeed, it was consistently found in the literature that the most influential source of information is word of mouth (Gartner & Hunt, 1987; Baloglu, 1997; Hanlan & Kelly, 2005; O'Leary & Deegan, 2005; Grosspietsch, 2006). Baloglu and Mangalolu (2001) engaged in establishing the relationship between the images held by U.S. travel intermediaries such as tour operators (TO) and travel agents (TA), and the promotion of destinations and packages offered. Results indicated that the images held by the travel intermediaries is especially important since it influences their choice of what destinations to promote, since they would not suggest destinations they hold negative images of. In addition, it was found that the intermediaries' images were passed on to their customers. This was explained by the identification of TO and TA as both formal and personal, or social, making them influential information sources for customers.

Cultural influence, proximity or relative distance

The country of origin of the individual is found to be a determinant of the degree of familiarity. Individuals residing geographically close to the destination are found to be relatively more familiar with it, compared to individuals residing farther away. Proximity to the destination increases the chances of exposure to both induced and organic information related to it (Crompton, 1979; Ahmed, 1991; Baloglu, 2001; Pavesi, Gartner, & Denizci-Guillet, 2015). In addition, there are higher chances that people residing closer to the destination have previously visited it (Hunt, 1975; Gartner & Hunt, 1987; Ahmed, 1991).

A number of studies have focused on destination image variation depending on travelers country of origin (Crompton, 1979; Ahmed, 1991; Chen & Kerstetter, 1999; Baloglu, 2001;

Hui & Wan, 2003; Hsu et al., 2004). These consistently confirmed that different nationality groups hold different images of a same destination (Hunt, 1975; Gartner, 1989; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 2000; Joppe et al., 2001; Hui & Wan, 2003; Prebensen, 2007). The variation due to this variable is usually attributed to the 'relative distance' both geographical and cultural of travelers from the destination in relation to their country of origin. Not only the amount and type of destination-related information circulated in the country of origin varies depending on the countries involved (Crompton, 1979; Ahmed, 1991; Baloglu, 2001), but also the cultural background of the traveler might influence different interpretations and thus evaluations of the same object (MacKay & Fesenmaier, 2000).

Studies' results are largely homogeneous in founding nationality, country of origin, or destination proximity to be a destination image variation agent. However it has been argued that these results are not conclusive (Baloglu, 2001), or at least the reasons of such variations are not readily available (Chen & Kerstetter, 1999). In fact, destination proximity was found both negatively and positively related to destination image. Studies found that the more distant the country of residence of the traveler, the more positive the destination image (Hunt, 1975; Crompton, 1979; Hui & Wan, 2003; Hsu et al., 2004). These results are commonly explained in terms of novelty seeking in more distant destinations (Hsu et al., 2004); these results were also ascribed to distance providing reduced chances of previous visitation, which may also result in negative experiences (MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997). Fewer are the cases displaying positive correlation between proximity and destination image. However, these results are normally interpreted as supportive of the assertion that a higher degree of familiarity with the destination provides a more positive evaluation of destination image (Gartner & Hunt, 1987; Ahmed, 1991). And proximity to the destination reduces travelers' risk perception (MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997; San Martin & Rodriguez del Bosque, 2008), contributing to a more positive perception of the destination. Even if other studies found that residents of neighboring countries were the most critical of destination's performance (Prebensen, 2007).

Visitation

Visitation, is a crucial step in the familiarization process, which might be understood as

the step dividing awareness and familiarity, on the familiarity continuum (Gunn, 1972; Milman & Pizam, 1995; Wang & Davidson, 2010). Some researchers investigated image variation due to actual visitation comparing travelers' pre- and post- visitation images (Pearce, 1982; Chaudhary, 2000; Li & Vogelsong, 2006; Pavesi et al., 2015). For example Wang and Davidson (2010) examined the image of the destination Australia in the Chinese market focusing on participants of package holiday. Results showed that the perception of more than half of the measured items improved after visitation. Chon (1991) investigated destination image variation between pre-visitiation and post-visitiation of American travelers to South Korea and also found that first-time travelers' image of the destination displayed positive change. Similar conclusions were reached by Pizam and Milman (1993) and also O'Leary and Deegan (2005). Both studies focused on destination performance, the former by testing Oliver's (1980) expectations disconfirmation theory, and the latter employing Martilla and James's (1977) IPA.

Pre- and post- visitation approach found application in evaluative contexts, where the main focus is on performance and satisfaction. Other researchers compared destination image between individuals who visited the destination (visitors) and those who did not (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a; Hsu et al., 2004; Awaritefe, 2004). These studies concluded that images held by whom visited the destination and by whom did not, are different as the two groups focus on different elements of the same destination (Hsu et al., 2004). For example, Awaritefe (2004) compared the relative importance of attributes of Nigeria as evaluated by domestic visitors and non-visitors. It was found that visitors valued man-made attractions and facilities more, while non-visitors highlighted the impressiveness of the natural environment. Baloglu and McCleary (1999a) found that while perceptual/cognitive elements were determinant in both visitors' and non-visitors' image, affective elements were distinctive of the visitors' group. These findings support MacKay and Fesenmaier's (1997), that show how more cognitive evaluations of the destination were typical of a lower degree of familiarity, whereas experience with the destination resulted in more affective evaluations.

In summary, different travelers' segments, identified by different degrees of familiarity with the destination, hold different images. However, it does not necessarily mean that a higher

degree of familiarity corresponds to a better image; it rather presents a more complex and detailed one (Pizam & Milman, 1993; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a; Litvin & Ling, 2001).

Time and events

Gartner and Hunt (1987) examined image change of the state of Utah employing the same measurement tool twelve years apart. Findings showed that the image of the activities and attractions investigated, changed in a positive direction. Results also suggested that change agents were represented by a mix of organic and induced information sources. The researchers acknowledged the role played by media, promotional efforts and conversations with friends and relatives in the shaping of image.

Image of a destination changes slowly over time (Gartner & Hunt, 1987; Gartner & Shen, 1992). Gartner (1986) researched short term temporal changes of destination image in relation to destination's activities and attractions. The two measurements were conducted four months apart. Little change resulted from seasonal differences suggesting that a longer time is needed for image variation in absence of extra-ordinary events. However, image was found to change rapidly due to events such as sports events (Kim & Morrison, 2005) or cultural events (Richards & Wilson, 2004). Results showed change in a positive direction in the short term. However, it was shown that such positive image modifications are not durable; they rather need to be maintained and fostered with systematic programs (Richards & Wilson, 2004). A variation of this concept is provided by image change due to dramatic events. Destination image experiences a change in the short term, in this case in a negative direction. However, time allows the original image of the destination to be restored (Gartner & Shen, 1992).

There is no shared agreement upon the durability of changes in image caused by any type of event. Kim and Morrison (2005) after investigating image change of South Korea after the 2002 FIFA World Cup, stated that destination image can be altered in the short term and last in time. However the researchers were not conclusive about the durability of such modifications. Gartner and Shen (1992) examined the image of China as a vacation destination in the American market before and after the violent manifestations in Tiananmen Square. The

assessment of image change was conducted through two studies, one completed just before the violence outburst and the second was repeated one year after the conflict. Data showed that the determinant attributes of image did not change homogeneously. Moreover, the researchers found the negative change to be more of a shift in attitude rather than a worsening of image in relation to the measured attractions and services. Results are not conclusive on durability of image change due to one-time events and dramatic events. Findings seem to suggest that image of a destination can be considerably altered quickly, however the quickest, but most incisive and durable changes are the ones caused by visitation.

Personal factors

Personal factors refer to individuals' characteristics, which have been acknowledged to be determinant of how the image beholder understands reality. These include socio – demographic characteristics, traveling motivations and experience in pleasure travel.

Socio-demographic characteristics

The vast majority of the studies, quantitative in nature include the collection of socio-demographic characteristics of respondents. Most commonly these are age, gender, educational level, country of origin, household annual average income. A number of studies also engaged in testing image variation in relation to these characteristics (MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997; Chen & Kerstetter, 1999; Baloglu, 2001; Hui & Wan, 2003; Beerli & Martin, 2004). Results consistently showed that socio-demographic characteristics of respondents are determinants of image, especially age, educational level, income and country of origin. However, variations are not missing, since also gender (Chen & Kerstetter, 1999) marital status and occupation (Baloglu, 1997) were found significant by some researchers. Atypical is the study by MacKay and Fesenmaier (1997) that concludes that demographic characteristics are not very influential predictors. It is generally agreed upon that image undergoes variations depending on demographic characteristics, albeit results from the literature are not homogeneous and conclusive in what characteristics exactly influence what component.

Results seem case specific, depending on the distribution of the population in relation to the type of market typical for that destination and the destination relative to the respondents'

location. In addition, socio-demographic characteristics should not be taken in isolation from other characteristics (Hui & Wan, 2003) as age could be a determinant of image variation because of different reasons, such as different exposure to information sources, but also to purchasing power.

Motivations

Travel destinations are chosen on the basis of individual's motivations, i.e. the needs the individual wants to fulfil through traveling. Motivations lead individuals' choice to travel and shape destination image before and after visitation (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999b). Therefore, motivations are important information in the context of consumer behavior in a traveling context (Pizam & Milman, 1993; Grosspietsch, 2006). Studies investigating traveling motivations were also concerned with destination choice and travel intentions (Baloglu, 1999; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Nicoletta & Servidio, 2012). Motivations normally vary depending on the destination under investigation. Pizam and Milman (1993) found that travelers to Spain were sun-seekers, or visiting friends and relatives, or were interested in cultural sites. Grosspietsch (2006) found that the main motivations for traveling to Rwanda were seeking nature and adventure, followed by recreation and culture. Beerli and Martin (2004) reported that international tourists in Lanzarote, Canary Islands, travelled for increasing their knowledge, seeking relaxation, entertainment and culture. Dadgostar and Isotalo (1995) explicitly connected the motivations of near-home tourists traveling to a close-by destination, with leisure motives. These are generally agreed to fulfil main needs for relaxation, diversion and social participation.

Beyond the case-specific reasons for traveling, it is important to understand how motivations feed into the process of image formation. Hu and Ritchie (1993), investigated destination attractiveness variation by two traveling motivations: educational and recreational, which the researchers call vacation contexts. It was concluded that tourists' evaluation of the same attributes were different depending on their traveling context. What was evaluated positively in one context was not necessarily acceptable in the other, so that some attributes evaluated positively in the educational context, may provoke negative evaluations in the

recreational context. There is general agreement in the literature on the relationship between motivations and image formation. Motivations are determinants of the affective component of image (Beerli & Martin, 2004; San Martin & Rodriguez del Bosque, 2008; Nicoletta & Servidio, 2012). Thus, congruence between motivations for travel to the destination and what is offered at the destination creates positive influence on the affective component of image (Beerli & Martin, 2004).

The growing body of literature has recently reached a stage where the development of a comprehensive theoretical framework is of utmost importance. On the one hand, image studies have been target of criticism for lacking a solid theoretical framework. On the other hand, time is mature, given all the scholarly efforts and valuable contributions, for the emergence of an integrative framework. Destination image formation can display limited studies, making of this area one of the least investigated in the field (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Tasci et al., 2007). In the following section an overview of these remarkable works is provided.

2.2.4. Destination Image Formation

The proposed few models of destination image formation (Gunn, 1972; Gartner, 1993; Baloglu and McCleary, 1999b; Beerli & Martin 2004; Tasci et al., 2007) share some fundamental dimensions and differ in some aspects, possibly the most relevant of which are the researchers' perspective and objectives.

Gunn (1972) and Gartner (1993) adopted a consumer behavior perspective. Baloglu and McCleary (1999b), took a more explanatory approach focusing on proposing and testing the relationships composing the model of destination image formation. Baloglu and McCleary (1999b) were also the first ones to verify their model providing empirical support to their propositions. Proceeding from Baloglu and McCleary's (1999b) work, Beerli and Martin (2004) proposed and tested empirically a model that included visitation and post- visitation image. Tasci et al. (2007) rather intended to synthesize the efforts shaping the literature from the 1990s. Their work is primarily conceptual and focuses not only on a thorough examination of the literature, but also on providing a conceptualization of the formation process rooted in widely accepted modelling works, e.g. Fakeye and Crompton (1991), Gartner (1993), Echtner

and Ritchie (1993), Baloglu (1997), MacKay and Fesenmaier (1997; 2000), Baloglu and McCleary (1999b) and Coshall (2000). Table 4 at the end of this sub-chapter provides a thematic summary of the reviewed literature on destination image.

Destination image formation models: components and determinants influencing the process

The models introduced are hereby presented in chronological order. Attention is placed on the stages of the process through its components and construct's determinants.

Destination image formation and travel experience

In 1972, Gunn described the experience of a traveler and how his/her image of the destination undergoes subsequent modifications through a seven-stage process. After the gathering of mental images about the vacation, these are then modified due to additional information until the decision to travel is taken. Traveling to the destination, participation at the destination and the return trip, are sequential steps. Moreover, accumulation of images continues based on the individual's direct experience after the completion of the trip.

Formation agents and the image formation continuum

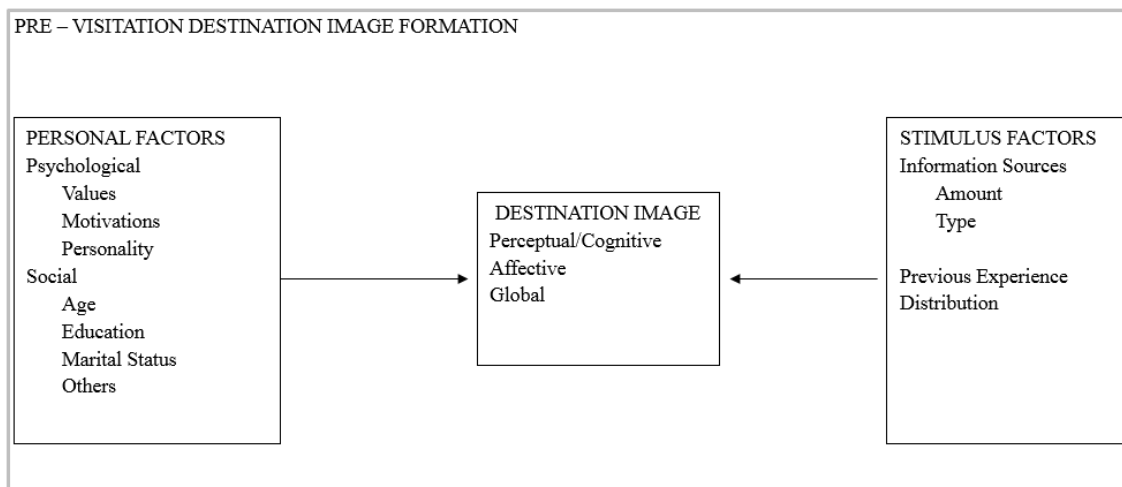
Building on this line, Gartner (1993) proposed a model of image development as a continuum of eight stages marked by formation agents. These are distinguished on the basis of the degree of control exercised by the promoter and therefore the credibility that the information holds in the perceiver's eyes. The stages are named overt induced, covert induced, overt induced II, covered induced I, covered induced II, autonomous, unsolicited organic, solicited organic and organic. Therefore, the continuum proceeds from the induced end, where the control exercised by the agent is stronger and finds its conclusion in the actual visitation, the organic stage. This model is hierarchical, but not linear. It is rather circular, as the visitor who now holds a renewed image, feeds back into the cycle as a new provider of information as unsolicited/solicited organic agent.

Pre-visitiation destination image formation

Baloglu and McCleary (1999b) adopted a managerial and developmental perspective. Based on previous studies, they developed a model in the framework of vacation destination

selection, representing determinants of image formation pre-visitation. Figure 3 below visually displays the authors' conceptual model. The authors identified two components of destination image in absence of actual visitation. These are stimulus factors and personal factors. Amount and type of information sources, including previous experience and distribution channels, represent the former. The latter is twofold: psychological characteristics such as values, motivations and personality, and social characteristics such as age, education and marital status. According to the conceptual model, these determinants influence the cognitive and affective evaluation of the destination forming its overall image. Baloglu and McCleary (1999b) found that amount and type of information sources and tourists' socio-demographics, especially age and education, influence directly the cognitive evaluation of the destination attributes; these perceptions, in combination with the socio-psychological motivations create an affective response to the destination. These feelings towards the destination are the main actors in overall image creation. The researchers found that information sources are positively related to perception, while age and education are negatively related. One particularly relevant finding of their research, consistent with much of the literature, is that word of mouth is the most influential source in pre-visitation image formation. Moreover within the personal factors component it directly influences destination image, together with knowledge, prestige and social motivations.

Baloglu and McCleary's (1999b) study was a crucial step forward for the conceptualization



Source: Baloglu & McCleary (1999)

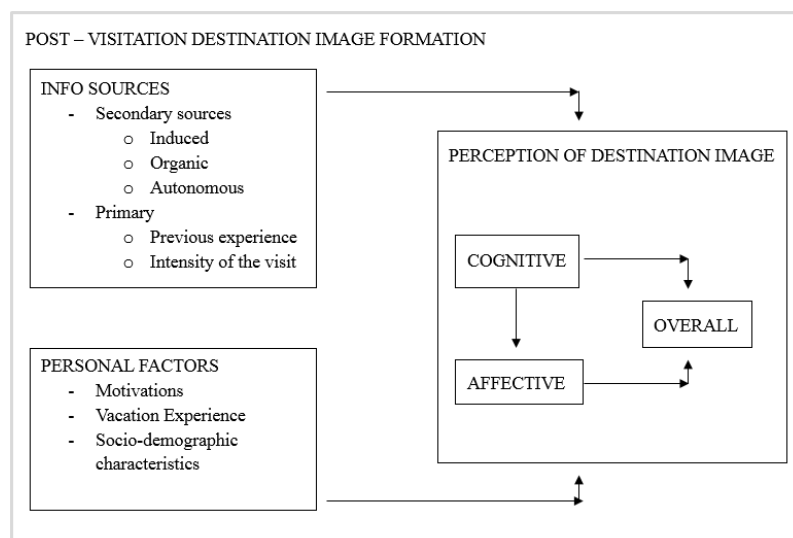
Figure 3 Model of pre-visitation destination image formation

of a theoretical framework and the understanding of destination image formation. Even though perfectly in line with the scope of their research, this model is only concerned with pre-visitation image formation. In addition, this is a linear model, which does not consider a subsequent phase of information collection, assimilation or divulgation leading to further modification. The linear model makes of destination image a static construct (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999b).

Post-visitation destination image formation model

Beerli and Martin (2004) set off to develop and validate empirically a model, which would be able to explain post-visitation image and the different factors concurring to it. With this study the researchers intended to address the criticism of the lack of a conceptual framework for the investigation of destination image. Synthesizing previous knowledge from the literature with this objective in mind, the model intends to test the influence of the factors participating to post-visitation image formation. More precisely the relationships between the cognitive and affective components of image and information sources both secondary e.g. media and primary i.e. visitation; but also personal factors, such as motivations and travel experience and socio-demographic characteristics, including age, gender, educational level, social class and country of origin. Figure 4 visually displays the authors' model.

Through an explanatory research design based on quantitative methods of data collection and analysis the authors tested the model. Results display no significant influence played by secondary induced sources on the cognitive component. The only secondary source showing significant and positive influence on the



Source: Beerli & Martin (2004)

Figure 4 Model of post-visitation destination image

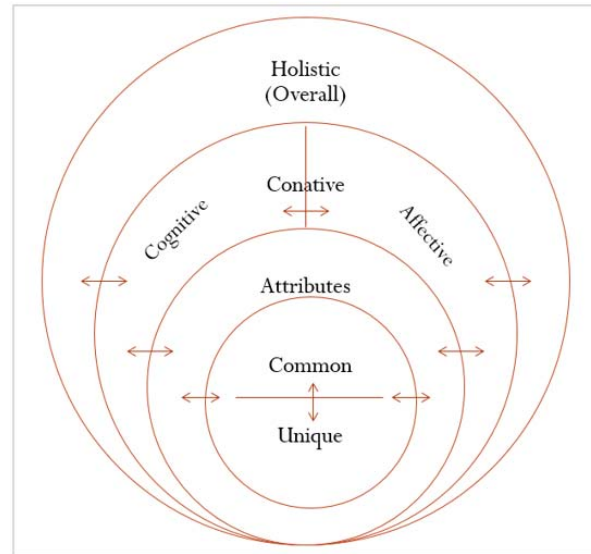
cognitive component is the TAs' staff. This result suggests that the social element, in form of the relationship developed with the customers, was the influential agent. Moreover organic sources significantly influence the cognitive component. Word of mouth was considered the most trustworthy source and it influenced the cognitive component. Finally, the primary source of information, visitation, was found significantly influential.

Personal factors' relationships with image components were also tested. Motivations were found significant in influencing the affective image, supporting the assertion that the congruence between the offer at the destination and motivations positively influences the affective component. Experience with leisure travel also displayed positive relationships depending on individuals' familiarity with the destination: in the case of first-time visitors, previous leisure travel experience is positively related to their cognitive image, whereas it has positive influence on the affective component for repeaters. This suggests that previous traveling experience makes tourist generally more aware and thus more tolerant when evaluating a destination. They have been in contact with other realities before and use them for comparison. Socio-demographic characteristics of age, gender, educational level and social status of the respondents shows moderate, but significant relationships with both cognitive and affective components. Whereas country of origin showed the greatest significance in influencing both cognitive and affective components.

A conceptualization of interacting components

Tasci et al. (2007) examined the implications of Echtner and Ritchie's (1991, 1993) work. The authors looked at both the theoretical and operational evolutions in the literature and then proposed and illustrated (see Figure 5) a conceptualization of destination image proceeding from the framework of Echtner and Ritchie (1991, 1993). The authors define destination image as "an interactive system of thoughts, opinions, feelings, visualizations, and intentions towards a destination" (p.200). The model displays the object's attributes at the center. These are placed

on the common-unique continuum. The attributes are placed within the cognitive – affective components which connect to the conative dimension of destination image. The interrelated components result in a holistic/overall image. According to the interactive system any change in one component results in a change in the entire interactive system.



Source: Tasci, Gartner, & Cavusgil (2007)

Figure 5 A system of interacting components

Table 3 Summary by concentration areas

Research Stance	Studies
Marketing/promotion	Jenkins, 1999; Hanlan & Kelly, 2005; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Wang & Davidson, 2010; Tasci & Holecek, 2007; Grosspietsch, 2006; Baloglu, 2001; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a; Chon, 1991; Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 2000; Dadgostar & Isotalo, 1995; Prebensen, 2007; Nicoletta & Servidio, 2012; Walmsley & Young, 1998; Hui & Wan, 2003; Hu & Ritchie, 1993; Li & Vogelsong, 2006; Crompton, 1979; Hunt, 1975; Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997; Ryan & Cave, 2005; Litvin & Ling, 2001; Gartner, 1993; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Prayag, 2007; Pan & Li, 2011.
Consumer behavior	Gartner & Hunt, 1987; Ross, 1993; Coshall, 2000; Chen & Kerstetter, 1999; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a; Chon, 1991; Pizam & Milman, 1993; Awaritefe, 2004; Gartner, 1986; Hu & Ritchie, 1993; Crompton, 1979; Milman & Pizam, 1995; Ryan & Cave, Structuring destination image: a qualitative approach, 2005; Baloglu, 1999; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Sirakaya, Sonmez, & Choi, 2001; White, 2004.
Destination evaluation and positioning	Gartner, 1989; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Wang & Davidson, 2010; McCartney et al., 2009; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a; Chaudhary, 2000; Hsu et al., 2004; O'Leary & Deegan, 2005; Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001; Nicoletta & Servidio, 2012; Reilly, 1990; Joppe et al., 2001; Hui & Wan, 2003; Li & Vogelsong, 2006; Ahmed, 1991; Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Litvin & Ling, 2001.
Formation	Vogt & Andereck, 2003; Gartner, 1993; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Tasci et al., 2007; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999b.
Methodology	

Quantitative	Gartner & Hunt, 1987; Gartner, 1989; San Martin & Rodriguez del Bosque, 2008; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991, 1993; Wang & Davidson, 2010; Ross, 1993; Baloglu, 1999; Baloglu, 2001; Baloglu, 1997; Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Baloglu & Mangaloglu, 2001; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999b; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a; McCartney et al., 2009; Tasci & Holecek, 2007; Grosspietsch, 2006; Chen & Kerstetter, 1999; Pearce, 1982; Chon, 1991; Gartner & Shen, 1992; Chaudhary, 2000; Pizam & Milman, 1993; Hsu et al., 2004; O'Leary & Deegan, 2005; Awaritefe, 2004; Dadgostar & Isotalo, 1995; Nicoletta & Servidio, 2012; Stern & Krakover, 1993; Walmsley & Young, 1998; Joppe et al., 2001; Hui & Wan, 2003; Hu & Ritchie, 1993; Li & Vogelsong, 2006; Crompton, 1979; Milman & Pizam, 1995; Hunt, 1975; Ahmed, 1991; Litvin & Ling, 2001; Beerli & Martin, 2004.
Qualitative	Hanlan & Kelly, 2005; Coshall, 2000; Prebensen, 2007; Reilly, 1990; Prayag, 2007.
Mixed-methods*	Vogt & Andereck, 2003; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997; Ryan & Cave, 2005; Ryan, 1995.
Theoretical	
Review	Jenkins, 1999; Gallarza, et al., 2002; Tasci et al., 2007; Pike, 2002; Stepchenkova & Mills, 2010.
Conceptual model	Gunn, 1972; Gartner, 1993; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999b; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Tasci et al., 2007.
Most acknowledged frameworks**	
Gunn (1972)	Baloglu, 1997; Prebensen, 2007
Gartner (1993)	Baloglu, 1997; Prebensen, 2007
Echtner and Ritchie (1991, 1993)	McCartney et al., 2009; Grosspietsch, 2006; Chen & Kerstetter, 1999; O'Leary & Deegan, 2005; Hui & Wan, 2003; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997; Tasci, et al., 2007.
Oliver (1980)	Wang & Davidson, 2010; Chaudhary, 2000; Pizam & Milman, 1993.
Kelly (1955)	Coshall, 2000; Pearce, 1982; Ryan & Cave, 2005; Prayag, 2007.
Martilla and James (1977)	O'Leary & Deegan, 2005; Joppe et al., 2001; Litvin & Ling, 2001.
Focus areas	
Proximity	San Martin & Rodriguez del Bosque, 2008; Gartner & Hunt, 1987; Gartner, 1989; Hsu et al., 2004; Prebensen, 2007; Stern & Krakover, 1993; Joppe et al., 2001; Hui & Wan, 2003; Crompton, 1979; Hunt, 1975; Ahmed, 1991; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Gallarza, et al., 2002; Dadgostar & Isotalo, 1995.
Familiarity	Hanlan & Kelly, 2005; Gartner & Hunt, 1987; Grosspietsch, 2006; Vogt &

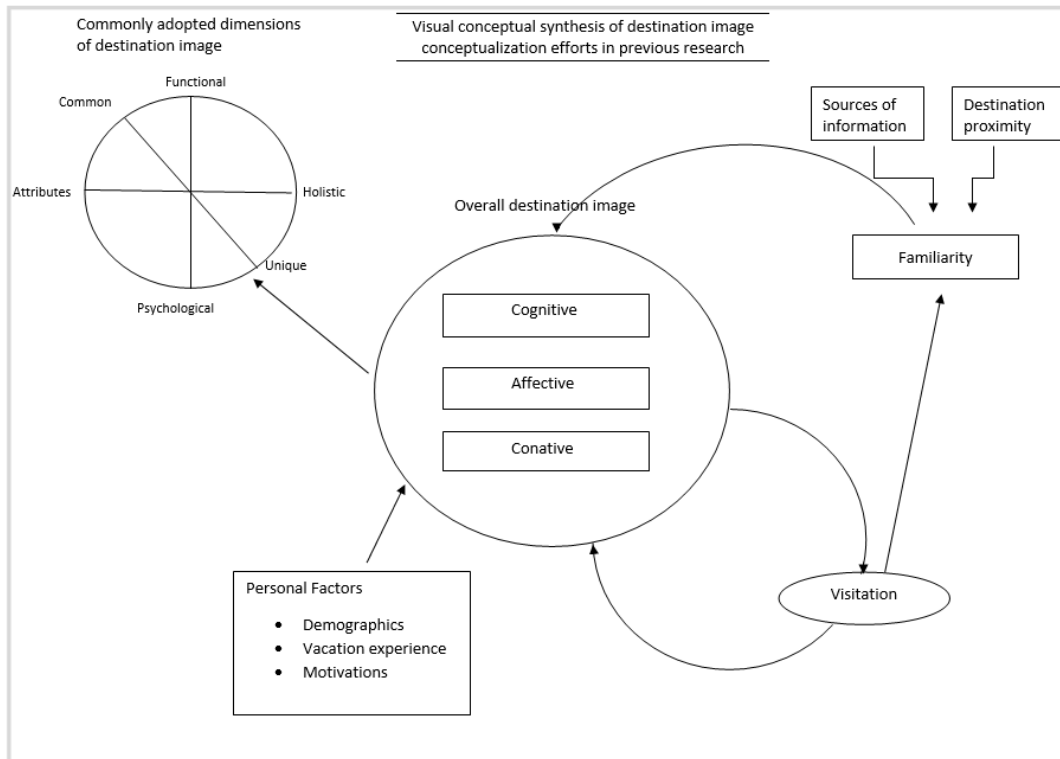
	Andereck, 2003; Baloglu, 2001; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a; Pearce, 1982; Chon, 1991; Chaudhary, 2000; Hsuet al., 2004; Awaritefe, 2004; Baloglu & Mangaloglu, 2001; Prebensen, 2007; Walmsley & Young, 1998; Hu & Ritchie, 1993; Crompton, 1979; Milman & Pizam, 1995; Ahmed, 1991; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997; Ryan & Cave, 2005; Litvin & Ling, 2001; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Carneiro & Crompton, 2009; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991.
Information Sources	Hanlan & Kelly, 2005; Gartner & Hunt, 1987; Baloglu, 1997; Grosspietsch, 2006; Baloglu & Mangaloglu, 2001; Baloglu, 2001; Stern & Krakover, 1993; Hui & Wan, 2003; Milman & Pizam, 1995; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Baloglu, 1999; Carneiro & Crompton, 2009; Frias, Rodriguez & Castaneda, 2008.
Image change	
One or multiple one-shot-measurements	Hanlan & Kelly, 2005; Gartner & Hunt, 1987; Wang & Davidson, 2010; McCartney et al., 2009; Vogt & Andereck, 2003; Chon, 1991; Gartner & Shen, 1992; Pizam & Milman, 1993; Hsu et al., 2004; O'Leary & Deegan, 2005; Awaritefe, 2004; Gartner, 1986; Li & Vogelsong, 2006; Pearce, 1982; Walmsley & Young, 1998; Ahmed, 1991; Litvin & Ling, 2001; Kim & Morrison, 2005.
Process	Vogt & Andereck, 2003.
Expectation/Satisfaction	Pizam & Milman, 1993; O'Leary & Deegan, 2005; Joppe et al., 2001; Litvin & Ling, 2001.

*Mixed methods includes those studies which place equal emphasis on different methods between quantitative and qualitative methods. Thus it excludes those studies which use qualitative methods for preparatory purposes, or include a couple open-ended questions in their questionnaires which are the main research tool. All these studies are included in the Quantitative category, since their main focus is rather on this methodology

**Frameworks includes only the studies which adopted the framework for guiding the investigation at large. It excludes the studies which only acknowledge these frameworks in their literature reviews.

2.2.5. A synthesis

Despite the variety of approaches, purposes and definitions, some agreement was reached to date. Figure 6 provides a visual interpretation of a synthesis, of the main themes largely accepted in the destination image literature.



Source: developed from the adaptation of Baloglu and McCleary (1999b), Beerli and Martin (2004), Tasci et al. (2007), and Echtner and Ritchie (1991, 1993)

Figure 6 Visual interpretation of a synthesis of the destination image literature

Destination image can be operationalized in relation to identified characteristics that can be placed on three dimensions. These vary on continua ranging respectively from functional - psychological, attributes – holistic, and common – unique. On the basis of these stimuli, the overall image of the destination is formed through the interactive relationships of its main components. These can be distinguished into a cognitive component, which comprises of knowledge and/or beliefs about the destination; an affective component, which includes emotional responses to the cognitive component and to personal factors, such as motivations. Lastly, the conative component identifies the direction of behavior towards the destination. These main components are influenced by a variety of elements, or sub-constructs, which influence destination image. These influential sub-constructs are familiarity with the destination, constituted by amount and type of information sources and relative distance from the destination. Personal factors are also influential. These include individuals’ socio-demographic characteristics, previous travel experiences and motivations for traveling. Crucial is experience with the actual destination. This feeds into the process as new source of

information. This can refer to a first visitation, but also to subsequent visitations. In fact, a new visitation may provide additional information. Visitation can adjust destination image by modifying it or confirming the information that shaped pre-visitation image.

Gallarza et al. (2002) reviewed and discussed the image literature of the previous three decades. The authors provided a taxonomy of the employed methods for the measurement of destination image with the objectives of helping other scholars in choosing the measurement method, and suggesting a conceptual model. The authors' analysis of the literature gravitates around three basic concepts or dimensions previously suggested by Mazanec (1994). According to this structure, studies focused on subjects' evaluation of an object and its attributes. Where the subject is the individual who holds destination image and the object is the destination under investigation. The attributes are the identified characteristics of the destination. Thus, under investigation are the relationships between these elements: the images held by the subjects (1st dimension), about a destination (2nd dimension) measured in relation to specific attributes (3rd dimension).

The researchers conclude that efforts focusing on destination image formation processes display two main approaches: one treats image as a static construct and the second as a dynamic construct. Gallarza et al. (2002) define static the study of the relationship between destination image and tourist behavior, for example destination choice (Gartner & Hunt, 1987; Wang & Davidson, 2010). Whereas, dynamic is the investigation of the structure of the construct and the process of its formation (Gartner, 1993; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999b).

Gallarza et al.'s (2002) synthesis of the literature proposed a theoretical model. This is not an operational one. It defined destination image through four features, or defining elements. Thus, destination image is complex, meaning that it allows for various analytical interpretations; it is multiple, meaning that destination image is an overall output of multiple attributes' images; and finally that there are many influencing factors concurring to destination image formation. It is relative, meaning that it varies from individual to individual and is understood in comparison to other objects. Lastly, it is dynamic, since it varies depending on the variables of time and space. If it is accepted that image forms through a process, time is an

essential variable; and being image subjective in nature, it is indivisible from the spacial context in which it occurs, such as the geographical location, the country of origin and the distance of the subjects from the destination (Gallarza et al., 2002). Gallarza et al.'s (2002) observations are largely supported by this literature review.

Despite Gallarza et al. (2002) mentioned a dynamic approach is present in more recent literature, it is argued here that even when the dynamic element is present in the proposed theoretical framework it is lost when it comes to practice. It is evident that a static methodological approach to destination image is dominant, reflected in the investigations' outcomes and conclusions. While recently, destination image formation has been investigated more (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999b; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Tasci et al., 2007), studies focusing on the actual process are limited in number. Destination image is treated as a static concept (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999b; Gallarza et al., 2002) rather than as a *process*. Destination image is captured at one point in time on the basis of pre-determined characteristics, attributes and feelings; conclusions are drawn on the basis of this one-time measurements.

Research in the field of destination image dealing with its variation would provide a conducive scenario for the investigation of the process. However, for the functional purposes of the studies, such as destination evaluation and marketing development are end-oriented approaches. These approaches can be operationalized however, they do not uncover processes, but rather their outcome. These outcomes are bare of context and meanings, which cannot be captured by static approaches. What is being compared are the starting point and the end point of a process, but no information on the process itself allowing only for educated guesses.

2.2.6. The missing context

Destination image studies largely ignored that a vacation experience most frequently includes the company of others (Yarnal & Kerstetter, 2005) and as such, this company is deemed to have some influence. This literature review supports Dadgostar and Isotalo's (1995) observation that destination image composition depends on a number of factors, including the type of destination under investigation, the attributes selected, the recreational needs sought to be fulfilled and the subjective interpretation of the researcher. These factors are inescapable

since they are integral part of every destination image research. However, there is an additional element that is latent, but neglected in destination image research. This is the social nature of the subject. This is surprising given that it is widely accepted that driving motives for traveling include not only fulfilling major needs of relaxation and diversion, but also of social participation (Nash & Smith, 1991).

How individuals' social context affect interpersonal behavior and intrapersonal processes, has been dedicated limited attention (Bagozzi, 2000). The social nature of the individual is generally not explicitly included within the variables influencing image variation, unless country of origin is considered a sufficient operationalization of the individual's social context. This is not considered to be enough here. Destination image is treated here as a dynamic and ongoing phenomenon. It consists of continuous processes indivisible from the social context and physical environment in which the phenomenon occurs.

The subject's social context

One interpretation of variations of a destination's image depending on the image beholder's country of origin is that differing cultures interpret information in different ways. MacKay and Fesenmaier (2000) investigated cross-cultural destination image of a destination in Canada. The researchers considered two groups of respondents, US and Taiwanese students for inter-cultural comparison. Firstly, it was examined intra-group agreement and then inter-group similarities and differences between destination images. Results of the adapted MDS technique show that the Taiwanese group displayed 3 dimensions, while the US group reports 2 dimensions. Despite the differences, it emerged that one element, namely water, was salient to both cultures. Noticeably, the interpretation of the same symbol was opposite between the two cultural groups. Water relates to 'what is known' for the Taiwanese respondents, whereas it signifies 'the unknown' for the US students' group.

Different countries of origin might hold different destination images not only for factors of relative distance from the destination under consideration or different degrees of exposure and type of information. Also inter-group interpretations based on culture-specific meaning creation appear to be determinant (Kelly, 1981; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 2000). Individuals

form their image of a destination in the context of relative intra-group agreement

The subject's social context was not directly addressed as part of the destination image formation process in the majority of the studies dealing with the phenomenon. Noticeably however, it was included sporadically under different conceptualizations. Destination image sub-constructs include a number of social elements. The most outstanding example is word of mouth (Gartner & Hunt, 1987; Gartner, 1993; Baloglu, 1997; Hanlan & Kelly, 2005; Grosspietsch, 2006; O'Leary & Deegan, 2005). Motivations include meeting others, develop new friendships, or strengthen existing relationships (Gartner 1989; White & White, 2008). In addition, the traveling context, including traveling companions and party size, was already found to be influential (Baloglu, 1997).

A relevant example is Gartner's (1993) eight-component continuum for destination image development. At least three stages of his model, i.e. autonomous, unsolicited organic and solicited organic, are social in nature. The fifth stage of the continuum, the autonomous stage, refers to the autonomous efforts or actions connected with destination related information. This stage is composed by two categories, i.e. news and popular culture. While the former has a communicative and informative function and it is received from the subject as such, the latter comes in various forms, such as movies, sitcoms, TV series and books. These elements portray places, which are potentially travel destinations and portray people indigenous to those places (Gartner, 1993). What makes a movie, for example, popular culture? It has to be a contemporary item, well-known and largely accepted within a population and thus form part of a distinctive cultural pattern (Dictionary Popular culture, n.d.). It means that the movie is well known within a population and the individuals of this population have reached a sort of intra-group agreement on it, e.g. Crocodile Dundee in USA (Gartner, 1993).

The sixth stage of Gartner's (1993) continuum, unsolicited organic, accounts for information related to a destination, which come from an acquaintance and were not requested, or solicited. The individual who communicates the non-requested information, might have been at the destination, or not. Through casual conversations individuals receive information about other places, known or not yet, continuously. In the same way, the seventh stage, named

solicited organic, refers to the active request for information from someone regarded as a knowledgeable source, such as a relative or a friend. These two stages of image formation are also known as word of mouth. In the latter stage the process is started by the information seeker, who is in information-searching mode and thus willing to listen and retain; since the source is autonomously selected by the information seeker, it enjoys the highest degree of credibility. These information exchange requires a certain amount of contact between individuals, therefore the social context of the subject -acquaintances, friends and relatives, etc.- plays a role in destination image formation with informal communication embedded with beliefs, meanings and cultural values.

Culture, as the totality of beliefs, values, attitudes, behaviors and feelings which characterize a specific society, informs the behavior of the individuals belonging to the same social context. Culture is not innate in the individual, it is learnt, preserved over time even if dynamic (San Martin & Rodriguez del Bosque, 2008). As defined by Nash and Smith (1991) it is “a set of more or less important social requirements, which people internalize in the course of their socialization” (p.14). Thus culture is deeply rooted; it is an integral part of individuals and it is the link with their social context.

The subjects' relationship with their social context

It has been suggested in the literature that “destination image is a combination of both subjective and social construction” (Nicoletta & Servidio, 2012, p.19). The subject is embedded in a dialectic relation with her/his social surroundings, and when the destination is included in the “process” as the object at its center, destination image is created as the outcome of a dialectic relation between object, subject and the subject’s social surroundings.

Wolff (1950) explains how the conceptualization of society for the purpose of setting the boundary of the realm of sociology, criticized the separation of the individual from the society. All human life happens in society and society is characterized by social encounters, or interactions between individuals belonging to a same group. Individuals are determined by society which is part of their life. Society is not the sum of the individuals, but the synthesis of their social interactions, where social interactions are the everyday face-to-face social

encounters.

Despite social associations are initiated for attaining some needs or for pursuing specific personal interests, in each interaction there is the underlying push to socialization, also *sociability*, intrinsic in human nature. Social interactions can be manifested in a variety of ways; they create and negotiate meanings of social value, consolidated with time, that inform and guide individuals' behavior (Wolff, 1950). Therefore, social interactions are the necessary means through which social meanings are negotiated and formed within a group of people whose behavior is equally informed by the same social constructions (Wolff, 1950).

The latent presence of a social element in destination image research previously pointed out, is constant; nevertheless the studies investigating its relevance as a legitimate construct are limited. Gartner (1989) used MDS for investigating the destination image of four USA states, based on attributes and products such as national forests, national parks, historical sites, hunting, and fishing, among others. Results show that the products identified for evaluation can be clustered according to their attributes. The attributes are placed on two dimensions represented by bipolar continua, resource/cultural based and in-group/out-group social. The former indicates that the activities can be either more connected to the natural resources, or more social oriented. The latter continuum, also termed social interaction dimension, displays what type of social relations are more typical of every activity. Therefore, in-group social, signifies that the activity involves more interaction within one's own group; whereas, out-group social, describes activities which provide for interaction with members of other groups. Besides providing a valid positioning tool (Gartner, 1989), this study shows one possible socially-based interpretation of a destination image, where encounters between individuals interacting with and for each other are an intrinsic element of it (Kelly, 1981; Nash & Smith, 1991, Dann & Cohen, 1991).

The subject – object relationship

Tourism implies people and places (Fridgen, 1984), however the literature has tended to discriminate these two elements as two separate and independent units confronting each other on a one-on-one basis. There is an object that exists in its true and real form, though

multidimensional; and there is a subject. They are separate and independent in the assumption that only the subject is modified by the object, even though they relate to each other. Moreover the subject is considered as an isolated unit independent from external influences other than the stimuli coming from the object.

Pons (2003) took a stance which he called dwelling perspective, proceeding from the admission that *being* always means “being-in-the-world”, which implies some degree of engagement with the environment. He reflected upon the approach to tourism investigation which considered the individual as the subject being de-contextualized and isolated as a totally separate unit from the object. Instead the author argued that subjects are involved with the environment; subjects create knowledge through reciprocal interactions with the physical and social environments, in the acknowledgment that tourist subjects’ involvement with an environment differs from the resident subjects’ involvement. Whereby, Pons (2003) disagrees with the unitary approach reserved to doing tourism adopted in the literature. Instead, Pons (2003) states that tourism is “a conglomerate of multiple and complex encounters between several different human and non-human entities” (p.51). Therefore tourist encounters happen with other subjects and objects. In these encounters neither is neutral or static, but they are all constantly in making, in a relationship or in reciprocity (Pons, 2003).

2.2.7. Changing perspective

Wearing and Wearing (2001) discussed the need of a change in perspective to tourism research. The authors maintained that the perspective should shift from an economic, marketing one to a person-centred one. In fact, the researchers discussed how tourism provides the opportunity for change in the individual’s self, due to cross-cultural interaction. This reflection further elaborated on the nature of the tourism experience. Wearing and Wearing (2001) maintained that group tour, host community and natural environment are all inter-dependent components of a tourist experience. The tourist cannot be isolated from her/his social context since the human mind and the self are determined by social interaction, language and the taking on of roles. The authors then, advocated for the need of a more flexible perspective and supported focusing on individuals’ perspective while in their social context.

One recent example is White and White's (2008) empirical research focused on the social element in relation with a traveling destination. The authors chose the Australian desert, the Outback, as the study location. The study was a qualitative investigation of the nature and meanings of inter-tourist social encounters, as they are framed and informed by the surrounding unfamiliar natural environment of the destination. White and White (2008) used thematically coded semi-structured interviews with independent travelers. The researchers show not only the multiple meanings of the inter-tourist social interactions, but also how the meanings of the experience were negotiated through social interactions and were shaped and contextualized within the landscape. The study findings show that travelers were affected by the unfamiliar nature of the landscape, both physical and cultural, and that the mere presence of other travelers was reassuring. The emerging themes of the inter-tourists conversations were found to be ritualized, narrative and connected to and framed by the physical and cultural landscape. Noticeably, it emerged that the topics of conversations were not the objective of social interactions, rather the means. In fact, social interaction was significant in dealing with the anxiety caused by the unfamiliar. The researchers also noticed that this casual and informal communication mode also enabled travelers to voice their feelings towards the environmental surroundings. For example, the landscape was beautiful, but also incredibly vast and threatening. The exchange of information and opinions were directed to test the congruence of one's understanding and interpretations against others. The researchers concluded that social interaction was the means in the creation of meanings of the experience; in turn social interaction was filtered through feelings and knowledge about the location (White & White, 2008). Therefore, the destination emerges as the stimulus around which social interaction discloses, and meanings are created forming a shared ground able to inform behavior. The experience is negotiated through inter-tourists social interactions; the destination's environment frames social interactions.

The themes of social interaction and how it relates to the environment was also central in Yarnal and Kerstetter's (2005) work. The researchers engaged in investigating how social interactions among travelers in the context of a group vacation is relevant to the vacation

experience; and how the spaces dedicated to the vacation shape social interaction among travelers. After a review of environmental psychology literature, the authors highlighted that the proposed frameworks neglected the influence that other travelers have on the individual's relationship with the environment. The authors conducted systematic participant observation of a group tour traveling for nine days on a cruise ship in order to observe and document social interactions of group travelers. The study results showed that social interactions with other travelers influenced individuals' behavior for example in their degree of relaxation. Moreover, social interactions were found to be the means through which spaces on the cruise ship, such as different themed rooms and halls, became social spaces. Through a process of meanings negotiation among the users and their interaction with the spaces different rooms were identified with different codes of behavior. An example was one of the swimming pools, which became a place and an occasion for women's sharing and self-disclosure.

White and White's (2008) and Yarnal and Kerstetter's (2005) works display the reciprocal relationship of meanings' negotiation between multiple subjects and their contextual environment. These studies also support Pons's (2003) formulation which describes the tourist condition as determined by ordinary practices part of the tourists' everyday life. In addition, the author maintained that in order to understand a process embedded in a vacation context it is necessary for the investigator to examine what tourists do and how they make sense of it; also a unitary approach is limiting. The context, the embodied practices and the 'representations' have to be part of the investigation simultaneously (Pons, 2003). This line of inquiry is consistent with Fridgen (1984), who already stated that tourism and environment are strictly interrelated and cannot be separated. In addition, the author maintained that tourism is a "complex interrelationship between the social situation, the physical environment, and human behavior..." (p.20).

In light of this discussion social interaction is defined here as the day-by-day, verbal and non-verbal unmediated communication, among people, and their relation with the physical environment. It emerges from the review of the literature that group travel contexts provide a social-interaction-intense setting. The following section discusses the social context of group

travel contexts in this light.

Groups and group travel

Jenkins (1999) suggested that there is some additional element affecting destination image formation beside direct visitation and noted that enjoyment also played a role in the image held of a destination. On this line, Baloglu (1997) found that the perception of some measurement items of the destination US for West Germany travelers, was significantly influenced by the size and composition of the traveling group. The destination was more positively perceived by lone travelers compared to who was traveling in couples or families. Similarly, a dyad traveling party perceived the destination more positively even compared to groups of three. Even though these results are not conclusive, they seem to suggest that traveling in groups does influence destination perception; and that the smaller the traveling party the more positive destination perception. However, the author does not provide a plausible justification for this outcome: possibly the structured methodology employed for data gathering, an attribute-list rating questionnaire, is not sufficient to explain the nature and the emergence of unexpected results.

An earlier study might come in aid at explaining the phenomenon. Quiroga (1990) examined the importance of group dynamics during coach-group-tours with the objective of identifying some influential variables of the phenomenon. Identified variables crucial in the unfolding of group interaction included physical proximity, or the space available to the group. In fact, physical or verbal interactions might be forced in captive situations imposing close contact with other group members such as a bus. This variable is thus interrelated with group size, since given an available space, an increased group size imposes closer contact between group members. It also has implications on the experience. A larger group increases waiting times for example, it might compromise the enjoyment of group activities; it might also decrease the quality of treatment reserved to the group being approached with a mass-treatment.

Group cohesion provides a conducive social environment for group interaction. It results in increased influence of the group on the individual; it also generates greater general satisfaction among group members and in turn it increases motivation to actively participate in

the happiness of the group. The study shows that small groups were more cohesive when they expressed mutual likes compared to larger groups. However, in large groups there are more possibilities of finding people with affinities (Quiroga, 1990).

Social interactions have been investigated in vacation contexts from other and different perspectives. Despite the consistently confirmed importance of positive word of mouth on travelers' decision making, Murphy (2001) points out that research on how to foster positive word of mouth is lacking. The researcher focused on the travel context of backpackers' social interaction. He found that word of mouth is an integral part of the backpacking experience, starting from the travelers' motivations and extending into the whole experience. Word of mouth played a functional role in the backpackers' choices of destinations, accommodations and activities. Therefore, in order to examine the development of the word of mouth phenomenon, Murphy (2001) focused investigation on backpackers' social interactions defined as the study of "everyday encounters with other people" (p. 51). The author applied the framework provided by the study of social situations, understood as social encounters familiar to members of a culture or sub-culture. Social situations present a number of components, such as sequences of behaviors, concepts, environmental settings and language for example. Through unstructured personal interviews, subsequently content analyzed, Murphy (2001) found that gathering information over destinations, for example, constituted one main motivation for interacting with others. However, many were the elements influencing the value attached to the information received, such as consistency of the reports, general feelings and attitudes towards the person providing the information; but also previous knowledge and expectations towards the destination under discussion. The author found that the physical and social environmental setting is crucial to the quality of social interactions. Some recurrent themes emerging from group travels' literature are outlined hereafter.

Recurrent themes

Group tours come in every size and compositions however, the functions and the roles that they play seem to be common to the vast majority. They provide the chance to meet people and develop new relationships due to prolonged contact (Crompton, 1981; Schuchat, 1983; Yarnal

& Kerstetter, 2005) and receive expert's guidance (Schuchat, 1983; Quiroga, 1990). The tour guide is crucial in travelers' perception of the places visited, since s/he is the authority integrating information on the place in both its environmental and cultural aspects. Moreover s/he plays the mediator role between travelers and locals (Quiroga, 1990).

Another recurrent theme in a group travel context is the unfolding of personal identities (Schuchat, 1983; Yarnal & Kerstetter, 2005; White & White, 2008), where the concept of liminal spaces (Lett, 1983; Yarnal & Kerstetter, 2005) and role-play (Wolff, 1950; Schuchat, 1983; Yarnal & Kerstetter, 2005) provide the framework for interpretation. Liminality indicates anything which is outside the ordinary (Yarnal & Kerstetter, 2005), therefore when applied to tourism spaces and from the perspective of the traveler, it refers to any location dedicated to a tourist purpose, different from everyday spaces, e.g. a theme park or a couple of days in the middle of a desert. Liminal spaces and activities allow travelers to break with the routine and enjoy something different from their everyday life and provide the chance for adopting liminal behaviors. Customary rules of everyday life are suspended on a temporary basis and sometimes inverted (Lett, 1983); the nature and the rules of behavior that apply to these places are negotiated by the users. For example, it is suddenly socially accepted to wear a head scarf every day, or wear the same clothes multiple times (Yarnal & Kerstetter, 2005). This environment provides the perfect scenario for role-play, since tourism is the "sacred dimension of social life" (Lett, 1983, p.39) which provides a break from the commitments of everyday life. Thus individual's personality aspects kept captive during the unfolding of everyday commitments are allowed to surface and create the playful atmosphere of the tourist spaces. Travelers are free from social-structural limitations and are allowed to play with their temporary identity and with social relationships (Lett, 1983). Taking on different roles on a vacation, play with these new roles and let go of the everyday, structuralized roles however, has significance only when in the context of social interaction. In fact, the manifestation of the roles needs the participation of others in their chosen role (Wickens, 2002).

In light of this review, and given that most vacation experiences involve the company of others or the social encounter with others (Yarnal & Kerstetter, 2005), this work takes into

consideration the physical and social environment of the vacation. Therefore this study places special attention on the interpersonal relationships, during the vacation experience in order to establish what role social interaction plays in the process of destination image formation.

2.3. The social approach of this study

In light of the identified gaps, including the lack of empirical investigation of the actual processes of destination image formation, and the static and unitary approaches employed for destination image formation investigation the social representation approach is adopted in this study and is presented in this section. The social representation approach is proposed as a valuable conceptual framework informing the examination of the human social nature integrated into the investigation of destination image formation.

Social representation theory in the literature

The social representation theory is more appropriately called approach (Wagner, 1996), since it frames the researcher's perspective to research and informs investigation. It was applied in a number of investigation fields. The social representation approach was originally employed in the literature of social psychology for investigating the understanding of psychoanalysis in France (Moscovici, 1961). Moscovici (1963) engaged in investigating how scientific concepts spread through society. More specifically, he examined how, from a restricted circle of scholars and scientists, these concepts were included in the culture, the thinking, the language and the everyday behaviors, to become common knowledge (Moscovici, 1963, 2001). It explains that concepts and theories are elaborated and transformed through their circulation among the population turning into what is termed social representations (Moscovici, 1963, 1984). Subsequently, the approach was extensively applied to investigating the understanding of AIDS (Markova & Wilkie, 1987) by the public. Wagner et al. (1999) reported a number of studies which applied the social representation approach. These range from the understanding of democracy in Easter European countries to the meaning of "public sphere" in Brazil; from the internalization of gender by children to media representation of madness in the UK and representations of androgyny. Other studies belong to the field of urban psychology. Cities (Milgram, 1984) were investigated as social representations. Milgram's (1984) study shows

that people's images of the selected city and its various parts, or neighborhoods, were of social nature. Residents of the city, represented its various parts attributing them the social status and social values of the people historically inhabiting the specific areas. Vice versa characteristics identified as descriptive of the area are attributed to individuals inhabiting it. Milgram (1984) explained that social representation of a certain area corresponded to a simplification and at the same time an exaggeration of dominant characteristics.

The role social representations plays in the organization of movement within urban spaces is another example. Pailhous (1984) showed that the purpose of the journey and the activity were determinant for the representation of the urban space. The author intended to identify the image of the city after the study participant's journey, by analyzing the organization of her/his movements. Pailhous (1984) maintained that the image of the city was not only the result of the perception of it; it was rather the product of the experiential activity, i.e. the actual interaction with the environment, in view of a specific purpose.

In the field of tourism, the social representation approach found application in the investigation of residents' understanding of tourism to their area of residence (Purkhardt, 1993; Pearce et al., 1996). investigated the host community's reaction to a major event, the gold coast Indy event in Australia. They compared residents' reactions to tourism in general and to a major event in specific. The researchers adopted the social representation approach for the examination of a complex phenomenon, i.e. the representation of events and the role that social networks played in their formation. Fredline and Faulkner (2000) employed a cluster analysis of pre-established criteria. This is an approach that imposes *a priori* assumptions and constructs on the respondents. The authors maintained that cluster analysis revealed respondents' own constructs, and that the uncovered patterns revealed the community's reaction processes (Fredline & Faulkner, 2000). However, the appropriateness of such method is doubtful in the framework provided by the social representation approach. If a social representation is created, developed, and negotiated, but also revealed through day-by-day social interaction, the ability of cluster analysis to uncover such richness and complexity of information is questionable. Nevertheless, the authors concluded that there was need for a more general theory for the

investigation of host communities and tourism in respect to major events. The authors proposed the social representation approach to provide support to the inclusion of influential agents in the host-guest-event relationship, such as socio-political values, direct contact through social interaction and media (Fredline & Faulkner, 2000).

Social representation approach in the tourist destination image literature

San Martin and Rodriguez del Bosque (2008) adopted Baloglu and McCleary's (1999b) framework of pre-visitation destination image formation. The aim of their study was to identify how the cognitive and affective components of destination image concur to form individuals' destination images during their decision-making process. Secondly, the researchers examined whether other personal, psychological factors, such as motivations and cultural values contributed to the formation of differing destination images. The researchers acknowledged that social and cultural contexts may be among the most influential factors in destination image. These constitute the filters through which information and stimuli are interpreted by individual (San Martin & Rodriguez del Bosque, 2008). San Martin and Rodriguez del Bosque's (2008) study proposed the social representation approach as the perspective leading their investigation. The social representation approach also provided theoretical justification for the inclusion of a social factor to a larger extent.

In the context of cultural values, the researchers discuss that what influences destination image formation and choice of a destination over another, is the perceived risk of traveling there; different cultures show different approaches to risk taking (San Martin & Rodriguez del Bosque, 2008). This interpretation is interesting since it recognises individuals as inseparable from their social knowledge, or culture by which they are guided. However, when it came to investigation, the authors preferred a quantitative approach; the measurement employed to operationalize this concept was respondent's country of origin. Despite the widened perspective provided by social representation theory, it is questionable whether this measurement is able to disclose insights about cultural influences and differences between different cultural prescriptions. Differences in destination image by country of origin had been repeatedly observed (Hsu et al., 2004; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 2000; Prebensen, 2007; Hui &

Wan, 2003). However, perhaps because of lack of explanatory power of such measurement items, the findings were considered not conclusive (Chaudhary, 2000; Baloglu, 2001).

Within the research employing the social representation approach to their specific fields, there is general agreement that it is particularly appropriate when an emic perspective is what is needed. Pearce et al. (1996) identified the emic paradigm as one which recognizes the complex phenomenon of creation of representations on behalf of a group or community, and which places emphasis on the social context and network of interactions for extrapolating constructs by the community itself. It is in contrast with the etic paradigm. This finds its foundations in the researcher's *a priori* constructs imposed upon the respondents. Thus the freedom of choice and expression of one's understanding is limited by the choices provided by the researcher. In Wagner et al.'s (1999) words: "the authors of these (...) studies used the social representation approach because it enables them to capture more aspects of the object of study than a purely developmental, cognitive or media analysis approach would have allowed." (p. 98). For these reasons the social representation approach is particularly appropriate in the case of the current study.

2.3.1. Social Representations

Moscovici (1963) defined social representation as "the elaborating of a social object by the community for the purpose of behaving and communicating" (p.251). A social object is anything that is part of the group's everyday life. Therefore, an object is social because people relate to it, attribute to it characteristics and meanings through their talk and the group's behavior has to be determined towards it and because of it. Social objects are identified by social representations. For an object to exist in the world of a group, it has to be socially represented. The shared understanding and meanings of the objects constituting the world of a group provide the basis for communication and behavior for the group members; this makes social representations prescriptive.

Social representations' formation process

The means through which this processes take place is social interaction. Social representations are circulated by daily face-to-face communication and the media (Pearce et

al., 1996; Moscovici, 1984, 1988). Social interaction entails interaction with the environment intended as both its physical and its socially-constructed characteristics (Purkhardt, 1993). The development of social representations and the process of content creation depend on the complexity and speed of communication. These are determined also by the means available to communication through which thoughts and feelings are modified and realities are created (Moscovici, 1984, 1988, 2001). Communication “objectifies thoughts and feelings as soon as they are communicated and shared” (Moscovici, 1988, p.229). Therefore social representations are created and their structure outlined in the communication process.

The relationship between social representation and communication is crucial. One is necessary condition for the other. Shared representations are necessary in order to communicate; simultaneously, social representations are shared and constructed via communication (Moscovici, 2000). Social representations are revealed in form of “a body of propositions, metaphors, value judgements or figurative beliefs” (Moscovici, 1984, p.22) expressed through verbal and non-verbal communication. Consequently, representations’ “social characteristics are determined by the interactions between individuals and/or groups, and the effect that they have on each other as a function of the links that binds them” (p.220).

Moscovici (2001) explained that the reason why we create representations is to make the unfamiliar familiar. This happens through two main processes (Moscovici, 1984, 1988), namely anchoring and objectification. Anchoring is the process through which a new, unfamiliar stimulus or object is introduced into the pre-existing system of representations and it is related to a specific category. In doing so the new object is related to something familiar; it is invested of characteristics that identify the category to which it is assigned. For example, if the destination Jordan, is a relatively new concept, the individual might assign it to the category ‘countries of the Middle East’; the characteristics assigned to that category are automatically transferred to Jordan, since it now belongs and is anchored to that category. Once the object is categorized, it is visually reproduced (Moscovici, 2000), meaning that the representation is conferred visual characteristics which make the object realistic. This visual component of social representations is called representation field (Moscovici, 1963); it includes

the almost tangible imagery set now characterizing the object. Therefore, Jordan, from being an unknown, unfamiliar object, is now visually reproduced with an imagery set that can be talked about and related to. This process is termed objectifying (Moscovici, 1984, 1988, 2001; Wagner, 1996; Wagner et al., 1999). Figure 7 below displays a visual interpretation of the anchoring and objectifying processes of social representation's formation with its interacting components presented hereafter.

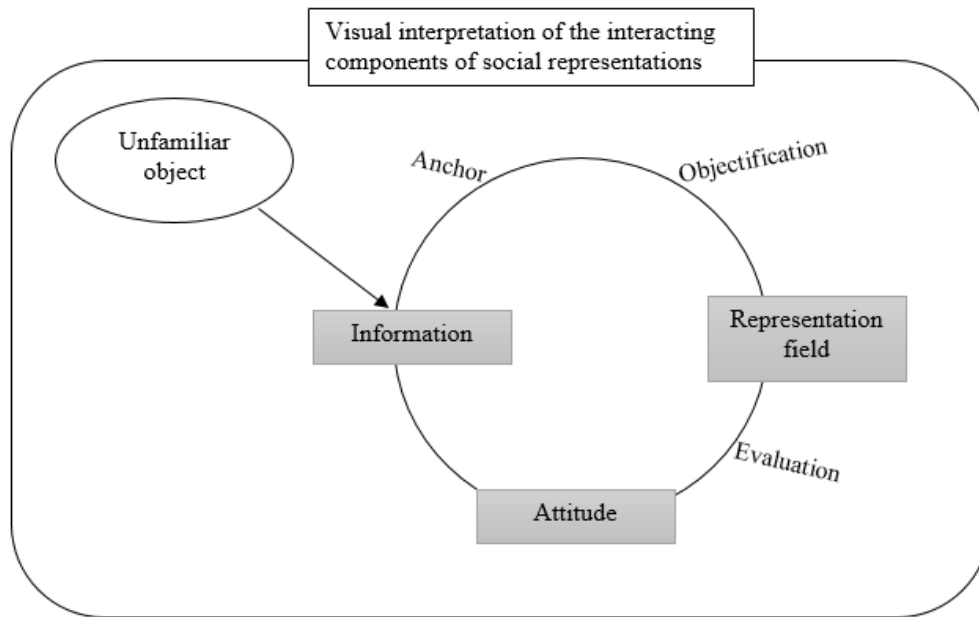


Figure 7 Interactive components of social representations

The components of social representation

Social representations function in networks composed by interactive concepts (Moscovici, 1988) whose content is in continuous development over time and space. Three components can be isolated as constituents of a social representation (Moscovici, 1961): information, representation field (imagery set), and attitudes. Moscovici (1984) identified the information component as the organization of a group's knowledge in relation to an object. The quantity and nature of information depend on the degree involvement of the group with the object. The component 'information' includes cognitive knowledge, or beliefs in that need to be anchored to pre-existing representations. Information is retrieved from one or multiple sources of social representations, i.e. media, social interaction and direct experience. This provides the basic contents for the creation of a social representation in the pre-existing structure; it also

contributes to the nourishing and development of the specific social representation and social representations' structure over time (Pearce et al., 1996).

Representation field is the imagery set. It is a complex of visual reproductions of a set of ideas (Moscovici, 2000), a model constituted by selected and defined contents, which visually exemplify and designate specific characteristics of the object represented. Once new information is anchored to pre-existing social representations, the object is objectified through the creation of a system of visual reproductions which make the object almost tangible. The object is thus attributed features and characteristics determinant of the category to which it was assigned through the anchoring process (Moscovici, 1984, 1988, 2000, 2001). Through the cognitive and affective responses and the selection of distinguishing characteristics the representation field is attributed meaning (Moscovici, 1984, 1988). Consequently, in Moscovici's (1984) words: "Neutrality is forbidden by the very logic of the system where each object and being must have a positive or a negative value" (p.31).

The last component is attitude, which determines the orientation of the representation. This is the direction of behavior towards the object by the group sharing the representation. Subject's evaluation is based on the social representation the individual refers to (Moscovici, 2000). Attitudes of individuals respond to a social representation shared by their social environment. Thus attitudes can be quite informative in identifying different social groups (Jaspar & Fraser, 1984).

Sources of social representations

Social representations have their roots and origins in social interaction and communication; they find expression in the social context in which they are shared and elaborated; lastly, social representations are closely related to social and cultural products such as language, which exist autonomously from to the individual (Purkhardt, 1993; Moscovici, 2000). Social representations cannot be isolated from the social context in which they are formed and developed. Three are the interactive information sources of social representations: the media, social interactions and direct experience (Pearce et al., 1996).

Media

Media are electronic, such as the news, movies, documentaries, Internet articles, websites, and social media; and printed such as newspapers, magazines, tourism brochures or general promotional material. These are all channels spreading information, contents and also visual reproductions. Each channel has a different purpose, it might be informational such as the news, documentaries or the newspapers; it might be promotional such as travel magazines and tourist brochures. It might also be informative but for special interests, such as a travel magazine or sports magazines, just to name a few examples. All these channels disseminate information in line with their own specific nature; and have a wide reach within the group they are directed to. Pearce et al. (1996) identified three main ways in which media contribute to the public's understanding of the disseminated issues and thus to the formation of social representation. Firstly, media select the stories to be disseminated and thus are crucial in the affirmation of what are the salient issues. In a tourism setting, the media can influence what are desirable destinations and which ones are not. Secondly, the information disseminated also provide the content for social representations. They disseminate visual portrayals and suggest analogies and metaphors. Whether they are tourism related portrayals, or illustrations accompanying a news article, or even movies, these are received and recorded by the watcher, they are stored, and contribute to the formation of social representations (Pearce et al., 1996). Illustrations of vast open spaces of a desert, colorfully dressed Bedouins, or rather flooded villages and half naked children with bellies bloated by hunger, certainly contribute to different meaning creation. This provision of contents influence the processes of anchor and objectification. Thirdly, it is not uncommon for media to present issues as a conflict between groups. Social identification on behalf of the information receiver can then influence her/his stance, or attitude and opinion on the presented object (Pearce et al., 1996).

From a tourism perspective, this is important. Even when information is not directly related to tourism they still have an influence on the representation of the destination in question informing affective response, imagery set and attitudes. For example if the media disseminated information about the involvement of the King of Jordan in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the information might influence the beliefs, opinions, feelings, imagery and attitudes of an Italian

towards Jordan.

Social interaction

Social interaction includes interaction of individuals and groups with each other and with the social objects part of their world. Verbal and non-verbal communication are crucial means in facilitating the process (Moscovici, 1984, 1988, 2001). Social representations of a group are created and nourished by social interactions within the group. Social representations are negotiated and adapted to the needs of the group for communication and behavior among its members through daily face-to-face communication. In turn, social representations inform action of the group members, thus a group traveling together for a relatively extended period of time, would develop its own representations. Daily talks about the salient topic and about the shared element, e.g. the destination they are traveling to, would allow for the development of a social representation of such object, shared by the group members. The shared representation would inform their behavior, attitude, opinions etc., during their trip shared with the group.

However, social interaction can also be entertained with members of other groups as diverse as the workplace, family, friends, sport mates and strangers, but also sub-groups of those. Any type social interaction provides additional elements for the evolution of the individual's social representation. The individual, then brings the new information received from inter-group social interaction to other groups s/he belongs to. It is her/his social interaction within the group, sharing the new information via communication, which contributes to the evolution of the group's social representation (Moscovici, 2000; Purkhardt, 1993). For example, in the context of a group travel, inter-group social interaction occurs when a traveler meets and interacts with a member of the local community, which is a group other than hers/his. When the traveler shares the experience and encounter with the group s/he is traveling with, the new information feeds into the social representation of the group. The encounter would have been already elaborated by the individual; when it is reported back to the group, it has already been filtered through the individual's social representation.

It is through social interaction especially through conversation that representations are

spread and individuals feed into their evolution, while being influenced and informed by them. Individuals and groups communicate through shared social representations and meanings which are conventional of both language and actions, such as gestures. Therefore language is a crucial mean for the dissemination of contents of representations. At the same time, gestures and non-verbal communication whether voluntary or involuntary, also contribute to communication of meanings when these gestures are conventional. Therefore, misinterpretation and misunderstandings can occur when representations are not shared, for example when members of different cultures come in contact (Purkhardt, 1993). The social representation phenomenon is a process taking place through social interactions, dynamic and ongoing in nature (Purkhardt, 1993). The dynamic and ongoing nature of social representations is evident once the process is understood in its continuous evolvement.

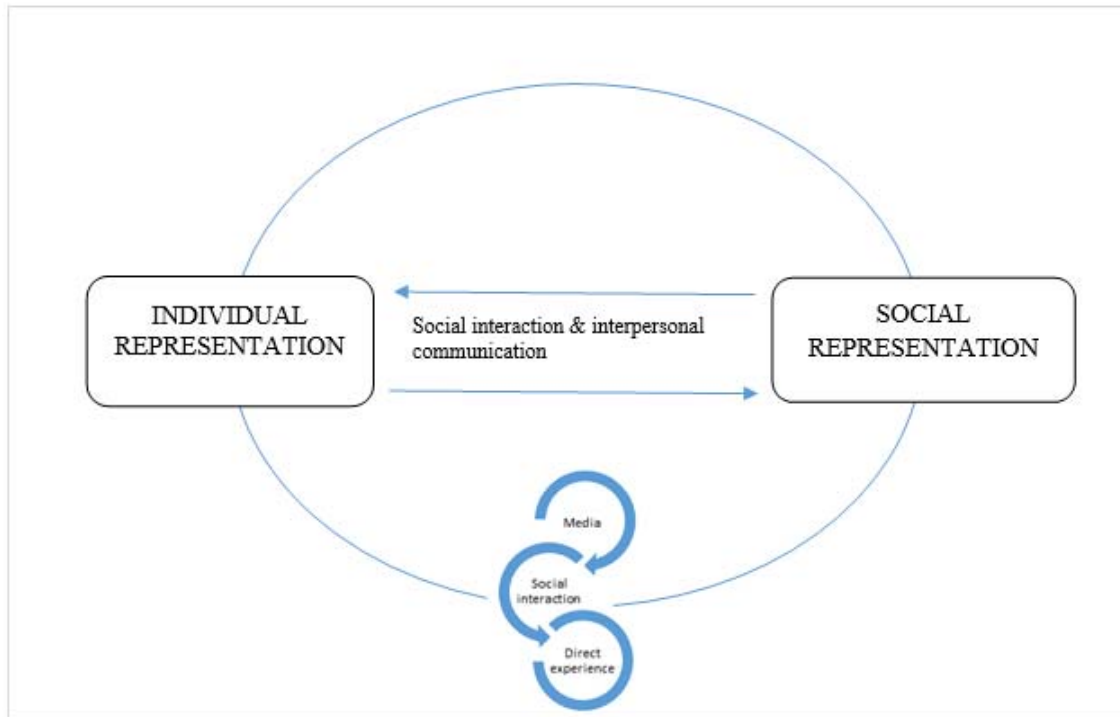
In summary, social representations are initiated through social interaction. Social representations inform and are prescriptive of social action. At the same time, social interaction and communication are determinant of social representations and represent the channel of its evolution (Moscovici, 1984, 1988, 2000, 2001; Purkhardt, 1993; Pearce et al., 1996; Wagner et al., 1999).

Direct experience

Direct experience provides individuals with the perception that the new knowledge is under their control; individuals regard direct experience as the most reliable source of information and as such, the most efficient and effective trigger for change of opinion (Pearce et al., 1996). Direct experience at a destination for example, provides the occasion for testing the information previously gathered and the image previously held. Travelers experiencing the destination first-hand value more their direct experience rather than the information previously gathered, or someone else's accounts. However they tend to look for confirming their pre-existing beliefs (Pearce et al. 1996).

Direct experience is more vivid and provides for the individual to interact with the object. Once the object enters in an interaction relationship with the individual, it feeds into the development of her/his representation. The existing social representation influences the action

of the individual and the group towards the destination. However, direct experience and interaction with the destination also contributes to the widening of the representation (Pearce et al., 1996). Figure 8 proposes a visual interpretation of social representation theory.



Source: adapted from Pearce, Moscardo, & Ross (1996), Wagner et al. (1999) and Wagner (1996)

Figure 8 Visual interpretation of the social representation theory

Wagner (1996) in his analysis of social representation theory, discusses the true or false value of social representation. He concluded that there is no such distinction. Social representations are systems of beliefs and cognitions; it is their validity in guiding behavior and providing for actions to be successful, which makes them “true”. For example no average individual of a general population ever went and verify for her/himself the roundness of Earth, however it is conventional knowledge and it guides subsequent reasoning as it did when the Earth was believed flat (Wagner, 1996). In the tourism realm we can think for example, of the disease of Malaria common in some regions of Africa. Travelers will have some representation of the disease, how it is contracted, what it entails and its consequences. No traveler will attempt to verify the truth of the representation, however s/he will behave accordingly. The behavior of the members of a same group is guided by some shared understanding of the world and since the representations of an object are group specific, the object is attributed social

characteristics specific to the group. Social representations also vary according to the level of involvement of the group with the object in question. When the object is an integral part of the everyday reality of the group, its social representation is more shared and communicated, it is more detailed, vivid and salient. When it is not quite relevant because it does not belong to the group's everyday reality, it may even be adopted from elsewhere (Pearce et al., 1996). Social representations exist as long as they are useful, i.e. as long as the object of representation is part of the group's reality (Moscovici, 2000).

The object and social representation

Wagner (1996) accepts social representations as socially elaborated systems of knowledge, symbols that guide behavior. This definition highlights further the distinction between the object and social representation. Social representations do not represent the object, but rather the understanding of the object by a group. The nature of the group, influences its degree of agreement and its cohesiveness. This affects social representation since it is the product of the sharing, interacting and circulating of knowledge between group members, groups and sub-groups in contact with each other (Pearce et al., 1996).

Social representations of a same object may be as many as the subjects/groups representing it. Each individual has multiple representations, however adaptation is necessary when people want to communicate. Thus the stream of group's opinions develops in a structure which is sufficiently common to all members for communication and mutual understanding. Whereby, individual social representations deviating from the shared social representation, are limited and appear as anomalies which do not destabilize the regularity of the structure.

This approach may help to explain the variations of image of a same destination according to nationality reported in the literature. Social representations are part of a structure of classifications and concepts of previous knowledge matured within a society. This structure preserves previous representations and maintains them connected; new representations are included in this pre-existing structure that they need to be compatible with (Moscovici, 1984).

The subject and social representation

Individual within social representation theory, are not computer-like processor responding

to external stimuli one by one, which then have to be merged together to form an overall understanding. Individuals rather behave towards and for the object or stimulus according to the social representations they hold (Pearce et al., 1996). The object is not distinguished from the subject; the object exists only in form of the subject's representation.

Generalized subject

Tasci et al. (2007) identify two opposing views in the destination image formation literature, relative to the nature of the image beholder. The researchers distinguished authors between those who consider the individual as a "logical thinker" who responds to stimuli evaluating attribute by attribute (Gartner, 1986; Milman & Pizam, 1995); and those who, in contrast, maintain that individuals' evaluation processes are simplified in order to create an overall impression of the object in question (Crompton, 1979). Such impression is based on different criteria that are situation-specific rather than a response attribute by attribute towards a sum-total. Similar to the latter, social representation theory, understands that the cognitive and evaluative processes on behalf of individuals are simplified in order to create social representations that are functional for the creation of the group's reality (Moscovici, 1984, 2000; Purkhardt, 1993).

Even though the approach encourages a person-centered enquiry, it was observed that the theory of social representation lacks reference to personal characteristics of individual. It considers the social nature of the subject and it implies that individuals have generalized characteristics that belong and are shared by their social context. This does not consider any element of individuality. The only connection to personalized abilities is the personal internalization of information, which then feeds back into the social representation evolution process (Purkhardt, 1993; Moscovici, 2000). However, even this personal elaboration occurs through the social representation structure.

Baloglu and McCleary (1999b) in their proposed model of pre-visitation image formation, took a step towards recognizing the individuality of the subject. The authors included mention to personality among the influential elements constituting psychological personal factors. However, no mention was made to whether, nor how it was operationalized for measurement.

In conclusion of their study Baloglu and McCleary (1999a) recommend further research into travelers' personal characteristics. They suggest that these characteristics may be determinant, or at least influential in destination image formation (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a). Therefore, it might be that a more outgoing individual, influences her/his social environment more, compared to other more reserved travelers. It is plausible to think that positive-thinkers and negative-thinkers would bring different contributions to the group social interactions through different ways of communicating. Table 4 summarizes the key concepts of the social representation theory.

Table 4 Social representation theory in key concepts

Social Representations:

Make the unfamiliar familiar
Inform behavior, and communication
Are prescriptive of behavior and thoughts of individuals/groups
Originate and develop through social interaction and communication between individuals and groups
Are expressed and shared through verbal and non-verbal communication
Inform and are informed through social interaction
Are multiple and group specific
Have cognitive and symbolic content
Are dynamic and changeable→ their evolution depends on many dimensions: they are modified overtime; they depend on the type of communication; their development and form are influenced by the level of involvement of the group; they are contributed to and influenced, by individuals' contribution (e.g. direct experience)
They exist as long as they are useful
Fit new objects in the pre-existing structure through processes of anchoring and objectification
Distinguished from the object→they are the group's understanding of the object. The object is one with the subject, since it exists only through the subject's representation. Thus there is no true or false representation.

2.3.2. Criticisms to the social representation approach

The theory of social representation was criticized as vague (Moscovici, 1988; Duveen, 2000). However, vagueness is also a blurred concept. It could be argued that vague concepts depend on the perspective of the critic and what s/he considers exact, measurable, definite, and tangible and what is not. What appears vague to some reviewer could be enlightening to some other and provide an alternative way for considering old concepts, for example the concept of

destination image and its formation process in the tourism literature. Duveen (2000) also observed that the critiques of vagueness to the theory appeared to be of methodological nature rather than conceptual, since they tend to challenge the concepts of the critic's paradigm. Thus one school of thought would only value attitudes and another would only consider the results of communication (Duveen, 2000).

Purkhardt (1993) explained that Moscovici's works communicated a confused idea of the social representation approach instead of defining clearly its determining concepts, theoretical framework and empirical issues. The deriving uncertainty according to the author, would limit its understanding and obstruct its acceptance. However, Moscovici (1988) maintained not only that his theory was clear enough to encourage an abundant body of literature, but also that further clarity and specification would result from further research and would not be its precondition.

Pearce et al. (1996) reported another criticism to the social representation approach, which maintained that it was nothing new. However, even if the theory did not provide new discoveries and all it revealed was the crucial importance of the social and cultural elements in the study of human related matters, it was indeed an advance (Farr, 1987). A change of perspective can bring valuable insights. The most resounding example is the change of perspective from when the Earth was believed to be the center around which the sun was moving to when it was hypothesized that actually it was the sun to be the center of Earth's rotation. This change of perspective made further valuable discoveries possible (Moscovici, 1988). At a smaller scale a change of perspective can open new doors to the conceptualization of destination image formation. In this perspective the subject is to be investigated in the context of social interaction with other individuals and groups; within the physical and symbolic environment where meanings and contents are created and shared through interactions and communication; and where reality is what the individual and the groups believe to be real. This change of perspective can bring the discussion and conceptualization of destination image back to focusing onto its actual formation process, rather than limit its investigation to the functional purposes of the investigators.

One more criticism is that of reflexivity (Jahoda, 1988). The extent to which the researcher is able to distance from her/his own social representation when approaching investigation and the interpretation of findings was at the center of the criticism. However, social representations are fed into by individuals who are also considered capable of identifying, discerning and choosing among the various coexisting social representations (Pearce et al., 1996). In addition, the limited possibility of the researcher to get rid of her/himself when engaging in investigation is a question suitable for every theory, every framework and every approach. The chances that the researcher manages to be free of her/his own understanding structures are non-existent, however efforts can be made in order to reduce the impact of the researcher's bias (Pearce et al., 1996). For example they can be used to benefit research by choosing a group which shares the same representation structures as the researcher. By being aware of their existence the researcher can reach in-depth insights in how social representations are formed and evolve. If the researcher did not share the same social representations with the chosen population, any interpretation of the investigation outcomes would be more challenging and should be considered inexact.

Nevertheless, the theory appears to provide a solid enough framework for supporting a wide number of studies (Duveen, 2000) investigating a wide range of topics of interest (Pearce et al., 1996; Wagner et al., 1999). The approaches so far widely adopted in the destination image literature, have been limiting for the understanding and conceptualization of the concept and its formation and evolution. The social representation approach, on the contrary, allows for a change of perspective.

2.3.3. The social representation approach and the destination image formation process

Examining the main components and information sources, a marked parallelism is observable between the process of social representation development and destination image formation; moreover the whole process presents marked parallelisms between the two conceptualizations in the literature to date.

Components

In outlying the social representation approach, it was suggested that when the destination is substituted to the object of social representation, its image formation process might be explained further. The three main components of the social representation phenomenon i.e. information, representation field and attitude, interconnected by the processes of anchoring, objectification and evaluation are similar to the cognitive, affective and conative components of destination image. The approach still accounts for the main components of destination image while potentially shedding light on some neglected determinants and processes.

The social representation's information component comprises of the knowledge and beliefs, thus cognitive information about the object, which can now be substituted with the destination. This component is congruent to the cognitive component of destination image, which accounts for what the subject knows or believes to know of the destination.

The representation field component (Moscovici, 1984, 2000) is twofold. Firstly it accounts explicitly for visual reproductions that make the destination a tangible reality. Secondly, these are charged with meanings through previous processes of anchoring and objectification. Therefore, this component is related to the affective component of destination image, which comprises of all the feelings and meanings the subject attaches to the destination.

Finally, the social representation's attitude component represents an evaluative synthesis of the information, the imagery and the meanings attached to the destination. This synthesis shapes the subjects' attitude, and thus informs behavior towards the destination. Therefore this component is congruent to the conative component of destination image, which is indeed the behavioral component of the construct (Gartner, 1993; Tasci et al., 2007).

Sources of information

Destination image research that pursued this stream of investigation found that information about a destination come from a multiplicity of media types, word of mouth and direct experience through visitation, or a combination of these. The sources of social representation resemble the information sources of destination image. Where the social representation sources media and direct experience reflect destination image's secondary and primary information sources; and social representation's social interaction recalls destination image's word of

mouth. Even though word of mouth is a social, dynamic and fluid phenomenon, it has been treated as a static, discrete variable, i.e. whether these social interactions or word of mouth happened or not. Applying the understanding of information sources suggested by social representation to destination image formation, would contribute to a social and dynamic perspective to investigating the process of destination image formation.

It is suggested that the integration of the two concepts contributes to the conceptualization of destination image formation by drawing attention on the crucial role played by the social context in which the process of destination image formation occur, and without which, it is maintained, such image would not exist.

2.3.4. The approach to the current study

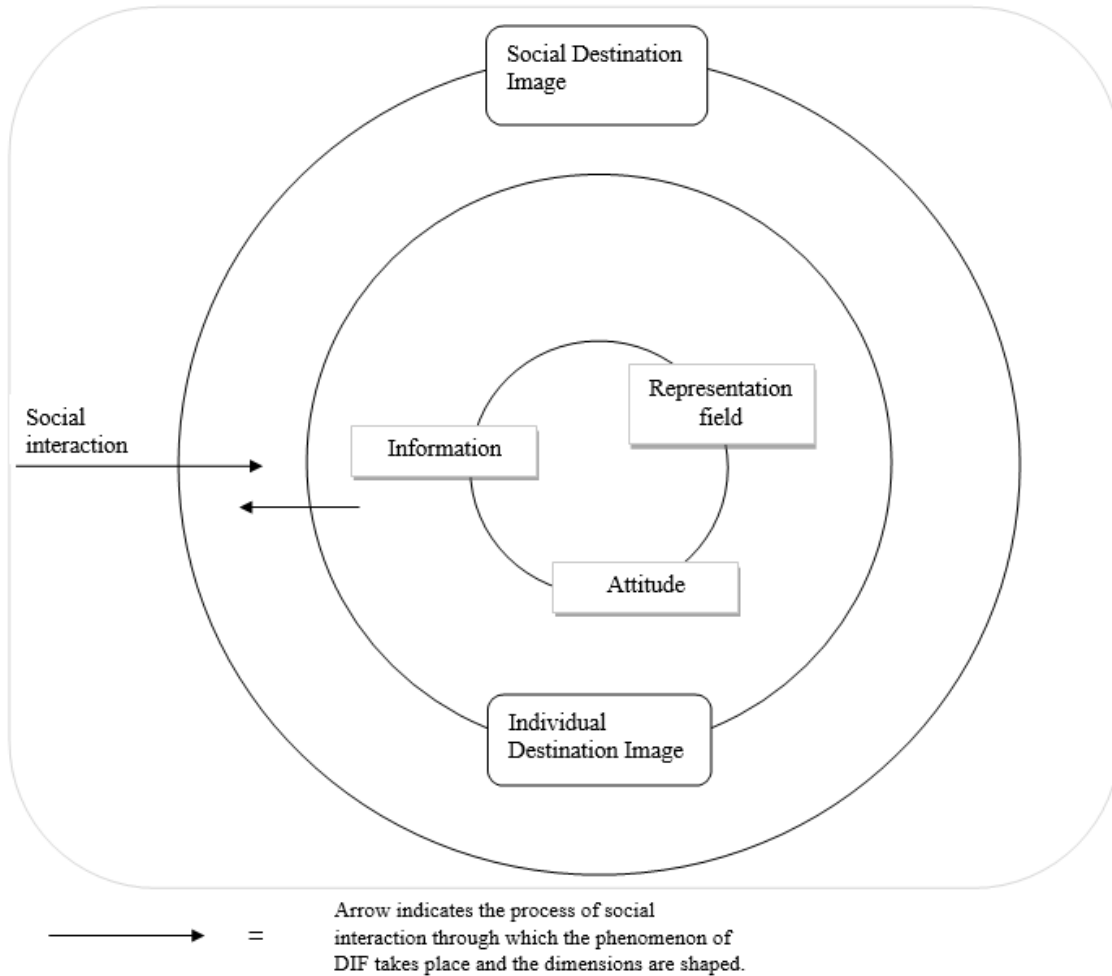
The additional insight that the social representation approach contributes with, is the underlying ongoing and dynamic (Moscovici, 2000) process through social interaction. The social representation approach provides a frame of reference for exploring destination image from an innovative perspective. One which allows to consider the destination image formation process as a phenomenon, rather than a concept. Thus destination image formation is approached as a dynamic, ongoing phenomenon. Multiple and simultaneous influential forces nourish the interacting components through continuous processes which find their origin and evolution in day-by-day unmediated social interaction.

Figure 9 provides a visual display of the approach, which integrates the social representation approach into the conceptualization of destination image formation as a process. The proposed approach places emphasis on the individuals' social nature and everyday environment, rather than considering them as isolated, computer-like information processors. At the same time it considers destination image and its formation as a dynamic and ongoing process, rather than a static multidimensional construct detached from the individual (Pearce et al., 1996).

The individual's and the group's social representation of the destination are respectively referred to as individual destination image and social destination image. So that the destination is not 'other', or external to the subject. The destination exists as a reality in the world of an

individual and/or a group only because of the means available to the subject to understand it. The destination, is internalized by the traveler as individual destination image, informed by the group's social representation of it, or social destination image (Moscovici, 1961, 1984, 1988, 2000, 2001). There is a continuous exchange between the individual destination image and the social destination image through social interaction.

Social destination image is the product of the group's prior complex of social



Source: adapted from Tasci et al. (2007), Wagner et al. (1999) and Pearce et al. (1996)

Figure 9 Destination image conceptual framework integrated with social representation representations, individuals' interaction with the destination and intra-group social interaction within the current group of belonging. Direct interaction between the individual with the destination informs the individual destination image. The individual destination image contributes to the development and co-modification of the social destination image through

intra-group social interaction. This phenomenon is continuous as long as the destination is part of the everyday life of the group. The elements represented by the components of individual and social destination images comprise a variety of elements, which at this point can be identified as people and places.

People and places

A destination image might include multiple dimensions which can be distinguished into the macro areas of people and places. Destination is not only spatially represented but also culturally represented. This is important especially when considering that much of what the travel media propose is sold as local people and the places of the local people (Bruner, 2005). This kind of discourse encourages meaning attachment to spaces in relation to the local people's interaction and use of these spaces (Buzinde, Choi, & Wang, 2012)

These meanings are not provided from the perspective of locals. The reproduction presented by the media replace the values and discourses of whom is being represented with those of the message receivers (Santos, 2004; Buzinde, Santos, & Smith, 2006) or with the fantasies and desires of the message receivers. Salazar (2012) focuses on the imaginaries induced by the media of people and places; he highlights how these are represented from a mythological and colonial perspective, which is strongly influenced by Europe-centric discourses. The media provide visuals and discourses embedded of messages that place the destination's landscapes and people in the position of the Other, which is available for consumption through observation (Santos, 2004). Local people are preferably presented through their tribal identity as timeless, unchanging and extracted from any historical context while still frozen in an unhistorical past (Bruner, 2005; Salazar, 2012).

Destination images include both macro areas of representations which are strictly intertwined. Therefore, every component of the process of destination image formation as described by the integrated approach interests both macro areas. There is no reason to investigate spatial representation and cultural representation separately in the context of the current study; it is believed important to make them both explicit because tourism is based on people and places.

The social representation approach represents a shift from a unitary to a social perspective. It allows to leave aside the view of a mechanical relationship of stimuli and responses. It plays the role of mediator in re-placing image beholders in their social context (Moscovici, 2000). In light of the current review, the research question of this study is formulated as follows.

The main purpose of this study is to investigate:

What is the role of social interaction in the destination image formation process?

In order to answer this research question the following objectives are identified:

- a) To examine and report the process of destination image formation in its development in a group vacation travel context;
- b) To determine how intra-group social interaction contributes to the destination image formation process; and
- c) To propose an integrated approach to the investigation of the destination image formation process, in a group vacation travel context, which accounts for social interaction.

2.4. Summary

This chapter reviewed destination image literature focusing on the process of destination image formation. For the past four decades destination image has yielded a large body of research. A variety of perspectives and purposes are employed for its investigation: from consumer behavior and decision making to marketing and promotion. It was recognized that destination image identification and measurement is a valuable tool for destination performance evaluation and positioning.

The review of the literature focused on the main themes of destination image investigation, including definitions and frameworks, the influential factors in the formation of destination image and finally its components. An overview was provided of the main methods employed for destination image investigations, followed by a review of the few studies which engaged in the formulation of destination image formation models.

The scrutiny of the numerous definitions, conceptualizations and frameworks of the destination image construct revealed two most popular threads: component-based and

dimensional. The former mostly refers to Echtner and Ritchie's (1991, 1993) three-dimensional framework. Destination image is structured according to three continua: functional-psychological, attributes-holistic and common-unique. The latter thread conceptualizes destination image as a three-component construct: cognitive affective and conative.

Some agreement was reported on the main influential determinants of destination image. These include familiarity and visitation, and personal factors. Familiarity is largely determined by information sources and destination proximity. Visitation, or direct experience, is one crucial source of information and thus determinant of familiarity. Lastly, personal factors include demographic characteristics (e.g. age, educational level, income and country of origin), motivations and previous vacation experience.

A number of neglected areas emerged from the review of the literature including (gap1) the limited emphasis placed on the actual process of destination image formation, (gap2) the approach to destination image investigation as a static concept rather than a dynamic process, and (gap3) the neglecting of the individual's social nature and context. Individuals are isolated from their context and treated as independent and isolated units. Instead, individuals are constantly embedded in their social context; their isolation from it was found inappropriate already in sociology and in social psychology.

It was recently recognized in the tourism literature that the destination image is both an individual as well as a social construction (Nicoletta & Servidio, 2012). Individuals' natural drive to social interaction was discussed, explaining that it is social interaction, as verbal and non-verbal day-by-day communication that forms the social context and the social reality of individuals, which in turn informs their behavior. Even though social interaction can be repeatedly identified in various forms within destination image's determinants, it was never considered as a legitimate factor on its own.

It was also argued that tourism is a complex of social encounters between numerous and different subjects and objects. Therefore a change in perspective to the study of tourism is called upon. In this respect it was presented how congruent the social representation approach is to destination image formation. The approach was outlined. Its strong relation to the

conceptualization of destination image formation was highlighted while also the additional insights it provides were discussed. Prominent similarities encompass the main components and their information sources. Whereby, the components of destination image namely the cognitive, affective and conative components, are reflected in the social representation components information, representation field and attitude. It was discussed how the representation field component of social representation represents a further specification of the construct implying not only affective meanings, but also visual reproductions of the object being represented. The media, social interaction and direct experience were identified as main sources of social representations strongly related to the media, word of mouth and visitation in destination image formation. While the media and direct experience are common elements, social interaction, on the one hand reminds of word of mouth, on the other it represents a more sophisticated elaboration of this phenomenon.

Adopting the social representation approach for this investigation represents a perspective shift that can further the understanding of the destination image development process. This study investigates the role of social interaction in the process of destination image formation in a group vacation travel context, informed by the social representation approach. For this purpose, the approach to this research was visually represented. The next chapter discusses the methodology employed in this study.

3. CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1. Chapter introduction

This third chapter is divided into four parts including the research paradigm and design; followed by the methods of data gathering, data analysis and the choices made for ensuring the study trustworthiness.

The first part introduces the paradigm, or system of beliefs and assumptions about what is reality and how it can be understood. This guide the researcher's, i.e. my understanding of the world. In the belief that careful planning is needed in any study, the research design guiding this investigation is reported and displayed as a cyclical process.

The second part describes in detail the data collection methods. The study context is explained first, followed by the methods combination which include semi-structured in-depth (SID) interviews and participant observation. The strengths of the methods are combined for complementing each other in order to gather a more diverse range of data typology. At the same time the nature of the two methods allows multiple occasions for checking inferences and clarifying questions and doubts. The intrinsic threats for their internal trustworthiness are assessed.

The third part explains the analytical procedure for data analysis adopted from the grounded theory approach. This approach proposes a procedure based on four types of data coding, which aim at allowing the emergence of new elements. Employing this analytical strategy contributed to the integration of a conceptual approach which fits the data.

The fourth part is dedicated to reporting the steps taken for ensuring this research's trustworthiness. Three were the main concerns identified, including the researcher's subjectivity, confirmability and transferability of the investigation; the practical measures for tackling these concerns are reported.

3.2. Paradigm

The previously illustrated conceptual framework identifies the concepts and theories, but also assumptions, beliefs and expectations that inform and guide this research. It does not represent a limitative model, rather one that allows to approach the phenomenon of study in a systematic and focused way, choose and assess the most appropriate methods for tackling the investigation, and identify the potential threats to the credibility of the study conclusions (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011; Maxwell, 2013).

A conceptual framework, whether explicit or implicit, informs investigation. At the same time investigation is guided by the understanding of the researcher of what reality is (ontology) and the extent to which it can be understood (epistemology). From these positions and beliefs, or paradigm, the researcher interprets the world, and chooses the best method for investigation in the world (Hennink et al., 2011). Guba and Lincoln (1994) defined paradigm as "the basic belief system or worldview that guide the investigator" (p.105).

Many are the possible interpretations and categorizations of the philosophies and theoretical approaches which developed and shaped the research panorama. Guba and Lincoln (1994) identified four categories: positivist, post-positivist, critical theory and constructivism. Denzin and Lincoln (2003), identified seven different approaches in qualitative research history, which they called the seven moments. Patton (2002) suggested a distinction based on the 'foundational question' guiding research, and identifies more than ten theoretical perspectives.

It is not an objective of this work to provide an extensive a detailed account of the paradigm panorama, which can be found elsewhere. Guba and Lincoln (1994) and Denzin and Lincoln (2003), represent just a couple of works that engaged in this effort. Nevertheless, it is valuable to reflect on the mainstream paradigm of the field of study this investigation belongs to. This could influence the researcher's approach to investigation since previous literature forms the researcher's grounding knowledge (Hennink et al., 2011). Since the researcher's paradigm is so influential in the investigation development and resulting conclusions, it is important to make explicit the paradigm from which this study is conducted.

The commonly recognized dominant paradigms are the positivist and the interpretive paradigms (Hennink et al., 2011). These labels are extremely general and only identify two main streams. Under these umbrellas, a large number of paradigms can be found. Their underlying ontological and epistemological beliefs can be connected to these two core sets of assumptions.

The positivist paradigm rests on the ontological assumption that there is one reality which is made of observable facts. Thus, its epistemological assumption is that what reality is and its functioning can be operationalized and measured. The methodological choices deriving from these core beliefs conceive the researcher as an external, objective observer detached from the natural phenomena, which are only to be recorded and reported. Therefore, the etic (external) approach is the distinguishing feature of this group. The etic approach implies that it is the view or understanding of an external observer to be tested. Therefore hypothesis are formulated by the researcher and are verified or falsified, through empirical data collection. The results of the hypothesis testing aim at being generalized and generalizable (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Hennik et al., 2011).

Positivism's underlying assumptions have been largely criticized. In the social sciences, objectivity has been especially criticized for the forced separation between researcher and phenomenon under investigation. The attempt to eliminate the researcher's individuality has been denounced for neglecting human nature. This is intrinsically subjective, and it underlies the whole process of data collection, which occurs among human beings. Moreover, the approach of pre-established hypotheses, obstructs the emergence of new discoveries, since it does not account for unpredicted events to manifest (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

The interpretive paradigm developed in reaction to some major drawbacks of positivism (Hennik et al., 2011). The interpretive paradigm appreciates the subjectivity intrinsic in human subjects, both the investigator and the study participants. It highlights the coexistence of multiple perspectives, which although they might be more or less informed and sophisticated, are of equal value (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Hennink et al., 2011). Reality is contextualized within the cultural, social, temporal and individual condition, thus it is socially constructed. Its

grounding epistemological assumption emphasizes that in order to understand the phenomenon under investigation, people's perspectives and experiences are key. Thus, it is the emic (internal) approach to be preferred. In line with this approach, meanings, opinions, attitudes, personal experiences, etc. are the focus of investigation and sources of information.

The methodological choices following this approach highlight the crucial relevance of in-depth explanations and contextual information (Hennik et al., 2011). In addition, these realities or social constructions, can be identified through the interaction between the investigator and the individuals forming the study population (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Qualitative research methodologies are usually employed for conducting investigations within this framework of beliefs and assumptions. Qualitative research is defined as an assemblage of interpretive methods such as participant observation, content and discourse analysis and visual analysis. These methods do not belong to one single discipline, and they are employed widely across disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, education and communication (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

Positivists criticized this approach as unreliable because subjected to a high risk of researcher's bias (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Maxwell, 2013). According to the interpretive paradigm, the researcher is viewed as participatory actor in the creation of data during data collection, and researcher's subjectivity is integral part of data analysis (Hennink et al., 2011). Positivists also maintain that interpretive researchers employing qualitative research methods, are not able to verify their conclusions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). However, this threat can be tackled. The reliability and validity, or rather trustworthiness of these data and conclusions can be assessed through quality criteria developed throughout the long tradition of qualitative inquiry. These are a set of guidelines which provide common and systematic tools for judging the trustworthiness and quality of qualitative inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

By reviewing the destination image literature of the past four decades, it emerged that the predominant paradigm is one which assumes that reality is constituted by facts. The researcher can observe and objectively measure reality so that there is no researcher's influence on the data. Therefore, the operationalization of hypothesis is considered to be the way in which the

researcher's bias is reduced to the minimum. Whereby, the researcher formulates hypothesis based on relevant theories. These are then tested against empirical data to seek whether the hypothesis are supported. This type of approach to research is normally ascribed to the positivist paradigm.

Although this approach contributed to advances towards the maturity of the field, it shows its limitations when the focus of the inquiry is revised. It is doubtful how human behavior is to be explained when the context in which individuals' lives and experiences occur is excluded from investigation. Moreover, human behavior is not value-free, therefore it is arguable that it can be understood without accounting for the meanings and motivations attached to actions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Hennik et al., 2011). Human lives are contextual to the social, political and historical environment in which they unfold. Therefore, the detachment of the researcher from the study population prevents a plausible interpretation of data (Maxwell, 2013).

3.2.1. Ontology and epistemology guiding the current study

The paradigm guiding this study differs from the dominant paradigm in the destination image investigation field for being ascribable to the interpretive paradigm. The ontological belief, which the current study relies upon, is relativistic, meaning that reality is multiple and the co-existing interpretations are equally valid. It depends on the individuals' context and their relationships with it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Hennink et al., 2011). It is not value-free nor objective; it is rather subjective and embedded of meanings and motivations. Reality is changeable, time bounded and socially constructed. Individuals are products of their context, history and time; they do not live in isolation, instead they interact with the environment and other individuals on an everyday basis; therefore they are also products of their experiences and roles in the society (Hennink et al., 2011).

The epistemological view is interactionist and subjectivist, but also pragmatist. The researcher and the object of inquiry need to be in an interactive relationship for which data are co-created while the phenomenon under investigation unfolds or is negotiated (Hennink et al., 2011). The researcher is then in charge of making sense of the data for understanding the

phenomenon under investigation; in doing so researchers employ their own understanding patterns during analysis (Hennink et al., 2011; Maxwell, 2013). The co-created data guides research towards the conceptualization of the phenomenon under investigation (Charmaz, 2000). On a methodological note, since realities are social constructions, they imply individual constructions and interactions between and among individuals. Therefore, the researcher needs to be involved in the examined phenomenon for conclusions to be plausible. The role of the investigator is of an insider uncovering the views of individuals or groups of interest.

In summary, the current paradigm is relativist, social, interactionist and pragmatist. This approach presents strengths unmatched by positivism-driven paradigms. It values that individuals are embedded in their social and physical setting; the individual does not exist in isolation, but rather exists in an ongoing relationship with others and the physical environment. Crucial are meanings and interpretations which permeate processes and situations (Charmaz, 2000). Individuals have cognitive abilities and feelings that permeate self-cognition and are reflected in language and social interaction (Dann & Cohen, 1991; Wearing & Wearing, 2001; Yarnal & Kerstetter, 2005).

The researcher participates in the phenomenon in order to examine it in-depth, seeking its understanding rather than its generalizability (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Hennink et al., 2011). The analysis and interpretations of data are intended for the development of a conceptual system that is applicable and useful when applied to real life situations (Charmaz, 2000). Destination image formation is treated as a social phenomenon. As such individual destination image is an ongoing process, relativistic, dynamic, and socially constructed. It is assumed that individuals hold images of the destination, which are not static products of their own individual internal processes. The individual's destination image is rather an ever-changing phenomenon subject to social influences: it is socially negotiated and constructed through social interactions. In order to contextualize this work's research design within the destination image literature, the next section provides a brief account of the qualitative driven investigation in the field.

Qualitative studies

From the review of the literature it is noticeable that quantitative driven investigations are

dominating. However there are some noteworthy studies qualitative in nature. A brief account of these is provided ordered according to their sophistication.

Reilly's free elicitation technique

Assessing the image of Montana, US, from a marketing perspective, Reilly (1990) suggested that free elicitation is a suitable alternative technique to more structured methodologies that limit informative insights, such as the frequently used multidimensional scaling (MDS) and semantic differential (SD) techniques.

Reilly (1990) defined image as a description of the overall perception of the destination in the mind of the observer. Reilly (1990) suggested that to allow individuals to describe the destination in their own words and in constructs that they consider salient, provides more accurate and informative data, in contrast to having the individual's responses fitting in pre-determined constructs. Study participants were asked questions on the line of "what three words best describe x for vacation or pleasure travel?" and "what three words best describe x as a place for...?". Data analysis is conducted by grouping similar answers and determining the relative importance these descriptors have in relation to the total number of participants. Different segments hold different salient constructs that are readily visible with free elicitation techniques; they are less evident when more structured method is employed.

In depth interviews

Hanlan and Kelly (2005) opted for in-depth interviews with the objective of determining destination brand image of Byron Bay, Australia, in the eyes of backpackers from the UK and Europe. The researchers investigated which information sources influenced and contributed to destination image formation and how. Additionally, in order to capture the influence of direct destination experience, a primary source of information (Beerli & Martin, 2004), the study considered two groups: tourists who had visited the destination and those who had not. Data analysis was conducted by two interviewers working simultaneously, but separately. Through the comparison of each set of interview data, the researchers sought convergence within the interviews sets. Convergence was reached discharging information only mentioned once. Once the interviewers agreed on data interpretation, their conclusions were checked for accuracy by

testing questions intended to either confirm the researchers' conclusion or to explain an eventual disagreement. The process was repeated until data saturation, i.e. when new interviews do not yield any more new information. Through this method, triangulated with a short questionnaire asking relative importance of information sources, Hanlan and Kelly (2005) confirmed that word of mouth and autonomous information sources, i.e. not promotional in nature and personally sought by the traveler, were the most influential ones. Findings also confirmed previous quantitative studies' conclusions that direct destination experience is key in the process of image formation (Pearce, 1982; Chon, 1991; Pizam & Milman, 1993; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a; Beerli & Martin, 2004; O'Leary & Deegan, 2005; Li & Vogelsong, 2006; Tasci et al., 2007; Wang & Davidson, 2010).

Combined techniques

Prebensen (2007) intended to evaluate different qualitative techniques for determining destination image. Combining words association, picture association and collage creation with in-depth interviews, the author not only examined destination image, but also investigated its variation in relation to distance from the destination, nationality of the participants, familiarity and information sources. The author maintained that qualitative techniques, especially when employed at an early stage of a research, allow for the elicitation of more aspects of tourists' destination image compared to quantitative methods. The study examined whether different qualitative techniques displayed different findings, or whether they highlighted different aspects of a destination image. The words, for the word association technique, were related to specific attractions at the destination, e.g. sledge dog adventure, the North Cape. The pictures for picture association were taken at the destination by the researcher, to be briefly described by the participants. The last technique was free elicitation through collage creation. Participants were asked to choose a color for the background; subsequently they could pick images and words from various magazines portraying Norway and other European destinations in order to create their visual representation of the destination. In addition, participants were asked to explain their choices.

Results were two-fold. Firstly, the evaluation of the methods based on Echtner and Ritchie

(1991, 1993) dimensions (holistic versus attributes; psychological versus functional; common versus unique), showed that picture association yielded more attribute-centered images in comparison to the other two. Both psychological and functional elements were elicited along with more common types of images. Word association resulted in more holistic images. The technique revealed a tendency to highlighting the functional and common aspects of the destination. The collage technique in combination with the in-depth interview extracted mostly holistic images, psychological elements and unique aspects. In addition, picture association yielded more affective types of images compared to the other two. Secondly, results were able to show differences in the images held by different nationalities and also to highlight differences in the familiarity of these groups with the destination consistent with previous literature's conclusions.

Word association was employed also by Prayag (2007). In combination with two more techniques, brand fingerprint and brand personification. The author explored the relationship between destination image and brand personality of both South Africa and Cape Town. Similar to Prebensen (2007), Prayag (2007) also found that the word association technique was particularly suited for eliciting images of cognitive nature and it aided recollection of both common and unique attributes. In addition, Prayag (2007) sought color descriptors from study participants. Participants' color choice provided additional psychological elements of the destination. This study showed the different abilities of different qualitative techniques, which used in combination can extract richer and informative information. Table 5 provides a summary of the qualitative studies mentioned here. While the next section introduces this work's research design.

Table 5 Summary of qualitative driven research

Study	Purpose and objectives	Data collection techniques	Destination and participants	Adopted framework	Findings and conclusions
Hanlan and Kelly (2005)	Determine: 1. Destination image 2. Information sources on which destination image is formed 3. Role of the sources in image formation	In-depth interviews	Destination: Byron bay, Australia Participants: UK / and other European tourists		1. The method was successful in determining destination image and uncover details of its nature 2. Main sources of information resulted to be word of mouth and independent sources (e.g. guidebooks) 3. Destination image was found to have been largely influenced by these information sources 4. Destination image was spread and fed by the information gathered through these sources, and then spread again through word of mouth enriched with experience at the destination
Ryan and Cave (2005)	1. Measure image 2. Determine destination image role in destination Selection 3. Determine the dimensions and structure of destination image, and 4. Check appropriateness of means of measurements and data collection.	Semi structured interviews: comparison of destination with country of origin of the participants	Destination: New Zealand Participants: New Zealanders and international tourists	Kelly's (1955) personal construct theory	1. Qualitative method confirmed findings from quantitative methods 2. Provide more insights in the complex nature of the concept 3. Familiarity plays a role at least in creating more complex images 4. Destination image is dynamic
Prebensen (2007)	1. Evaluate different qualitative techniques for image identification in identifying destination images of distant places	Free elicitation techniques (within in-depth interviews): words association, picture	Destination: Norway Participants: French, Germans,	Gunn (1972), and Gartner (1993)	1. A combination of various methods should be employed in order to examine destination images 2. Images vary depending on tourists' nationality 3. Familiarity with the destination influence destination image

	2. Analyze tourists' responses by nationality, familiarity and other information sources	association, and collage.	Swedish and Norwegian tourists	
Reilly (1990)	1. Illustrate the technique of free elicitation 2. Show its potential in destination image studies.	Words association (within in-depth interviews)	Destination: US Participants: US / tourists	1. Words association provides a simple but powerful tool for examining the image or lack of image of a destination. 2. Word association is an appropriate method for exploratory purposes of an investigation.
Prayag (2007)	Identify: 1. Destination image 2. Perception of the brand personality of 2 related destinations 3. Evaluate the effectiveness of projective techniques at identifying destination image and brand personality dimensions	Projective techniques (within in-depth interviews): words association, brand fingerprint and brand personification	Destination: South Africa and Cape Town Participants: international tourists	Kelly's (1955) personal construct theory 1. Words association: excellent for extracting cognitive images both common and unique attributes 2. Brand fingerprint: exposes psychological and functional characteristics, color descriptors holistic and attribute based images. 3. Destination image can have both positive and negative elements and have elements holding both positive & negative connotations 4. Brand personification: effective for affective images

3.3. Research design

Qualitative research represents the most suitable approach for the investigation of processes and the in-depth understanding of a phenomenon. The definition of research as qualitative underlines the difference of interest from a type of research oriented towards the verification of hypothesis, or frequencies and repetitions of occurrence. It rather highlights a type of investigation focused on the socially negotiated nature of what is real, the processes involved in the individuals' experiences, the meanings attached to these and the relationship between the researcher and the phenomenon under investigation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

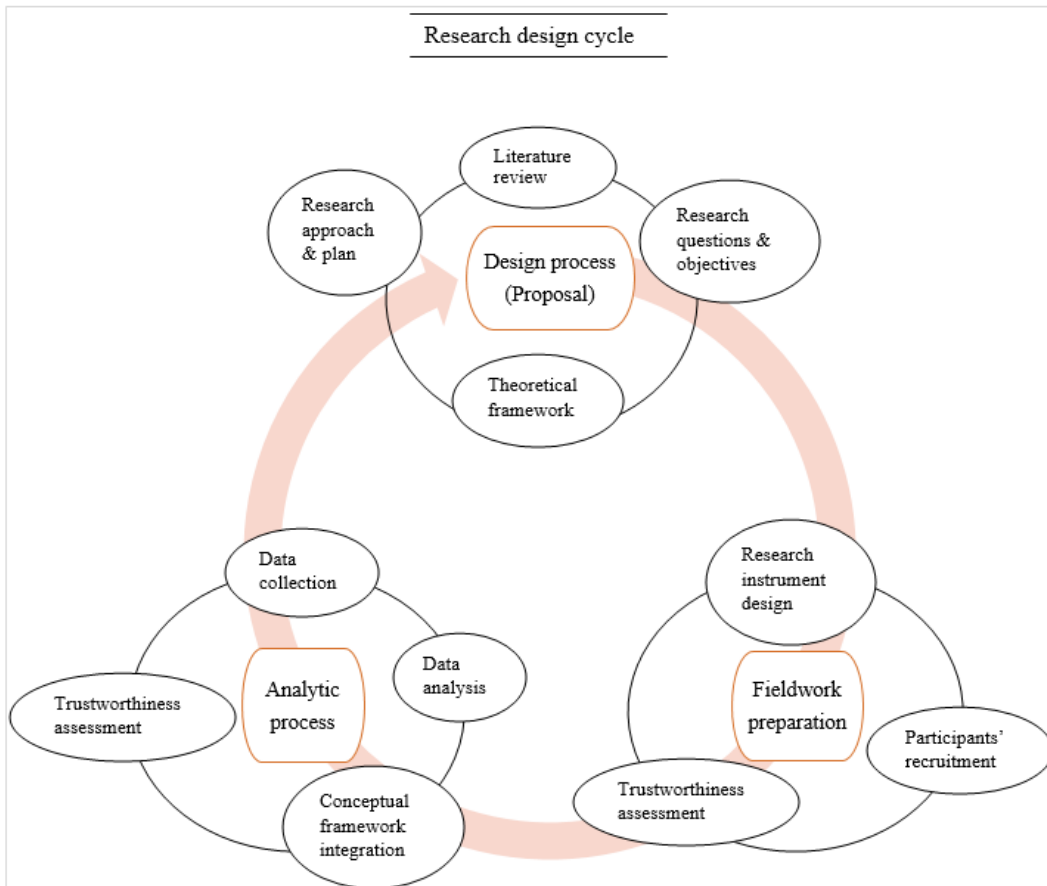
Another advantage of qualitative research is its intrinsic flexibility. Qualitative methods seek to reach the maximum spectrum of perspectives in order to add depth to the phenomenon and account for the most possible variations; in contrast, quantitative research needs to control for every possible factor in order to test the significance of the hypothesized relationship or variation. While quantitative designs must not be modified after the commencement of data gathering, since it might compromise statistical tests, qualitative designs allow room for the emergence of unpredictable events and are continuously adapted in reaction to the emergence of new information from the data (Galser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Hennink et al., 2011; Maxwell, 2013). This flexibility is necessary in the development of new theory informed by the data in a social context which is subject to self-determining human beings.

A number of scholars believe in the importance of clarifying the research design at the very beginning of the investigation in order to make explicit the steps followed for reaching the presented conclusions (Hennink et al., 2011; Maxwell, 2013). The advantages of making it explicit are readily available. First of all, it provides a reference for guidance to the researcher, who benefits from a well-planned research. Presenting the research design shows strengths and weaknesses of the undertaken research. This not only allows for assessing the work, but also for evaluating the potential improvements for future research. Finally, it adds to the transparency of research contributing to its trustworthiness.

Qualitative research is recognized to be of cyclical nature, characterized by constant and ongoing negotiation among its parts. Despite the interpretive perspective adopted for the

current study, this research takes place in a positivism-dominated quantitatively-driven area of research; the background on which the current study is drawn was shaped by this ontological and epistemological environment. This is reflected in a number of elements forming the current research design. Even though the cyclical nature of qualitative investigation is valued, some aspects of the linear design typical of a quantitative approach are maintained. The research questions, the objectives and the guiding approach are developed deductively from the literature. These elements guide research (Hennink et al., 2011). However, throughout the process both deductive, typical of positivism, and inductive reasoning, indicator of interpretivism, are incorporated complementing each other. Whereby inductive reasoning is more intense in the analytical process and inductive and deductive reasoning come together again for the development of a final integration of the emerged theory.

The structure of the current work can be displayed as a cycle of interrelated processes, which are also cyclical; the role of their constituting units evolves with the maturation of the investigation. Therefore, the research design can be displayed like in Figure 10 as a cycle linking sub-cycles (Hennink et al., 2011): the design process, the fieldwork preparation process and the analytical process. The design process consists of four tasks, or units, including the review and examination of the relevant literature, the formulation of the leading research question and the objectives of the study; the guiding approach is formulated and the methods appropriate for carrying out the investigation are identified. The fieldwork preparation process, consist of three tasks of organizational nature. The research instrument is designed and the participants to the study are recruited; importantly the threats to the trustworthiness of the study identified in the design process are constantly assessed. The analytical process consists of four main units: data collection and data analysis according to the grounded theory's methods; while the trustworthiness of the processes is constantly assessed. Figure 10 visually displays the research design cycle. The data treatment procedures are reported hereafter before proceeding with the study context.



Source: adapted from Hennik, Hutter, & Bailey (2011)

Figure 10 Research design cycle

3.3.1. Data treatment

Data treatment is divided into different phases; the data treatment flow is displayed in the flowchart in Figure 11. Data gathering is organized in three phases. SID interviews are employed in the pre-visitation and post-visitation phases. Participant observation is employed throughout the visitation phase. Data analysis follows the guidelines suggested by the grounded theory approach and it includes four levels of coding. Findings are discussed in relation to how they compare to previous destination image literature and the social representation approach. Finally, findings are integrated into a conceptual system representing an integrated approach to the investigation of the destination image formation process in a group vacation travel context, which accounts for social interaction. Data gathering and data analysis are not drastically distinguished; preliminary data analysis starts already with the first few interviews. Trustworthiness is assessed throughout the process, by keeping separate sets of notes during

all three phases of data collection and data analysis. Multiple participants' check are placed at multiple stages with the participants. The last of these aims at checking the plausibility of the proposed integrated approach and record participants' feedback and concerns.

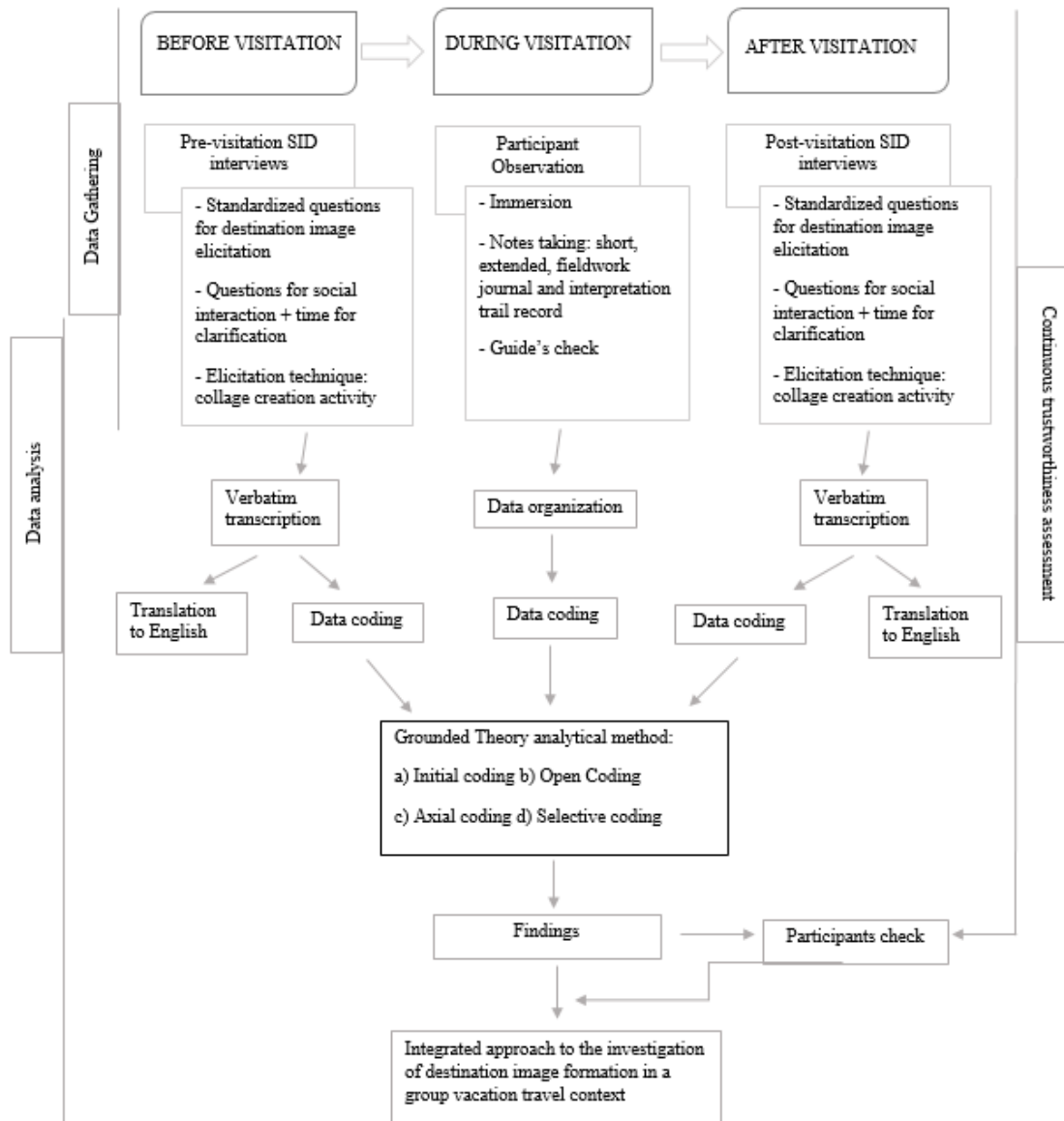


Figure 11 Data treatment flowchart

The next sections explain in more details this study's methodology. The study context is explained followed by the data gathering methods of semi-structured in-depth (SID) interviews and participant observation. To follow it is explained the adoption of grounded theory's data analysis procedures. Lastly, the adopted measures for ensuring the trustworthiness of the research and its findings are presented.

3.4. The study context

Given the discussion of the literature and the integration of the social representation approach, a group tour is found to be the most appropriate setting for studying the process of image formation in the context of this study. Group tours dwell in the destination's environment and the group provides a context in which the dynamics of mutual influence through unmediated communication and interpersonal association occur and are observable from a participant perspective (Yarnal & Kerstetter, 2005).

According to Wagner (1996) a group is any set of at least two people. It is a sub-set of the larger set of total people or a "universe of people", thus it is not a socially independent unit, but it is itself included in a wider social context in contrast with other groups. The social identity of a group is determined by the understanding of social phenomena that its members share. This is group specific, and it differentiates one group from another. Subsequently, this common understanding, determines what is real for the group, providing common ground for communication and co-action (Wagner, 1996)

Social scientists accept that groups are not real entities (Wolff, 1950). What is real and observable are the relationships and the interactions between individuals, who are the members of a group. A group is an ongoing process, which exists in the social interactions among individuals (Wolff, 1950; Bagozzi, 2000). Therefore, groups may have limited existence, since they exist as long as the interactions constituting them are maintained. These interactions take place among a gathering of individuals who establish a somewhat continuous contact with one another. They take into account one another in the awareness that they share some commonalities that are significant to them (Crompton, 1981; Moscovici, 1984) at least for a period of time. These may be ideas, attitudes and goals, but also activities or interests (Moscovici, 1984).

When a plurality of individuals is artificially gathered for a shared action, for example a group tour, it is not automatic for a group to be formed; however, the shared awareness of being away together (Lett, 1983) may provide the conducive environment for social interaction to

happen. The common destination of the group tour is another readily available commonality among individuals. This provides some initial common ground for communication to happen. Duveen and Lloyd (1993) maintained that what is shared by the individuals forming the group, is then expressed through their practices and behavior, whether it is language, activities or preferences (Pearce et al., 1996). Therefore, groups are formed through social interaction among individuals; what determines the nature and the boundaries of the group is manifest through social interaction among its constituting members.

Group size and its implications are still riddles. Research on the topic yielded interesting, but not conclusive results since it seems that every context presents different dynamics also depending on its size (Wolff, 1950; Hare, 1981; Quiroga, 1990; Baloglu, 1997). There is general agreement that groups of two, or dyads, present special interaction patterns, probably due to the intimacy they allow and foster. Groups of three also present a delicate balance. The trend of two individuals to polarize in contrast to a third is commonly observed (Wolff, 1950; Hare, 1981). Finally, a group tour in a traveling context can be defined as a gathering of individuals, who engage in frequent face-to-face interaction through communication, take one another into account, in the awareness of some significant commonality for a period of time of variable length.

A group tour during vacation is the chosen setting for the current study. A number of criteria are considered for the selection of the study context. Firstly, the study context has to reflect a real life situation. Secondly, it has to be accessible, meaning that approval for carrying out the study can be obtained from the tour company. The destination had to be known but not popular within the study population. This would allow the observation of a larger variation in destination image. Finally, Jordan, the Middle East, was selected. While being a real life situation, it needs to provide a conducive environment for participant observations during visitation. Therefore criteria regarding a manageable group size, the group tour organization, and nationality or rather culture of belonging of participants are discussed. The parameters identified aim at providing the best conditions possible for the current study.

3.4.1. The Tour Company and accessibility

To better explain the study context this section briefly introduces the selected company *Viaggi Avventure nel Mondo* (AM), the selected destination, Jordan and the selected group tour's logistics, composition and recruitment.

Accessibility and Viaggi Avventure nel Mondo

The well-established tour company *Viaggi Avventure nel Mondo* (AM) was considered an optimal choice for conducting this study for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is long established and popular in Italy and it encourages education and research in the field of tourism. Secondly, the style of the tours' organization provides facilitated and informal access to participants well before the departure date, as it will be further explained. The company started in the 1970's as a cultural association. *Mondo Avventure* promoted traveling as a culture, encouraging travelers to discover the value of traveling out of the beaten track, avert the mass tourism style of traveling and prefer traveling that is oriented towards discovery and understanding. In 1978, the association developed into a tour company based on the association's values presenting the activity of traveling as a cultural phenomenon rather than an act of consumption. The tour company AM organizes group tours reaching all continents and a long list of countries and regions.

The cultural association is still operating with cultural events, publications, constant research and conferences at study and cultural centers in Italy. Part of an effort for developing a documentation center in the name of the "travel culture", the company holds a Best Thesis Award on a yearly basis, since 2009. Within this initiative Italian students may apply for conducting their final thesis research project using one of the company's tours. Permission is granted if the proposal matches the company's travel philosophy and meets a number of criteria. The thesis has to focus on travel and its social, cultural, emotional or environmental implications; while economic and logistic implications are excluded from the eligibility criteria. This thesis proposal matched these requirements and permission was granted.

Viaggi Avventure nel Mondo's group tours organization

The company developed a rulebook summarizing its values in form of basic rules for those

who choose it. By communicating these rules, travelers are made aware of the pillars supporting the company’s operations, and are encouraged to honestly assess by themselves whether they are suitable for the kind of travel the company promotes. The rulebook explains the role of the coordinator clarifying the boundaries of the responsibilities s/he is entrusted with. It explains the existence and use of a shared pool of money for shared expenses at the destination; it also explains the shared life circumstances with the rest of the group, mostly strangers, and promotes the creation of a community feeling within the group. Lastly, it encourages respect for the visited destination, its people, its environment and its costumes.

The vast majority of the planning activities are carried out on-line with rare and minimal company-costumer relationships. The long list of tours potentially available are listed on-line on the company’s website. An example is portrayed by Figure 12. There are tours available at any time of the year; multiple tours depart every day and the choice of destinations and tour type are many and diverse. Multiple tour typologies are available for the same destination, too: for example, some are labelled *Discovery* and cater for a younger market, where traveling and accommodation conditions are

purposefully kept very humble. The ones labelled *Soft*, envisage relatively more comfortable traveling and accommodation conditions. These are just a few examples, however the list of trip typologies is extensive. The tour selected for this study was labelled *Breve* (i.e. short), implying that the length of the tour was limited to less than two weeks.

Tour enrolment happens entirely on-line (see Figure 12).

AMM VIAGGI NEL MONDO

SITUAZIONE PARTENZE

Cerca il viaggio che ti interessa e, quando lo hai trovato, clicca sul codice numerico per avviare la prenotazione. Clicca invece sul punto interrogativo accanto al titolo del viaggio per visualizzare la scheda relativa

Titolo del viaggio (anche solo in parte) Data di partenza (gg-mm-aaaa)

Codice	Titolo	Partenza	Ritorno	Prenotati	Offerte e Note	Stato
5501	? PASON COLOMBIA	23-05-2015	13-06-2015	15	effettua itinerario modificato, contattare il coordinatore coord.FOGLIA FLORIA-3335248952-	COMPLETO
1868	? IRAN SUITE	24-05-2015	01-06-2015	8	coord.LOMBARDI TIZIANA-3382863571-	
8551	? LE ORME DI TAMERLANO	24-05-2015	13-06-2015	4	coord.FASSINO PIER GIOVANNI-3333017907-	COMPLETO
1859	? IRAN IN LIBERTÀ	25-05-2015	09-06-2015	15	coord.BONI GIORDANO-3356842797-	COMPLETO
8202	? CANDIA TREK	28-05-2015	07-06-2015	3	coord.OTTONELLO LUIGI-010323374-	
2837	? GIBUTI SOLO	28-05-2015	03-06-2015	6	itinerario modificato - viaggio di 6 giorni - contattare il coordinatore coord.ZATI SIMONA-3332298993-	COMPLETO
6807	? CAPO NORD LOFOTEN	29-05-2015	07-06-2015	9	coord.IACUCCI IRENE-3472511432-	COMPLETO
8397	? CINA VIA DELLA SETA	29-05-2015	14-06-2015	6	post solo da milano coord.GALARDI PATRIZIA-3355696260-	
7293	? FARWEST BREVE	29-05-2015	14-06-2015	3	coord.DOBROVICH GIORGIO-3663723510-	
5052	? FARWEST BREVE	29-05-2015	14-06-2015	15	coord.SPOLETINI ANTONIO-065041618-	COMPLETO
1820	? ISTANBUL 5 DAYS	29-05-2015	02-06-2015	6	coord.COLOMBO MARIA GRAZIA-3932902729-	
3258	? KERALA AYURVEDA BREVE	29-05-2015	07-06-2015	3	coord.DONNOLI PATRIZIA-3478423009-	
1775	? ARMENIA SOFT	30-05-2015	07-06-2015	6	coord.ZINGARELLI LUIGI-0744407991-	
8674	? GIORDANIA BREVE	30-05-2015	07-06-2015	0		
1870	? IRAN SUITE	30-05-2015	07-06-2015	6	coord.ROCCOTELLI MARIA PIA-3334056216-	

Figure 12 Screen shot of the company's web page listing the offered tours and their status

Prospective travelers apply via the designated link. A preliminary registration is carried out by creating a personal account and paying a deposit. The on-line list is updated a few times a day so that the number of participants who pre-booked the trip appears next to the tour name on the list. Tours are confirmed for departure when a minimum of four participants registered for it. Therefore, tour participants have mostly never met before. Frequently, small groups of friends (2-3 people) and occasionally couples register together; the other tour participants though are strangers.

Contacts between the potential and prospective travelers and the company are limited to the bare minimum and mostly occur via Facebook. E-mails are used only when strictly necessary. Personal contact with the tour participants, as well as potential tour participants, are entertained by the tour coordinator. The company does not have its own travel guides. The coordinators are individuals who had previously travelled with AM, one or multiple times and came across as experienced, proactive and responsible travelers and individuals. An individual can become a coordinator only if recommended by another well-established coordinator who travelled with the individual. The group coordinator is not paid by the company, instead her/his trip is paid for. The coordinator is in charge of finalizing the tour itinerary, organizing logistics within the destination, establishing contact with local partners, selecting and booking accommodations and finally mediating the relationship among travelers. This operating mode made the company a most suitable one for the purposes of this study. After over three months monitoring the website and the destinations' popularity the best candidate emerged to be Jordan.

3.4.2. The selected destination

The first criterion to be met was that the destination was an uncommon one, but gaining interest and popularity in recent times. A relatively unknown destination would allow a larger image modification due to visitation. A number of destinations matching this criterion were shortlisted. Within the planned time span and budget, Jordan was selected as the best option.

Jordan: country introduction

The country Jordan, formally the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, is a constitutional

monarchy. Located in the Arab peninsula, it is grouped under the Middle East countries. As illustrated in Figure 13, it borders with Syria in the North, Iraq in the North East, Saudi Arabia in the East and South and with Israel in the West. Its capital city is Amman. According to the National Department of Statistics, Jordan's 2012 census



Figure 13 Jordan on the map

recorded a population of almost 6.4 million people (DOS, 2014; WTTC, 2014) for a total area of 89,318 sq. km. As shown in Figure 14, of the total area of the Kingdom, 70,000 sq. km (78.4%) is semi-desert area. The highest point is less than 2,000 meters above sea level; while the lowest point is reached by the Dead Sea, which is located 416 meters below sea level (DOS, 2014), constituting also the lowest point of the Earth's surface.

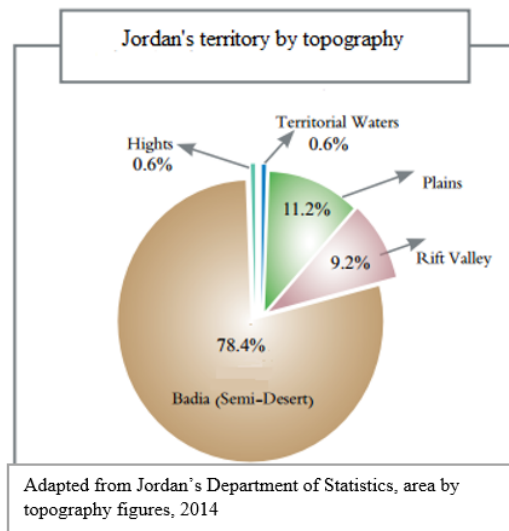


Figure 14 Topography of Jordan's territory

The local currency is the Jordanian Dinar (JOD) which exchanged to approximately 1 JOD to 1.4 USD and 1.11 Euros in June 2014, at the time of traveling. The national language is Arabic and the constitution of Jordan establishes

that the state religion is Islam. With the vast majority of the population, approximately 98%, being Sunni Muslim, while Shia Muslims, Christians and other religious minorities constitute the remaining 2% of the population (United States Department of State, 2013).

Jordan lists four sites in the UNESCO world heritage list. Three are listed in the cultural category: the archaeological site of Petra, on the list from 1985 (UNESCO World Heritage Center, 2014), is probably the most popular one recording approximately 630,000 (25%) of the 2.5 million visitors to museums and archaeological sites in 2012 (DOS, 2014). While the desert, the Wadi Rum area is on the list since 2011 in the mixed cultural and natural category

(UNESCO World Heritage Center, 2014) and according to the Department of Statistics it received approximately 140,000 visitors in 2012 (DOS, 2014).

The national department of statistics has a section of published and publicly available statistics under the heading Tourism. *Number of visitors* are listed under *selected tourism indicators* and reported according to the access to museums and archeological sites and plane passengers. These are distinguished between the Royal Jordanian Airlines and other airlines.

The published data for the 2010 – 2012 period show minimal changes in the development of the industry. Numbers of visits to museums and archeological sites recorded a decrease from 2010, from a total of about 4 million visits to about 2.5 million; the number of airline passengers recorded an aggregated increase from 5.8 million to 6.7 million approximately (DOS, 2014). However there is no data displaying visitors' arrivals by land and no information about visitors' nationalities. These data do not provide a comprehensive picture of the tourism sector in the country. According to the 2014 Tourism Highlights report (UNWTO, 2014) tourist arrivals fluctuated in the entire region. Jordan arrivals for 2012 were 4.1 million and estimated 3.9 for 2013. A similar fluctuation is recorded by the WTTC Economic impact report (WTTC Country Report, 2014) reporting a drastic drop in the growth trend of both direct (-14.6%) and total (-12.4%) contribution of travel and tourism to the country GDP in 2011, which grew in 2012 to drop again in 2013. The tourism development of the entire region is being affected by the ongoing tensions. With conflicts escalating in the region since June 2014 both in Syria and Israeli-Palestinian territories, and the increasing presence of the IS, optimistic views on short-term tourism development in the region are to be excluded.

3.4.3. Group tour's logistics and composition

The participants' group had to satisfy two conditions: to reflect a real life situation and to provide a conducive environment for participant observations. A standard group tour involving some sightseeing and some outdoor group activities satisfies the first criterion. While the conducive environment was identified after reflecting upon group tour organization and transportation. These group tour characteristics are explained hereafter, followed by group composition and recruitment.

Group tour's logistics

The selected group tour mainly involved sightseeing of ancient ruins, two days of roaming in the Jordan desert and also a few outdoor activities such as hiking and canyoning. However, the group also spent a large amount of time traveling by minibus. This travel arrangements put the group in the condition of having to spend a lot of time together at close contact. Not only it provides a captive, thus favorable environment for participant observations, it is also expected to encourage social interactions (Quiroga, 1990).

The length of the trip has to allow time for participants to bond; a ten-day trip was considered appropriate. Another reason for choosing this type of tour is the accessibility of the type of vacation. This type of sightseeing is not selective in terms of demographic characteristics or physical abilities. The tour does not require any specific skill, nor is it restricted to a specific age group.

Group composition and size

As discussed in the second chapter, the researcher has to be aware of the assumptions and covert meanings on which participants build upon (Charmaz, 2000). When researcher and participants do not share the same representations structure, thus belong to different cultures and speak different languages misinterpretation of behavior and interaction is likely to occur. So that if an Italian investigator was to examine social interaction between Chinese participants, the risk would be very high for meanings and symbols to be lost in the process jeopardizing the plausibility of interpretation. These meanings are connected to, but also go beyond language, they are unsaid building blocks of a specific culture, which behavior and communication are based upon. My culture of origin is Italian, and for these reasons the selected tour company is an Italian one, catering Italian travelers.

The ideal group size for conducting participant observation remains a riddle. While brainstorming studies commonly use groups of four, and focus groups' sizes range between four and eight (Fern, 1982), there is no universally accepted, optimal number of participants for observations. Each observation exercise is context specific. Observations are used especially for examining social settings and contexts. It is a method usually employed for

describing and discovering contextualized patterns of social dynamics. The number of participants being observed and their context vary according to the research objective that led to conducting observation. Usually the reasons for employing the observation data collection method lays in the need to understand the investigated phenomenon in its usual and natural context (Hennink et al., 2011). Therefore the number of participants and the selected unit of analysis depend on the phenomenon of investigation and its usual context. In a tourism travel context Bowen (2002) conducted covert participant observations of a group tour departing from the UK with the objective of investigating consumer satisfaction or dissatisfaction processes. On the basis of in-depth interviews with the tour operator management, a group size of ten to twenty travelers was considered a normally desirable group tour product for the specific company; Bowen (2002) considered this range to be also appropriate for maximizing the potential of participant observation. However, Yarnal and Kerstetter (2005) conducted participant observation in a cruise ship tour comprising more than 90 guests and approximately 1,000 staff members; Quiroga (1990) observed a total of 574 people participating in coach tours, in which the smaller group size was of 26 and the largest of 58 participants. In the group tour literature reviewed there is no indication of an ideal group tour size, nor for research purposes, nor as an ideal group tour product (Baloglu, 1997).

Finally, excluding the researcher (myself), the group tour was constituted of ten Italian participants, one group coordinator and one local guide, a Jordanian man whom the group met at the destination on the second day. The group participants came from different regions of Italy. Therefore half of the group, including myself, met at Milan airport, in the North of the country; the other half met at Rome airport in the center. The two halves merged in El Cairo for the last flight to the destination airport in Amman. The flight duration was approximately 10 hours including lay-over.

Participants' recruitment

The group coordinator and I had been in contact since the moment in which the specific tour was selected after receiving access from the tour company. The coordinator was briefed about the project and consented to support it. The tour became very popular about fifteen days

before departure and reached 25 participants. The tour company decided to split it in two in order to have two parallel groups independent from each other, but following approximately the same itinerary. I will call the second group ‘the parallel group’ from now on. Once the group was finalized, the group coordinator put us all in contact through a group mailing list, about two weeks before departure. The first contacts between participants thus happened via e-mail. The first e-mails exchanged within the group aimed at introducing oneself to the others. In this occasion and facilitated by the coordinator, I asked the group members’ consent to take part in my research project. They were asked to make themselves available for two consecutive interviews and to consent to me traveling with them. Participants were offered an incentive, portrayed in Figure 15, for participating in the study, a souvenir from Jordan, which they would have received upon completion of the second interview. All of the participants agreed to take part in the project and data collection gathering.



Figure 15 Participation incentive

3.5.Data gathering

Qualitative methods of data collection and analysis seek to gather rich data, dense with descriptions and explanations, coming from different sources, encompassing different angles and perspectives. The desired result is to reach a variety of information, which provides a good understanding of the extent and boundaries of the phenomenon and the range of meanings and interpretations relevant to it (Charmaz, 2000; Hennink et al., 2011; Maxwell, 2013). Individuals usually provide accounts of their experiences and actions, however they are usually not able to provide full and detailed explanation of why they acted the way they did (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003); and, their overt messages and accounts are not the original experience, they are rather a reconstruction and interpretation of the original experience.

A combination of two methods, SID interviews coupled with participant observations can better uncover variations and different angles of the social phenomenon investigated (Denzin

& Lincoln, 2003). It also allows to employ the strengths of different tools for understanding the phenomenon relying on more than one perspective (Prebensen, 2007; Prayag, 2007). Neither of the two methods is more central than the other. They hold equal importance, and they are coupled for complementing each other.

3.5.1. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews (SID interviews)

In-depth interviews are especially suitable when seeking understanding on people's decision making, personal perceptions, meanings and feelings that people attach to phenomena or experiences (Hennink et al., 2011). Therefore this method is appropriate for this study, where individuals' image of a destination is sought in details.

SID interviews prove very useful when some aspects of the research are well-known and can be used for comparison while some other aspects of the investigation are largely unknown and information is expected emerge in conversation. For example, when the image of a destination is investigated and answers are to be comparable across participants and time, the information sought is known; however, freedom and flexibility is needed for participants to elaborate on topics related to the role of social interaction in the process of destination image formation, which are largely unknown (Patton, 2002).

Two sets of interviews were conducted. One before visitation and one after visitation. SID were conducted within ten days before departure and two weeks upon return. The rationale behind the pre- and post- visitation approach is manifold. Firstly, since it is a dynamic phenomenon which is investigated, arbitrary points of beginning and end have to be set. The information retrieved in the two occasions provide points of reference for the examination of the process observed in between. Secondly, comparison between the two moments is expected to provide evidence of the dynamic nature of destination image due to recorded modification likely to occur. Lastly, pre-visitation SID interviews are particularly useful for eliciting information such as travel motivation and sources of information that contributed to destination image formation before visitation; it also provides some information on the individual's personality, relevant, in this case, for data analysis. Post-visitation SID interviews, provide data for comparison, and represent a crucial opportunity to check the outcome of the phenomenon.

The SID interviews design

The two interviews were designed in three parts. The first part aimed at eliciting the individual destination image. The second part was dedicated to encouraging participants to talk in relation of the expected/actual social interaction within the group. This part was also used for seeking clarification of any topic that might have needed it. The third part was dedicated to a creative activity, namely the creation of a collage composition, for eliciting additional and detailed destination image elements. This elicitation method is relatively original in the tourism literature and its employment will be further elaborated. Demographic characteristics of the group members were collected partially from the self-introductory e-mails and partially through informal conversation with participants. The design of the SID interviews is hereafter outlined, addressing each part separately. While the interview guide can be found in Appendix A.

PART ONE: literature-based investigation of destination image

The first part of the SID interviews was concerned with identifying individual destination image. The information retrieved in this part needed to be comparable across individuals, and between the two interviews for the same individual. Three standardized questions adapted from the literature and originally developed by Echtner and Ritchie (1991, 1993) were included in this section. These are 'What images or characteristics come to mind when you think of Jordan as a vacation destination?', 'How would you describe the atmosphere that you would expect to experience while visiting Jordan?', 'Please list any distinctive or unique features that you can think of in Jordan'. These aim at eliciting both cognitive and affective elements of the image of the destination Jordan, encouraging participants to retrieve also holistic, psychological and unique images. The simplicity of the questions aims at easing participants into the interview and the topic. In the pre-visitation interview, subsequent questions investigated the sources of information participants used and to what extent; questions aiming at eliciting participants' prior travel experience were also asked. In the first part of the post-visitation interview only the first three standardized open-ended questions were asked; information sources and travel experience were excluded.

PART TWO: exploring social behavior

The second part of the interview was dedicated to eliciting information about what type of social actor the participant was. Questions addressing participants' perception of the group as expected before visitation and as experienced after visitation, aimed at eliciting traits of participants' personality and the importance that the social context had to them. This part was less structured even if it was maintained as consistent as possible across participants and interview sessions. This was also the part in which any needed clarifications were sought. This part is even more crucial in the post-visitation SID interview. Any incident that occurred during visitation that needs further elaboration, any question that arose during participant observation or during preliminary data analysis was addressed in this occasion. This occasion was also a first participant check of preliminary analysis of pre-visitation SID interviews and participant observation.

PART THREE: collage creation as free association technique

Research that requires richness of in-depth and detailed information constitutes a challenge. When information is not entirely rationally elaborated by individuals (e.g. destination image, ideal experience, etc.) traditional elicitation techniques, such as words association, are not enough at times. To tackle this challenge, a collage creation activity was introduced in third part as a technique of free association.

Tool background. Collage creation is defined as the selecting, cutting and pasting of pictures, texts or fragments of any material and proceeding from any source, onto a flat surface (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Davis, 2008). It is considered a projective technique included in art informed research (Davis & Butler-Kisber, 1999). It is exceptionally accessible, flexible and capable of retrieving conscious and unconscious connections and feelings (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Davis, 2008), as well as visual and non-visual knowledge (Koll, Wallpach, & Kreuzer, 2010). For the complexity of its construct, destination image research is challenging since investigation of its complexity requires reaching below the common images readily accessible at the surface of awareness.

The technique of collage creation is often employed as a channel of expression in

therapeutic and recreational fields (Davis, 2008). Its applications in academic research appears sporadic and mostly concentrated in fields such as psychology, nursing and education (Davis & Butler-Kisber, 1999; Davis, 2008; Butler-Kisber, 2008, 2010; Mannay, 2010). Researchers who employed it appreciate collage creation's ability to succeed where language and text fail. Language and text are communication channels that allow the elaboration of one thought at a time only. Also, these means only work if the individuals are rationally aware of their thoughts. This is not necessary in collage creation. The creative activity of selecting fragments, their reshaping, juxtaposition and combination produces a visual representation of the complex inter-related determinants that the composer attributes to the object being represented. It is the creative process that retrieves attributes of verbal and non-verbal nature, which might be present at both conscious and unconscious level (Davis, 2008; Butler-Kisber L. , 2008). This property makes collage creation a powerful tool in a therapeutic and pedagogical environment; for the same property it constitutes an option worth exploring for the investigation of non-tangible concepts such as tourist destination image.

The technique is rarely found in academic research and in tourism there are only a couple of examples (Prebensen, 2007; Wagner & Peters, 2009). Examining the literature on collage creation it is noticeable that there is no method development thread. One would expect to find a series of subsequent applications being discussed, adjusted and improved building on reported experiences. It is not the case with collage creation. Different applications are isolated in their disciplinary silos. Studies that employed the tool belong to different fields of knowledge and research and do not refer to each other's works across disciplines. (Please, refer to Attachment B for more detailed explanations, additional background as well as methodological details on this technique.)

Tool development. While a creative activity without defined guidelines maximizes the spontaneity of knowledge elicitation, a set of clear guidelines is considered more appropriate for the purpose of cross-sample comparability. Guidelines comprise the selection and nature of visuals in respect of pictures copyrights, background surface for the composition, its inclusion within an in-depth interview and data analysis; continuous trustworthiness

assessment also needs a tailored plan.

Tool material. Pictures selection was planned in order to eliminate the concern of potential copyright violation. Two major risks of bias introduction need to be mitigated, these are researcher's personal preference and the potential leading effect that visuals may have on participants' choices. Pictures are retrieved from a website providing free images for public use. In order to mitigate researcher's pictures preference a mixed subjects' album was chosen and every tenth image was selected. From this first collection repeating subjects were eliminated and the one that appeared first in the on-line album was kept. This procedure reduced the pictures to a set of 40: this was judged as an appropriate amount allowing for enough choice without becoming overwhelming. Participants were provided with the same six-cardboard set of colors: black and white, red and green, blue and yellow, also known as the psychological primary colors (Hurvich & Jameson, 1957; Krantz, 1975) and the cardboards measured 33cm x 24cm.

Tool implementation. Participants were asked to compose a collage displaying their image of Jordan by using the provided material. The only limitations were that the choice of visuals was limited to the provided set, the final outcome should measure the size of one cardboard and they were required to explain their choices and thoughts throughout the composition. Researcher's intervention was limited to asking questions in case some emerging point required further elaboration.

Tool contribution. This technique was believed to be very valuable due to a number of reasons. Firstly, it is believed to contribute to the mitigation of the SID interview environment, making the participant more at ease with a playful and creative activity; this was especially important in the pre-visitation interview, for the development of a rapport which would last throughout the research project. Secondly, providing participants with choices, will make them think and their rationale is expected to disclose a great variety of descriptive information about the many aspects composing their image. Finally, the tool is recognized for been able to reach deeper strata of individuals' cognition, and is capable of retrieving information that might not be rationally elaborated; thus it complements the verbal elicitation technique employed in the

first part of the SID interview. The activity was repeated identically in the post-visitation interview.

Language

The language in which SID interviews were conducted is Italian, the mother tongue of both participants and researcher. The SID interviews were recorded with a digital recorder and transcribed verbatim. The transcriptions were sent to an Italian-mother-tongue translator. These translations were checked for accuracy by me. In fact, my background includes an undergraduate degree in translation and interpreting. Preliminary data analysis was conducted on the Italian data since the participants would express their understanding with that frame of mind. A subsequent data analysis was conducted on the English translation of the interviews. It was found that the coding of these preliminary data analysis over the entirety of the interview data, corresponded to the coding on the Italian data. This was possibly due to the continuous collaboration between the translator and myself; the translator's mother tongue is also Italian, which allowed her to convey the same messages through the English language. Given the found correspondence in coding, data analysis continued on the English translation. As an extra check, the Italian original was constantly referred to for confirming extracts' meanings.

Risks and Weaknesses

Even though interviews are widely employed in qualitative research, they are not weaknesses free. These include lack of feedback from others, it might be challenging to build a comfortable relationship or environment and lastly they are time consuming (Hennink et al., 2011). In addition the introduction of the collage creation technique also needs a separate assessment. The SID interviews are a one-to-one encounter, there is no opportunity of receiving feedback from others for the interpretations of the individual's interview. Being in such an intimate environment, it might be challenging to construct a situation that is comfortable and conducive to the free flow of one's elaboration. This favorable relationship is also called rapport and in every SID interview, it is necessary for it to be established in order to retrieve trustworthy data.

The collage creation technique presents challenges in the interpretation phase that can be

tackled through advance planning. While the ambiguity inherent to the visuals and multiplicity of potential interpretations possible represent part of the potent elicitation potential of the collage creation tool, it also represents a major threat of meaning distortion. The tool was designed accordingly.

SID Interviews trustworthiness

The identified risks are tackled as summarized in Table 6. Feedback on the findings and interpretations is sought continuously. A series of checks are planned and conducted. Firstly, participant observations is conducted between the two SID interviews. It provided the occasion to check the consistency between pre-visitation participants' accounts and behavior; it also provide occasions for checking preliminary inferences with the group coordinator making use of his experience in the position and with the phenomenon. Finally, verbatim transcription of interviews are sent back to the participants for them to check not only the transcription accuracy, but also to be given the possibility of expanding or correcting their answers. The second SID interview provide feedback and consistency check on the first one. Finally, interpretations of findings in form of synthesized conclusions are submitted to the participants for their feedback and comments. The received feedback and comments are then taken into consideration and findings and discussion are re-addressed.

Rapport building, is considerably in the hands of the interviewer's social skills. The collage technique, especially in the first SID interview contributed to ease the atmosphere due to the playful and creative nature of the activity. It helped building rapport between the interviewee and myself, which proved beneficial for nurturing participants' support trust during visitation and after visitation. For the second SID interview, rapport is not a concern. Moreover, the topic of investigation is not considered sensitive, which also mitigates the concern of participants lying or omitting relevant information.

The translation of the interviews' transcriptions was assigned to an Italian-mother-tongue translator. Finally, the planning and implementation of the collage creation activity needed to tackle the challenges to interpretation of the data created through the creative composition. Firstly, the activity was standardized so that conditions were homogeneous across sample.

Participants were requested explanation for their choices and the process leading to these choices during the actual creation; they were also asked to explain their personal interpretation of the final outcome. Thus the activity’s product was verbally explained and could be transcribed and analyzed like the rest of the interview. Data elicited by the open-ended questions and the collage activity were maintained separately in order to check for correspondences and differences and make noticeable any contribution by the creative method.

Table 6 Interviews trustworthiness assessment summary

Lack of feedback	Continuous search for feedback Check with group coordinator Participants’ check at multiple stages
Challenging to build rapport	Pre-visitation: collage technique Post- visitation: increased familiarity due to the shared trip
Time consumption	Commission the translation of the verbatim transcriptions (transcriptions checked for accuracy by me)
Collage creation	Standardized conditions Participants’ own explanation through interview

Participant observation

Participant observation is the “systematically watching, listening, questioning and recording people’s behavior, expressions and interactions as well as noting the social setting, location or context in which the people are situated” (Hennink et al., 2011, p.170). Moscovici (1988) expressed his preference for observation as a method for investigating processes of thoughts and communication such as social representation. This is because, the author maintained, this method allows for an in-depth examination of the phenomenon. Moreover it allows for an approach free from premature categorizations, making findings free from constraints. Wagner et al., (1999) report that researchers who engaged in social representation studies focus on talk and behavior related to a social object. In order to study how and why representations are created, Moscovici (1988) explained that investigation should focus on communication, since this is the channel that “enables individual thoughts and feelings to converge and allows something individual to become something social” (p.219).

Participant observations allow the researcher to immerse herself in the researched situation and be part of the phenomenon under investigation. While the technique is guided by the purpose, research question and objectives of the study, events unfold independently; the phenomenon happens in its natural setting and at its natural pace and the researcher has the chance to notice unexpected developments (Patton, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). These can then be clarified or explored more in depth in post-visitation interviews.

Bowen (2002) opted for participant observation for investigating consumer satisfaction or dissatisfaction of a group tour departing from the UK and traveling to Southeast Asia. The researcher discarded the option of employing a more traditional questionnaire approach to the study, for the weakness of this approach of grasping meanings and rationales behind respondents' answers. Bowen (2002) concluded that the method proved most appropriate. In fact, it allowed for conceptualizing findings in a real situation, where the voices of both tourists and service providers were available. Moreover the author highlighted that being there is a valuable source of insights otherwise unreachable.

Hennink et al., (2011) indicated in what instances it is beneficial to employ the observation method for investigation. Relevant to the present study these include, the investigation of a new or unexplored research topic and actions and interactions of a certain group in a specific setting.

Advantages

The familiarization opportunity with the social context that allows for identifying unspoken rules informing behavior (Hennink et al., 2011) is one of the advantages of participant observation. This provides access to a deeper understanding of the situation framing the phenomenon and what influenced its development (Patton, 2002). Participant observation naturally encourages the researcher to inductive reasoning, since direct experience allows the detachment from deductive projection of context and setting (Patton, 2002; Hennink et al., 2011); it provides the chance to notice elements and details that participants may not be aware of and thus would be lost with other methods (Patton, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). People's accounts, as for example SID interviews, are interpretations of an event and what is reported is influenced by the speaker's background, knowledge, culture and personal interest. Therefore,

observation allows for reaching beyond participants' interpretation and access the phenomenon during its manifestation (Patton, 2002). Participant observation started at the first group gathering prior to flight departure and was concluded at the luggage claim upon return.

Immersion

On the basis of these advantages, a participant type of observation was chosen. The immersion in the social context being investigated provides access to multiple and simultaneous sources of data, which are obtained through natural processes of emergence. Therefore not only contexts, patterns, processes and unexpected events can emerge, but also data can be obtained by casual conversations with participants. Engaging in casual, every-day, informal conversations, or be present during opinions' exchange provides access to the insider perspective, which would not be available otherwise. Comments, opinions, feelings and impressions can be noticed and recorded in the moment when they spontaneously arise; they are contextualized and not rationalized or deliberately selected by participants as they would be in a SID interview (Patton, 2002; Bowen, 2002). Moreover, a participant type of observation allows access to the tour guide and the group coordinator, regarded as valuable sources of insights and data check.

Weaknesses and risks

Participant observations also present a number of risks. These include time commitment, overwhelming raw data, but also data dispersion and misinterpretations. Participant observation implies, in this case, participating to a group tour and be present and take part in the activities the other participants are undertaking. Commitment to fieldwork time is clearly crucial and the length of the engagement can affect the concentration abilities of the researcher, or even make the researcher lose her ability of distinguishing between her dual role. Long-time participation and immersion is bound to produce a large amount of data. It can be extremely challenging to explore and analyze such data and find threads to follow. And again, a participant type of observation limits the possibilities to take notes on the spot. This challenges the abilities of retaining and later eliciting the observed happenings for the data to be recorded and not to go lost (Patton, 2002; Bowen, 2002; Hennink et al., 2011).

Lastly, misinterpretations of the researcher in relation to what is observed are a common concern, since the researcher has a dual role, one of participant and one of observer, which might be challenging to combine; moreover the researcher's observations depend on her selective reasoning due to background and interests (Patton, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

Participant observations trustworthiness

Silverman (1993) suggested to keep four types of notes as a counter measure precisely to the identified threats. These include short notes taken as soon as possible after some relevant happening is noted; expand the notes as soon as possible; keep a field work journal, in which to record ideas, insights, problems and doubts that arise at every stage; and lastly keep running records of the analysis and interpretation process parallel to data gathering.

Silverman (1993) highlighted the importance of data records quality. Records should be accurate, so that notes can be checked against an event recalled for example during a subsequent SID interview. Records should also be contextualized, so that setting, social happenings, body language, and surroundings are noted and coupled by thick description of situations, background information and description of imagery. Records must be useful, meaning that the information noted is relevant to the purpose and able to provide context and details about the situation, together with interpretations. Lastly, records have to be reflexive. Since the researcher is integral part of every step, importantly also in data creation, attention has to be paid to the influence and effect the role and presence of the researcher brings to the field, and what effect it has on the data.

Identifying the occasions in which social interactions are more likely to occur and in what form, can help the researcher, who can be prepared and be more alert when needed. Given the structure of the trip, it was expected that some interaction-intensive occasions during the day, would include meal time and the transfer trips between one destination and the next on the itinerary. The captive environment was expected to encourage interactions between participants. While sightseeing time and activities were expected to be less interaction-intensive, because attention would be dedicated to the enjoyment of the view; it would have been also less easy to observe since the group would break up. However, these occasions were

still very relevant, since these were the moments in which spontaneous comments, and feelings may be expressed.

The occasion for checking observations, before post-visitation SID interview was provided by informal conversations with the group coordinator and with participants. The group coordinator, with a long record of previous trips of this type and in that role, was a valuable source of insights. This provided an extra check on the trustworthiness of the data, which was checked three more times with the participants. Once with the post-visitation SID interview, again when they were provided the interviews transcriptions and again when presented the preliminary research conclusions for their feedback. Table 7 provides a summary of the adopted measures.

Table 7 Participant observation trustworthiness assessment summary

Prolonged concentration need	Identify focal situations
Researcher’s dual role: participant/observer	Reflexivity
Amount of data Data dispersion	Four types of notes: short, extended, fieldwork journal and interpretation record
Misinterpretation	Guide check Two levels of participant check

Over and covert researcher

A researcher embarking in an observational study can chose whether to conduct overt or covert observations. There are different viewpoints on this choice, since each has its implications (Patton, 2002). Covert observation presents the advantage of having access to the real-life, undisturbed unfolding of the phenomenon, since the researcher role is not known and thus cannot alter participants’ behavior. The alteration of participants’ behavior because they know they are being observed is a commonly raised concern in overt observations. However, the overt observer might benefit from the willingness to share on behalf of the participants. Once the role of the researcher is disclosed, questions may come not as a surprise, but rather be justified, and thus make participants accessible. This is clearly not the case in every inquiry, since it might be the exact opposite when investigating sensitive issues, such as drug dealing (Patton, 2002). Either choice presents implications which may be beneficial or limiting. Finally the choice is research specific: it depends on the objectives and the purpose of the study. In

program's evaluation Patton (2002) encouraged completely overt observations. While Bowen (2002) opted for covert observations for exploring satisfaction and dissatisfaction in a tour group context. Yarnal and Kerstetter (2005) were required to adopt an overt position as an ethical requirement of the institution they worked for. In this research an overt position was adopted. The choice of conducting interviews with the participants before traveling makes this choice obligated. Participants were informed that I was participating to the tour and the purpose for this participation was disclosed as a necessary step for understanding the topic.

3.6.Data analysis

“If social representations serve to familiarize the unfamiliar, then the first task of a scientific study of representations is to make the familiar unfamiliar in order that they may be grasped as phenomena and described through whatever methodological techniques may be appropriate in particular circumstances” (Duveen, 2000, p.15). An effort has to be made for the researcher to leave behind the conceptualization approach previously formulated, since it is crucial that the data is allowed room for speaking itself and show its categories, their relationships and patterns (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The method developed in the grounded theory approach for data analysis is adopted for the current study. It is believed that this is one appropriate method for checking the fit of the previously introduced approach with a real life situation's data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), but also enables to integrate the conceptualization approach with unexpected components or processes and inform its development.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) explained that generating theory implies different procedures. While verifying existing theories, traditionally implies either verification or falsification of hypothesis, the generation of new theory requires systematic and purposeful examination of data, which provide the evidence for its formulation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Where a theory is defined as organized knowledge able to explain a phenomenon when applied to its real-life happening. The grounded theory guidelines are adopted in this study limitedly for guidance in data analysis towards the generation of an integrated theory.

The Grounded Theory analytical method

Glaser and Strauss (1967) developed grounded theory as an approach to research aiming at refocusing the trend of sociological research which, they maintained, was increasingly focused on theory verification. The authors aimed at compensating the inability of quantitative research in sociology of capturing the meaning of experience. The authors maintained that logico-deductive theory often present a mismatch between theory and empirical world, or at best, a partial account of the investigated phenomenon. They created a framework for guiding systematic collection and analysis of data.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) introduced grounded theory as “the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research” (p.2). Grounded theory designates an inductively formulated theory; this is developed through systematic steps aimed at a continuous relation with the emerging data, so that the theory is “grounded” in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Maxwell, 2013). The approach originally was strongly focused on the inductive process of discovery only and directly from the data, which is the stance that Glaser maintained. Strauss diverged from this view stressing the validation characteristics of grounded theory. In collaboration with Corbin, the authors identified the analytical steps for the formation of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The authors stressed the non-prescriptive and non-dogmatic nature of the approach, highlighting that the framework that they were presenting was to be considered a way of thinking of research.

Grounded theory emphasizes especially the processes of data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) providing tools for the understanding of the investigated phenomenon through masses of data (Charmaz, 2000): in this lies its strength. When the knowledge about the phenomenon under investigation is very limited, e.g. what role social interaction plays in the process of destination image formation in a group vacation travel context, a clear, systematic and flexible procedure for approaching the raw data is especially valuable. Charmaz (2000) revisited grounded theory from a constructivist perspective, whereby the importance of studying people in their natural contexts is restated as paramount. The author maintained that grounded theory should be non-prescriptive and not a rigid scheme; the focus

on interpretive understanding should benefit from placing emphasis on meanings; and importantly, the methods of grounded theory can be adopted without embracing the underlying paradigm (Charmaz, 2000).

The strategies of grounded theory satisfy four broad criteria, and follow clear procedures for data analysis. A theory, or in this case a conceptual approach, has to satisfy four requirements: it must fit the investigated situation, it must be relevant to the phenomenon, it must work when it is employed, and it must be modifiable. Where “fit” means that the categories constituting the integrated approach have to be provided by the data; the integrated approach has to be relevant to the situation under investigation and have the ability of explaining the phenomenon. It has to “work”, which means that when the integrated approach is applied to a real life situation it is useful for making sense of the phenomenon. Lastly, it has to be flexible so that it can be modified when new insights emerge from additional data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Charmaz, 2000).

Grounded theory works in two directions, inductive and deductive. The method is inductive because it employs strategies that allow the emergence of a conceptual system from the data. It is also deductive when the fit of the finally formulated approach is checked in terms of its explanatory power (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Maxwell, 2013). In this case, the formulated approach is also checked for how it compares with previous relevant literature.

Data analysis procedure

The guidelines of grounded theory are employed in this study limitedly as guidance for data analysis. Raw data are subject to successive data coding procedures, i.e. initial coding, open coding, axial coding and selective coding. The processes of data collection and coding have to be combined with memo writing aiding conceptual analysis. The process culminates in the formulation of an integrated approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Charmaz, 2000).

Initial coding

Initial coding starts immediately with the first data gathered and transcribed. It consists of the thorough examination of the raw data line-by-line (Charmaz, 2000). It aims at finding the

underlying ideas relevant to the phenomenon under investigation. From a line-by-line coding, labels are assigned to emerging ideas, which are the basis of the understanding of the phenomenon. Coding every single line makes the researcher immerse in the data. This type of microanalysis has two implications. Firstly, attention is paid to every action and every event, thus the researcher builds sensibility to the concepts relevant to the phenomenon; secondly, it helps prevent the forcing of a pre-existing theory onto the emerging data.

Initial coding aids a deeper understanding and provides leads for developing further data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2000). Charmaz (2000) merges initial coding and open coding in one procedure only. However Strauss and Corbin (1998) distinguished the two procedures. Line-by-line analysis is an initial microanalysis that puts the researcher in touch with the data. The procedure suggests the initial categories and provides hints about the relationships between them (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Open Coding

Open coding is the analytical procedure through which data are distinguished and compared in purposeful search of similarities and differences. Figure 16 provides a visual display of the open coding procedure. Open

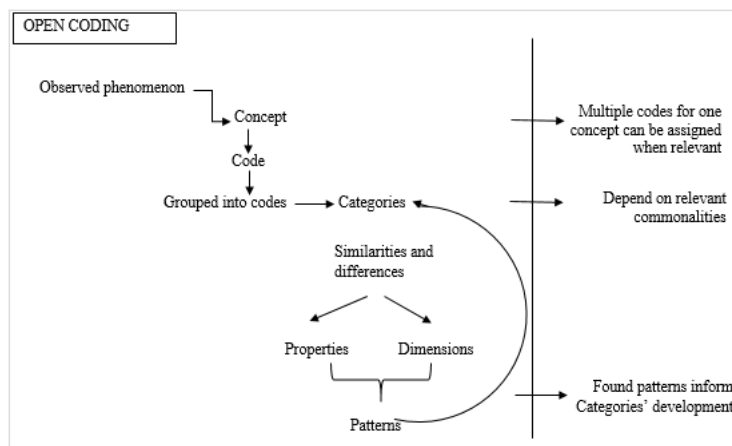


Figure 16 Open coding procedure display

coding is the process through which the central phenomena constituting the data are identified as concepts. The concepts, components of the emerging theory, are grouped into codes according to commonalities identified as relevant. The coded concepts are thus organized into categories. The range of dimensions the property can assume are then identified. The properties and their dimensions explain the meanings and the variation encompassed by the theory. In the process, can emerge subcategories that designate additional concepts to a category and further specify it. Subcategories also present properties and properties' dimensions. Through the

further specification of the category through its properties and their dimensions, patterns can start emerging. This constitute the beginning of the foundations of the theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Charmaz, 2000).

Axial coding

Axial coding is the process through which the relationship between categories and subcategories are established. This method aims at exploring how data is related to form the phenomenon. Figure 17 provides a visual display of the axial coding procedure. The process aims at answering why, how, where, when, and with what consequences and implications the happening represented by the category takes place. Conditions are to be induced from the data. These are set of happenings that have some explanatory ability over the reasons and ways people act the way they do.

Interaction, as acknowledged by Strauss and Corbin (1998) is a key concept since it is the means through which situations are defined and given meanings by people

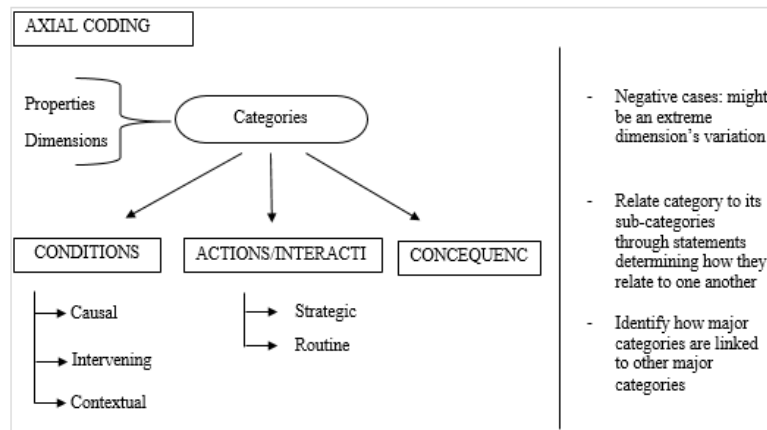


Figure 17 Axial coding procedure display

as they evolve over time. Finally, the identification of consequences uncovers the way in which the phenomenon evolves or is modified in its unfolding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Selective coding

Categories are generated, with their properties and properties' dimensional variations through open coding. The relationships between the categories and their subcategories are established through axial coding (Charmaz, 2000). The formulation of the theory then requires the integration of the major categories into a theoretical framework: this is the process of selective coding. Through this process a central category is identified which is linked to all the major categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The central category is one which is able to explain the whole network. Therefore it has to satisfy a number of criteria. First of all, all the major

categories have to be connected to it and the relationships have to be logical and consistent. Moreover it has to emerge frequently, directly or indirectly from the data. The category has to reach a level of abstraction which allows its applicability to other similar contexts of research, allowing for its evolution towards a more general theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This is also the process in which categories that were identified early during coding and come to be in excess are eliminated. When a category is not well defined by the data and thus does not bring crucial contribution to the development of the theory, it is dropped (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Memos

One crucial technique for recording the emerging relationships connecting the categories is memo taking. Strauss and Corbin (1998) identify three kinds of memos: the first one is code notes, second is theory notes and the third is operational notes. Code notes, explain and describe the ideas that emerge from the data and are being coded and categorized. Theory notes aim at recording the researcher's ideas or understanding of what is actually going on in the data. The last kind, the operational notes, are intended to keep track of operational issues (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). Keeping systematic running notes comprising different aspects of the research process help the researcher in keeping track of the development of the investigation; and it also facilitates the self-reflection of the researcher who can then analyze her/his personal influence on the investigation.

Even though the data analysis process has been broken down and presented in individual blocks, the coding methods are not linear and hierarchical steps: they are simultaneous. Data analysis starts with data gathering and it finishes arbitrarily when an end is put to writing (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Maxwell, 2013; Hennink et al., 2011).

3.6.1. Computer assisted data analysis

Qualitative data gathering methods consist of the accumulation of a large and dense amount of raw data which is not organized. This data, can be very challenging to manage and search because of its extensiveness. The assistance of a computer software for data analysis presents a number of advantages. Firstly, the computer software stores the data. The data is organized by the researcher according to her coding decisions. The computer is able to search

the data faster and more accurately than if the researcher was to do it manually. It allows for memos to be situated at any point in the text, which makes memos retrieving immediate. Data searches are saved preventing time-wasting repetitions of searches (Charmaz, 2000; Hennink et al., 2011; Maxwell, 2013). Therefore, computer assisted data analysis allows for a more efficient and accurate data management. Aiding accuracy and immediacy the computer is able to assist the analytical process of the researcher. The NVivo software is used for data management during data analysis.

3.7. Trustworthiness

In the positivist tradition trustworthiness is represented by the concepts of validity and reliability. Validity is the extent to which results match reality (Silverman, 1993). Thus within an interpretive paradigm, where there are multiple socially constructed realities, it refers to whether the conclusions, drawn on the findings, are *plausible* in a given real life context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Reliability is understood as the ability of the research methods to capture reality (Silverman, 1993; Maxwell, 2013). Within an interpretivist perspective there is no such thing as one reality and the belief that some method can completely reach such accuracy has also been abandoned (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Maxwell, 2013). An interpretivist assessment focuses on whether the investigation is *credible*, i.e. whether it shows methodological relevance and rigor (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Maxwell, 2013). Denzin and Lincoln (2003) discussed that the crucial test any research has to pass is whether the findings are trustworthy, meaning that they resemble some reality, or “the way others construct their social worlds” (p.274).

The method is chosen on the basis of the purpose of the study, the research questions, the objectives, the perspective and the circumstances. Finally the conclusions depend on the researcher’s interpretation (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Maxwell, 2013). In order for the findings and conclusions of an investigation to be trustworthy both methodological rigor and interpretive rigor are required (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Silverman, 1991; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Hennink et al., 2011; Maxwell, 2013).

Trustworthiness is also a relative concept. Since there are multiple realities and the findings cannot resemble them all, it became a concern to establish some set of criteria and strategies that allowed to address threats to trustworthiness. Therefore, researchers who engaged in qualitative investigations, put efforts in developing sets of criteria that served the purpose. Guba (1981), Lincoln and Guba, (1985), Creswell, (1998), Riley and Love; (2000), Denzin and Lincoln, (2003) are among those who developed models for qualitative research trustworthiness. However there is no model for ensuring trustworthiness that applies indiscriminately to every research. Trustworthiness threats are investigation specific. By drawing on these previous works, a trustworthiness assessment plan was developed for this study.

Trustworthiness criteria, dimensions and strategies

A study is trustworthy when its findings are plausible and the processes for reaching them are credible. In order for these conditions to be satisfied a number of criteria were identified for this study. Namely the researcher's subjectivity, which includes the dimensions of voice, self-reflexivity and immersion; confirmability, concerned with distortion; and finally transferability, including findings transferability and research repeatability (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Krefting, 1990; Maxwell, 2013).

Researcher's subjectivity

The subjectivity of the researcher is maybe the most frequently questioned element when dealing with qualitative research (Maxwell, 2013; Hennink et al., 2011; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Denzin and Lincoln (2003) maintained that the attempt to exclude the voice of the researcher in the social science inquiry in pursue of objectivity put at stake the trustworthiness of research. This is because there is no way of separating what is known and who knows it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

The current will be an overt research: participants know of the presence and role of the investigator. The overt researcher has created a lot of concerns among scholars, since it is maintained that s/he is bound to have some effect on the participants' responses and behavior (Maxwell, 2013). However, the concern of participants' behavior alteration is plausible when

sensitive issues are investigated (Maxwell, 2013). In the case of the current study, the topic is not sensitive and such an issue was not foreseen. In addition, while it might be an issue in experiments or focus groups (Maxwell, 2013) it is very unlikely that participants would constantly behave in an altered manner for the whole duration of the trip. Three dimensions related to researcher-related criteria were identified that affect investigation: voice, reflexivity and immersion (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Riley and Love, 2000, Patton, 2002; Hennink et al., 2011; Maxwell, 2013).

Voice, reflexivity and immersion. Once accepted that there are multiple realities, it is rather fruitful to acknowledge and analyze them in the investigation context instead of trying to hide them. Voice refers to the importance of the multiplicity of opinions, stances and interpretations that emerge from the data. Both the researcher's voice in the role of integral participant and the voice or multiple voices of the participants in relation to the phenomenon, have to be recorded and examined. These voices are the focus of investigation and are the actors constructing the phenomenon. Qualitative research examines similarities and differences and includes the full range of variability. This increases the ability of the emerging theory to explain the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Riley & Love, 2000; Hennink et al., 2011; Maxwell, 2013). In order to leave space for new insights, patterns and potential interpretations to emerge, the study participants are given multiple occasions to express their understanding and their interpretations. These are addressed directly during the interview process; during participant observation any expression of opinions are given attention and recorded; in the last two participants' check they are asked to provide their personal feedback.

Reflexivity refers to critically address the role of the researcher as an instrument of investigation, as integral part of the data co-creation, gathering and interpreting processes (Hennink et al., 2011). Human beings are intrinsically subjective and circumstantial (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) and the interpretive approach acknowledges this human feature (Hennink et al., 2011). The objective is not to hide the researcher influence on the investigation, but rather to keep track of it and put it under examination through critical self-reflexion (Hennink et al., 2011). Reflexivity can be personal or interpersonal. The former interests how the researcher's

personal assumptions and constructions influence the research process at different stages of research; the latter interests how her interpersonal relations with participants and environment affect the investigation (Hennink et al., 2011). Reflexions are recorder as running notes during the entire process of data gathering and analysis (Patton, 2002; Hennink et al., 2011).

Immersion refers to how deeply the researcher allows involvement with the phenomenon, including participants, environment and context (Riley & Love, 2000). The researcher can be the external observer whose judgement is the most powerful, as advised by the positivist tradition; or she can be totally immersed in the phenomenon, taking part to it, so that knowledge comes from interpretation of direct experience. Maxwell (2013) talked of intensive and long-term involvement. The author underlined the value of the constant involvement with the research environment for an extended period of time. This provides the conditions for gathering different types of data; it also provides the possibility to check and confirm inferences and rule out equivocal and unsubstantiated theories. In this study, immersion is sought in form of repeated involvement with the subjects, through two main SID interview sessions and participant observation during the group tour.

Confirmability

Confirmability is concerned with meaning distortion (Krefting, 1990). In order for a formulated theory to be trustworthy it has to rest on interpretations that are found plausible through credible processes. Repeated confirmation of interpretations is obtained through triangulation, participants' check, comparison and negative case analysis.

Triangulation

Triangulation is traditionally understood as the strategy that aims at collecting information of different kind and from different sources. This is usually achieved by employing different methods. The main purposes of triangulation is to check the consistency of the obtained findings and the mitigation of biases which might be systematic when employing one method only (Silverman, 1993; Maxwell, 2013). In the current study two methods were employed: SID interviews, and participant observation. The combination of the two, mindful of the different purposes they serve and contexts they imply, were employed for seeking clarification and

confirmability. Prolonged involvement with the participants during participant observations and repetitive contact with them in different occasions and contexts, provide multiple occasions for checking the plausibility of the inferences. Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest to check trustworthiness of the formulated theory with the sources, therefore to ask the participants to check the resulted formulation. The majority of participants should recognize the formulation as a reasonable explanation of their case.

Participants check

Participants check is the search for participants' feedback on the study conclusions. In this case two types of checks were operated. On the one hand, participants' check is considered as the most trustworthy strategy to rule out any chance of meaning misinterpretation of incidents, participants' opinions, statements and perspectives on behalf of the researcher. While on the other hand the group coordinator check provides an opportunity for checking my observations. Having experienced many of these situations before, the coordinator may identify patterns more easily.

As Strauss and Corbin (1998) warned, the formulated theory "will not fit every aspect of each case because the theory is a reduction of data, but in the larger sense, participants should be able to recognize themselves in the story that is being told." (p. 159). A theory should reach a certain level of abstraction, this is necessary for it to explain the largest reachable spectrum of manifestations of the phenomenon. Naturally, individual experiences are not reported by the theory in details. In the current study, the verbatim transcription of the interviews were sent to the participants to seek whether they wanted to clarify any statement; also the findings and the tentative formulation of the theory was submitted in writing to the participants soliciting their comments.

Negative case analysis

Negative case could be understood as a specification of voice. Providing the data the chance to prove interpretation wrong is a crucial feature of qualitative research (Maxwell, 2013). While in statistical analysis outliers are excluded from examination, in qualitative research the maximum range of variations is sought. The multiple voices related to the

phenomenon are important, and the ones that seem discrepant must be included in the range. These might be discrepancies, but also variations that the categories' dimension can assume (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Maxwell, 2013). The discrepant voices were included in the examination and are reported as variations of the phenomenon.

Transferability

For much of qualitative research, generalization is not relevant; qualitative research rather seeks deep understanding of a specific phenomenon in a specific context (Krefting, 1990; Maxwell, 2013). The current study intends to develop a theory for a particular phenomenon neglected in the literature of destination image so far. Generalizability as intended in quantitative research, is not relevant here. However, the investigation should be transferable in two ways: its findings should fit similar contexts external to the study and the study should be repeatable under similar circumstances (Guba, 1981; Krefting, 1990).

Findings transferability

From an interpretivist stance, human behavior is intrinsically meaningful, so that the same behavior, whether words or gestures, have different meanings in different contexts. In order for the meaning to be grasped, at least two conditions have to be in place. One is the understanding of the underlying system of meanings guiding behavior, the other is the understanding of the situation itself (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). This study adopts an emic perspective to research, (Hennink et al., 2011), for which the researcher looks for the insiders' understanding, opinion and meanings attached to the phenomenon under investigation.

In the current study, the study participants and I share the same nationality and language, and generally a cultural background. This provided the necessary tools for understanding the context and its meaning. Thick descriptions of relevant, recorded incident's context were recorded for ensuring transferability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Krefting, 1990; Hennink et al., 2011; Maxwell, 2013) to a similar and comparable context (Krefting, 1990).

Repeatability

A second criterion for transferability is the study repeatability. The exact methods and processes employed throughout the investigation were reported and described. These include

recruitment of participants, planning and employment of the methods for data gathering, data analysis and interpretation process (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Krefting; 1990). Once the methods are transferred for reproduction they may yield different results, since meanings are context-bound, as previously discussed. However, this should not prevent the research to be reproduced, and the emerging theories or findings to be comparable. All the criteria just presented interact towards ensuring trustworthiness. Trustworthiness assessment is an ongoing task crucial to the investigation, as underlined in the research design. Table 8 summarizes the trustworthiness assessment plan.

Table 8 Research trustworthiness assessment plan summary

Criteria	Dimension	Strategy
Researcher's subjectivity	Voice	Interview: direct solicitation of participant's interpretation Observation: running notes
	Reflexivity	Memos of critical self-reflection
	Immersion	Prolonged engagement Repeated contacts
Confirmability	Distortion	Triangulation Participants' check Negative case analysis
Transferability	Findings transferability	Context and thick description
	Repeatability	Audit trail

3.8. Summary

This chapter explained in detail, how this investigation was planned and carried out. The chapter can be summarized by identifying its four parts. These include the paradigm guiding investigation, data gathering methods and data analysis strategy and lastly, research

trustworthiness.

The first part, introduced the paradigm of the researcher, the assumptions on which this research rests upon and the research design. My paradigm can be ascribed to the interpretive school of thought. It is ontologically relativist and social; it is epistemologically subjectivist, interactionist and pragmatist. It allows multiple and equally valid realities which are influenced and negotiated by social influences. Individuals are embedded in social and physical contexts. Individuals attach personal meanings and interpretations to processes and situations, which are reflected in language and social interaction. In conjunction with the beliefs informing the researcher's understanding of the world, there are also the assumptions on which this specific investigation rests upon. These include that individuals hold images of the destination; destination images are ever-changing and subject to social influences.

The research design for this investigation was explained and visually illustrated. It is presented as a cycle of three components, which are also cyclical. The first one is the proposal cycle. The second and the third cycles, the fieldwork preparation and the analytical cycle respectively, are concerned with the implementation of the study. These include research tool development, participants' recruitment, data gathering, analysis and the integration of a conceptual framework. The assessment of the threats to trustworthiness is ongoing during the whole cycle.

The second part of the chapter explained the study context followed by the data collection methods chosen as most appropriate for the current research. From a review of the literature it was concluded that a group tour represents the most conducive context for the examination of social interaction during visitation. Where group is understood as a gathering of individuals, who engage in frequent face-to-face interaction through communication, take one another into account in the awareness of some significant commonality, for a period of time of variable length. A group tour composed by Italians departing from Italy with destination Jordan, was selected. This arrangement was chosen on the basis of two main criteria: accessibility and real life condition. The group was composed of ten members, in addition to a local tour guide, a group coordinator and myself. The length of the trip was ten days. The destination was selected

not only for being accessible but also for being not a popular one yet for the Italian market, but gaining popularity for the past few years.

The data gathering was a combination of the methods of semi-structured in-depth (SID) interviews and participant observation. Two waves of SID interviews were conducted, once before visitation, in order to gather information about the individuals' pre-visitation destination image and other characteristics of the participants. The second wave took place after visitation with a dual objective: firstly, to elicit individuals' post-visitation destination image; secondly, to check some of the inferences developed during participant observation, and to clarify any questions or doubts that might have arisen. Therefore the SID interviews were composed of three parts: the first part was structured and through pre-worded open-ended questions, it aimed at the elicitation of destination image, information sources and participants' travel experience. The second part was dedicated to exploring the social behavior of the individual and to clarifying relevant topics; this was especially important in the post-visitation interview. The third part focused on a more in-depth investigation of the individual's destination image through the technique of collage creation. The SID interviews were conducted in Italian, recorded and verbatim transcribed. The verbatim transcriptions were translated into English and after testing the comparability of the preliminary coding, analysis was carried on the English translations. SID trustworthiness was assessed by seeking participants' feedback multiple times. The establishment of rapport, important for the rest of the research, was aided in the first occasion by the collage creation technique; in the second occasion, by increased familiarity between me and the interviewee due to the shared vacation.

The second method, participant observation, was conducted by participating in the group tour. Observation started at the first group gathering point and occasion, and it ended at luggage claim upon return. Participant observation provided the chance for understanding the context in which the phenomenon takes place, and for observing it during its unfolding instead of filtered through someone else's interpretation. Moreover, different types of data were collected through this method thanks to the immersion with the participants and the casual conversations with them. It provided access to the group coordinator, who was involved in the observation

process as an extra check. Trustworthiness of the observations was assessed through identifying the critical situations for social interactions during the trip, keeping running memos on observations, self-reflexivity, ideas, insights and questions, and initial interpretations and inferences; lastly checking observations with the group coordinator when appropriate.

The third part, described the analytical strategy that was employed i.e. the data analysis method of the grounded theory approach. Data underwent four coding steps, firstly initial coding to familiarize with the data and uncover themes and tentative categories. Then open coding to identify categories and their defining dimensions. Axial-coding to establish the relationships between categories. Selective coding identified the central categories largely explaining the phenomenon.

The fourth part addressed the trustworthiness of the current work, identifying the threats to the plausibility of the results and the credibility of its execution. Three categories were identified which need to be addressed. The first one involves the researcher's subjectivity. The research has to account for all the voices emerging from investigation, including participants' and the researcher's. This was achieved through methods triangulation as well as keeping memos at every stage. The process was reflexive. Immersion was achieved through prolonged engagement and repeated contacts with participants. A second category is the confirmability of the study. Distortion of what is being investigated is a threat. This threat was tackled by choosing participants of my same nationality, but also methods triangulation, participants' and group coordinator's check and analysis of negative cases. Finally, the third category is transferability. This refers to both findings transferability and the repeatability of the research. The first one is addressed by providing context and descriptions in order for the situation to be clear for a comparable one to be identified. The latter was tackled by keeping running memos.

4. CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

4.1. Chapter introduction

Firstly, it is established that there is a modification in the participants' destination image after visitation. Only then the process of destination image formation can be examined in its development; and it can be determined how intra-group social interaction contributes to the destination image formation process. This chapter presents the findings in three main parts.

The first part provides information about the participants that helps contextualize the study findings. These include demographic information, whether they have a traveling partner, their travel experience and the motivations for choosing Jordan; their information sources and level of preparation prior to traveling are also reported. This information was found crucial for understanding the study findings.

The second part distinguishes three interrelated sections presenting the destination images before and after visitation. The first section presents the group's social destination images providing the frame of reference within which individual destination images are to be understood. The second section establishes the modification of participants' individual destination image after visitation. The third section highlights the similarities and differences between individual destination images emerging from participants' accounts.

The third and last part of this chapter integrates interview findings related to individual destination images' modification with observation data. This part is divided into three sections. The first section presents evidence of social interaction within the group drawing from both observation data and participants' accounts. It includes the development of intra-group relationships and recorded conversations relevant to destination image formation. The second section presents how, according to the participants, intra-group social interaction contributed to the formation of their individual destination image throughout visitation. The section presents what form of social interaction is perceived as more salient by participants; and it shows the extent of participants' awareness of both the processes of social interaction development and individual destination image formation. Finally the third section presents the

emerged relationship between social interaction and its development, local environment, destination image and its formation process.

4.2. Participants' information

The first part of this chapter introduces the study's participants. The study participants' group is first described through some demographic information including gender, age group of belonging, education and area of origin; followed by specification on whom they are traveling with and information in regards to their travel experience. Subsequently, the travel motivation for choosing Jordan and the information sources that reportedly contributed to participants' destination image formation are briefly presented. Finally, the level of preparation in regards to the destination emerged from participants' pre-visitation interviews is reported in relation to their destination image.

4.2.1. Participants' profiles

The group is composed by ten participants. The term participants does not include other members of the group who do participate in the daily social context of the group, but are not included in the investigation as subjects. These individuals are the group coordinator, the local guide and myself. These individuals are still observed in context as integral part of the intra-group social interaction. However, destination image and its formation process, and the effect of social interaction on these individuals was excluded from this investigation.

Table 9 Participants' profiles

PARTICIPANT	GENDER	AGE GROUP	EDUCATION	TRAVELS WITH	ORIGIN
BALLERINA	Woman	56-65	University degree	/	North
BELLA	Woman	26-35	University degree	/	South
CIAK	Man	36-45	High school	/	South
ELLINA	Woman	36-45	High school	GGB	Center
FRANKY	Man	56-65	University degree	Miele	North
GGB	Man	36-45	Master's degree	Ellina	Center
LALLA	Woman	26-35	Master's degree	/	North
MIELE	Woman	56-65	University degree	Franky	North
RUBY	Woman	56-65	University degree	/	North
SASSO	Man	26-35	Master's degree	/	North

Table 10 Participants' information by characteristic

SUMMARY	FREQUENCY AND %	
WOMEN	6	60%
MEN	4	40%
AGE RANGE:		
26-35	3	30%
36-45	3	30%
46-55	/	0
56-65	4	40%
EDUCATION:		
HIGH SCHOOL	2	20%
UNIVERSITY DEGREE	5	50%
MASTER'S DEGREE	3	30%
ORIGIN:		
NORTH	6	60%
CENTER	2	20%
SOUTH	2	20%
TRAVELING WITH:		
ALONE	6	60%
ACCOMPANIED	4	40%

Tables 9 and 10 provide an overview of group's participants. Table 9 shows individual information in alphabetical order; while Table 10 reports a summary of the participants' information ordered by captured characteristic.

It is observable that there is no participant belonging to the 46-55 age group. The wide age gap marks the distinction between two sub-groups. Participants between 26 and 45 years of age constitute the majority of the group i.e. six out of ten. 80% of the participants have tertiary education, while two participants hold a high school degree. As illustrated by Figure 18 participants come from different parts of the

country. 60% come from four different regions in the North, two participants from the same place in the Center and the remaining two from two different regions of the South.

The majority of the participants were traveling unaccompanied, while four participants were traveling in pairs. One pair was a couple, namely Miele and Franky; while the other pair, Ellina and GGB, were work mates and friends and it was their first time traveling together.

Travel experience

Participants' self-assessment of their own travel experience was sometimes problematic, since six out of ten appeared to feel insecure in defining themselves as experienced. These participants would distance themselves from the label, give a brief overview of their travel history and traveling style and attempt to describe an individual



Figure 18 Participants' areas of origin

who can be defined as an experienced traveler. The traits of this ideal experienced traveler were mostly related to travel style. It emerged that traveling solo and with no prior organization is the main criterion for defining someone as an experienced traveler. Other criteria include ease of adaptability, and extensiveness of travel history. One illustrative example of the challenge constituted by travel experience self-assessment is provided by Ciak:

“Not very experienced, because for example I didn’t see Africa almost at all, because I only saw Egypt and Morocco, which overlook the Mediterranean Sea, therefore in my opinion they’re completely different from Black Africa. Very experienced no... I went to 56-57 countries, but... in the end in Europe I went to... out of thirty-five countries... except for 4-5 countries, I only went to the capital cities. On the contrary once I spent three consecutive months in Asia. (...) That time I travelled alone. I took plenty of trips alone between Asia and South America. While in Europe I always travelled with friends, groups of friends and so on... I only took two organized tours, one to Egypt and another... but otherwise only “do-it-yourself”, alone or with friends.”

(Ciak, Pre-visitation interview)

Finally, I defined participants’ travel experience based on the amount of trips they reported throughout the interview, whether the trips were domestic, international within Europe or overseas. When I defined participants travel experience I took into account these factors in general terms, but also in relation to one another. Participants were then distinguished in three categories, namely ‘little experienced’, ‘experienced’ and ‘very experienced’. Table 11 below summarizes participants’ travel experience, travel motivations, information sources and level of preparation about the destination and the trip.

Bella reports two international trips with friends within Europe, and multiple domestic short trips. Ellina reports four international trips, three of which to European destinations and one overseas, all with friends. Sasso reported to have traveled to three destinations out of Italy, one of which with a group tour; the other two with some friends were Morocco and Corsica in the Mediterranean Sea. Otherwise he undertook mostly domestic hiking trips. These participants do define themselves as not experienced on the basis of the limited number of trips they had taken. Ballerina, GGB, Lalla and Ruby are defined as ‘experienced’. These participants report many trips both domestic and international, including to destinations within Europe and overseas. Excluding the domestic ones, the reported trips are mostly organized

group tours. Lastly, Ciak, Franky and Miele were included in the ‘very experienced’ category. These participants reported an extensive travel history both to domestic and international destinations, in which organized group tours accounted for the minority of the trips taken.

Table 11 Participants' defining characteristics

PARTICIPANT	TRAVEL EXPERIENCE	MOTIVATIONS	INFORMATION SOURCES	LEVEL OF PREPARATION
BALLERINA	Experienced	Time	Friends & relatives Printed material TV/movies	Medium
BELLA	Little experience	Time	Internet Printed material	Low
CIAK	Very experienced	Time and money	Internet Printed material TV/movies	Medium
ELLINA	Little experience	Time	Friends & relatives Internet TV/movies	Low
FRANKY	Very experienced	Miele wanted to go Fascination with Lawrence of Arabia and history	Internet Printed material TV/movies	High
GGB	Experienced	Time	Friends & relatives Internet	Low
LALLA	Experienced	Time	Friends & relatives Internet Printed material TV/movies	Low
MIELE	Very experienced	Time and Fascination with the Middle East	Friends & relatives TV/movies	High
RUBY	Experienced	Time and Fascination with the Middle East	Friends & relatives Internet Printed material TV/movies	Medium
SASSO	Little experience	Time	Friends & relatives Internet	Low

Travel motivations

Participants’ motivations for traveling to Jordan were generally vague. Miele and Ruby were the participants who had the most interest in exploring the specific destination. Miele

reports to be especially interested in exploring the Middle East and given the general turmoil in the region, the selection is restricted to very few destinations; among the ones available she arbitrarily prioritized Jordan. Ruby also expressed a fascination with the East and Middle East and she is especially curious about Jordan's main and most popular archaeological site Petra because of hearing her father talking about it. A different case is Franky who is passionate about history and fascinated by the Lawrence of Arabia's history; he thus welcomed Miele's destination choice. However the other participants had a different approach to the trip, which GGB provides an eloquent description of:

“So, in Jordan, let's say I checked the available journeys [offered by this tour operator]. And I remembered some friends who already went there. Therefore yes, let's say a country with the green light, among the many names, there is a green light there. Because other people told you. You only live once... there are countries which I'd like to see. Like a range of alternatives. Therefore I put South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, India absolutely once again, Thailand, if only there hadn't been a coup d'état some days ago, then I would also be very interested in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos... I think we have understood each other. There are these countries, each one of these has a green light... so it's useless to become rigid every time that a person has a few days off.”

(GGB, Pre-visitation interview)

Some patterns emerged from participants' explanations on how they chose Jordan. Reasons included the preferred tour operator, and the time and money available for traveling. For all ten participants the first choice after deciding they wanted to take a trip, was the tour operator. This specific tour operator is known to be reliable, flexible and provide multiple options. It has a particular traveling style which according to its reputation accommodates adaptable, friendly and adventurous people. These characteristics were crucial for every participant's expectation about their traveling companions. Therefore one crucial choice was the tour operator.

Secondly, according to the available days for traveling and the budget they could allocate to it, participants shortlisted some destinations and settled for Jordan. Sasso's and Ballerina's days off for example coincided exactly with the days the trip was scheduled for. While GGB and Ellina for instance, had previously selected a different trip to Indonesia, and when it did not reach the minimum number of participants required, they chose Jordan as the alternative.

Ciak's priority was to take scenic pictures and within the time and money available he chose the destination he thought would provide him with more opportunities for scenic snapshots. Lalla had days off during that time and when she saw the option on the tour operator's trips schedule, she remembered that an office mate had told her once that Jordan is a good place to visit between May and June. Bella reported that while looking at the website for curiosity she saw that this trip was scheduled and it awoke the fascination she used to have for the mysterious Petra when she was in school and came across it. It matched her availability to travel and so she chose it. Therefore participants do not have a strong interest in anything specific in relation to the destination. To follow it is provided an overview of the information sources participants attributed their pre-visitation image of Jordan.

Information sources

Participants' information sources reportedly included, in decreasing order of frequency and influence, friends and relatives, Internet and TV/movies, and printed materials. The majority of the participants, seven out of ten, reported to have gathered information about Jordan from friends or relatives who went there and talked about it upon return; in two cases, the respective fathers fascinated by the site of Petra talked about it without having been there, and transferred curiosity to Ruby and Ellina. Bella and Franky are the two cases who do not mention other people as sources of information about Jordan. Ciak does not report having received information from anyone he knows. However, he reports relying on individuals' travel blogs on-line.

The second most popular information source is the Internet. Eight participants reported generically to having searched information on the Internet. A specific example that half of them report is the trip information page on the tour operator's website. The information page provides the standard itinerary and a brief description of what participants will see and can expect for every stop. For example, in relation to the desert it describes that after the day-explorations, participants will enjoy "breathtaking" sunsets over the desert.

Seven participants reported having seen Jordan on TV possibly on the news, especially more recently with the conflicts in the neighboring countries; while three of them mentioned

generic documentaries that they might have watched. Four participants reported to have gathered images watching movies especially *Lawrence of Arabia*. Miele also mentioned *Indiana Jones* and Lalla recalled movies representing episodes from the Bible.

Finally, six participants reported having drawn information from a range of printed materials. Four maintained to have learnt from the newspapers, two from travel magazines, especially the one issued by the tour operator. Ciak mentioned travel novels, Bella the art's history course book in university, Franky history books or historical novels, and Lalla recalls the catechism course book when she was a child.

Generally participants were specific in recalling friends and relatives' accounts and the movies they had watched. Other specific examples referred to the tour operator trip itinerary and magazine. The other information sources were listed in a generic estimation of where they think they might have heard about Jordan and Petra, but there is no clear recollection of any specific example. Prior to presenting participants' destination images, hereafter is reported as an indication their level of preparation in relation to the destination.

Level of preparation

In view of the outlined motivations and the reported information sources employed by participants, an indication of the participants' personal preparation in relation to the destination helps to put into perspective the findings subsequently presented. From the pre-visitation interviews it emerged that some participants were more prepared than others. These participants showed to be more aware of features and characteristics of the destination, which they would describe in relatively more details and more confidence compared to the other participants. There is no specific measurement for participants' preparedness, however from the pre-visitation interviews – presented in more detail in the next part of the chapter – it was possible to distinguish participants in three levels of preparation: low, medium and high. Participant observation contributed to disclose every participant's preparation triangulating the conclusions drawn from the pre-visitation interviews.

In the cases of Bella and Lalla, who were interviewed upon return only, their level of preparation emerged during the trip. The two participants also acknowledged spontaneously in

their post-visitation interview that they did not take actions for gathering information before traveling. It emerges that the participants identified with low level of preparation coincide with the younger portion of the group with both low and medium travel experience; thus it excludes Ciak who is a very experienced traveler.

A common pattern emerges behind the participants identified with a low level of preparation. These participants spontaneously provide a rationale behind their limited preparation in relation to the destination. Bella, Ellina, GGB, Lalla and Sasso share the view of embarking on the trip with no additional preparation so as not to form expectations. These participants maintained that expectations jeopardize enjoyment and discovery; they are the seed of disappointment and spoil surprise and discovery. As GGB affirmed:

“And I don’t need to know everything... I mean... when I’m there I can find out, there will be guides, we will move and see local customs and traditions...”

(GGB Pre-visitation interview)

For the purpose of explaining their reasons, these participants compare themselves to hypothetical travelers whom they identify as their opposite. These opposite travelers research information about the destination before-hand, are well-informed and prepared; some highlighted the tour guide and sought pictures and information about the place and its people on-line; they know what to expect in situations ranging from meteorological to social. The ‘little prepared’ participants feel that this approach is not desirable to them because it spoils the enjoyment of discovery and surprise. As Lalla evaluates her approach to the trip a-posteriori:

“Since I didn’t prepare, I didn’t know, I mean, I just had a vague idea of what there would be. And I have to tell you, I was very happy it was like that, because it took my breath away much more than those who maybe had a precise idea.”

(Lalla, post-visitation interview)

The type of traveler they make a point of being different from, largely reflect the other portion of the group. This rationale never emerged from the more prepared participants, who differently from the previous portion of the group, always attempted to draw from their past knowledge for answering the interview questions. In fact, it was more frequent for the

participants with low preparation to answer “I don’t know”, “I’m not sure” and the like, than the ones who were identified as being medium or highly prepared. Therefore the group emerged to be composed for one half of participants with low preparation level and the other half with relatively prepared participants; Franky emerged as the most prepared. Clarifying participants’ preparation in relation to the destination provides the connection between the individual participants and their destination images presented in the following section. It also assists in contextualizing the effects of the intra-group social interaction presented later in this chapter.

4.3. Destination image

This second part of the chapter is divided into three sections respectively dedicated to introducing the group’s social destination image before and after visitation, highlighting relevant differences between individual destination images pre- and post- visitation for each participant and lastly presenting the similarities emerging within the group.

4.3.1. Group’s social images of Jordan

This first section presents the group’s social image of Jordan before and after visitation emerged from the interviews’ analysis. Providing the social images of the destination has two main objectives. First, to provide a frame of reference for understanding the individual images’ changes; second, to present findings related to the image of Jordan, which are common to all or most of the participants and put into context the relative importance of discordant findings.

Data analysis elicited three macro categories of image properties, or constituting elements. It emerges from the data that every image constituting element is composed by a cognitive and an affective dimension. As also displayed in Figure 19 below, the macro categories identified have been named ‘psychological-emotional environment representation’, ‘natural representation’ and ‘socio-cultural representation’ further distinguished into two subcategories ‘built environment’ and ‘people and culture’. The properties of each category are the constituting elements of participants’ image. ‘Ambiance’ and ‘emotions’ are the properties specifying ‘psychological-emotional environment representation’. ‘Climate’, ‘landscape’ and ‘natural attractions’ are the properties of the category ‘natural representation’. Within the

‘socio-cultural representation’, ‘archaeological heritage’ and ‘development-urbanization’ emerged as the properties of ‘built environment’; and ‘geopolitical environment’ and ‘people’ of ‘people and culture’. These properties have sub-properties further specifying them. For example, the ‘desert’ is a sub-property of ‘natural attractions’. Finally, every property presents a cognitive and an emotional/affective dimension. The cognitive dimension is based on what is known, or believed to be known in terms of the intrinsic qualities of the destination, or destination’s property. It is determined by what the individual is aware of, what is cognizant. The affective component is based on the individual’s feelings arousing in relation to what is cognizant. For example, the desert presents a cognitive dimension that describes it as rocky, hot, arid and red; its affective dimension refers to peace-of mind, sense of infinite, feeling good and in contact with the earth and sense of adventure.

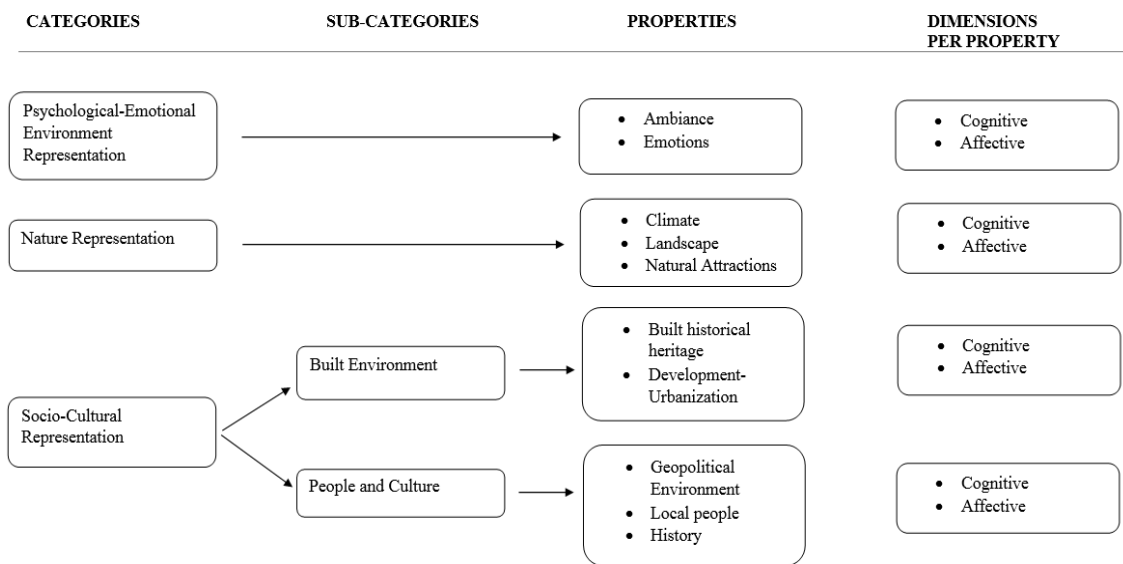


Figure 19 Constituting elements of destination image

Destination image was investigated through the three opening questions adapted from Echtner and Ritchie (1993) and the collage creation activity concluding the interview in both pre – and post – visitation sessions. The opening questions aimed at breaking the ice and make participants start talking by focusing on their own thoughts. The central part of the interview addressed other topics focusing on individuals’ social attitude, in both interviews. This section led participants away from the topic of Jordan’s destination image; finally, they were brought

back to their destination image by composing a collage displaying their image of Jordan.

This section outlines the general image modification of Jordan as it emerged from the interview data. It is distinguished into social image of Jordan before visitation and social image of Jordan after visitation. The social image provides a framework of reference in the subsequent session analyzing participants' destination image one by one.

Pre-visitation social image of Jordan

The pre-visitation image of Jordan was generally vague. The archeological site of Petra and the desert were the two elements mentioned consistently with some precision. Otherwise participants mentioned a multiplicity of topics in mostly vague terms. The topics mentioned by the majority of the participants, and relatively more talked about, in order of popularity, included, archeological finds (mainly Petra) and natural landscapes (mainly the desert), ambiance at the destination, contemporary socio-cultural and political conditions and local people, the Dead Sea, followed by more generalized built cultural heritage and local food; history was mentioned only by a very small minority of the participants.

The participants emerge as divided into two in relation to what was perceived as the dominant element of their image of Jordan. One half considered Petra as dominant, while the other half considered the desert as dominant. The desert is mostly referred to as 'the desert', only two participants, Franky and Ciak, use its name 'Wadi Rum'. Despite this clear division, the participants mostly mention both elements as largely describing their image of Jordan.

Participants found it difficult to describe what Petra actually is. They talked about it as a mystic place, characterized by a rocky landscape; while a minority mentioned that there are monuments with arches and columns and a canyon leading to the most famous façade of *The Treasure*. A general note of excitement and anticipation underlined participants' references to the site of Petra mostly for its ancient origins. Otherwise Petra was repeatedly mentioned as a primary, self-explanatory concept spoilt of description.

The desert is generally described as an arid vast and open landscape. While on the landscape there was no general agreement on whether it is a rocky or a sandy desert, four participants underlined that it is not inhabited only by a few animals belonging to arid and hot

climates, but also by the nomadic population of Bedouins. Apart from some physical descriptions, the desert's image is accompanied by emotional arousal. It is associated with a feeling of peace-of-mind, a romantic and almost magical atmosphere. In the words of GGB:

"It's a matter of landscape. So the desert aspect is actually very important. Generally speaking, the image of empty spaces. A space to think more...to experience emotions"

(GGB, Pre-visit interview)

The wide, open spaces emerge as an important element of appeal, accentuated by the ability of seeing clearly the stars at night. For example one participant described:

"Infinite space, namely not seeing the end of the sand, watching the sky so close, the idea of infinite at night, of you...that are there, an individual, small in front of the infinite and immensity..."

(Miele, Pre-visit interview).

Moreover, the sunset emerges as defining especially of the desert. The red color pervades the landscape in Petra, but most of all it is associated with the sunset over the desert. The image of these places' landscape at sunset dominates making emerge a romantic feeling attached to them. While choosing the background for her collage, one participant explained:

"Red is a bright color, a color I associate with sunset, with brightness anyhow. Well, together with yellow they are bright, intense, warm colors...that's how I imagine this country"

(Miele, Pre-visit interview).

The natural landscape of Jordan is described as vast, barren, and arid and alternating between red and yellow. It is associated with droughts and an extremely hot, dry and sunny climate. Some empathy transpires from participants' accounts for the issues the country must be suffering for the lack of water.

The destination is associated to an adventurous feeling that participants accentuated by underlying the mysterious and magical atmosphere of Petra and the presence of dangerous animals in the desert. This feeling derives, by their own admission, from the movies Indiana Jones and Lawrence of Arabia, set in Petra and the Jordanian desert, and in general from their being unfamiliar and fascinated with these places. The ambiance associated with the destination at large is consistently one of tranquility and serenity, which makes it a relaxing place to visit. Participants valued this aspect as standing in contrast with the conflicts and tensions

characterizing the rest of the region involving a number of neighboring countries. This aspect of the destination was reported by seven out of the eight participants interviewed before visitation, with varying degrees of knowledge on the topic; the two participants interviewed after visitation about their pre-visitation image did not report this as an element present before traveling. The neighboring, long dated and lasting Israeli-Palestinian conflict was on these participants' mind in combination with the expected presence of a conspicuous refugees' population, especially from Syria. One elucidating example of this sentiment was voiced by GGB while composing his collage:

” And this is more a mood (Figure 20)...this man's mood, who is not a person showing off something or displaying who knows what. There's more an undecided expression. I mean, anyhow this is a country close to the war, I mean to the border, right? They have their own refugee camps. I mean yes, on one side this joviality (refers to figure...), but by contrast (Figure...) also in this country there will be some backgrounds where you have to be cautious a bit. I mean, situations at geopolitical level that in the future could even contaminate, also arrive at the border of this country, who knows. An area where it can easily happen...”

(GGB, Pre-visitation interview).

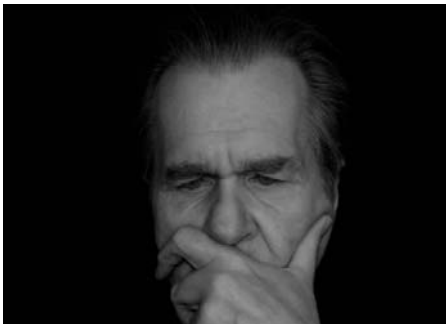


Figure 20 Collage picture: thinking man

Despite the acknowledged turbulences surrounding the country, participants regard Jordan as safe and stable. The local people are generally friendly, welcoming and accepting with tourists and foreigners. One participant mentions that, because of this attitude of local people, women travelers are not expected to be completely covered and do not have to fear for not being

covered. However, only one participant expressed her interest in the conditions of local women in relation to their freedom. Her concern is nevertheless in line with three other participants who maintained that Jordan represents “the real Arab world” (Franky, Pre-visitation interview). This preconception was partially explained as people with a darker skin color, wearing mostly colorful tunics, as it emerged from the collage activity where the picture displayed by Figure 21 aided participants' self-expression.



Figure 21 Collage picture: men figures

Arab also means living in a society heavily informed by Islam. However, two participants expressed a different representation of the local people: Ciak and Lalla talked about the local population as dishonest especially with tourists, pushy for selling to tourists. Ciak also specified that the language, so different from one's own, makes it even more difficult to spot the swindle. Lalla linked

anxiety with this scenario. Both of them hoped it would be different; they based their representation on a previous experience in Morocco.

Local people are represented working as pastoralists and merchants at the local markets, and relying on relatively chaotic and rudimentary urban development. These aspects of the local people's society and development are perceived as signs of authenticity; this was perceived as exciting and arousing interest. For example Ciak summarized his image of Jordan:

"In many places also a quite underdeveloped atmosphere, and I always like seeing quite underdeveloped atmospheres. I don't like seeing let's say an excessive progress. I like seeing things as they once were".

(Ciak, Pre-visitation interview)

Other attractions featuring briefly, but frequently mentioned are the Dead Sea, source of fascination for its floating properties, and other archeological finds ranging from ancient Roman ruins to crusaders' castles. Lastly the food is described as appetizing and tasty, made from fresh produce produced locally on small scale.

One last topic is that of history. Despite the consistent mentioning of the archaeological site of Petra, the history of the place is not referred to conspicuously. Petra is treated almost as a self-standing attraction detached from the country context. Two participants, i.e. Ballerina and Ellina made brief mention to a non-better specified ancient population inhabiting the site. In this context, only Franky talked extensively and repeatedly about historical facts while describing his image of Jordan. He went into details, ranging from reciting the populations recorded to have been present in the country, to recounting wars and dates and celebrating the late King Hussein and his exemplar leadership. In one of his historical references he

summarized some points:

“People living in Jordan in 1916 were 40,000...Jordan had its history in ancient times... with Petra, the Nabataeans and that’s all. With the Roman Empire, with Mahomed who became an important descendant. (...) Jordan doesn’t have a history if not after the war after 1945.”

(Franky, Pre-visitation interview).

The social image of Jordan before visitation recorded some points of convergence between the participants especially on Petra and the desert being the dominating attributes of Jordan. Topics of agreement are also the climate being hot and dry. Jordan is characterized as an adventurous destination and the atmosphere is tranquil, but constantly threatened by turmoil at the country’s doors. There is convergence over other attributes, such as a range of other archaeological finds and local food. While there is general parallelism over the local people representation, one participant expressed interest and some concern with the situation of women in the society. Lastly the country’s history emerges as a major determinant by one participant only. The next session reports the social image of Jordan after visitation, paying special attention to the elements that undergo modification.

Post-visitation social image of Jordan

The social image of Jordan after visitation is more specific and detailed after direct experience. Participants’ first images were related to the many landscapes they saw. The desert is dominating, immediately followed by Petra’s sight. Other very prominent natural landscape references were made to the Dana valley and the Dead Sea and the local climate. One dominating topic is now the history of Jordan; Jordan is also described in terms of its atmosphere, food, local people and their social culture. The Roman ruins spontaneously appear among the least popular properties.

It appears that the Wadi Rum desert, now called with its name by everyone, mostly defines Jordan’s post-visitation image for this group, immediately followed by the sight of Petra’s archaeological site. Participants described the landscapes as barren, rocky, reddish; wide open spaces fill their eyes when thinking of Jordan. The most distinctive among the natural landscapes is the Wadi Rum desert. From the descriptions after visitation it emerges that the Wadi Rum has a dominating affective dimension rather than a cognitive one. It elicits an

adventurous feeling, for it is full of secrets that only the local population of Bedouins can disclose, such as where to find water and refuge and how to find the way anywhere. Most of all its vastness, silence, and stillness are conducive of a mystic feeling encouraging self-reflection, in an “almost religious” (Franky, Post-visitation interview) way.

In Bella’s words:

“But the desert, I repeat it, there was this magical moment in which everybody meditated. Everybody, me, too could simply say: “very beautiful”. I mean to sum up in just one word what has a whole meaning behind it, because then I think everyone found a part of themselves...”

(Bella, Post-visitation interview).

The image of Petra is embedded with excitement and fascination and participants presented it as pervaded by a magical, almost otherworldly feeling:

“There is a special atmosphere. You feel there was something. I can’t tell you what. But there was definitely something. A past age, with peculiar people, a peculiar population that lived there. (...) I felt the same thing when I went to Auschwitz concentration camp. There’s nothing, because there are just bricks, tiles and streets, but you feel there is a different atmosphere. There [Auschwitz] of grief, while on the other side [Petra] of power”

(Ruby, Post-visitation interview).

Petra’s description is mostly of emotional nature. The general emphasis is on the fascination for the ancient, mysterious, but advanced civilization. Jordan was described by recounting episodes of interaction with the environment and with other participants in the environment. Therefore the social image of Jordan post-visitation is characterized by a dynamic image of different hiking excursions which exposed the group participants to the landscapes. For example in Petra participants described walking by recounting:

“You need to climb these damned, never-ending stairs in forty degrees [Celsius temperature]! But when you arrive up there it’s beautiful!”

(Ciak, Post-visitation interview)

For other clearly identified landscapes, such as the Dana valley and the Wadi Mujib, the destination of a one-day-hiking-excursion and the location of a canyoning activity respectively are also largely described through action verbs, e.g. walking, climbing, or floating, going against current; these describe participants’ experience with the environment in connection with emotional contents: adventure, astonishment, surprise, accomplishment for carrying out the physical effort, are some examples.

The Dead Sea was consistently agreed upon as the unique unimpressive feature of Jordan. Before visitation the Dead Sea was surrounded by excitement and fascination for its extraordinary floating properties. After visitation it was described by everybody as the only flaw of Jordan and mostly reported as “you can say you did it” (Lalla, Post-visitation interview). Six out of ten spontaneously reported that they did not like the Dead Sea while the others were solicited to talk about it, and then confirmed they did not like it. Bella eloquently described the general feeling:

“The Dead Sea...I don't know, it's strange! (...) I mean... it was nice to try it, because imagine, it was an absolute novelty! And, I wouldn't do it again. It's a thing I tried, it's ok like this, but then I wouldn't do it again”

(Bella, Post-visitation interview)

One element within the socio-cultural image category that gained prominence in the post-visitation image of Jordan is its history. While before visitation Jordan's history was marginally mentioned, it becomes a major element in the social post-visitation image, where six out of the ten participants referred to Jordan's history, to various extents, and not only in relation to Petra. However Petra and its ancient civilization, the Nabataeans, are still the historical element most referred to; a typical example is Ballerina:

“All of this history that is incredible. The history of this territory, which experienced and saw many populations passing through it... in a lot of different ages, well... I think history is the most important thing. That's what I felt myself more”

(Ballerina, Post-visitation interview)

The more recent history, referred to as a tormented geopolitical situation, lost prominence in the post-visitation image and was overwritten by a strong feel for the ancient history.

The ambiance after visitation appears multifaceted. It is mostly described as serene and tranquil, an atmosphere of positivity; people appear discrete, respectful and polite; everyday life rhythms appear more relaxed, which allows space for some peace of mind. At the same time the ambiance is also a touristy one, at least the locations participants got exposed to.

Eight of the ten participants report that they did not have much contact with the local people apart from the group's local guide. Their representation of the local people and culture portrays Jordanians as friendly and welcoming people; they wear white tunics and headscarves.

The majority of the descriptions end here. Five participants talk about women mostly referring to their being wholly covered. They observe that there is a difference between men and women in the living of public spaces. Four participants described local people as tolerant and two stressed that they are open-minded and knowledgeable.

There is some agreement on the living conditions being humble, nevertheless dignified. Two participants commented on the infrastructure, especially roads being well-maintained and functional; while one person described the local urban organization as typically Arab. The 'Arab World' thus re-appears in the post-visitation interviews presenting slightly more connotations. It appears that wearing tunics and headscarves, or veils, is part of the Arab World; it is a concept also described as mysterious to non-Arabs. In terms of urban organization it emerges that essential, humble living conditions and mostly dirty public spaces and a chaotic social environment are also usually attributed to what is the Arab World. In the case of Jordan, participants confirmed the humble living conditions, and two participants also reported that the landscape is polluted with plastic waste; however Jordan is regarded as an unusual Arab World for it is not chaotic, but rather calm.

As for the local food, four participants referred to it in an enthusiastic way. Lastly, the Roman Ruins was not a popular topic. Only two participants spontaneously mentioned them while recounting the itinerary, Ballerina and Franky. Ballerina admitted she could not remember them well really because they were the first sight visited on the trip; however she remembered it was a huge site. Franky explained that even though we are used to Roman ruins, because in Italy you walk on them every day, it was impressive to see them so far from home. The other participants were solicited to talk about them. They generally described the Roman finds as something interesting, but nothing special. Four participants showed some enthusiasm about them, for they are well-maintained and constitute an extensive site, namely Ballerina, Franky, Bella and Ellina. The other participants acknowledged the historical value of the Roman ruins, but they did not place them in their descriptors of Jordan. One participant maintained that they are not so well-maintained and are very touristy.

It is noticeable how the social image of Jordan after visitation is more specific and detailed.

The two most noticeable differences between the two social images are the representations of the Dead Sea and Jordan's history. After having presented the findings about the general trend of the social destination image before and after visitation, the following section helps summarizing some observations made about the characteristics of the participants' accounts and the main points of the comparison between the two social images.

Comparison highlights

From the social images analysis emerged that participants' image descriptions between the two accounts present differences in the positioning of the narrating voice and in the cognitive content of the images. Whereas both accounts present different types of images. Before visitation, accounts are not only vague and general, they are also mostly detached from the destination. Participants' accounts describe the destination from the outside, as if they were looking at it from a distance. However, in some descriptions participants place themselves inside the picture and describe the environment through their expected involvement with it. In the pre-visitation image it occurs when participants talk about the Dead Sea. Participants described themselves at the location either swimming or sun bathing. While one participant placed herself in the desert at night describing the starry sky.

In the post- visitation interviews this description mode became the norm. Participants described the destination placing themselves in it doing actions such as climbing, hiking, dancing, swimming, sweating, making efforts or relaxing while interacting with the destination. After visitation Jordan exists in participants' lived interaction with the environment; their image appears dynamic and dependent on the individuals' interaction with and within it.

Another noticeable difference between the two accounts is that before visitation participants used previous experiences for expressing themselves. When they had difficulties in expressing their thoughts they refer to their previous trips, especially when solicited with follow-up questions that demand for more details, or when they felt they need to provide an example. Morocco and Egypt were frequently referred to when talking about the desert and the people; however other destinations such as Yemen, Omar, Syria, Armenia and Norway were also mentioned. After visitation participants did not feel the need for using previous

experiences to express themselves to same extent, and references to previous trips and destinations were less frequent.

Data analysis shows that the cognitive dimension is dominant pre-visitation. Post-visitation shows an increase of both cognitive and affective elements, but there is no definitive dominance of either. More precisely it appears that pre-visitation image is generally informed by the trip description provided by the tour operator. An indicative example is the recurrence of the element of the sunset over the desert, in the pre-visitation accounts. This is a detail stressed in the itinerary provided by the tour operator. Five out of the eight participants interviewed before visitation, described the desert as having beautiful sunsets. Moreover, the strong influence of the itinerary information explains how pre-visitation images of Jordan are vague, but still somewhat homogeneous in the mentioned locations and attractions. Nevertheless, differences are still evident in the preparation of each participant. This influences the amount of cognitive elements and the extent of details emerging from the accounts. The social, post-visitation image presents increased cognitive elements, with more details; it also presents increased and deepened affective elements.

Participants' overall images, both before and after visitation, are composed of different types of representations. Some are related to the generalized country destination and others to more specific attractions or features, for example Jordan is hot and dry and the Dead Sea has the property of making you float. The same example illustrated that some are common representations and some are unique to the destination. And again some are representations of observable characteristics, while some are representations of psychological-emotional environments, for example people's wear and a tranquil ambiance.

This section reported the general trend of the group's social image before and after visitation, and summarized the characteristics of the participants' accounts emerged from the comparison between the two images. This section had the twofold objective of confirming that the group's social image of Jordan underwent modification throughout visitation and contextualizing the individual destination images variation, which will be presented in the following two sections.

The next two sections compare the individual images of Jordan before and after visitation. The focus is on highlighting the elements which underwent modification and are relevant to this work. What is relevant is informed by the combination of interviews and participant observation which indicated that one particular modification was not caused exclusively by personal direct interaction with the destination.

4.3.2. Individual destination images: differences between pre – and post - visitation



Figure 22 Minibus seating plan

Findings are hereafter presented according to an arbitrary order that follows participants’ seating position when traveling on the minibus at the destination; the only two exceptions to this order are participants Lalla and Bella. These two participants were interviewed only upon return and were asked questions from both interview guides. Figure 22 above displays a schematic reproduction of the minibus seating plan. The minibus’s seating capacity was higher than the passengers’ number leaving empty seats. The entire back row was empty.

Findings are presented following an anti-clockwise direction starting from Ciak and concluding with Ruby, leaving Lalla and Bella last, for this time only. Driver, local guide, coordinator and I are not part of these sections since these were excluded from the interview part of data collection. Table 12 below provides a synthesized display of the findings related to the individuals’ destination images before and after visitation. This section identifies the differences between the individual images of Jordan, before and after visitation, for each participant. The similarities are presented in the section to follow.

Table 12 Individual destination images: interviews' findings

People	PRE-VISIT				POST-VISIT				
	Psychological environment/emotional representation	Nature_Geographic Representation	Sociocultural Representation		Psychological environment/emotional representation	Nature_Geographic Representation	Sociocultural Representation		
		Built environment	People & Culture			Built environment	People & Culture		
1. CIAK	Touristy, contrast, underdeveloped, lives in the past	Desert: rocky, intriguing, peculiar landscape, beautiful sunsets, red; Inhabited by the Bedouins. Swimming in the Dead Sea. Dana: a mountainous and green natural reserve	Petra: catalyst of interest, peculiar site, red. Roman ruins Underdeveloped	Israeli-Palestinian conflict, war refugees, tension for proximity to war-zones. Social inequalities (wealth) People: dishonest, hard-core Muslims; Wear tunics and colors.	Friendly, tranquil despite the surrounding events. Touristy	Desert: beautiful, colorful rocks, red dominant, magical nights, beautiful sunsets. Dead Sea: 'crap', salty, you have to see it once. Canyoning: beautiful rock formations, adventurous, dangerous,	Petra: hot, red, never-ending stairs, big effort. Roman ruins some beautiful, uninteresting	/	
2. MIELE	Adventurous	Desert: rocky, red and warm colors, infinite space, strong emotions, romantic. Dead Sea: fascination, floating easily. Natural beauties. Pastoralism. Hot, arid, sunny.	Petra: reddish scenery, incredible sight. Crusaders' castles: ruins on cliffs.	People: sunny and warm. Arab population: colorful fabrics, darker skin color, wear tunics, merchants and markets. Resilient country in a geopolitically turbulent area	Tranquil, non-tiring, dignified, well-managed. Positive country.	Desert mainly: big spaces, beautiful sunsets, impressive night skies, adventurous, exciting, emotionally moving, self-meditation. Red land. Plenty of fruit. Hot and bright light. Dead sea: not exciting. I saw it.	Petra: path across the cliffs leading to Treasure's façade, exciting, altar remains on top of a high hill, evocative; the site in general impressive but like others.	Not much contact with people. Markets and merchants, spices, donkeys for transport. Well-managed country	
3. FRANKY		Desert: Sandy, like the Lawrence of Arabia movie, Adventurous, exciting, vast open space, hot and dry Dead Sea: you can swim A lot of vegetation and animals in the wild, undisturbed natural sceneries and blue skies	Petra: monuments, was home to Nabatean population in conjunction with the Roman empire	History: Peculiar ancient history with Nabateans and Roman Empire and Mohammad. Then meaningless history until WWII, Lawrence of Arabia, Israeli-Palestinian conflicts, American participation. It is the poor country of Arabia. Hussein was a great King. The only safe country of the region. 'the real Arab world', authentic, wear traditional wear, Suk (markets)	Positivity, relaxed, tidy	Desert: astonishing landscape, deep silence, a particular rhythm, feeling 'like entering church' Dead Sea: unique, but not that impressive Dana landscape: breath-taking, meditative	Petra: unique, astonishing. (Roman ruins: impressive still intact.) Development: good infrastructure.	History: mysterious ancient civilization of Petra, Nabateans' history is the unique element of Jordan. King Hussein of Jordan was great in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and in infrastructure development, 'everybody loves' him. Mount Nebo: impressive, symbol to our culture dominated by Catholicism. People: tidy Arabs, authentic, wear tunics, have donkeys. Good food.	

People		PRE-VISIT				POST-VISIT			
Psychological environment/emotional representation		Nature_Geographic Representation	Sociocultural Representation		Psychological environment/emotional representation	Nature_Geographic Representation	Sociocultural Representation		
		Built environment	People & Culture				Built environment	People & Culture	
4. GGB	Serene, where you empty yourself to create mental space of the heart, reminds of the past, Adventurous	Landscape open spaces, romantic. Arid, hot and flooded of bright light. Desert sandy, exciting, meditative, you can think and experience emotions. Dead Sea: high salinity floating property.	Less 'civilized'(developed), not very urbanized Roman ruins and other archeological finds	Unfamiliar culture, Muslim, authentic, non-westernized, maybe good character, wear traditional clothing. Good food, fruits. Geopolitical situation unstable, but still safe.	Serene, tranquil, peaceful.	Landscape: barren, wide open spaces, trekking in nature. Sunny and bright light. Desert is the hit: sandy, deep silence, varied landscape, adventurous, evocative, positive emotions. Dead Sea: not exciting, salt is painful, floating.	Petra: temples and houses carved in rocks, 'there is history there', evocative, romantic, out of time. Simple development, bazaars, less civilization. Good food.	Arab world: approaching mysterious culture People: kind, polite, respectably dressed and sobriety, tolerant. Women: burqa, but all seems normal, noble tradition. Enlightened leader keeping tidiness. History: the origins of our Romans, Nabateans created a mix of cultures and trade.	
	Peace	Sunny, arid Desert: Sandy, where you feel good in contact with the earth, romantic, adventurous. Dead Sea: relaxing, exciting floating property.	Petra: ancient city, fascinating, fantastic water-carved passage in the rocks to get there.	Chaotic towns and markets. Spicy food	Beautiful, Positive, Kind people. Touristy	Sunny, arid Desert: sandy, adventurous, walks and dinners, where you feel good, bon fires Dead Sea: you have to see it once Dana natural reserve: adventurous, 'out of the world' beautiful landscape. Canyoning: a river in a beautiful canyon, dangerous climb, made me proud.	Petra: intense colors, fascinating, once there was water and waterfalls. Roman ruins exciting, 'Romans arrived everywhere'	People: kind, good, open-minded, even if women with burqa maybe changing idea. They live well and safe despite refugees and neighboring wars, resilient and socially 'ahead compared to the West'. Bedouins: happy and tranquil in the desert; a man-led family structure where women are united when younger. Food: good vegetarian food.	
	6. SASSO	Calm and quite	Desert: rocky, fascinating landscape and ambiance Dead Sea: high salinity Arid climate, bright sunlight.	Reinforced concrete building. There is Petra	People: calm and honest	Tranquil, relaxed life rhythm, touristy	Desert: rocky, amazing deep silence. Arid climate, rocky landscape with colorful shades. Everything was yellow. Full of flocks and shepherds. Dead Sea: unimpressive, floating, if you are in Jordan you have to see it once.	Amman: crowded, mostly men, dirty. Petra: awe striking, worth it, was in the stones, was once fertile maybe. Typical Arab urban organization: small villages, dirt, barefoot children, all living together.	History: air soaked in history, cradle of human civilization, impressive. People: no personal contact, generally friendly, welcoming to tourists, respectful, serene, wear white tunics and head scarfs. Women: really covered. Living conditions: humble, barefoot children dirt, affected by water shortage.

People	PRE-VISIT				POST-VISIT			
	Psychological environment/emotional representation	Nature_Geographic Representation	Sociocultural Representation		Psychological environment/emotional representation	Nature_Geographic Representation	Sociocultural Representation	
		Built environment	People & Culture			Built environment	People & Culture	
7. BALLERINA	Colorful	Natural landscape barren, dry and rocky, except for the Jordan Valley which is lush. Climate: hot and dry. Local fruit is juicy.	Petra: Magical place, heritage of ancient civilization. Development: there are cars and streets. There is the desert: fascinating.	Mix of religious cultures reflected in peoples' wear, reserved society. Women have limited freedom of expression.	Serene, with genuinely kind and welcoming people with distinct dignity.	Landscape: barren and ugly with; full of flocks. Climate: burning hot. Desert: adventure, spiritual dimension, touristy; inhabited by Bedouins living in camps; rocky, silent and it has also water. Dead Sea: terrible, have to see it once, never again, peculiar. Dana natural reserve: beautiful walking peculiar environment. Canyoning: beautiful, fun.	Petra: Fascinating, exciting beautiful, colorful, effort. Behind with urban development. Roman Ruins: beautiful, not many memories.	Society: social and family rules are different which restrict women freedom. History: Ancient history is the distinctive element of Jordan especially related to Petra and the Romans.
	Fascinating (new world), tolerant, touristy.	Desert: Sandy, Red, with canyons, inhabited by Bedouins, Bedouins' atmosphere, adventurous, nights exciting. Dead Sea: mud-baths, floating property, dying atmosphere.	Petra: children begging and touristy, red sunsets, magical, out-of-the-world feeling. Moses of the Commandments Mount fascinating not religious feeling. Mosaics' city beautiful but dirty. Castles not exciting.	People: friendly, open-minded, tolerant with tourists (especially referred to women' dress code), welcoming. Food: fresh and made with love and care	Different ambiances: some places busy and time dependent, some places relaxed and natural earth rhythm, namely in the desert, and Mount Nebo awe-striking	Desert: unconventional with rocks and spring water; harmony between men and nature, magical atmosphere, pathos in the evening, isolated from the world. Dead Sea: fascinating the descent to 400 meters under sea level, floating property, the water sucks, I did it once, enough. Canyoning: beautiful sceneries but touristy. Hiking in the Dana reserve. Intense bright light.	Amman: big town, markets, not clean. Mount Nebo: the cherry on top, there have been continuous wars, there is something sacred and important there, evocative – and puzzling. Petra: touristy but with a special atmosphere of power.	People: not much contact, tunic and headscarf.
9. LALLA	Polarization of anxiety for people and peace for natural sceneries	Large, open red spaces.	Petra: blurred image.	Biblical episodes. People: with beards and wearing tunics Suk markets.	Serene, simplicity, peace of mind and sense of infinity in front of wide open spaces general sense of magnificence	Desert: rocky, camels, open spaces, sense of infinite, meditative ambiance, silence, inhabited by Bedouins give the sense they are living out-of-time, simple life. Landscape: wide open-spaces, everything is ocher color. Dead Sea: unimpressive, you have to see it once.	Petra: deeply fascinating, canyon towards the Treasure's façade most exciting, ancient civilization. Less civilization, [vs place of origin].	History: cradle of civilization, feel history on you. Mint tea and sesame cookies.

SOCIAL INTERACTION AND DESTINATION IMAGE

People	PRE-VISIT				POST-VISIT			
	Psychological environment/emotional representation	Nature_Geographic Representation	Sociocultural Representation		Psychological environment/emotional representation	Nature_Geographic Representation	Sociocultural Representation	
			Built environment	People & Culture			Built environment	People & Culture
10. BELLA	Not chaotic	There is a desert.	Petra: shrouded in mystery, façades incredible piece of art, exciting, emotionally moving	/	Fascinating, exciting	A red world. Desert: arid landscape, meditative self-reflecting, connecting atmosphere, emotionally moving and arousing. Dead Sea: floating, fascinating that it is unique, disgusting water, not relaxing 'sea day', if you are in Jordan you have to see it once. Dana reserve: hiking paths, incredible heights and spectacular landscapes.	Petra: incredible art and architecture, charming, monastery not worth the effort, fascinating ancient civilization of Nabateans. Roman ruins: impressive, beautiful and surprisingly very well maintained.	People: attached to their beliefs (Muslims), open-minded, proud, resilient, very knowledgeable and 'ahead compared to the West'. Women: wear burqa mysterious, not a sign of close-mindedness, younger ones more open-minded. Region underwent territorial division.

1. *Ciak*: Ciak's image before and after visitation is predominantly of its landscapes. It is noticeable however that before visitation he reports having a representation of the local social context. Not only he mentions the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the abundant number of refugees due to the proximity with war zones; he also describes a population that he defines 'hard core' Muslims. They wear traditional clothes such as tunics and head scarves. The social scenario is also characterized by visible social inequalities based on wealth; while the individuals can easily be dishonest, especially in the context of small businesses, which tourists usually have direct contact with when on a trip.

Ciak's post-visitation image of Jordan appears quite different. He reports a friendly social ambiance; it is tranquil despite the events surrounding the country. Noticeably there is no more mentioning of any social representation. Otherwise his image of Jordan is dominated by landscapes whether of natural sceneries or of Petra's archeological site. In this context Ciak's image of the Dead Sea is negative. He acknowledges that it is something that needs to be seen once. His evaluation however appears contradictory and differs from that of the other participants, since he is the only participant who mentioned that our stay was too short on the site and we should have spent more days there.

2. *Miele*: Miele appears to be well-informed about the destination, but she does not dwell too much to describe her representations and her pre-visitation image results to be parallel to the common themes of the social image of Jordan before visitation. The dominant element of her image is constituted by the desert and the emotions it evokes in her; this is followed by Petra and its distinctive reddish landscape, the Dead Sea and its peculiar floating property. Finally, the Jordanians are an Arab population; people are warm and sunny and Jordanians have proved to be a resilient population in a geopolitically turbulent region.

Her post-visitation image also appears in line with the social image after visitation. Nevertheless, two elements have emerged that appear relevant in the current context. Miele describes the ambience of Jordan as a 'positive country' and defines it a well-managed country. Lastly, also in line with the social image is the representation of the Dead Sea as not exciting, as something that she saw once.

3. *Franky*: Franky's image of Jordan before visitation appears as the most articulated and multifaceted among the trip participants. In relation to the nature representation his image is dominated by the desert. Initially, he does not want to describe it in his own words and images; he repeats that his image coincides with what is portrayed in the movie *Lawrence of Arabia*. The desert corresponds with adventure and excitement and it is a strongly anticipated sight. Second, respecting the hierarchy of importance suggested by the participant, is Petra: a fascinating site with a concentration of monuments proof of the ancient population of the Nabataeans in conjunction with the Roman Empire. Third, Franky praises the uniqueness of the Dead Sea.

Franky is also the only participant who gives prominence to Jordan's history as a component of his image. He lists historical events and phases, ranging from the ancient times corresponding to the time of Petra and the Romans, to the World Wars and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He singles out personalities in Jordanian history, paying special tribute to *Lawrence of Arabia* and the late King Hussein of Jordan. Especially in relation to the latter he stresses what a great King and leader he was and how he managed the country's position in the general turmoil of the region, while also promoting its development against all odds.

After visitation, Franky's Jordan is characterized by a positive atmosphere. He stresses that it is tidy. The desert keeps its place as a dominating feature of Franky's image for its astonishing landscapes, the particular rhythm the desert seems to dictate, for which only traveling by camel is appropriate. The desert acquires more emotional characteristics: quite marked is an almost sacred feeling he describes 'like entering church'. In Franky's post-visitiation image, Petra gets credit, but does not emerge as a predominant feature, while Jordan's history keeps its importance. History is defined as the unique element of Jordan. Franky praises the Nabataean ancient population as mysterious and extremely fascinating; he celebrates the late King Hussein of Jordan for his deeds, his role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts and gives him credit for the development of the country's infrastructures, especially the roads network. One more element Franky shows particular enthusiasm for is Mount Nebo as a symbol dear to Catholicism as one of the places defining its origins, and thus a place symbol of our (Italians') culture dominated

by Catholicism.

4. *GGB*: *GGB*'s image of Jordan before visitation appears vague, but multifaceted. He is the only one who does not mention Petra at all. He makes a reference to the presence of Roman ruins and other archeological finds, but not Petra. *GGB* describes Jordan as 'less civilized' referring to the country's development, also referring to his image of a territory that is less urbanized compared to Italy's or other destinations'.

GGB's post visitation image is still quite multifaceted. His image of Jordan gained some definition and details and also presents some additional elements: that of Petra and history and a representation related to local women. After visitation *GGB* describes the history of the Nabataeans as the origin of our Romans. He says of Petra that you can feel that 'there is history there', the ambiance is evocative of the ancient civilization.

The local culture is the mysterious 'Arab world'. He describes local people in relation to their wear as all respectably and soberly dressed. Women are all covered, and *GGB* suggests that his previous representations of women covered by veils for religious reasons might have changes since their situation seemed all normal and natural and it is a local costume that might just be a noble tradition. In *GGB*'s words:

"Of course I never liked seeing burqas, you know? And there you see some burqas sometimes, but in any case I see the girls wearing it, in the morning they mutter among themselves, I mean it doesn't give the idea of a place where there is a lot of oppression, a lot of violence, (...)In any case it's the result of a tradition. It also has its noble aspects."

(*GGB*5420 Post-visit interview).

Lastly, he confirms his image of a place where there is 'less civilization', with simple development, however he praises Jordan for being tidy: he attributes this achievement to an 'enlightened leader'.

5. *Ellina*: *Ellina*'s image of Jordan before visitation is mostly about the desert and the feelings it inspires her; but comparatively more detailed is her image of Petra, which presents an entrance created by the passage of water in ancient times and which hosted some ancient population whose life was based on the trade of goods. *Ellina* is excited by the Dead Sea because of its renowned floating properties.

Ellina' post-visit image, portrays a Jordan with a multifaceted natural environment.

Her image of Petra now has a component of fascination for the fact that once there was water there. She describes that on the site there was a cliff right next to a carved temple which once was a waterfall. One more element in relation to the built heritage, which gains prominence, is represented by the Roman ruins, which she describes as very-well maintained and exciting for being a proof that the Romans reached everywhere.

Noticeably Ellina's post-visitation image presents a more articulated representation of the social category. She describes that the Jordanian people live well and despite the neighboring wars they also live safe. She states that Jordanians are socially '*ahead* compared to the West'. They host refugees from the tormented neighboring countries and they 'don't complain' which makes of them a resilient population. Jordanians supposedly have a better organized education system. They are kind, good and open-minded people. In this respect she briefly explains that her image of women in the local society, who are all entirely covered, has changed and she might not see it as an oppressive practice anymore. In the social representation realm, Ellina is strongly fascinated by the Bedouins, whom she describes happy and tranquil living in the desert. In this context she mentions Bedouin women being united with a man at a young age.

6. *Sasso*: Sasso displays a marked image modification after visitation. His pre-visitation image of Jordan is fragmented and vague. His first elicited pictorial image is a decontextualized reinforced-concrete building. Finally, it emerges that he pictures a calm ambiance with honest people. Otherwise it matches the few common elements identified for the social destination image. The desert is rocky and it is a fascinating natural system, the Dead Sea is characterized by extremely high salinity and the weather is arid and desertic and characterized by very bright light. There exists a site, Petra. Sasso does not provide any more details about his image of the destination. He self-admittedly forewarns me he was not prepared and had not thought about it at all.

Upon return, Sasso's image displays a noticeable enrichment. The ambiance is tranquil, and the rhythm of life is relaxed; it is also touristy, at least in the places he visited. What struck him the most of the Desert was the deep silence; while both the desert and the landscapes in general are characterized by rocks with colorful shades; flocks of goats and their shepherds are

found everywhere. As for the Dead Sea it is unimpressive, but he acknowledges that if you are in Jordan, it is a place that you have to see once, but only if you have spare time. His representation of Amman is that of a town, which is dirty and crowded, mostly by men. Petra is an awe striking sight, everything is built in the rocks and he describes that despite his skepticism there might have been water there once upon a time.

The change that stands out the most between Sasso's pre- and post- visitation images is noticeable in his socio-cultural representation. After visitation Sasso places special emphasis on history. Sasso maintains that in Jordan 'the air is soaked with history'. One of Sasso's comments states:

"First of all my thoughts were that I was in a land where civilization was actually born. I strongly felt this very thing (...). The fact of being on the border with Israel, Syria, with the Golan Heights... Iraq... I mean, I really felt part of the human civilization, you know...I felt this thing very strong. That all our culture was born there and that every single stone actually emanates this very strong history that is present..."

(Sasso, Post-visitatio interview)

Sasso's image after visitation is strongly marked by its historical property of Jordan, which he now describes as being where 'human civilization was actually born'. In regards to the modern social environment, Sasso describes that despite having almost no contact with the local people, they are generally friendly and extremely welcoming with tourists. They appear serene and wear traditional clothing such as tunics and head scarves. He emphasizes that the few women he spotted were 'really covered', which struck him.

7. *Ballerina*: Ballerina's image of Jordan before visitation presents a unique element among the participants. According to her, women in Jordan have limited freedom of expressing themselves due to societal and family structure in the local society; they are also inhibited by Westerners making any contact with them virtually impossible on the trip. This is a topic that she feels very strongly about, as she explains:

"From the point of view of the family, because in any case women can't communicate how they would like to... maybe not every woman, but most of them are at least intimidated by Western people, therefore... but... in any case I'll observe that..."

(Ballerina, Pre-visit interview).

After visitation she confirms that women's freedom is restricted in the local society.

Ballerina observes how they have to follow dress code rules, and how only men are to be seen in the social, public spaces.

In her post-visitation image related to Jordan's natural environment the desert holds an important position and has acquired an emotional dimension. In its more physical appearance, the Jordanian desert is characterized by spring water, an aspect that impressed her. Ballerina describes the Dead Sea as a terrible place: she acknowledges, that it is a peculiar place and has to be seen once in a lifetime, but that is enough. Her opinion is quite strong and her acknowledgement seems almost reluctant, almost an attempt to be polite towards Jordan. The history of the country gains importance in Ballerina's post visitation image. This is a knowledge item that she only quickly mentioned before the trip and only in relation to the ancient population of Petra. After visitation, Jordan's ancient history, in relation to both the Nabataean population (Petra) and also the Romans, is now a distinctive element of Jordan.

8. *Ruby*: Ruby's image of Jordan sees Petra in dominating position and connected to an otherworldly ambiance. In regards to other heritage sites, she is the only one to mention Moses, a personality in the Bible, even if she specifies that it does not have any religious connotation for her; and also a mosaic's city, which she pictures beautiful but dirty. Ruby's fascination for the desert is increased by the inhabiting population of Bedouins. Lastly, she describes Jordan as a touristy destination, where the local people are friendly and tolerant with tourists who do not follow the local dress code.

Ruby's image of Jordan after visitation has a stronger component of peculiar ambiances such as natural, earth rhythm of the desert and the awe-striking Mount Nebo and Petra; while history does not emerge as an important image element. She describes the desert as an unconventional one with hidden water springs that only the Bedouins know of. Mount Nebo is a special place. It evokes a sacred feeling and there is something special about that land; she maintains this is why so many wars have characterized this relatively small strip of land. Petra, despite being flooded with tourists, has a special atmosphere of an ancient power still residing there in the ambiance. In regards to the Dead Sea, Ruby is in line with the social image of it being a unique place for its location and properties; however it has terrible water and it is a

place to be tried once in a lifetime.

These are the findings for the eight participants I was able to interview before departure and upon return separately. The next two participants Lalla and Bella were interviewed once, after visitation. The first part of the interview investigated a-posteriori their pre-visitation image, asking the same questions as the other pre-visitation interviews; the second part of the interview was then the same post-visitation interview also administered to the other participants.

9. *Lalla*: Lalla reports that before visitation her image of Jordan was self-admittedly vague; Petra did not have any feature apart from its name. She describes the ambiance of Jordan polarized between anxiety in the towns and among the people and a deep sensation of peace in front of the natural sceneries. These she describes as large, red, open-spaces. She links Jordan to some biblical episodes; and her representation of the local people portrays them with beards and wearing tunics; while in-town's Suk markets can be found easily.

After visitation she describes a serene ambiance, which allows for experiencing some peace of mind. The desert is one dominant element of her image especially for its meditative ambiance. The Dead Sea is unimpressive however she specifies it is something you need to see once. Petra is now well-defined. Referring to Jordan's modern urban areas she maintains there is '*less civilization*' in comparison to other cities elsewhere. Finally, Lalla underlines how Jordan is 'the land where it is said civilization was born' and where 'you feel history on you while you are walking'.

10. *Bella*: Bella's pre-visitation image mostly coincided with Petra, which she had a relatively detailed image of. Her image of Jordan after visitation appears multifaceted with representations of numerous of the visited sites. Prominence is attributed to the desert, for its meditative, connective and emotionally arousing ambiance; and to Petra for its charming architecture, the art it represents and the fascinating ancient civilization of the Nabataeans. Bella also highlights how well-maintained and impressive are the Roman Ruins. Finally, her representation of the local population portrays Jordanians as very open-minded people, who are very knowledgeable and '*ahead* compared to the West'. They are a resilient population and

proud also of their belief (Muslim faith), which they show in their everyday life through their wear and behavior. Women are fully covered, which lavishes them with mystery and it is not a sign of close-mindedness.

This previous section has presented the differences emerged from comparing individuals' pre – and post – visitation interviews. For the purpose of the current study, reporting of participants' comprehensive and detailed destination images before and after visitation is not necessary. Thus informed by the research question only the differences between the images found relevant across participants in the context of this study were articulated.

The next is the last section of the second part of this chapter; it focuses on presenting the similarities observed between participants.

4.3.3. Individual destination images: similarities between participants' accounts

The analysis of individuals' image change highlighted a number of similarities between and among participants. Some of these appear to be due to visitation and direct interaction with the destination, such as the increased details in relation to both Petra and the Wadi Rum desert some changes in the physical description of the attractions, the physical description of locations such as the Dana natural reserve and the hiking activity, or the canyoning in the Wadi Mujib, and the modification of image in relation to the Dead Sea. Equally, for temperature and climate at the destination, the characteristics of the landscape and people's appearance and food variety and characteristics. These items appear to follow the same trend with minimal differences between participants.

There are however some other representation items that emerge after visitation, which are common only to a number of participants and not others; informed by the participant observation, the representation items modification do not appear to be explained only with direct interaction with the destination during visitation. Similarities interest especially socio-cultural representations in relation to people and culture. These include history and country's management, women in society and the Jordanian people in comparison to the Western society. Only to a lesser extent the similarities interest built environment. These include country's

development and Roman ruins. While the nature geographic representations present one element of interest among participants, namely the disappointment with the Dead Sea. The identified representation elements are reported hereafter in this same order, in decreasing order of emerged significance.

History

Before visitation participants' representations largely did not include the element of the country's history. Two participants, Ballerina and Ellina, mention that the site of Petra used to host some ancient civilization; while Franky is the only participant who strongly emphasized Jordan's history and related it to a broader historical context. Franky rattled off historical events ranging from the ancient history of Petra and the Romans to the World Wars and the more recent history up to today's situation in the region. He pays special credit to the late King Hussein of Jordan giving him credit for the relative progress of Jordan despite the scarce resources and the difficult geo-political situation in the region.

After visitation, Jordan's history or historical relevance, emerges as one unique and prominent element. Ballerina connects to her pre-visitiation interview and reconfirms that ancient history, especially in relation to Petra and the Romans is a distinctive feature of Jordan. In Ellina's account history does not appear so prominent anymore, even if she comments that the 'Romans arrived everywhere'. Franky reaffirms history is the unique element of Jordan, praises the late King again in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the development of the country's infrastructure, especially its roads system; he adds the relevance of Mount Nebo to Italians, whose culture is dominated by Catholicism, and how Mount Nebo stands as a symbol of the origins of our culture because of its relevance to Christianity and Catholicism.

For the other participants who did not report history as part of their representation before visitation, this becomes a very relevant element after visitation. The most evident is Sasso who states that he felt strongly that he was immersed in the land which gave origin to 'human civilization', where air is soaked in history and this sentiment is what characterized Jordan in his view. GGB also reports how history is now part of the picture. GGB states that Jordan stands at the origin of 'our Romans', and then in relation to Petra he maintains it can be sensed

that 'there is history there' and how great of a population the Nabataeans were. Finally, Lalla, who was interviewed only upon return and reported that she did not prepare for the trip, defines Jordan as the place where 'it is said civilization was born', where 'you feel history on you'.

Country management

Before visitation there is no actual reference to the country's management apart from Franky's mentioning of King Hussein and how he made country's progress possible at best of Jordan's limited possibilities. After visitation, Franky confirms his view of King Hussein and maintains that thanks to him the country was put on track, it is kept tidy and orderly and it is noticeable that investments have been made on the country's roads network.

After visitation Miele maintains that it can be noticed that Jordan is a well-managed country; while GGB reports that you can tell that the country is led by an enlightened leader who keeps it tidy.

Women

Before visitation the topic of local women is not popular. Only Ballerina refers to the topic saying that women in the local society must have restricted freedoms in interpersonal relationships. She explicitly states that she would pay attention to this specific aspect during her time in Jordan. After visitation Ballerina reaffirms her interest in the position of women in the local society; she states that family rules in the Jordanian's society are different from ours, i.e. in Italy. Women have restricted freedom; this limit and rules their behavior and appearance in public spaces.

After visitation, women in the local society are mentioned by four participants. Sasso highlights that women are "really covered!" and are not seen around town much. In Sasso's representation the crowd is mostly composed by men. GGB, Ellina and Bella also talk about women in the local society. They all suggest that a change has occurred in their representation of women and the societies in which they have to wear burqas. GGB describes that all the women he saw were wearing burqas, however all seemed normal and natural; it is the product of traditions and it has noble aspects, which he does not explain further. Ellina describes how

women in town all wear burqas. She explicitly mentions how she started changing her view about it; nevertheless Ellina does not elaborate on what her representation of women with burqas and their society was and how it is changing after visiting Jordan. She also mentions of Bedouin women that are united to men when they are very young. Finally, Bella explains that women covered with burqas have a mysterious aura; it is not a sign of close-mindedness, which discloses, at least partially, her previous representation of the practice. She also mentions how the younger generation of women are more open-minded and benefit from increased freedom.

Jordanian people vs. the West

From the post-visitation interviews a new element emerges in relation to the local people and society that is common to Ellina and Bella only. They both describe Jordanian people as open-minded and ‘*ahead* compared to the West’. Ellina maintains that they are socially more advanced, claiming that their education system is better organized. Bella also describes people as open-minded and very knowledgeable, and thus ‘*ahead* compared to the West’.

Country’s development

Before visitation Ciak and GGB report a representation of Jordan as a country that has a lesser extent of development. This is mainly relative to Italy, which is participants’ usual and most familiar environment. Ciak describes it as an ‘underdeveloped atmosphere’; GGB calls it ‘less civilized’. They are referring mostly to the urban development and general infrastructure development as they know it.

After visitation, Ciak does not mention the topic anymore. GGB reaffirms it by describing Jordan as a country with simple development, where the main form of commerce occurs in ‘bazaars’ or street markets and defines it once more as ‘less civilized’. Lalla is another participant who addresses the topic of development and urbanization in her post-visitation interview and also describes Jordan as a place presenting ‘less civilization’.

Roman Ruins

The Roman Ruins are not popular an attraction before visitation, as only two participants mention their existence, Ciak and GGB. They remain a minor element in the representation of

Jordan's built heritage also after visitation. I solicited participants to talk about the Roman ruins. Among them, Franky stated that it was impressive to see them there, out of Italy and still intact. Bella describes them as impressive and surprisingly very well-maintained. Lastly, Ellina says they are exciting, especially the amphitheater; she explains that there are many in Italy, but not as well-maintained as in Jordan.

Dead Sea

Finally, the representation of the Dead Sea presents similarities across participants. Before visitation the Dead Sea represents a fascinating feature mainly for the uniqueness of its floating ability. Visitation confirmed the floating property of the Dead Sea, but changed participants' representation to an unpleasant and unimpressive place. What is noticeable is that all participants refer to the Dead Sea, whether spontaneously or solicited to address the topic, in the same way. Despite the unpleasantness, they acknowledge its uniqueness in the world and thus as something that 'you have to see it once', there is no need to repeat, and they are still not impressed. This element is noticeable because of the homogeneity of the formula participants use to address the topic.

This section concludes the second part of the findings dedicated to identifying the modification between social and individual destination image before and after visitation. This section showed not only that social and individual images of Jordan underwent modification throughout visitation, but also that there are specific topics and representations that are shared by some participants and not others. In some cases the topic was shared by a large number of participants who related to it at varying extents, such as history or women in the local society; in other cases the way of describing one object of representation presented marked similarities, as in the cases of country development, Jordanian people and the Dead Sea.

Some changes noticeable across participants can be attributed directly to participants' interaction with the destination, such as the description of the landscapes. However, some do not appear to be explained only by direct experience with the destination's environment; in addition they appear to be common only to some participants and not to others. The next and last part of this chapter addresses this point. It aims at reaching the objectives of examining and

reporting the process of destination image formation, in order to determine how social interaction contributes to the destination image formation process.

4.4. Social interactions

After having established that participants' image of Jordan undergoes a modification throughout visitation, this third and last part of the chapter presents the intra-group social interaction findings from participant observation and in-depth interviews. This part is divided into three sections. The first section presents the formation of relationships between participants within the group, starting from the situations and conditions conducive to group formation, followed by the group's general sub-divisions, the controversial relationship with the local guide and the development of friendships between participants. To follow, it presents the topics of conversation recalled by participants, integrated and triangulated with participant observation. The second section is dedicated to the participants' self-assessment of how social interaction contributed to the formation of their image of Jordan throughout visitation. This section reports the themes emerged from participants' accounts identifying participants' perception of what are the forms of social interaction that have any role on the formation of their individual destination image; in light of these findings it also assesses to what extent participants are aware of the processes of social interaction development and of individual destination image modification and formation. The third and concluding section, expands on the previously mentioned observation of the strong relationship between post-visitation image and the personal interaction with the environment. The section presents the emerged indivisible relationship between intra-group social interaction and its development, interaction with the local environment and the process of destination image formation.

4.4.1. Intra-group relationships development

This first section reports first the relationships' development, what occasions were more conducive to social bonding, the development of a controversial relationship with the local guide and the development of one-on-one relationships; subsequently are also reported the conversation topics entertained between participants documented and found relevant. These

forms of intra-group social interaction provide context to the similarities and differences noticeable in the post-visitation image accounts.

Conducive conditions for social bonding

Participants agree that social relationships and friendships are especially developed during transfers, which starting from the day after arrival, were happening by minibus. As Bella explains when she is asked what were the occasions or the spaces that were more conducive to social interaction and group creation:

“The bus for sure, because when you travel the moment is created when you begin sharing and talking with someone. To me this was fundamental, too. Moving by bus alone, without other people. It was the moment when people got to know each other more.”

(Bella, Post-visitation interview)

The seat selection in the first two minibus rides is dynamic; however from the third trip on the seats became fixed. Since then, it happened in a couple of occasions only that two participants swapped seats, these were separately Ciak and Sasso; these incidents will be explained later. Otherwise the seating plan remained fixed, as previously displayed in Figure 22. The minibus was one of the most conducive environments for social interaction in form of the conversations that could be joined in by nearby participants. The captivity of the environment certainly made it the space that allowed me to observe the entire group at once. Other situations that appeared conducive to some elaborated conversations and exchanges were the long walks, which we had many of. These allowed for one-on-one bonding since adapting to each other's pace and thus have private time is relatively easy; these situations allowed for personal disclosure and private conversations. Because of these conditions I was only able to notice conversations that included myself. Meal time also appeared as a conducive condition for intra-group social interaction through conversations; these were relatively lighter hearted, playful and circumstantial.

Certainly other moments allowed for different manifestations of social interactions, such as night time between roommates and after dinner hang-outs, are some examples. However, I had no access to the former. In regards to the latter, all nights we were joined by the parallel group, therefore social interactions were involving external actors, too.

Even if it was outside the scope of this research it is worth noticing that interactions between the two groups involved almost exclusively the younger portions of both groups and conversations remained mostly playful, circumstantial and non-confrontational. Therefore, it appeared that topics of conversation that allowed for extended discussion and elaboration occurred during walking and sightseeing and during transfers on the minibus; in the latter case conversations also allowed more people to join in and share also occasional disagreements.

Participant observations allowed me to note the sub-groups and friendships developing within the main group. Some participants would spend more time together than with other participants, even if sometimes the groups would be differently composed depending on the activity. The internal subdivision created mainly one larger sub-group and then mostly pairs and two more solitary individuals; these groupings will all be called sub-groups. Within the whole group one-on-one friendships or bonds developed between participants regardless of age or sub-groups, meaning that the same individual also developed multiple one-on-one closer bonds. These did not necessarily coincide with the person or people s/he spent most of the time with. From participant observation it emerged that the sub-groups' composition of people spending more time together somewhat resembled the minibus seating plan, even if participants' age is probably the strongest criterion for the sub-groups' composition. By examining the findings on individual images of Jordan— presented in the previous part of this chapter - it is observed that some of the similarities emerged between people sitting in the vicinity of each other; however the minibus seating plan also does not explain them entirely.

The group coordinator and the local guide are also included in this section focused on social interaction; and social interaction and bonding are presented from the general sub-groups formation to the specific one-on-one bonding and friendships. From now on, the seating plan order that is being followed for findings' presentation will include Bella and Lalla, who were previously separated.

General sub-divisions

It was observed that the major sub-group was composed by Ellina, GGB, Bella, Sasso, Lalla and the coordinator. With the exception of Sasso who was sitting slightly removed in the

back, the other components of this sub-group were sitting in each other's vicinity on the minibus. These participants also coincide with the younger portion of the group. Of the younger portion of the group Ciak and I were the exceptions not included in the constant members of this sub-group. This sub-group would sit together for dinners, hang out later at night, and stick together relatively more during the daily activities.

The same sort of sub-group behavior was observed, even if to a lesser extent, in the elders' group composed by Miele and Franky, and Ballerina and Ruby. However, as further reported later, bonds between individuals within these groups were not of equal intensity. It also has to be highlighted that even if in some occasions and activities the age distinction was more noticeable, the group was well integrated in the majority of the group moments. Before illustrating the participants' bonding among themselves, a brief explanation of the group's relationship with the local guide is needed since it emerged as controversial.

The local guide and the group

The local guide, Lui, is a Jordanian man who carried out his post-graduate education in Italy, got married in Italy with an Italian woman and then moved back to Jordan after about fifteen years in Italy. The guide spoke fluent Italian and some vocabulary of other Italian dialects; the entire visit and explanations were conducted in Italian.

The whole group accepted him well at the beginning, however it was not long before many participants started liking him less. Already at the end of the first day, Sasso openly declared to me and others of his already close circle, especially Ellina, that he did not trust the guide's words and explanations. Sasso maintained that the guide said a few things he "knew" were wrong and therefore he would not trust him anymore. Sure enough, Sasso would not follow him or pay much attention to his explanation anymore, he rather chose another participant, Franky, as his own guide for the trip, as will be illustrated later.

Ciak was the participant who was most exposed to the guide in the first couple of days. During transfers, Lui would stand between the door and the front row seat, where Ciak was sitting by himself. From there he was able to address the whole group and look at everyone; occasionally he would sit next to Ciak. Lui started making fun of Ciak in a playful manner, but

already by the third day, Ciak felt that the guide was exaggerating and the joke was not fun anymore. They had a verbal crossfire in front of both our group and the parallel group. The guide made fun of him again not realizing that Ciak was not enjoying it anymore; Ciak answers made it quite clear to everyone. After that site visit, Lui apologized to Ciak who told the guide he accepted the apology, but should not talk to him again. For the rest of the day Ciak sat in the back of the bus with me and Sasso. Starting from the day after, the guide went to sit in the front with the driver and the coordinator and avoided direct interaction with Ciak, who returned to the front seat. The day after this incident, Sasso commented to me on the minibus that since Ciak talked the guide off, the situation had definitely improved within the group.

Bella and Ellina were the ones that more frequently were caught up in lengthy conversations with Lui. While Bella kept having the most relations with the guide throughout the tour, both Bella and Ellina, stated that by the end of the tour Lui's behavior bothered them. Bella then commented in her post-visitation interview that she was caught in an internal debate about her opinion in relation to Lui because she praised his knowledge, but she felt he was ambiguous:

“The one that I still cannot evaluate well is our guide. Because on one hand he fascinated me very much for his knowledge. But sometimes he was a little bit ambiguous. (...) Finally his way of being bothered me. On the other hand, there was a side which was completely opposite to that, which made me feel happy he was our guide and not somebody else. Because he gave me a lot...”

(Bella, Post-visitation interview)

Ellina was more definitive when talking about the guide, and openly stated that she liked him at the beginning, but not anymore towards the end. The other participants mostly did not mention the guide at all in their post-visitation interviews; only Miele commented on his extensive knowledge.

Acknowledging the guide's controversial position within the group is important, since it is the guide who is usually considered as the primary source of information about the destination besides the personal individual's interaction with the physical and social environment. It will be shown how this relationship affected some participants' choice of their source of information and their image of the destination. In contrast with the guide's situation, the coordinator, mostly

in charge of the decision making in terms of logistics, group’s money management and liaison between guide and group, was praised by everyone.

The social interactions between participants in relation to whom they spent more time with and whom they bonded more with was recorded thanks to participant observation. In order to triangulate my observations and gather the participants’ perspectives, questions were included in the post-visitation interview guide. These were openly asking participants whom they bonded more with and whom they spent more time with, never assuming the answers would coincide. Hereafter, the social interaction patterns between participants are presented.

One-on-one bonds

Ciak, noticeably did not form constant part of any sub-group and did not develop any particular, closer one-on-one relationship; he did spend relatively a little bit more time with GGB, simply because they shared the room in the hotels for three nights. During the day however, Ciak was sitting by himself in the two-seat front row (Figure 23). During the sightseeing and hiking activities, as also reported by other participants mentioning him

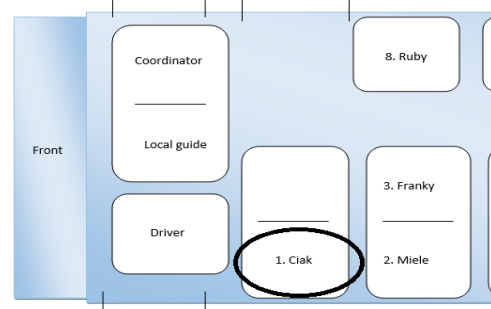


Figure 23 One-on-one bonds: Ciak

in their post-visitation interviews, he was constantly far behind the rest of the group, reason being his passion for photography. Taking pictures and experimenting with his camera was the priority and main activity for Ciak throughout visitation.

On the bus he would not engage in conversations, he would often sleep through the transfers in fact; and in the evening he would be one of the first ones to be headed to bed. He would be very sociable in group situations, such as dinner time for example, however he did not develop any closer one-on-one bond with anybody in particular. His post-visitation interview confirms this observation. When he is asked openly who he bonded the most with, he answered: “Everybody”, and then spared a few words for listing the participants and saying some characteristic or a joke about some of them. It can be noticed that there is no relevant similarity between Ciak’s individual post-visitation image of Jordan and others’ individual

image; and his representation is dominated by landscapes and sceneries.

Miele was traveling with her partner, Franky. She spent most of the time with him sitting together on the minibus (see Figure 24), at meals, sharing the hotel room and spending most of the activities together. She appears extremely reserved and discrete, however she is very sociable and approachable. She did in fact talk a little bit with everyone and did participate in group’s jokes. However, she would rarely disclose of herself. These observations were confirmed by Miele herself in her post-visitation interview; she mentions that even if she talked a little bit with everybody, and a bit more with Ballerina and Ruby, her closer relationship and bond remained the one with Franky:

“You know I’m not very...extrovert, let’s say I’m quite a reserved person. I need more time than others, here’s people’s personal character, the personality comes into play. I mean the person I was traveling with [Franky] maybe tells you: ‘how beautiful, how beautiful, how beautiful’ one thousand times, [laughs] I’m quite different.”

(Miele, Post-visitation interview)

Franky was traveling with his partner Miele, he spent most of the time with her (Figure 25). However, he is very extroverted, confident, opinionated and talkative. He engaged in conversations with many other participants, conversations he would mostly dominate, especially with the younger participants. During sightseeing he was gladly walking along with some other participant, often with Miele on his other side; he would be engaging them in conversations most often focused on his historical knowledge about that specific site, but also

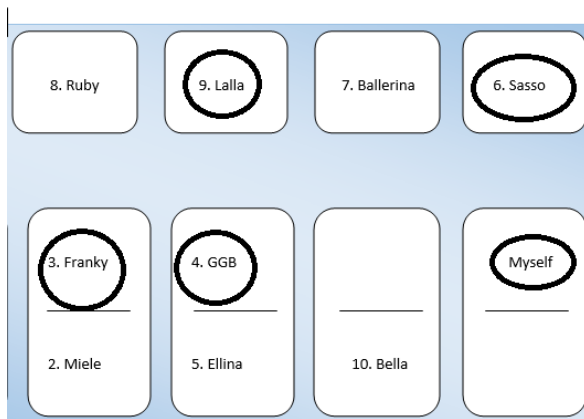


Figure 25 One-on-one bonds: Franky

general historical and political knowledge he had and he connected to the site or that just crossed his mind. He would be frequently followed by Sasso; but he would also often be walking with GGB, Lalla and myself. I observed he repeated his concepts to the different interlocutor.

Franky shows to be aware that he was



Figure 24 One-on-one bonds: Miele and Franky

often sharing his thoughts and knowledge and that he was recognized by some of the participants as a point of reference for more in-depth knowledge. This point is reflected by his answer when asked whether there was anyone, or any conversation he could remember that made him notice something, taught him something or gave him a different perspective:

“No. There wasn’t something... in fact, maybe it’s the contrary. I was the one who wanted to convey something different.”

(Franky, Post-visitation interview)

Franky displayed and shared thoughts and information, also when that meant disagreeing with the local guide. If he had read something that was in contrast with what the guide was explaining, he would rarely hesitate in commenting on it openly seeking clarification; sometimes he would openly integrate information into the guide’s explanation. The guide did not seem to mind.

GGB was recognized by the group as an entertainer. He was travelling with Ellina and sitting next to her on the minibus (Figure 26). He spent most of the time in the company of the sub-group of the younger participants, even if he was not often participating in the long nights

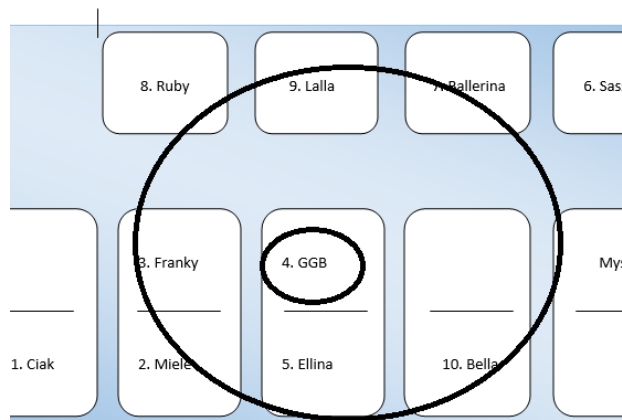


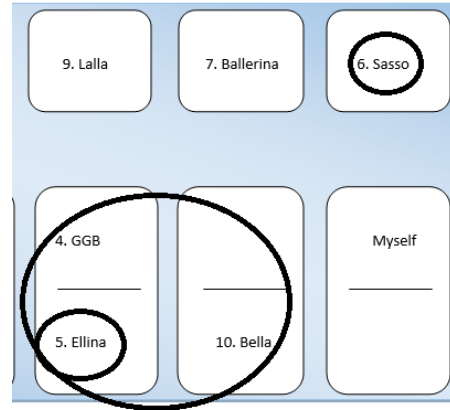
Figure 26 One-on-one bonds: GGB

the others would engage in. Apart from Ellina, his travel mate, he and Lalla became quite close relatively fast. They are sitting next to each other on the minibus separated only by the narrow corridor. The vicinity and the fact that Lalla was traveling unaccompanied probably helped the development of the bond. They got very close the first half of the trip. Then they grew apart in the last three/four days and they would not be spending any more one-on-one time together.

GGB does not mention this relationship in his post-visitation interview. He does mention Ellina for whose enjoyment he appears to care; he mentions holding in high esteem Franky and having been surprised and inspired by Ballerina’s character, enthusiasm and active personality.

GGB goes on to describe what he learnt on a personal level from, or that impressed him of Ciak, Sasso, Bella, the coordinator and myself (Figure 26). However, the closer one-on-one bonds identified were with Ellina and Lalla.

Ellina was traveling with GGB and sitting next to him on the bus (Figure 27). She started getting close to Bella already at the departing airport in Florence, as she reported herself already when we all met in the El Cairo airport. They started sharing the room starting from the first night and spent only the very last night separated. They developed a close relationship which Ellina would



praise continuously. Ellina was a constant member of the sub-group of the younger participants, in fact her one-on-one interactions with the elder participants remained relatively limited. Finally, in the second half of the trip, she spent progressively more time with Sasso who increasingly sought her company. Ellina in her post-visitation interview emphasizes how important the new friendships she developed are to her, especially because, she maintains, they are something that she lacks in her daily life.

Figure 27 One-on-one bonds: Ellina

Bella was the party driver. A constant of the younger participants' sub-group, probably more like the epicenter of it. She was traveling unaccompanied and sat on a two-seat row by her own. However, during the transfers she frequently engaged in conversation with Ballerina, sitting just on the other side of the corridor, in whispered conversations with Ellina in front of

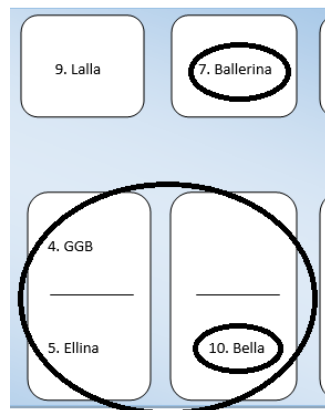


Figure 28 One-on-one bonds: Bella

her, and more playful conversations with GGB and Lalla by leaning forward to reach closer to them (Figure 28). She spent most of her time with Ellina and the other younger participants. She started developing a close relationship with Ellina from their first meeting at the airport. The relationship grew closer and more affectionate with the passing of the days. They spent a lot of one-on-one time and rarely separated. It was more frequent that others joined in with them both.

In addition to her close bond with Ellina, the coordinator was also seeking her company and towards the end of the trip she spent some more one-on-one time with him. Bella does not interact much with the elder participants with the only exception of Ballerina, whom she talked to especially on the minibus. Bella relates to Ballerina for being the only one of the elder participants occasionally participating in the night parties. Bella recognizes Ballerina as an inspiring woman to learn from. In her post-visitation interview Bella praises her in many respects, including her enthusiasm and engagement in parties, despite her age; but also her resilience, independence and curiosity. Bella admits that she would often pay attention when Ballerina was asking questions, especially to the guide, because she knew she would learn something.

Bella is also the only participant who got relatively more involved with the local guide. When not on the bus, usually during sightseeing, they often walked together and engaged in long conversations, where Lui was the dominating party. Conversations ranged from architecture, for she works as a restorer, and the local social system. Because of the bond with Bella, Ellina was also listening to Lui relatively more compared to the other participants. This situations were more frequent during the first part of the trip.

In her post-visitation interview Bella also mentions me as one of the closer bonds she developed. However, we spent relatively little time together. The most bonding episode was half-way through the trip, coinciding with our first day in Petra, when we had a long walk together and after confiding to me some of her private life, she shared her view on how the group was indivisible from the destination. She confirmed this position in her post-visitation interview, and it will be addressed later.

Sasso was traveling unaccompanied (Figure 29) and was reserved and quite at the beginning. After the first couple of days however he was frequently joining the younger participants' sub-group in spare-time occasions such as meals and nights. He developed a close relationship with Ellina, already starting from the third day of the trip. In fact, one of the two occasions in which seats were exchanged on the minibus, it was because Sasso wanted to sit next to Ellina on that transfer, thus he asked GGB to switch seats. Sasso developed some degree

of affection for Ellina, so much that he was the only one who shed some tears when saying goodbye upon return. During the sightseeing and day activities however he was actively seeking the company of Franky especially and to a lesser degree, of Ballerina, whom he was already often conversing with on the minibus. In his post-visit

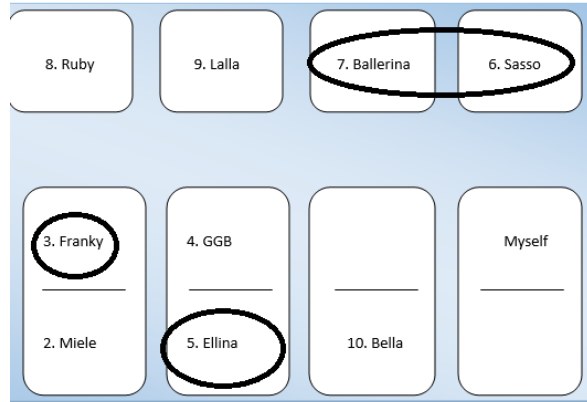


Figure 29 One-on-one bonds: Sasso

visitation interview, he confirms his frequent interactions with Franky. Sasso explains how he held Franky in very high esteem and tried to make the most out of Franky’s knowledge:

“I also felt very good with Franky, I asked him a lot of questions, a very prepared person... so I tried to take advantage of his knowledge and learn a bit from it. A super helpful person who explained me a lot of things, I understood a lot of things and I was really pleased he was my guide.”

(Sasso, Post-visit

ation interview)

Sasso took Franky as a point of reference as his own personal guide. He did not like and did not approve of the local guide himself from the very first day. He walked with me to the first sightseeing place shortly after meeting the guide for the first time and he was already skeptical and not convinced about him. Sasso explained back then and repeated in his post-visit

ation interview, that two explanations of the guide on two different topics were contrasting what he knew on those topics. Since then he did not recognize the local guide any longer and would question almost everything he said. Especially when history was involved, he would turn to Franky for the ”real story”.

Sasso is quite straight forward and openly talks about himself and his opinion when asked. He transparently provided his judgment about the guide:

“Instead talking about our guide himself, to me falls far short. I mean if I had to give him a mark from one to ten, I would give him a four [in Italian high school grading scale one is the lowest, ten is the highest and six is pass]. I immediately noticed it, from the first five minutes he was there (...) but to me out of ten things he said, eight were bullshit and two were right. I mean, at the very beginning he said two things I knew that were immediately wrong, and I

immediately tied his hands...”

(Sasso, Post-visitation interview)

When he was asked who he bonded more with and who he talked more with, Sasso identified Ellina, Franky, Ballerina and myself. He specified that the bond with Ellina was more affectionate, while with Franky it was more a one-directional relationship in which he was looking for ready information to supplement his poor preparation and his mistrust for the guide.

Ballerina is an elder woman and was traveling unaccompanied. Quite an independent and straight forward individual. She would speak her mind with self-confidence and no filters, also when she was disagreeing with the guide, which happened multiple times. Ballerina appeared to be at ease interacting with everybody in the group, but she would not stick to one person or one group more than another. Among the elder participants she was the one who joined more of the nights’ hang-outs with the younger participants’ sub-group, especially if music and some dancing were involved.

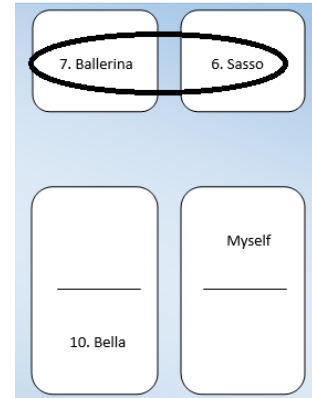


Figure 30 One-on-one bonds: Ballerina

Being two women of similar age and both traveling alone, Ballerina and Ruby shared the room for the whole trip, which gave them some one-on-one time. However, when Ballerina was asked whom she bonded more with, first she said she does not really bond closely with anybody ever, and then she indicated only Sasso as the one who impressed her most. On the trip I observed that it was mostly other participants approaching her first, however she would be always very friendly and welcoming of the approach. From the post-visitation interviews, it emerged that, similarly to Franky, she was recognized as a source of information. This was a result of both the preparation that she appeared to have and her predisposition to frequently asking questions and clarifications about information we were provided or not provided by the guide. The only person Ballerina seemed to have had very limited interaction with was Franky.

Lalla was traveling unaccompanied (Figure 31) and the first couple of days she remained relatively quiet, despite seeming supportive of GGB’s jokes and skits. Starting from the second night she was already bonding quite easily with GGB and their closeness increased quite rapidly. Lalla and GGB spent a lot of time together as part of the younger participants’ sub-

group, as well as one-on-one time for most of the trip. The last three/four days of the trip Lalla put some distance in between them and their interactions drastically decreased.

Lalla and I shared the room for the entire trip with the exception of one night in which I joined Bella and Ellina and she joined Ballerina and Ruby. At night she would stay up late joining some participants such as Bella, Ellina, Sasso and the coordinator, but also

some other participants from the parallel group. In fact in her post-visitation interview, she explains that, when her relations with GGB cooled, she developed an even closer friendship with a participant from the parallel group, which we were meeting mostly at night time at the hotels. During the day sightseeing she would spend time listening to Franky. In fact, it was not rare to see Lalla and GGB walking alongside an enthusiastic and talkative Franky. She seemed to enjoy also conversing with Ballerina who sat just behind her during the minibus rides.

In her post-visitation interview, Lalla identifies GGB as the closest bond she had until she interrupted it towards the end; she recognizes Franky and Ballerina as valuable and inspiring sources of information. She acknowledges openly that they dispensed information to the rest of the group either by direct conversation or through questions and challenges to the local guide. Of the other participants she says openly that she did not have any special, individualized bond; however she praised how the group bonded beautifully as a unit.

Ruby was among the elder participants and was traveling unaccompanied (Figure 32) likewise Ballerina. These commonalities made them share the room for the entire trip. Ruby has hearing problems, which she openly talks about as soon as she gets a little bit comfortable with the interlocutor. She told me on the pre-visitation interview that she is practically deaf from her left ear and her hearing from the right one is not perfect. This impairment seemed to compromise her interactions with the group, partially because she sat in the front row and on the right hand side of the minibus, and her left and non-functioning ear was the one exposed

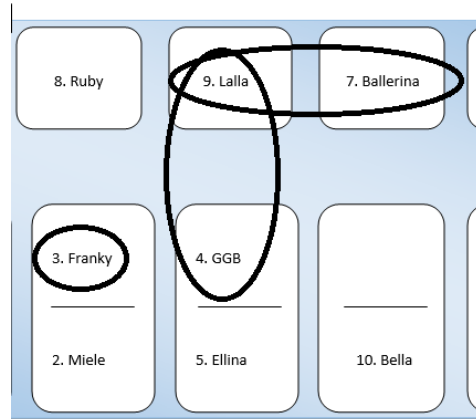


Figure 31 One-on-one bonds: Lalla

towards the others, but also because she restrained herself so that she would not be a burden:

“I become a little bit estranged right for this hearing problem, therefore sometimes I’m lost in my world not to stay there hearing, not to struggle to understand things. (...) sometimes I don’t speak with other people because I’m afraid of not understanding what on earth they tell me.”

(Ruby, Post-visitation interview)

She interacted easily and friendly with anyone who spoke to her directly and facing her, otherwise she rarely initiated contacts. She interacted more easily during meals when the group was sitting around a table facing each other; otherwise she was more at ease with Ballerina, since their one-on-one time made Ballerina aware of Ruby’s condition, and with me, who she had more confidence with and am sensible to hearing-impaired. During the day activities and sightseeing she was often by herself; especially during the multiple hiking activities, she was rarely even with the group since she was the fastest hiker among the elder participants’ by far and of some of the younger ones too; moreover the difficulties in hearing did not give a motivation for her to wait on the others or slow the pace for chatting along.



Figure 32 One-on-one bonds: Ruby

In her post-visitation interview Ruby acknowledges that she was impressed by her roommate Ballerina and she mentioned something that she liked of every participant. However no particular bond emerged. It is interesting to notice that when observing similarities in post-visitation interviews between participants’ accounts, Ruby’s representations did not show any noticeable or relevant similarity with any other participant.

So far the findings on intra-group social interaction were presented in form of the relationships developed among participants throughout the group travel at the destination. During the tour, the conversation topics I was able to witness were recorded; in some cases even some dialog excerpts that caught my attention for appearing particularly relevant to the formation of destination image. In order to further investigate these observations and triangulate the data, participants were asked whether they could remember any conversations, topics, comments or ideas exchange and if so, what were the circumstances and who the

interlocutors were. The findings on intra-group social interactions in relation to conversation topics are presented hereafter.

4.4.2. Conversation topics

Conversations that emerged as relevant to participants' destination image formation, in my observations, included general comments on the places' aesthetics, the history connected to the visited locations, comments, history and fantasies about Petra, women and the local social structure and the Dead Sea. From the Post-visitation interviews emerged that participants had difficulties in remembering any specific topic of conversation. The conversations elicited from the interviews are presented hereafter with a general to specific approach: from what emerged as a more generic memory to what appeared as more specific and detailed. Participants did not recall sharing their thoughts about the Dead Sea after visiting the site. However, I noted that comments were frequent and repetitive after leaving the site. This observation is presented after the conversations recalled by participants.

Beautiful

Franky and Ballerina, who were recognized as sources of information by multiple participants, did not identify any specific topic of conversation. All the others reported that topics of conversation related to the destination were typically quite general and short; participants' accounts were in agreement with Ciak's explanation:

“They were more general thoughts on how beautiful the place was, but nothing specific, deepened (...) in the end we just said: “beautiful...” – “yes, beautiful” (Laughs)”

(Ciak, Post-visitation interview)

History

Some participants did recall some more articulated conversations related to the destination. Lalla and Sasso recalled conversations with Franky that involved history; while Bella, Lalla and Ellina recalled talking about Petra and its ancient grandeur also fantasizing and speculating on how life must have been at the time of the Nabataeans' population. In regards to Petra, Miele, Ruby, Ballerina, Bella and Ciak recall exchanging comments of fatigue for the great effort that one specific hike represented for them in Petra.

Women

The topic and conversation that was actually more reported was that of women in the local society. Participants acknowledge that they did not see many women at all in the public spaces in the cities and there were mostly men in the streets. However, the topic of conversation most referred to is “that of women, of their covering up...” (Sasso, Post-visitation interview). More specific is Lalla who recalled: “all that discussion about women that Ballerina started, you know?” (Lalla, Post-visitation interview). The conversation Lalla refers to is in fact one I recorded, since it emerged as particularly relevant for the intra-group negotiation of the socio-cultural representation of Jordan.

On the third day, during a long minibus ride the local guide mentioned the local family structure; he commented on the average age of women getting married and bearing children being much lower in comparison to Italy, where he estimated it being around 30 years of age. The topic awoke Ballerina’s interest who mentioned briefly in her pre-visitation interview to have been a feminist. She sparked a conversation about women’s freedom to choose, women’s role in the family and in society and the like. It started as a question directed to the guide; she did not seem satisfied with the answer and she asked multiple subsequent questions. The conversation had the total attention of almost everybody. Ruby appeared to be unaware and Ciak woke up with the increased excitement. Miele joined posing a question herself, while Franky joined the conversation directing his comments directly to Ballerina. Lalla and GGB seemed not to understand that the conversation was a peaceful exchange of views despite the excitement from all the parties; they tried to interrupt the discussion with some jokes. They were first ignored; when they became an obstacle to the conversation, also due to their central position on the bus, they were even asked to stop disturbing by Sasso supported by myself. Ballerina and Franky were looking at the topic from two different perspectives and Ballerina was disagreeing openly.

Ellina’s socio-cultural representation includes a reflection related precisely to this conversation; and while she later maintains that she does not remember any specific conversation, she refers to Franky’s point in her reflection:

“They [Jordanians] indeed have a different conception compared to us. I mean, they get married, they make twenty-five babies...while we get married at forty, if things go well we make a baby at forty (...) if you make babies when you are young it’s because it’s a mistake (...) it’s what even Franky said on the bus... I agree”

(Ellina, Post-visitation interview)

The topic of women and more broadly of the organization of the local society was central also in the conversations that the local guide used to have with Bella - the one who appeared to be more receptive to his speeches - and as a consequence with the others of the younger participants’ sub-group. Bella reports that it emerged as a central theme for the guide to show her that some preconceptions Western people allegedly have of the local culture are in fact misconceptions. Among the examples she reports, the following refers to the topic of women and the Jordanian society:

“There were these girls in the swimming pool smoking the hookah, Lui wanted us to notice that, although their culture is based on ideas such as women have to be hidden behind those veils and everything else, then there was actually another side which was much more open-minded...”

(Bella, Post-visitation interview)

In that occasion the guide gathered Bella, Ellina, Sasso and GGB who were among the participants in the swimming pool and continued commenting on these two local girls clothed with pants and tops swimming in the pool and smoking the hookah (shisha).

Dead Sea

The last site we visited the day before departure was the Dead Sea, which emerged as an element characterizing Jordan and inspiring curiosity from seven out of the eight pre-visitation interviews. Close to the Dead Sea shores there were a number of big hotels equipped with spas and outdoor swimming pools. We accessed the site through one of the hotels, which we could use the swimming pools of, too. The group immediately headed to the Dead Sea shore leaving hotel and facilities behind. Once there, nobody commented on the scenery. Comments started when entering the water: these were describing the high salinity, the floating sensation, difficulty in swimming, the feel of the water and so on. It was not long before participants started heading back to the hotel facilities to go to the pool side. Ellina, Sasso and I were the

last group leaving the shore and I noted one conversation that took place. The following excerpt is extracted from my observation data:

“Sasso, Ellina and I were walking back to the resort, last behind to leave the Dead Sea site. Sasso suddenly and quite animatedly exclaims: “This Dead Sea thing is real shit!” Ellina promptly answers: ”well, it is something that you need to experience. You are here, you shouldn’t miss it.”

(Dead Sea, Observation data entry June 7th, 2014)

The topic was dropped right there. However, when the group was gathering for leaving the hotel and head back to town for our last night in Jordan, a similar conversation occurred. Miele said to the coordinator that she was unimpressed and probably the time spent there could have been better used. The coordinator answered that a tour to Jordan, in which everybody is a first timer, cannot exclude the Dead Sea stop, it is unique and it should be seen once you are in Jordan; besides tourists demand it. One hour later, the group left the premises and was heading back to Amman; my next observation data entry reads:

“We are in our usual seats leaving the Dead Sea site. Ballerina turns around and addressing Sasso and me, comments: “This was very ugly at the Dead Sea, wasn’t it? Not impressed at all.” And Sasso immediately replies: “Yeah well, it’s something you gotta experience since we are here and we can.”

This is right after his comment to Ellina. He just re-proposed Ellina’s answer to Ballerina. Now I wonder what will turn out from the post-visitation interview.

(Minibus, Observation data entry, June 7th, 2014)

The post-visitation interview with Sasso did not elicit any recollection of this incident. What is noticeable from the post-visitation accounts is that even if half of the participants spontaneously commented on their representation and evaluation of the Dead Sea, and the other half was solicited with direct questions, the answers were homogeneous. All participants said it was not necessary to repeat the visit, they were not impressed, they reported the water is hot, oily and it felt unpleasant, the salt makes the skin burn, the surrounding is ugly and unkempt and the vicinity of the luxurious hotels makes the ambiance worse. Half of the participants recognized the uniqueness of the site for its characteristics which are indeed impressive. The only divergent opinion was Ciak; while he agreed with the representation of the Dead Sea, he maintained that the stop at the site was too short, unlike the other participants who suggested the stop should be shorter and even unnecessary.

This section presented the findings related to the intra-group social interactions in relation to the relationships developed among participants and relevant conversation topics. To synthesize, are hereafter introduced the correspondences that emerged between individual images of Jordan between post-visitation accounts, the relationships developed between participants in the travel vacation context and the conversations reported. These correspondences are highlighted as they emerge following the seating plan order as much as possible.

Correspondences highlights

It can be noticed that there is no similarity between Ciak's individual post-visitation image of Jordan and others' individual destination images; his image of Jordan is dominated by representations of landscapes and sceneries. Franky is passionate about history in general and fascinated by Jordan's history and the character of King Hussein; he is enthusiastic and talkative and enjoys sharing his thoughts and knowledge with whom would listen. The participants who spent more time in Franky's company, including GGB, Sasso and Lalla, highlighted the strong relevance and uniqueness of the history of Jordan; and Miele and GGB praised the country's management and leadership.

Ballerina also emphasizes the element of history in her representation post-visitation even if she was not interacting much with Franky. However, she is the only other participant displaying some interest in history, even if very briefly, already before visitation. She was also identified, similarly to Franky, as a source of inspiration and information by a number of participants including GGB, Bella, Sasso, Lalla and Ruby. Here another interesting parallelism is that Sasso and Bella, who admittedly spent relatively more time with Ballerina, mention local women in their post-visitation representation. GGB also reported to have liked Ballerina, but he mostly spent time with the younger participants' group, where Bella was the major driver along with Ellina.

It is noticeable that the participants elaborating some thought on local women, a topic self-declaratively dear to Ballerina, are precisely Ballerina, GGB, Ellina, Bella and Sasso. However the content of their representation on women is not necessarily in line with Ballerina's. Bella,

Ellina and GGB in fact mentioned the costume of women being largely entirely covered with veils. In their post-visitation interview they say that they might have changed their mind on the meaning of this costume. Even if they do not elaborate on what was the previous meaning they attributed to it, they describe it as the result of tradition. It transpires that they previously associated it with oppression and violence. Bella explains that wearing the veil is not to be taken as a sign of close-mindedness. Sasso at first mentions the topic in the interview, but does not expand on it; when I sent him the interviews' transcripts for him to check their accurateness, I asked him to further explain his representation of local women. He answered that he was not sure, and did not feel like judging what he saw since it is part of a tradition, however he is not able to relate to it nor understand it.

It might be that Bella, Ellina and GGB, being more frequently together and more exposed to the guide's inputs, developed a more moderate representation of this costume. Sasso was skeptical of the guide's words, was more involved on this topic with Ballerina and myself - more in line with Ballerina -, but still very much in contact with the other three participants; this situation might have provided him with a more varied pool of perspectives to elaborate.

Another correspondence is noticed in Lalla's and GGB's representations of local development, which they describe as "less civilized" with exactly the same expression. This appears interesting since the expression in Italian sounds strange. The verb *to civilize* is usually properly employed when talking about a population bringing civil society to another population which is uneducated, that lives supposedly in a savage state. It implies that it needs to be made civil, to be elevated to some more enlightened and refined social condition. In colloquial Italian language it is not uncommon for the term to be misused for some exaggerated description of someone behaving in a non-proper manner, for instance. However, in the case of these participants, they are misusing the term *civilized* to indicate comparatively less urbanization, a different style of urbanization, architecture that they associate with a developing country; and also to indicate culture, customs and habits that are not only unfamiliar, but also different from theirs and from the Western ones in general. This same misuse of the term in the same context from these two participants attracts attention. Lalla and GGB are originally from two different,

non-neighboring regions, one from the north of Italy and the other from the center. Two different versions of the Italian language are spoken and develop different slang words and phrases. GGB used the same expression in his pre-visitation interview, and he actually emphasized this “less civilized” representation as an attractive element for visiting Jordan. Lalla was not interviewed before departure, however she described her pre-visitation representation of Jordan as chaotic and stressful, and did not mention development or urbanization or the like. The detail of language usage suggests the correspondence between their one-on-one bond and this common representation.

A similar situation is reflected in Bella’s and Ellina’s description of the local people as being “ahead compared to the West”. *Ahead* implies more progressive, more far-sighted. The two participants also come from two different non-neighboring regions, the first from the South of Italy, where the local dialect is widely used and the second from the center, it is noticeable that they misuse the same word in the same phrase. This representation might find explanation in the frequent and the types of conversations that Bella, together with Ellina was involved in with the guide, as she describes:

“Because we often talked with him [the guide], he tried to make us notice it: “if you hadn’t noticed it... do you see that also here...?”

And she uses the term *ahead* a number of times during the interview, suggesting that it probably came from her in the first place, for example:

“We, maybe for the fact that they [women] wear the burqa, we consider them close-minded. Instead they are very, very open-minded, they are very, very ahead.”

(Bella, Post-visitation interview)

Italian local languages or local use of the Italian language can be drastically different and these participants come from different parts of the country. These not only have their own local dialects differing hugely from one another, but also the local use of the common Italian language varies influenced by the local dialects and culture. This is why the use of the same expression with the same misuse of a word appears relevant when involving two individuals from different regions. Figure 33 provides a visual representation of the complex of intra-group social interaction among participants. It illustrates the interaction intensive younger participants’ sub-group and the identified forms of social interaction in relation to destination

image.

In regards with the Dead Sea, it appears from the Sasso and Ellina, and Miele and the coordinator’s incidents that opinions and comments are exchanged between participants even if in quick exchanges. And the incident involving Sasso, Ellina and Ballerina, emerges as a very observable example of opinion influence and transfer through social interaction in form of verbal communication. Ellina’s answer might have simply made Sasso re-assess his evaluation and judgement from a different angle, which then he adopted. The renewed opinion was what he presented to Ballerina about one hour later.

Finally, it is interesting to notice that, similar to Ciak’s case, Ruby’s representations did not show any noticeable or relevant similarity with any other participant’s account. When I asked individuals what the other participants thought of the Dead Sea, or Petra, or the desert, or the destination in general, they all answered, that the others almost certainly thought the same. However, in the cases of Ciak and his opinion of the Dead Sea and Ruby, their guess was not accurate. In fact, Ruby’s individual image dominating representations were of Petra, Mount Nebo and then the desert, while everybody else’s individual image dominating representation became mostly the desert. The individuals’ perception that everybody was in total agreement is probably due to the fact that there was no real disagreement and everybody seemed to enjoy themselves. Every participant, despite not discussing their views at length and in depth,

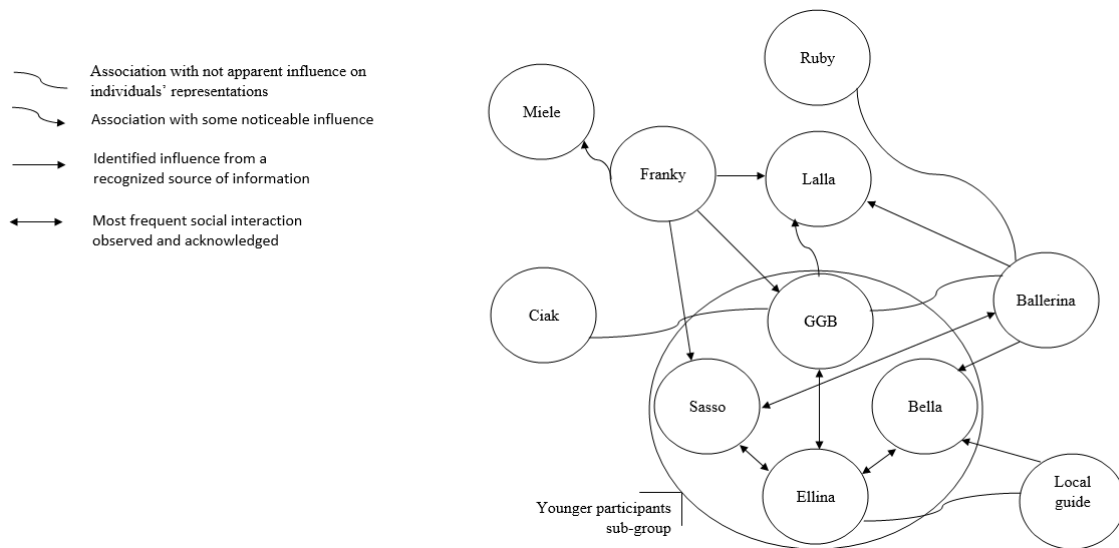


Figure 33 Display of intra-group social interaction

assumed to be in line with everybody else. When asked whether anybody made them change perspective or idea on something, all participants answered that no, their thoughts and opinions were always in line with the others.

This first section presented the intra-group social interactions, including the emergence of sub-groups and pairs most frequently interacting among themselves; the personal bonds developed between participants and the types of relations between participants. Subsequently the topics and conversations recalled by participants and recorded through participant observation were presented. Finally, I highlighted the correspondences that emerge between the similar post-visitation individual images and these forms of intra-group social interaction. The following section is dedicated to the participants' self-assessment of how intra-group social interaction contributed to the formation of their individual image of Jordan throughout visitation.

4.4.3. Participants' self-assessment

This section reports first the themes that emerged from the participants' self-assessments, starting from group cohesiveness and the perception of 'the other group'. Verbal communication, but especially non-verbal communication emerged as the ways in which participants described how social interaction contributed to the development of their individual destination image. In light of these findings participants' awareness of the processes of intra-group social interaction development and destination image formation is addressed. The negative cases denying any influence of social interaction in the formation process are also included providing the entire spectrum of opinions.

Group cohesiveness

The positive evaluation of the experience within the group is important for contextualizing participants' comments and self-assessment. In their post-visit interview all the participants praise the group. They mostly describe it as harmonious, cohesive, balanced, pervaded by a positive atmosphere and ultimately functioning. Lalla describes her experience with the group:

"I think we actually bonded as an entity, as a group. Not in pairs, in...mini groups. It was something quite cumulative and moreover it was recognized to us (...) [a participant from the parallel group] he told me that people from the outside could see we were actually a beautiful

group, a group in essence.”

(Lalla, Post-visitation interview)

Participants are enthusiastic of how the relationships within the group went smoothly, they all emphasize that there were no disagreements, no difficult individuals, that everybody was adaptable and easy going; it also emerged as very important that everybody was perceived by everybody else as being predisposed to be in the group and not imposing her/himself on the others.

All participants are found in agreement in their group cohesiveness perception. A single slightly divergent case is Sasso, who does not agree with the view of a united and cohesive group. Nevertheless, he agrees with the positive evaluation. Sasso maintains that there were sub-groups and pairs and not one cohesive group. However, in a personal negotiation of his answer, he recalls that most of the times when the parallel group was joining us for meals, we would stick together rather than mixing with them.

In the previous excerpt, Lalla, introduces the other group's perception of our group as a confirmation of her statement, as a proof of the cohesion and positivity of her group of belonging. In addition, the concept of social interaction within the group influencing the individual emerges from participants' comments involving the parallel group, as presented hereafter.

‘The other group’ and social interaction’s influence on the individual

Apart from Lalla, other participants compare our group to the parallel one for establishing how much better their group of belonging was. Participants mention that tourists from the parallel group told them they would have preferred to be in our group rather than theirs. While using it as a reference for comparison, the younger participants of our group perceived the parallel group mostly as some additional company, pleasant when limited to the spare time occasions; the elder portion of our group and Sasso, mostly perceived it as an intrusion.

The concept of the group influencing the individual, emerged from three participants. Talking about the parallel group and claiming that she had some insights thanks to her later developed friendship, Lalla maintains:

“I think they were very influenced by the fact that they didn’t feel at ease as a group”

(Lalla, Post-visitation interview)

Franky ascribes to the other group of interfering with the positivity of our group:

“I would say the other group that followed us influenced us. Now, when we were put together with the other group I didn’t feel that much at ease. It was a different group”

(Franky, Post-visitation interview)

The concept of influence is introduced referring to a negative influence and attributed to the parallel group. The parallel group constitutes a negative influence on its own members, but also on our group. It also emerges from these references that the concept of influence is related to the individual’s personal state of ‘feeling at ease’. Feeling at ease, feeling good with one’s self within the group represents an emotional, personal state influenced by the social environment understood as the feelings, conditions and atmosphere created within the group by social interaction. These findings are expanded upon later in this section.

During the trip, the influence of the group on the individual was mentioned in a few occasions, but the concept would not be further elaborated. This concept emerged again in post-visitation interviews spontaneously, the previous two excerpts constitute an example. Moreover, after visitation participants were asked directly how, in their opinion, social interaction within their own group contributed to their image of Jordan. Participants’ accounts reveal that intra-group social interaction contribution occurred through verbal communication, but most of all through non-verbal communication as presented hereafter.

Participants’ perception of how intra-group social interaction throughout visitation contributed to individual destination image formation

In their post-visitation interviews, two questions were consistently asked to participants. These aimed at uncovering their perception on how social interactions within their group influenced the formation of their image of Jordan. The first question investigated this point directly by asking ”what role do you think the group you travelled with had on how your image of Jordan is now?”. The second question was intended for seeking clarifications or expanding on the topic from a different formulation and angle. It was inspired by a private conversation

with Bella. In this she stated that of this trip to Jordan she will remember the people most of all; of the current tour and others alike she maintained:

“You don’t know whether you would have liked it differently if you did the same tour but with someone different because the place cannot be distinguished from the trip and the people you experienced it with”

(Bella, Observation data entry June 4th, 2014)

In order to better explore and understand the meaning of this statement, while following up with the previous question, participants were asked: “one other travel mate told me it’s impossible to separate the place and the people you saw it with, what is your view on this?”. This second question was mostly a provoking question for checking how the statement was understood by other participants. The question also encouraged participants to expand on any relationship between the two elements, i.e. intra-group social interaction and their individual image of Jordan. It emerges that the two questions and answers largely complement each other allowing for expanding on the topic.

It emerges that seven out of ten participants perceive that the intra-group social interaction, played an influential role in the formation of their individual image of Jordan. Two participants, namely Ballerina and Miele, clearly separate their representation of Jordan and the group social environment, and Sasso first states that Franky contributed greatly to shaping his image of Jordan, despite afterwards maintaining that the group did not play any role. The answers to this questions exposed some themes appear to be the ways in which participants explain what relationship there is between the intra-group social interaction and the formation of their individual destination image. These include information enrichment and the element of non-verbal sharing and are presented hereafter.

Information enrichment

In the widespread acknowledgment that social interaction within their own group influenced their image of Jordan, only two participants can indicate concrete, or rather cognitive and identifiable outcomes of this influence.

Cognitive knowledge. Lalla answers clearly that the two people that contributed to her image more than what visitation only could do, were Franky and Ballerina. She explains that

through conversations they did not hesitate in passing on their knowledge; and through questions they asked and discussions they raised, Franky and Ballerina influenced her image through 'information enrichment' as she calls it. Similarly, Sasso talked about his relationship with Franky and I asked directly whether he thought that his conversations with Franky influenced his image of Jordan. Sasso answered:

“Definitely, because he answered me, he told me a lot of things, I mean, I know a lot of things about Jordan because he explained them to me, apart from what I saw with my eyes, and they contribute to my perception of Jordan... think how weird... someone from Genoa who makes me have an image of Jordan (laughs)”

(Sasso, Post-visitation interview)

However, Sasso appears to contradict himself. A few questions later, he is asked the standard question on the role of social interaction on his perception of Jordan and he answers that on the one hand it is inevitable that others gave him something; on the other hand he is inclined to say that it did not have any role. However, it appears that in this instance Sasso is not referring to individual destination image anymore, but rather to a non-verbal and more personal contribution.

Lalla and Sasso are exceptions within the group when it comes to being aware that their verbal interaction with other participants enriched their cognitive knowledge of the destination and even being able to identify the source of it. Other elements of influence of intra-group social interaction emerge to be of emotional nature and sharing emerges as an emotional and mostly non-verbal form of social interaction.

Sharing

Participants explain the role of the intra-group social interaction on their destination image in terms of sharing experience, emotions, moments and environments. Sharing makes emotions to surge and be participated in; the participated emotions then give meaning to the environment participants are interacting with. The theme of non-verbal sharing emerges clearly from seven of the participants. Ballerina eloquently expresses the common perception:

“[we shared] the emotions felt in a dimension like this, let's say a physical-geographical dimension (...) I mean there are different methods of communication, not always communication happens through words, it can also be like this... non-verbal indeed.”

(Ballerina, Post-visitation interview)

Participants' statements in line with Ballerina's, refer to a form of social interaction that goes beyond the verbal communication; this social interaction is rather emotional and while it is felt individually it is shared by others. It emerges that the emotional sharing assumes different forms. In one form the emotions felt by the individual are found reflected in the others; and sharing emotions creates a generally felt sensation of emotional well-being due to the positive social interaction within the group.

'*See it in the others*'. Five participants state that they could "see it in the others". They could see enjoyment, amazement, surprise, satisfaction, excitement. The individual finding reflection of these feelings in other participants was confirmed in her/his perceptions, felt empathy and closeness, which had the effects of both strengthening the perceived personal connection between participants and deepening the individual's feeling. Exemplary of shared feelings strengthening the bond with other participants is Bella's comment. Hereafter she refers to one night in the Wadi Rum desert's camp site, when we all set together to watch the sunset:

"I looked very much at everyone's faces, I saw everyone had their thoughts. (...) and it was beautiful because it was everyone's personal moment of meditation which connected us all."

(Bella, Post-visitation interview)

Similar comments were made by the other participants in relation to the Wadi Rum and other locations, too, including the Dana natural reserve, Petra and Mount Nebo.

Experiencing a deepened feeling because it is reflected in the others, is reiterated multiple times, I cite GGB who stresses this point repeatedly with different examples. In the following instance he clearly states that others' interpretation of the environment influences the individual's; in the following excerpt he identifies one specific example:

"Even if Franky tended to be over excited "ha! it's fantastic", he talked like this (laughs)... this trend to over praise experiences and at the same time this bias of his interpretation of what is around him, takes root!! It takes root! Because suppose you are totally indifferent, you are walking and there is this man: "woooooaaah, look! The entire façade is carved in the rock, wooooaaah, how did they do it?! It's amazing!" even if you are indifferent, you look at it, you lift up your gaze, I mean something takes root."

(GGB, Post-visitation interview)

Openly and more than once GGB highlights a sort of contagious property of social

interaction. All participants refer to this property, sometimes not openly. Participants acknowledge it and give it different labels, as if they were not aware of it. They rather refer to it as positive social interaction also in the form of emotions sharing that produces a general sense of well-being: this sub-theme is explored hereafter.

Feeling at ease, feeling good. All the participants report that they felt at ease within the group. The harmonious and positive social interaction within the group made them feel good. Four participants mentioned the parallel group in making their point of how positive our group was. Franky specifically mentioned that when the other group was joining us he felt not “that much at ease” anymore. It emerges that the intra-group social interaction sets the conditions for experiencing the destination; social interaction ultimately interacts with the individual’s personal mood and contribute to the affective dimension of destination image

Personal mood or personal state.

Feeling at ease with the group allows to focus attention on enjoying the destination without being distracted by unpleasant individuals, unpleasant feelings and incidents. A serene, positive interaction creates a relaxed social environment in which the individual feels serene, at ease; this personal state promotes serene positive feelings, which affect the individual and feed back into the intra-group social interaction. All the participants describe that feeling at ease within the group was conducive to be more positive and receptive towards the destination. Lalla describes it saying that: “for the group we had I could live it serenely as an individual”. This and the other participants’ comments suggest that the quality of social interaction is conducive to enjoying the destination or alternatively jeopardizes the conditions for the individual to enjoy the destination.

It emerged repeatedly that personal state, sharing verbally and non-verbally and the crucial importance of feeling at ease influence the perception of the destination during visitation. Ciak is the only participant referring explicitly to mood as the element linking intra-group social interaction and individual’s predisposition towards the destination. In doing so Ciak establishes a direct relationship between mood and destination image formation. Ciak was asked whether in his opinion the meanings that individuals give to places are molded by the social

environment s/he experiences them within. Ciak explains:

"Yes, sure, actually rather than based on the people you are with, you can give a meaning to the things you see based on your mood. Then your mood can be influenced by the people you are with. (...) your mood can influence how much you'll like the places and if you are in a group trip the group can influence your mood. If you travel alone it amplifies your mood, but other people will be little incisive. On the contrary, when you are in a group you don't choose, so yes, the group can influence your mood and your mood can influence how much you'll like the places. "

Ciak also suggests that there is an exchange between the individual's and the group's moods:

"Since you have to stay with the others it also becomes a bubble, so... actually the group's moods become your moods and they also mix with how much you like the place"

(Ciak, Post-visitation interview)

This relationship emerges repeatedly from other interviews, precisely when participants maintain that feeling at ease was crucial in their ability of personally experiencing the destination serenely. This concept encompasses more than just mood, it refers also to a personal state of emotional well-being or ill-being. Thus personal state is presented as a pair of lenses through which the individual perceives what s/he is observing and experiencing: better personal state, better perception and evaluation; worse personal state, worse perception and evaluation.

Affective content. Positive feelings and serene quality of social interaction seem to also provide an affective dimension to individual representations. Emotions shared with the group became part of the emotional representation that the individual develops of the destination and its parts. For example, when Franky is asked, for confirmation purposes, whether in his opinion the group influenced the way he perceived the place, he answered:

"Well of course it influenced the place! Positively! Of course! If it had been a group... with problems, we wouldn't have experienced it the same way, some emotions, some environments...some environments!!"

(Franky, Post-visitation interview)

Five participants refer to that the positivity and the shared emotions within the group are internalized by individuals and contribute to the formation of the affective content of the destination image. Similarly, if social interaction is perceived negatively, the affective content and the perception of the place visited is jeopardized because the individual is not able to bask in what is pleasant of the destination and of the social environment; Ruby is eloquent in her

explanation:

“If you see something beautiful together with a nice person, you remember the beautiful thing. If you see a beautiful thing together with an unpleasant person, you just remember the unpleasant person. And the beautiful thing remains... it doesn't impress you.”

(Ruby, Post-visitation interview)

It emerges that the perceived quality of the social interaction is able to shift the focus of individuals' perception between focusing on the positive and focusing on the negative. The concept of feeling at ease emerged from every participant, appears in agreement with this phenomenon; half of the participants appear to consciously share this belief.

Sasso and Miele affirm that they can make a distinction, and that a negative social environment influences the trip experience rather than the image of the destination. Sasso affirms that if the entire group was negative he would not be influenced in his perception of the place; he would be able to distinguish that it was a negative social environment. Sasso recalled that it happened to him in Morocco and not only then in fact. In this regard however, it is noticeable, in the pre-visitation interviews, that participants' accounts of their previous visits were distinguishable in the same way described by Ruby's statement. Sasso mentioned that he went to Norway and Morocco. He stated to have a passion for the Scandinavian countries and described what he appreciated of Norway, praising the country and its people for different aspects; he travelled with a group tour there too. Of Morocco, where he traveled with a friend, the first comment is about the negative travel companion he had; successive comments highlighted only what he disliked of Morocco.

Ciak displayed a similar behavior. Ciak spontaneously mentioned a number of places he traveled to. Of the majority of these he described some elements he was impressed with, with the exception of Denmark. Ciak described only the negative group of people he traveled with and the unpleasant incidents among group members that characterized the trip. He never described anything of Denmark.

In her pre-visitation descriptions, Ruby took as examples two destinations she traveled to recently: Nepal, which she is very fond of and Oman, the most recent trip she had taken, which she is not enthusiastic about. Ruby described what she liked of Nepal in great details; of Oman

she talked about her non-cohesive and unpleasant group; in addition she had very few memories of the trip, one vivid one is that they mostly did not say goodbye to each other upon return among the group members. These examples appear to reinforce the suggested ability of the group social environment, which is determined by intra-group social interaction, of shifting one's focus between negative and positive perceptions.

Similarly to Sasso, Miele also maintains that she is able to distinguish the place from the group's feelings and opinions. Miele claims in multiple statements that places have their own objectivity; the following is an example:

“The country gave me the idea of a tranquil and dignified country. It gave me the idea of tranquility. Of a quiet place. Irrespective of my personal state. Then ok, I felt at ease so there's all that aspect, too... but with this image, of a non-tiring country, (...) Yes, because actually I was fine because I was in a group I liked, I was having fun, but irrespective of my personal state... I had the objective impression of a positive country. But I was fine, so in any case I would have been led to give a positive opinion. But irrespective of this, it really gave me the impression of a quiet and dignified place.”

(Miele, Post-visitation interview)

Despite her attempt to describe a place as having some objective characteristics, she contradicts her own statement by saying that her own personal state was positive and therefore she would have been prone to positive perceptions. Moreover, she drew the connection between her personal state and her feeling at ease with the group, which ties into the concept of personal state being the link between the group's social environment and the individuals' perception.

In this light and from the previous findings it emerges that the emotions of the group shared through social interaction were internalized by individuals and contributed to form the affective content of the individual destination image. Moreover, this phenomenon appears to be common to all participants, embracing also those who did not display any noticeable similarities with others' individual destination images in their cognitive dimensions.

Finally, it has been noticeable so far that asking participants directly yielded confused and at times contradictory answers suggesting that participants are not necessarily aware of this process. The majority of participants talk about the group as something very incisive, however when it comes to draw the relationship between the intra-group social interaction and the formation of one's individual destination image the boundaries between destination image,

enjoyment within the group and the qualities of the place become permeable. These finding is addressed hereafter and concludes this section.

Awareness and blurred boundaries

Three participants maintain that they are able to draw a clear distinction between the place and the social interaction within the group, treating them almost as two tangible entities. Sasso, Ballerina and Miele maintain that social interaction, which was positive, contributed to make them feel good and make them enjoy their time, but that 'the place is the place'. Miele even claims that places give her emotions or impressions that are not dependent on anything else but the place itself, despite then connecting her personal state with a positive or negative predisposition towards the perception of the destination.

Ballerina maintains that the group had the only effect of making her feel good, but then explains how, within the group, they shared emotions that belong to a specific location and moment. Before visitation Ballerina makes the point that she is traveling with this specific tour operator because she in desperate search of travel mates that she can relate to. In her pre-visitiation interview, Ballerina stresses the personal enrichment that derives from traveling with interesting and different people, because of the exchanges that it constitutes. When it comes to remembering or rationalizing in what way social interaction within this group contributed to the mentioned enrichment, she is not able to. Sasso contradicted himself by saying that his image of Jordan was shaped by his conversations with Franky and then maintaining that the group did not have any influence on his image of Jordan.

It is often recorded that even when participants first affirmed that the social interaction within the group played a role in the formation of their destination image, they cannot recall or rationalize in what way. Ultimately, they find themselves at difficulty in answering the question. It emerges that participants mostly recognize the importance of intra-group social interaction in their liking of the destination and in their enjoyment. It emerges also that these two tend to overlap and merge and participants have difficulties in drawing a clear distinction between whether they are talking about the place or their enjoyment. GGB like the others found himself at difficulty in explaining in what way social interaction influenced his representations

of Jordan and finds his way out through a metaphor:

“I mean, at the end is like you’re making soup and you put carrots and zucchini...after you boiled them, how can you do it? (Laughs) yes, there was Petra and there was Franky from Genoa, there was the location, Petra, the carrot... and Franky from Genoa, he’s a character and he’s a zucchini... I mean you made a soup with these two ingredients... now separate molecule by molecule what belonged to the carrot and what belonged to the zucchini! (Laughs)”

(GGB, Post-visitation interview)

Individuals are not necessarily aware of the process. They experience the moment and internalization happens immediately, while the specific incident, when there is one, is left behind. Ultimately, participants are involved personally in the process of which they are co-creators, but as Sasso affirmed, they do not pay attention to the social dynamics. They are also not aware of the small modification that their individual destination image undergoes with every new direct interaction with the environment. However participants do know that they share emotions and feelings and the shared feelings are inspired by their interaction with the environment. Individuals’ within the group and their emotions interact with the environment they are dwelling, which they are tightly intertwined with. Participants establish a connection between sharing emotions, interacting with the environment within the group and the formation of the individuals’ representations of the destination. As it is addressed hereafter, the environment is an indivisible component in intra-group social interaction.

4.4.4. Interaction with the environment

This third and last section, presents the indivisibility of intra-group social interaction, the environment the group dwells and destination image.

GGB recapitulates his image of Jordan at the end of the interview and he states that his image has changed because he experienced the destination directly. ‘Experience it directly’, means that he interacted with the environment, he smelt it, walked it and tasted it; he heard its music and the silence of the desert.

The images of all of the participants are more detailed than before traveling because of their personal and direct interaction with the destination environments. Some elements are represented in the post-visitation image and not in participants’ pre-visitation image, since these

elements had not been part of the participants' environment before, whether tangible, e.g. landscapes, archaeological finds or non-tangible, e.g. ambiance, emotions, history.

After visitation 'history' is represented in participants' post-visitiation image of Jordan, after it had become part of intra-group social interaction for the duration of the trip. Similarly local women, local people, the Nabataeans, the Bedouin population, the Dana natural reserve, the Wadi Mujib and so on and so forth, are represented in post-visitiation images. All these representations are not only elements and locations that the participants saw: participants interacted with them. They interacted personally and within the group. Participants personally walked through Petra for example, felt the heat, saw the temples and canyons; however they appreciated it with others, fantasized on how life must have been back then, commented "how beautiful" to each other and encouraged each other to make it to the top of the climb to one more monastery. It was observed that the environment was intertwined with the intra-group social interaction, and it was addressed differently throughout the development of intra-group social interactions, as explained hereafter.

The environment and social interactions' development

Participant observation revealed that social interaction at the beginning of the trip from the airport at departure and throughout the first day at the destination approximately, was mainly focused on getting to know each other. Participants also report in their post-visitiation interviews that the beginning of the trip was dedicated to 'study the others'. Getting to know each other started with asking for each other's names and city of origin; it included questions such as 'is it your first time to Jordan? To the Middle East?', "I think it will be hot, what did you pack? Anything special for the desert? They wouldn't sell alcohol down there, would they? Anyone brought a couple of bottles?", "Why did you choose Jordan? Have you traveled a lot?" All these questions, among others, aimed at getting to know each other, noticeably through interactions informed by the object for which the group exists, i.e. the destination Jordan.

With the days passing by, social interactions changed gradually and steadily. There were less questions-and-answers types of conversations and more exchange of comments and considerations about what was being seen, heard and experienced: 'it's hot I have a hard time

with heat, I love the cold of winter!’ ‘Oh no! I’m just happy with the heat!’ or ‘oh whoa, this food is amazing! I thought it would be unbearably spicy, instead it’s just so tasty!’ ‘I know I didn’t know there would be so much variety!’. Towards the end of the trip, conversations were encompassing a wide variety of topics ranging from commentaries about what was being seen, many conversations involve speculations about the social structure at the destination; but also exchange of personal information of everyone’s life back home, including difficulties and plans; jokes and mocking of each other increased; exchanging information, opinions and incidents also about the other group became common and filling in other participants on something they missed out on became frequent. For example:

“You missed it! GGB has a new girlfriend! We walked up to see the Treasure from that top, she was with her friends and he fell in love! Look he took a selfie with her [Lalla shows Franky and Miele, and then everybody else a picture of GGB and a goat]”

(Petra, Observation entry June 5, 2014)

The environment at the destination is what all the group members have in common from the very beginning of their intra-group social interaction. It is the common ground for initiating social interaction. It is also the reason why the group exists, it is the object at the center of the group’s everyday life and it is the space they dwell in. The environment, whether tangible or non-tangible, informs and is the object of participants’ social interaction. However, there is more to it that emerges. Not only the environment at the destination is the central object of social interaction, the environment also shapes participants’ social interaction. For example, after a long climb in the Dana natural reserve, the whole group finds rest on an open space on the edge of a very high cliff over a canyon. Everybody sits around in different groups and either keeps silent watching the view or speaks in low voice with other participants. One of these groups is composed of Miele, Ballerina, Ruby, GGB and Lalla, they are speaking in low voices and the conversation involves some degree of personal disclosure. Miele finally exclaims: “This scenery encourages these talks, isn’t it?” (Dana, Observation entry June 3, 2014). A similar situation happens in the desert when at sunset everyone sat together but in silence for a long while. In the post-visitation interviews, eight out of ten participants refer to that occasion as a very intense moment of sharing with the others while personally internalizing an incredible

sight and the emotions it inspired. In the post-visitation interviews, five participants refer to it as a moment of meditation in front of a wonderful sight of nature. The personal interaction with the environment also affects individuals' feeling or personal state, as a consequence it influences and informs social interaction between participants. In turn social interaction between participants influences individuals' interaction with the environment, thus contributing to its representation.

It emerges that the destination is at the heart of the group existence and its social interaction; the destination is not only the main object of intra-group social interaction, it also shapes social interaction; social interaction then contributes to shaping the individuals' representations of the destination.

This third and last part presented findings relevant to the first two objectives i.e. to examine and report the process of destination image formation in its development in this group vacation traveling context; to identify how intra-group social interaction emerged to have influenced individuals' destination image formation process.

This part presented the development of social interaction that created sub-groups. It also showed that representations of Jordan after visitation present commonalities that can be traced back to participants' social interaction patterns on the tour. It was found that participants are largely not aware of neither the process of social interaction nor of destination image formation and nor how they tie in together. It emerged that only a few recognized that verbal communication led to information enrichment, while there was more agreement on an emotional contribution of the group to the individual. In this regard, personal state emerged as an influential element in the development of social interaction, but also in mediating the perception of the destination. To conclude, intra-group social interaction and the locations in which it occurs were presented as indivisible since individuals interact physically and emotionally with both the space they dwell and the other participants at the same time. After a summary, the next chapter will discuss the findings in relation to the literature and their relevance in answering the research question.

4.5. Summary

The presentation of the findings was informed by the first two objectives guiding this study. First it was necessary to establish that a modification in the participants' social and individual destination image was observable after visitation. Only then the (1) process of destination image formation could be examined and reported in its development and it could be (2) determined how intra-group social interaction contributed to the destination image formation process. In light of this rationale this chapter presented the study findings divided into three parts. The first part provided information about the participants. The group was composed of slightly more women, i.e. six out of ten, than men. Six out of ten participants were younger than 45, while the remaining four were about sixty years old. Eight participants have higher education; six participants come from the northern part of Italy, two come from the center and two from the south. Six participants joined the group individually and four joined it in pairs; three participants had little travel experience, four were experienced and three were very experienced. The most reported and relied upon information source was found to be friends and relatives, followed by the Internet. Half of the participants displayed a low level of preparation and reported their preference for on-site discovery and surprise over prior preparation; while the other half displayed a higher level of preparation, where Franky emerged as the most informed participant. Identifying participants' level of preparation assisted in contextualizing the effects of the intra-group social interaction presented in the third part of the chapter.

The second part of this chapter comprised three interrelated sections presenting destination images before and after visitation. The first section identified the general structure of destination image; it then presented the group's social destination images before and after visitation. This section had the twofold objective of confirming that the group's image of Jordan underwent a modification throughout visitation and also contextualizing individual destination images variations. The aggregate interview data analysis revealed three main categories of the destination image of Jordan: psychological-emotional environment representation, natural representation and socio-cultural representation, further distinguished into built environment

and people and culture. Each of these categories is specified by properties. The psychological-emotional environment representation is described by ambiance and emotions; while natural representation by climate, landscape and natural attractions. Within socio-cultural representation, the sub-category built environment displays the properties archaeological finds and development-urbanization; while the sub-category people and culture is further specified by the properties geopolitical environment and local people. Properties mostly present sub-properties that are destination specific. Finally, every property, and sub-property presents two dimensions one cognitive and one affective. These dimensions gather all the cognizant knowledge about that property or sub-property, and the meanings and emotional or affective response to that property, respectively.

After identifying the structure of destination image, the two social destination images before and after visitation were identified and reported. It emerged that participants' overall images, both before and after visitation, are composed of different types of representations. Some are related to the generalized country destination and others to more specific attractions or features; some are common representations and some are unique to the destination. Some are representations of observable characteristics, while some are representations of psychological-emotional environments. Overall, the main differences between the social images were the precision and richness of details of the post-visitation social image compared to the vague and generalized pre-visitation social image. It emerged that the cognitive dimension is dominant in the pre-visitation social image of Jordan. In the post-visitation social image an increase of both cognitive and affective elements is observed with no definitive predominance of either. In comparison to the pre-visitation social image, personal interaction with the environment was noticeable as a feature of post-visitation social image. In addition in terms of destination features the main noticeable differences were identified in the post-visitation representations of a non-impressive Dead Sea, the prominence of Jordan's history and the increased prominence of women in the socio-cultural representation of Jordan.

The second and third sections of this part are strictly related. The second section established the modification of participants' individual destination image. It presented the

differences between individual destination images pre- and post- visitation, articulating only on the changes that were found relevant across participants. It was found that every individual image of Jordan underwent modifications. Some elements of representations that were found to have changed were highlighted for their relevance. These are addressed anew in the third section, which highlighted the similarities and differences between individual destination images as they emerged from participants' accounts. Similarities interested especially the socio-cultural representations in relation to people and culture, including history and the country's management, women in society and the Jordanian people in comparison to the Western society. Other similarities were observed within the built environment, including the country's development and the Roman ruins. While the nature-geographic representations presented one element of interest among participants, namely the reporting of the Dead Sea. These two sections showed not only that social and individual images of Jordan underwent modification throughout visitation. While some changes can be attributed directly to participants' interaction with the destination, e.g. the description of the landscapes, some do not appear to be explained only by it; in addition these same representations appear to be common only to some participants and not to others.

The third and last part of the chapter integrated interview findings related to individual destination images modification with observation data. It reported the examination of the process of destination image formation in its development in the context of this group vacation. This part was also divided into three sections. The first section presented evidence of social interaction within the group drawing from both observation data and participants' accounts. It included the development of intra-group relationships and recorded conversations found relevant in the formation of destination image. It was observed that the major sub-group composed of four participants and the coordinator, also coincided largely with the younger portion of the whole group. Other participants developed mostly one-on-one bonds, with the exception of two participants who remained more independent. All in all, participants formed sub-groups which were dynamic and in constant interaction between them.

In this context it was reported that the guide's position was a controversial one, in which

he was originally welcomed, however he lost popularity with the proceeding of the tour. Even if he was generally marginalized on a personal level, the guide was still praised for his extensive knowledge. Acknowledging the guide's controversial position within the group was important, since the guide is usually invested with the role of primary source of information about the destination.

Following the presentation of the development of intra-group social interaction, the topics and conversations recalled by participants and recorded through participant observation were presented. It appeared that transfers on the minibus, walking and sightseeing were the occasions and conditions that allowed for extended discussion and elaboration. Conversations that emerged as relevant to participants' destination image formation in my observations, included the history connected to the visited locations, comments, history and fantasies about Petra, women and the local social structure and the Dead Sea. From the post-visitation interviews emerged that participants had difficulties in remembering any specific topic of conversation; however the identified topics were ultimately confirmed with the exception of the conversations about the Dead Sea. It emerged that the topics of conversation and the elements of representation found in common between some individual destination images after visitation and not others found correspondence in intra-group social interactions. In this regard, it was found that the individual destination images of the two participants who remained the most detached from the group, were found different from the others. While these two participants' individual destination images were fitting within the group's social destination image, no evident correspondence with any other participant's individual image was found; the emphasized properties of the destination according to these two participants were different from the other participants' accounts. However these two participants were also among the most convinced supporters of the incisiveness of the group ambiance and cohesiveness in the formation of their destination image formation. Noticeably they identified the importance of the group in the process mostly with a more affective role. The non-verbal communication and the ambiance created within the group was incisive more than any information sharing.

The second section presented the findings emerged from discussing directly with the

participants how intra-group social interaction contributed to the formation of their individual destination image post-visitation. Information enrichment through verbal communication and sharing emotions through non-verbal communication appeared to be the ways in which participants explain what relationship there is between intra-group social interaction and the formation of their individual destination image. Subsequently this section also assessed to what extent participants are aware of the processes of social interaction development and of individual destination image modification and formation. Only a small minority of participants recalled and recognized that within-group verbal communication influenced their image of Jordan through information enrichment thus feeding the individuals' cognitive knowledge; while the vast majority were not able to identify what had been communicated. Sharing emotions emerged as the main form of communication according to the participants. It emerged that emotions-sharing assumes different forms. Individuals may find reflected in the others the emotions they feel. This has the effects of both strengthen the perceived personal connection between participants and intensify the individual's perception of the feeling. Sharing emotions may create a generally sensation of emotional well-being due to the positive social interaction within the group. The group's emotions shared through social interaction are internalized by individuals and contribute to form the affective content of the individual destination image. Ultimately, intra-group social interaction through emotion-sharing appears to influence individuals' personal state making participants 'feel at ease'. This personal state promotes serene positive feelings, which feed back into the intra-group social interaction; simultaneously it shapes the lenses through which the individual perceives the destination. It emerged that the perceived quality of the social interaction is able to shift the focus of the individual's perception between focusing on the positive and focusing on the negative

Finally, asking participants yielded confused and at times contradictory answers suggesting that participants are not aware of these processes. Ultimately, participants are involved personally in the processes of which they are co-creators, they do not attempt to rationalize the social dynamics, nor are they aware of the small modification that their individual destination image undergoes with every new direct interaction with the environment.

The third section presents the emerged relationship between social interaction and its development, interaction with the local environment and destination image and its formation process. It emerged that intra-group social interaction is indivisible from the location hosting it since social interaction occurs while individuals interact with the environment. This is especially relevant since interacting with the environment at the destination is the reason why the group exists. The environment at the destination is what all the group members have in common from the very beginning of their intra-group social interactions. It is the common ground for initiating social interaction; it is the object at the center of the group's everyday life and it is the space they dwell in. The environment whether tangible or non-tangible informs and is the object of participants' social interactions.

This chapter reported and examined the process of destination image formation in its development in this group vacation traveling context; and identified how intra-group social interaction have influenced the individuals' destination image formation process.

5. CHAPTER 5: FINAL DISCUSSION

5.1. Chapter introduction

The previous chapter discussed the findings in relation to their relevance and significance to the investigated phenomenon. This chapter elaborates on the findings in two parts. The first part discusses how the findings of this study compare to previous destination image formation research; and how the findings are interpreted from the perspective provided by the social representation approach. This discussion dedicates particular attention to the significance of this study's findings in relation to the information sources of destination image formation. In this regard, how individual destination image modification relates to the level of preparation of the individual travelers and how individuals' personality contribute to the process are also discussed. Two more factors, namely personal state and mood and the position of the tour guide, emerged as influential in the process; thus the potential implications of these elements are subsequently addressed. Finally, the lack of awareness about the processes that emerged from participants' self-assessment is further discussed. This discussion contributes to show how knowledge from sociology becomes relevant to deepening understanding of the process of destination image formation.

The second section addresses the last objective of this work. This part elaborates on the emerged process of destination image formation through intra-group social interaction. Finally, an integrated approach to the investigation of the process of destination image formation in a group vacation travel context, which accounts for social interaction is proposed, which synthesizes this work. Findings showed that the phenomenon of destination image formation is dynamic, ongoing and social; it is embedded in the social context and physical environment in which it occurs. Destination image is in continuous evolution and social interaction represents the channel through which the phenomenon evolves.

5.2. Contribution to the literature

The sources of information feeding destination image formation are addressed first, followed by more individual-specific factors, namely individuals' preparedness about the destination and the role of personal state or mood in the process of destination image formation through social interaction. Finally, also the potential role of the tour guide is discussed.

5.2.1. Information sources

Findings suggested additional insights into the phenomenon of word of mouth and direct experience at the destination, which are respectively discussed hereafter.

Friends and relatives, word of mouth and social interaction

The most reported and relied upon information source was found to be friends and relatives; only afterwards came the Internet and TV/ movies and last printed materials. It was also found that information from friends and relatives were recalled and reported in some details; when other information sources were mentioned, these were very vaguely listed and were mostly brought as examples of plausible sources of information that the participants thought applicable, mostly because they were asked.

The nature and role of information sources in destination image formation is extensively investigated. Information sources were distinguished in categories according to their nature: induced, organic and autonomous sources identify respectively sources of information of promotional, experiential and independently sought nature (Beerli & Martin, 2004). Similarly information sources were categorized according to the degree of control applied by interested parties over the information being conveyed: these can be identified as covert or overt, solicited or unsolicited and organic information sources (Gartner, 1993). Information sources were also examined in stages of information accumulation in a circular process including pre-visitation, visitation and post-visitation (Gunn, 1972).

However, during visitation, direct experience with the destination is the only information source taken into consideration. Direct personal interaction with the destination during visitation makes it the most accredited thus incisive source of information for it is unmediated (O'Leary & Deegan, 2005). Word of mouth, especially casual conversations with friends and

relatives, are acknowledged as the most influential sources of information mostly pre-visitation (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999b; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Hanlan & Kelly, 2005; Tasci & Holecek, 2007). However, this same phenomenon occurring during visitation is largely ignored. There is no further investigation on the power that these conversations with friends have during the travel vacation context, and on how these conversations are informed by actual interaction with the destination, which occur within a group formed because of the destination.

This work found evidence that a group of individuals traveling together do influence each other's destination images during the trip. The group becomes a context in which the other group members are now the individual's 'friends and relatives'. For example, Sasso reported that a friend had told him that Jordanian people are incredibly honest. This information formed part of Sasso's pre-visitation image in combination with the meanings and feelings he attached to this information and an attitude towards the destination because of this information. During the trip, Sasso became close to Franky. He told Sasso about the history of Jordan and how those places are strictly related to the development of Italian culture because of the close ties between the two populations far in the past; but also between the places and the Italian deeply rooted Cristian Catholic tradition. Sasso's post-visitation image represents Jordan as the cradle of our civilization. The group members are now a group of acquaintances and friends and thus their exchange of information falls into the information sources' category 'friends and relatives' even if already on the tour.

The evolution of social representations also takes into account information sources and groups them into the three macro areas of media, direct experience and social interaction. While among the sources of social representations media and direct experience are congruent to the ones of destination image, social interaction represents a more in-depth explanation of the phenomenon of word of mouth. Social interaction involves the verbal and non-verbal communication with the individuals forming one's social context at all times. Social interaction is not only a source of information pre-visitation, or a potential marketing tool post-visitation, it is a continuous phenomenon extending throughout visitation. It is dynamic and it molds to the context individuals interact with at all times. It is the channel through which individuals

make sense of the changes in stimuli and co-create the meanings and characteristics of the objects forming their environmental reality; consequently it informs behavior towards it (Moscovici, 1984; 2000; Pearce et al., 1996).

Social interaction during the trip emerges as powerful because it develops during the travel vacation context, it is informed by unmediated interaction with the destination, within a group formed because of the destination; within that group there is simultaneous sharing of the first-hand destination experience. When the destination is part of the every-day environment of the group, destination-related social interaction is more frequent; destination's representations are more intensively shared through both verbal and non-verbal communication; representations are more detailed, vivid and salient (Moscovici, 1984; 2000; Pearce et al., 1996). Thus social interaction is at the roots of destination image formation and it informs and channels its development more intensively during visitation.

Direct experience, or unmediated interaction with the destination

With this study it was found that the main observable differences between pre- and post-visitation images are the precision and richness of details of the post-visitation image over the vague and generalized pre-visitation image. Prior research on destination image formation consistently found that the exposure to information sources and the nature of the information influence individual destination images. Information richness and incisiveness reaches its peak during visitation with unmediated interaction with the destination (Gartner, 1993; Beerli & Martin, 2004; O'Leary & Deegan, 2005; Tasci et al., 2007). However, destination image formation research tended to consider the destination as an objective entity and the individuals exposed to it as the actors that undergo modification. From the perspective of the social representation approach, the image formation of the destination is a social phenomenon. The destination does not have objective features or meanings; these are attached to it by the visitors depending on their pre-existing social representation structures and their social interaction with the destination (Moscovici, 2000; Wagner, 1996).

The destination is the main object around which intra-group social interaction develops, it shapes social interaction, which then contributes to shaping the individuals' image of the

destination. Recently a few studies have investigated the relationship between travelers and the destination and concluded that the quality and nature of the interaction between travelers is informed by both the physical, social and psychological environment in which they took place (Murphy, 2001). At the same time the meanings of the experience were negotiated through these interactions and were filtered and interpreted through the landscape, feelings and knowledge about the location (White & White, 2008). This study findings support these conclusions and advance a deeper understanding of the phenomenon by explaining the social relationship between destination and visitors.

In relation to the exposure to information sources and how detailed individual destination image is as a result, it was noted that there was observable difference in participants' preparedness about the destination. Among individuals' personal factors, preparedness about the destination emerged as a determinant element in the modification of individual images.

5.2.2. Personal factors

In agreement with previous research, personal factors such as demographic characteristics, tourism experience and motivations are determinant elements of individuals' destination image formation. This study presents evidence to include preparedness, personality and personal state among the personal factors.

Preparedness and individual destination image modification

It was found that half of the participants displayed a low level of preparation and reported their preference for on-site discovery and surprise over prior preparation. Franky, followed by Ballerina, belonged to the more prepared portion of the group and were acknowledged by the least prepared portion as legitimate sources of information. Ultimately, the least prepared participants were the ones whose individual destination images reflected the most influence proceeding from intra-group social interaction.

Preparedness here is related to retained information about the destination, to active information seeking and purposeful or casual exposure to information sources. Destination image research places these elements under the umbrella term 'familiarity' together with participant's travel experience, country of origin and previous visit to that same destination

(Gartner & Hunt, 1987; Baloglu, 1997; 2001; Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001; O'Leary & Deegan, 2005; Grosspietsch, 2006). Preparedness is used here in order to distinguish it from previous visits and country of origin. These elements are also not relevant to this study since participants are all first timers to Jordan and all from Italy. Preparedness was determined on the basis of how detailed the description of one's own destination image and the confidence displayed in reporting one's own destination image, relative to the other participants.

As Sasso admitted after visitation, he did not really have a definite image before traveling, because he was quite uninformed about where he was going. He maintained his image did not 'change', it was rather formed anew. This feedback was largely shared by the other four participants with low preparation. Preparedness about the destination appears to be the key for explaining why those participants were affected more evidently than others. More prepared participants appeared to be more cautious in accepting just any information, they were more critical and inquisitive and also displayed a reduced need to receive information from external sources (Beerli & Martin, 2004). Less prepared individuals emerged as more absorbent. Pre-visititation findings showed that the participants who traveled the most and to the region of the prospective destination appeared more prepared even if they did not report to have engaged in active information source about the specific destination.

Travel experience. The current findings showed that pre-visititation individuals' images of more experienced travelers were more detailed and their accounts more confident; this emerged even if the individual had not traveled to that specific destination, or even to that region, such as Franky and Ciak. Franky showed to have engaged in extensive autonomous information seeking. Ciak did not, however he showed among the highest levels of preparedness. Beerli and Martin (2004) found that previous experience with leisure travel displayed significant relationship with destination image. Individuals tend to give more relevance to their own experience rather than external information, and individuals who have accumulated travel experience got in contact with other realities before and they use those for comparison. More experienced travelers are more prepared about the destination even if they admitted little effort in autonomous information seeking because they have accumulated more terms for comparison

(Beerli & Martin, 2004).

From a social representation approach, individual's accumulation of information feeds into the pre-existing social representation structure. It provides more elements for anchoring and objectifying new information (Moscovici, 1984, 2000; Pearce et al., 1996). New information provides the basic content for the creation of a new or updated social representation within the pre-existing structure (Pearce et al., 1996). Less prepared travelers hold less elements for comparison, or anchoring and objectifying, which provides them with less detailed individual destination images. Plausibly, these individuals had less pre-existing information that could clash with new information and they appeared more accepting of new information from secondary sources. However, not from anybody.

Personality and individual destination image modification

The unprepared participants admittedly took mainly two other participants as points of reference, Franky and Ballerina. Initially the local guide was recognized as the main authority as information provider, however he was subsequently marginalized. Franky and Ballerina were not the only prepared participants, however they were outspoken, self-confident, talkative and opinionated, which made them stand out.

Murphy (2001) analyzed unstructured interviews of backpackers and found that gathering information over the destination constituted one main motivation for interacting with others. The value attached to the received information varied depending on a number of factors including general feelings and attitudes towards the person providing the information, the consistency of the reports, but also previous knowledge and expectations towards the destination. These elements emerged from these participants' accounts. Participants developed a liking for each other, and Franky and Ballerina were the most widely mentioned by other group members. The liking of these participants as individuals and the appreciation of their preparation about the destination, invested them of more credibility and leadership as information providers. Finally, the least prepared participants were more receptive, especially if information was coming from their preferred company or someone like Franky and Ballerina whom they looked up to. Direct interaction with the destination made participants self-

confident in the validity of their representation (Beerli & Martin, 2004). The consistency of any input received was checked not only against other group members, but also against the readily available destination. Sharing the interaction with the destination under the same conditions, under each other's witness and in constant interaction seems to invest group participants with a similar level of trust in the validity of others' accounts.

Baloglu and McCleary (1999b), in their proposed model of pre- visitation image formation, mentioned personality among the psychological personal factors. However, personality was not operationalized for measurement. In conclusion of their study, the authors recommended further research into travelers' personal characteristics. In this study it emerged that more outgoing individuals influence their social environment more compared to other more reserved travelers. Franky's and Ballerina's enthusiasm was praised as much as their preparation, which further suggests that different personalities bring different contributions to the group's social interactions through different ways of communicating. This affects the in-group ambiance indicated as a crucial element by this study participants.

In summary, in addition to personal factors such as demographic characteristics and motivations, these findings provide empirical evidence that preparedness, travel experience and personality are influential factors in destination image formation in a group vacation travel context. These factors inform the process of intra-group social interaction by shaping individuals' interaction with the destination and verbal and non-verbal communication. These factors represent relatively stable individuals' characteristics which do not change during visitation and emerge to mediate individuals' information interpretation. Figure 34 visually displays these elements in the wider context of social interaction development.

Personal state and mood

Intra-group social interaction, as the verbal and non-verbal communication among people and their unmediated relation with the destination, evolve to create group ambiance, determine the extent of group cohesiveness and contribute to the emergence of likes and dislikes. Social interaction was described by participants as creating a general positive ambiance that allowed

individuals to experience the interaction with the destination in tranquility and at ease. Ross (1993), a unique example in destination image formation literature, found a clear relationship between backpackers' levels of enjoyment and positive evaluations of multiple elements forming the image of Northern Australia.

Baloglu (1997) found that the evaluation of some

measurement items of the destination US for West Germany travelers, was significantly influenced by the size and composition of the travel group. Baloglu's (1997) study findings suggest that smaller traveling parties have more positive perceptions. The author does not provide justification for this outcome, however group cohesiveness is a plausible explanation. Quiroga (1990) in a study of group dynamics in coach group tours found that smaller groups were more prone to sharing positive feelings and that more cohesive groups create more conducive conditions for group interaction. This translated into increased influence of the group on the individual and vice versa, increased motivation to actively participate in the happiness of the group and greater general satisfaction among its members.

According to this study findings, liking the group mates and perceiving a cohesive and positive group ambiance, emerged as mediating communication while further informing social interaction, as illustrated in Figure 34. Moreover, finding one's self at ease and happy with the group allowed individuals to be serene and enjoy themselves. So that social interaction

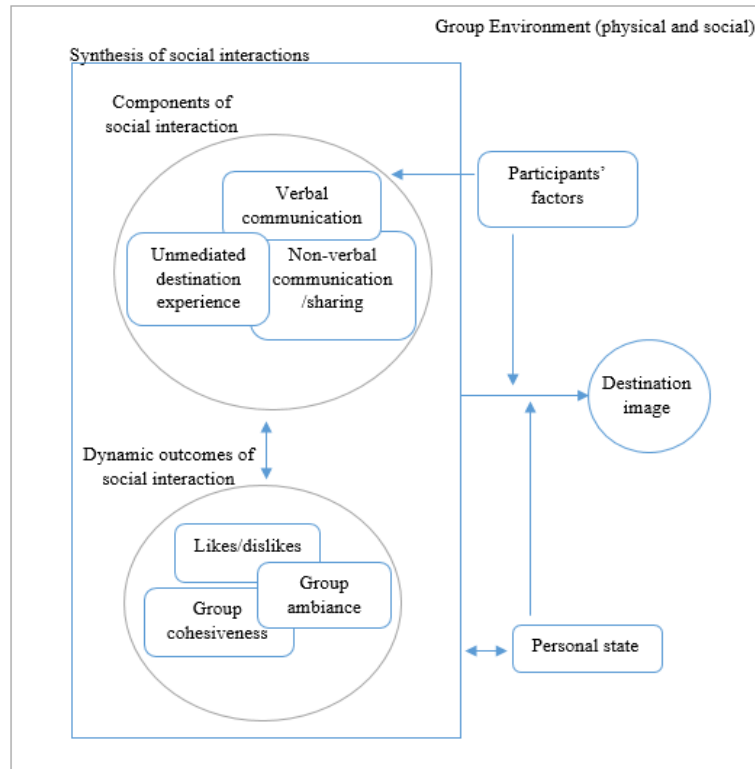


Figure 34 Interacting elements informing social interaction's development in relation to destination image formation

influenced participants' personal state. Participants' personal state feeds back into intra-group social interaction. Personal state emerged as some sort of lenses through which participants experience the destination. If the lenses are positive, individuals are prone to focus on the positive aspects of the destination, if the lenses are negative, they are prone to focus on unpleasant aspects of the destination. These findings provide evidence that individuals' personal state on-trip is influenced by and influences social interaction. Personal state also functions as lenses in individual destination image formation. This was a rather unexpected finding, however it is largely supported by the study participants. These findings do need to be further investigated.

Figure 34 illustrates the interaction of the elements informing social interaction development in relation to destination image formation. The phenomenon of social interaction and its development are specific to the physical and social environment in which they occur. Individuals' personal factors determine the manifestation of social interaction; this evolves to determine group ambiance, cohesiveness and intra-group likes and dislikes. These processes influence individuals' personal state, which in turn informs the further evolution of social interaction. Personal factors and personal state function as lenses for individuals' interpretation of information and experiences at the destination. Personal state is distinguished here from the other personal factors on the basis of its variable nature. Demographic characteristics, travel experience, personality and preparedness are regarded as relatively stable factors that do not undergo significant variations during visitation. Personal state, as reported by participants, is a highly dynamic, variable and easily influenced condition that may change multiple times during visitation. These dynamic and fluid processes of social interaction contribute to destination image formation.

5.2.3. The group's tour guide

Participants to this study praised the group coordinator for his ability in creating the group and never being invasive or authoritative. On the contrary, participants' attitudes towards the local tour guide were at least mixed. The local guide was originally welcomed, however he

progressively lost popularity. However, even if he was finally marginalized on a personal level, he was still praised for his extensive knowledge. In a group tour, the guide is usually and naturally invested with the role of primary source of information about the destination and has a crucial role in travelers' perception of the visited places. The guide is the authority integrating information on the place in both its environmental and cultural aspects and mediating between travelers and locals (Quiroga, 1990). Having the role of leader, the tour guide influences travelers' behavior to a certain extent.

This group tour formula features two individuals who are naturally invested with the role of leader, the group coordinator and the local guide. This group's participants ultimately limited the involvement of the local guide and gave more prominence to the coordinator involving him constantly in the group's social context. Simultaneously and through a natural process, two participants were taken as point of reference for knowledge enrichment. Some of the participants appeared almost upset when reporting their evaluation of the local guide.

The role of the tour guide has already been acknowledged as important as a mediator between the group and the destination environment in previous group tour literature (Quiroga, 1990; Schuchat, 1983). It emerges from the current study findings that the guide's influence in the intra-group social interaction might deserve further attention. Also in light of this discussion, a tour guide who is negatively perceived by the group may influence negatively intra-group social interaction, jeopardize individuals' enjoyment and the formation of a positive destination image. However a well-prepared, enthusiastic, likable and highly social guide may encourage a positive development of intra-group social interaction, potentially promoting a positive process of destination image formation.

Finally, the confused and contradictory answers retrieved from the participants when asked directly about how social interaction had contributed to their destination image formation, deserve to be further addressed.

5.2.4. Awareness

From the post-visitation interviews emerged that participants had difficulties in remembering any specific topic of conversation, however some topics were finally identified.

The elements of representation found in common between some individual destination images after visitation and not others could be traced back to intra-group social interaction patterns. Asking participants directly, yielded confused and at times contradictory answers. This uncovered that participants are not necessarily aware of this process. From participants' self-assessments emerged that individuals' awareness of the processes of both social interaction development and individual destination image formation is limited. It was concluded that participants, being personally involved in the processes of which they are co-creators, do not analyze nor rationalize the social interactions and their functions. Tasci et al. (2007) conducted an analysis of previous destination image literature and identified two opposing views relative to the nature of the image beholder. Some works conceptualize the individual as a "logical thinker" who responds to stimuli evaluating attribute by attribute (Gartner, 1986; Milman & Pizam, 1995). In contrast, other works maintain that individuals' evaluation processes are simplified in order to create an overall impression of the object in question (Crompton, 1979). This impression is contextual and situation-specific rather than a mechanical response attribute by attribute towards a sum- total.

Similar to the latter conceptualization, social representation theory understands that the information received is simplified by processes that link it back to pre-existing structures, which are functional for the creation of the social group's reality (Moscovici, 1984, 2000; Purkhardt, 1993). The individual is not considered as a computer-like processor responding to external stimuli one by one, which produces a fragmented image, as a self-standing sum-total. Individuals rather behave towards and for the object according to the social representations they previously hold and participate to the creation and evolution of social representations through social interaction (Pearce et al., 1996).

Findings of this research support the identification of individuals as contextual, situation specific and socially driven co-creators of their own reality. Individuals' everyday life happens through social interaction (Moscovici, 1984, 2000; Purkhardt, 1993) therefore this is a normal and ordinary process. Since it does not require extraordinary elaboration, individuals are not aware of the small modification that their individual destination image undergoes with every

new social interaction, whether with other individuals or directly with the environment. In fact, any exchange of information and opinions through conversation, constitutes material for the evolution of the individual's thoughts about a destination (Moscovici, 1984, 1988, 2001).

However, information enrichment through verbal communication and sharing emotions through non-verbal communication, appeared to be the ways in which participants explain the relationship between intra-group social interaction and the formation of their individual destination image; notwithstanding, accounts emerged as contradictory at times and boundaries between destination image and experience were blurry.

Experience

Often participants in their accounts try to make a distinction between destination image and experience, however when asked to describe their representations of a specific place, it is rather frequent that they answer referring to the 'experience'. Participants describe their image by recounting their interactions with the environment, with other individuals and their feelings while they were in the situation. They seem to label "experience" anything that involves a strong interaction between themselves and the environment, be it social or natural or a combination of the two. Noticeably, participants name a phenomenon an experience only when there is a strong emotional involvement or participation; thus experience does not appear as a synonym of trip, it rather reminds of the definition of social representation.

"Experience" is used by participants as an umbrella term, which includes interacting as well as the necessary components of social and natural environment and physical and emotional interaction. This is in line with a relatively recent work by Wearing and Wearing (2001) who maintains that the travelling party, the host community and the natural environment are all co-participating and interdependent components of a tourist experience. They cannot be isolated since the human mind itself and the self are products of social interaction, language and roles. These indivisibility and interdependence are also supported by the social representation approach, which maintains the indivisibility of the individuals, their social, cognitive and affective processes from the destination being represented (Moscovici, 1984).

These findings do not clarify the distinction between tourist experience and individual

destination image. In fact these findings, call back into the picture the individual overall destination-related tourist experience. This study's findings actually discourage attempting to isolate and extract experience from destination image formation research. However, the conceptualization and role of experience into the process needs a separate inquiry, and falls outside the scope of this work.

This first part discussed the findings of this study as they compare to previous destination image formation research and their significance from the perspective provided by the social representation approach. The discussed significance of this study's findings in relation to information sources and travelers' preparedness, individuals' personality, personal state and mood and individual's awareness, contributes insights into some determinant elements in the destination image formation process. Moreover, the support of the social representation approach to the interpretation of the findings showed how sociological knowledge can benefit tourism research contributing further insights.

The next and last part of this chapter addresses the emerged structure of destination image and its formation process; it leads to the integration of social interaction in the approach to the investigation of destination image formation in a group travel vacation context.

5.3. Towards an integrated approach

The identification of the participants' image of Jordan before and after visitation at both a social and individual level uncovered the represented categories forming the image of this destination and it provided additional insights into the complex phenomenon of destination image formation. The section discusses the emerged categories, properties and dimensions, but especially the emerged multiple layers of the phenomenon of destination image formation. The subsequent section discusses the proposed approach.

5.3.1. Destination image

Previous destination image formation literature largely agreed on two main interactive components being the core of destination image formation: a cognitive and an affective component (Baloglu 1999, Baloglu & McCleary, 1999b; Beerli & Martin, 2004; San Martin &

Rodriguez del Bosque, 2008; Tasci et al., 2007). These components encompass different categories that are cognitively and affectively represented to form destination image. The review of the literature identified some constantly recurrent categories namely natural environment, cultural environment and man-made attractions, social environment, political and economic panorama, facilities, leisure and entertainment, accessibility and lastly atmosphere, mood and lifestyle.

The three macro categories emerged from the current study's findings largely confirm the recurrently found categories in the literature. These include psychological-emotional environment representation, natural representation and socio-cultural representation further distinguished into built environment and people and culture. Some variations in the represented categories is also a consistent finding. Firstly, the social representation approach helps explaining that every cultural group, sample group, in short every group represents different categories depending on the pre-existing social representation structures (Moscovici, 1984). Secondly, the measured items in previous research are adapted to the specific destination and the purpose of the study. This causes properties and sub-properties to be destination specific.

It also emerged that participants' images are composed of different types of representations. Some are related to the generalized country destination and others to more specific attractions or features; some are common representations and some are unique to the destination. Some are representations of observable characteristics, while some are representations of psychological-emotional environments. This finding confirms Echtner and Ritchie's (1993) dimensional framework largely supported in destination image literature; according to this framework destination image is a composition of evaluations of individual attributes and features that can be positioned on three continua. These range from attribute based images to holistic, from unique to common features and from functional to psychological characteristics.

In these findings each property and sub-property constantly emerged as composed of distinguishable, but interrelated cognitive and affective elements. These determine the dimensions of the properties. These findings support the widespread agreement that destination image is constituted of interrelated cognitive and affective components. Similarly, the social

representation approach presents an evolutionary process encompassing the organization of cognitive information and the attachment of meanings and feelings to it. The approach explains that every information of any kind is integrated in the pre-existing representations' structure through the same process (Moscovici, 1984).

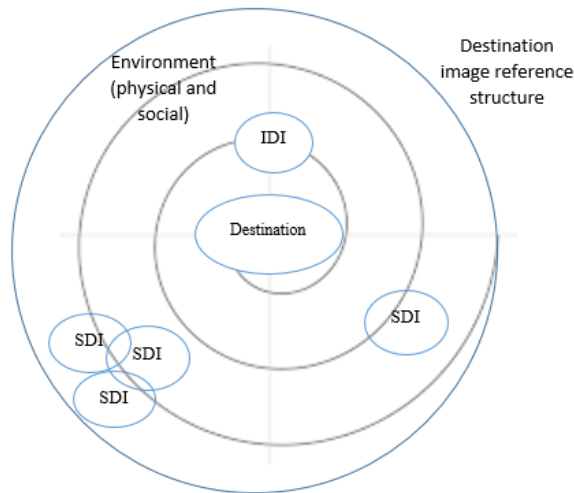
The examination of destination image modification highlighted that pre-visitation images are dominated by cognitive elements. The post-visitation images of Jordan present an increase of both cognitive and affective elements, but neither of the two is noticeably predominant. The cognitive component bears more details; and the elements constituting the affective component increased and appeared of stronger emotional nature. This trend is observed for all the macro-categories. Destination image literature tends to agree with these findings (Milman & Pizam, 1995; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 1997; Baloglu, 2001; Ryan & Cave, 2005). According to the social representation approach, increased frequency and intensity of unmediated interaction with the object of representation by individuals and their group, causes increased complexity, prominence and salience of the representation (Moscovici, 1984, 2000).

Multiple reference structures

Data analysis uncovered that there are marked commonalities between participants' individual images both before visitation and after visitation. A social destination image was identified from both interview rounds. Some differences in feelings, attitudes, interpretations and preferences were noticeable between individual destination images. However, these remained ascribable to the structure emerged from the aggregated analysis of participants' accounts. Finding a social image of the destination Jordan before the group members even met and traveled together might seem surprising. However, this appears compliant with the social representation conceptualization. This postulates that intra-group homogeneity is determined by intra-group social interaction, which brings to a certain degree of agreement for the purposes of interaction and communication. Different groups are characterized by different intra-group social interactions producing inter-group differences in the representations of a same object.

Destination image emerges from this study as a multilayered phenomenon. Figure 35 visually summarizes this point. It displays a reference structure that is specific to a specific

physical and social environment. Within this structure exist multiple social destination images that vary in their degree of interaction with the destination. The social representations' structure shared by a certain culture group for example, informs and is salient for the image formation of a destination that is not constantly part of



IDI = Individual Destination Image

SDI = Social Destination Image


 = The spiral line indicates the fluid and continuous process of social interaction within a specific physical and social environment

Figure 35 Visual display of destination image as a multi-layered phenomenon

the everyday physical and social environment of a certain group of individuals. When one group gets in intensified contact with a destination, through visitation, the group's image of it evolves. Individuals simultaneously belong to multiple groups and upon return they bring new information into these other groups through social interaction. For example Jordan is not frequently and intensively part of Italians' physical and social environment. A group of Italians travels to Jordan and their destination image presents a certain degree of agreement determined by the common reference structure. The social destination image of this group is re-negotiated through intra-group social interaction, which includes unmediated interaction with the other members of the group and the destination. During visitation and after visitation, the developed image is more informative to this group than the pre-visitation one. This was the product of the reference structure shared by the culture group Italians, as it emerged from pre-visitation findings.

In this same group traveling to Jordan, there are sub-groups, including dyads, who also share social destination images. These go through the same process since individuals are simultaneously members of multiple groups. Finally, individuals hold individual destination

images that go through the same process, while maintaining a certain degree of variation. Once back in their usual physical and social environment, this group's members will contribute to the further evolution of the reference structure through social interaction with members of other groups. Within the reference structure there are multiple and concurrent social destination images, shared by groups of individuals. These social destination images might differ from one another while still reflecting the reference structure; these lower layers better inform the behavior of individuals sharing it, because they are more salient on an everyday basis. Inter-group social interaction constantly negotiates the reference structure, which in turn informs the lower layers of destination images in a continuous flow.

This process might take time before the reference structure of destination image is noticeably modified. As noted by social representation theory, communication allows thoughts and feelings to be modified and realities created. Therefore, the development of the social representation and the process of content creation depend on the speed of and means available to communication; they also depend on the relevance of the object of representation to the everyday life of a certain group (Moscovici, 1984, 1988, 2001).

These findings, interpreted with the support of the social representation approach, contribute with a plausible explanation to how and why destination image research consistently finds intra-cultural homogeneity of a destination image and inter-cultural variations of a same destination image. In the destination image literature, commonalities and differences within a same nationality group are not readily observable. Within the leading quantitative methodological approach there is no room for these insights and the aggregate data yielded mostly for statistical analysis, does not allow for such examinations. This integrated approach provides a platform for future research to investigate the intra-cultural processes leading to a homogeneous destination image and examine the inter-cultural variations of image of a same destination. The multiplicity of interactive layers and the processes through which destination image evolves across sub-groups, contribute to further explain why and how destination image held by a specific nationality group display changes generally only over a relatively long period of time (Gartner & Hunt, 1987). According to the approach, social representations are part of

a structure of classifications and concepts of previous knowledge matured within a society. This structure preserves previous representations and knowledge and maintains them connected. New representations are included in this pre-existing structure which they need to be compatible with in order for the equilibrium to be maintained (Moscovici, 1984).

Finally, in light of this study’s findings and the present discussion, the next and last section of this chapter presents the proposed conceptualization of the process of destination image formation in a group vacation travel context that accounts for social interaction.

5.3.2. The proposed approach

This research’s findings can be illustrated as a conceptual system as displayed in Figure 36. It represents an integrated approach to further investigate a destination image formation process in the context of a group vacation travel, which accounts for social interaction. The approach conceptualizes individual destination image and social destination image as coexisting phenomena. They exist in a constant and mutual co-modification relationship that occurs through intra-group social interaction. The processes occurring during visitation in the context of the group tour revolve around the destination and are indivisible from the physical and social context in which they occur. New information also proceeds from the contextual environment and the social interaction processes. Social destination image, is co-created by

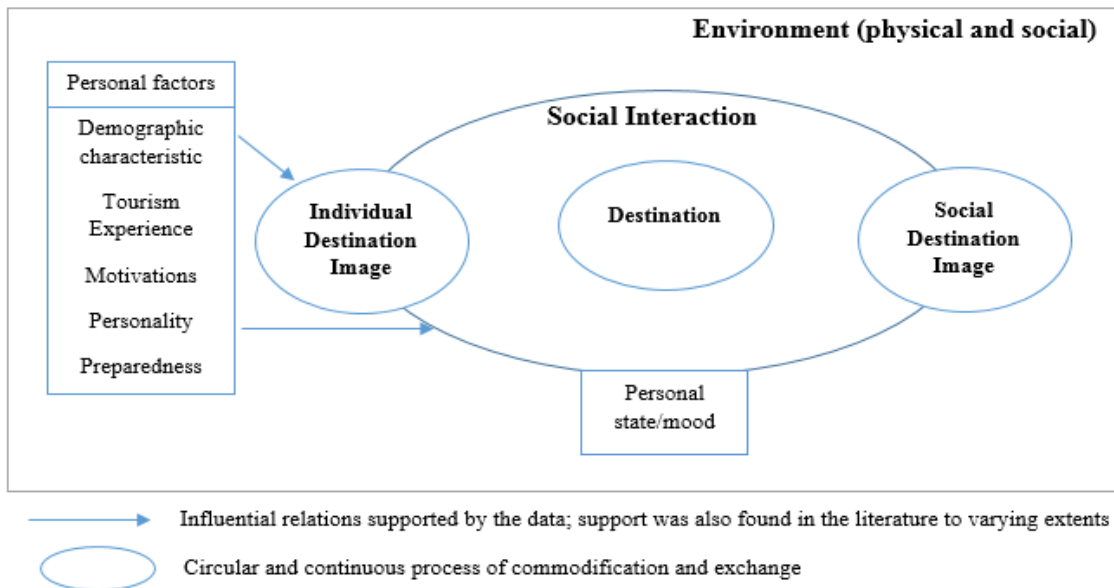


Figure 36 Integrated approach to the investigation of destination image formation in a group vacation travel context

destination-related social interaction among group members and is prescriptive of social interaction towards the destination.

As previously discussed, individual destination images ascribe to a common reference structure, while presenting variations between them depending on individuals' personal factors. The approach includes the individual personal state distinguished from other personal factors on the basis of its higher degree of dynamism, as previously discussed. Personal state is presented as a mediator co-modified by social interaction within the specific group context. It is dynamic and context sensitive functioning as a lens in the interpretation of new information. Personal state feeds back into the process contributing to shaping intra-group social interaction.

Figure 37 visually displays the structure of both individual and social destination image supported by the findings of this research and in accordance with both destination image research and the social representation approach. Destination image displays a cognitive and an affective components, which result in attitude upon further evaluation. The attitude component influences further elaboration of new information and also action towards the destination. New information coming from media, social interaction with other individuals and unmediated destination experience is fed into the process elaborated through social interaction. The elements of the destination represented by destination image can be general or specific, common or unique, tangible or more psychological.

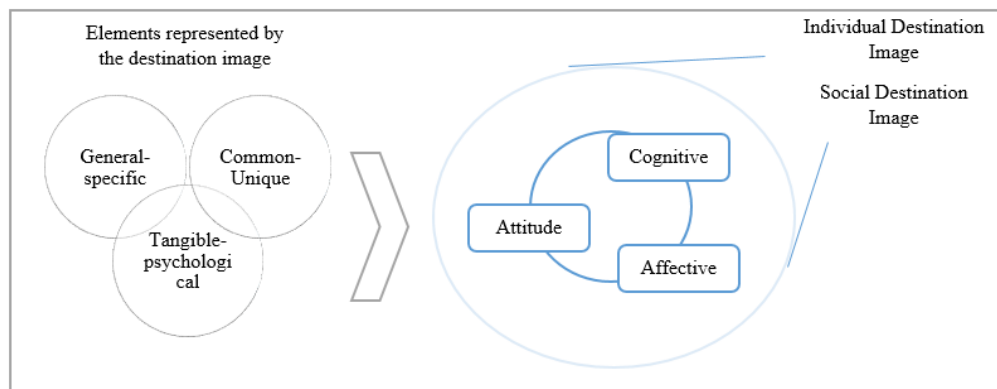


Figure 37 Structure of individual and social destination image

The proposed approach to the investigation of destination image formation represents a novel approach. It conceptualizes the process of destination image formation as a social phenomenon embedded in the social interaction between individuals, groups and the degree of

involvement with the destination.

The next chapter draws the overall conclusions of this research by highlighting the contributions brought by this work, its scope and limitations and recommendations for future research.

5.4. Summary

This chapter elaborated on the presented findings firstly by discussing their relevance and significance within previous destination image formation research and their implications from the perspective provided by the social representation approach; subsequently by proposing an integrated approach, which synthesizes this research work.

The discussion first addressed how the integration of social interaction contributes to expand the understanding of the phenomenon of word of mouth and the social relationship between the traveler and the destination's environment in relation to information sources. These findings add to the destination image formation literature uncovering a broader phenomenon behind 'friends and relatives', one which goes beyond the role information source and encompasses the whole visitation experience. Information from friends and relatives acquired before visitation, derive from social interaction that took place in one or multiple groups the individual belongs to. Since the group tour's members become acquaintances and friends, this phenomenon extends throughout visitation. Not only social interaction is a continuous channel of information sharing, it is also a tool for meaning creation attributed to the destination's image.

It was subsequently discussed how destination image is not an objective entity, but rather the understanding of the destination on behalf of individuals embedded in their social environment. So that destination image formation is a social phenomenon and not an individual experience in a stimulus-response mechanism. The destination is socially interpreted through the dynamic evolution of both the social context and the group members' relationship with the physical environment they are dwelling.

Within the personal factors influential in destination image formation, it was also discussed

how individuals' preparation about the destination appears to determine individual destination image modification. More prepared participants appeared to be more critical and less reliant on information from external sources; while less prepared individuals emerged as more absorbent. Therefore familiarity with the destination does not only determine the richness of details of travelers' destination image, it also appears to determine the influence of intra-group shared information and the extent to which social interaction molds the individual's destination image. In addition, it was suggested that individuals' personality contributes to the process of social interaction influencing information exchange. More outgoing individuals, influence the social environment comparatively more, than other more reserved individuals. Therefore different personalities would bring different contributions to the group social interactions and affect the in-group ambiance.

The intensity of intra-group social interaction was observed to increase over time throughout the tour, parallel to increased cohesiveness of the group. Liking the group mates, perceiving a cohesive and 'positive group' to share the experience with, emerged as elements mediating communication and social interaction influencing participants' personal state. Personal state was suggested to mediate the individual's interpretation of new information. Personal state is influenced by the group ambiance created through social interaction and in turn it feeds back into the evolution of social interaction.

A last influential element within social interaction, the tour guide was identified as an incisive actor. Besides the influence on the cognitive information provided to the group members, the tour guide can potentially influence and mediate the process of social interaction within the group. This intervention may impact greatly group ambiance and cohesiveness as well as the flow and nature of social interaction, consequently influencing destination image formation.

Finally, the lack of awareness about the processes of both destination image formation and social interaction on behalf of the participants, was discussed as plausibly related to the normality and ordinary occurrence of such processes. Individuals do not rationalize the processes, they are co-creators of them and largely unaware. Individuals' everyday life happens

through social interaction therefore it is a normal and ordinary process. Since it does not require extraordinary elaboration individuals are not aware of the small modification that their individual destination image undergoes with every new social interaction with other individuals or directly with the environment.

The second part of the chapter addressed the last objective of this work. Firstly, it further elaborated on the emerged process of destination image formation through intra-group social interaction and discussed how these findings largely supported previous destination image literature; at the same time adopting the social representation approach, it contributed with deeper insights into destination image formation research. It was discussed that destination image is a multilayered social phenomenon. This phenomenon displays a reference structure, which contains multiple and co-existent social destination images. The multiplicity of interactive layers and the processes through which they relate to one another, possibly explains the intra-culture homogeneity of a destination image and the inter-cultural variations of a same destination's image consistently confirmed in the literature.

Finally, an integrated approach to the investigation of the destination image formation process in a group vacation travel context, which accounts for social interaction was proposed; the approach in form of a conceptual system displays destination image as a social phenomenon which takes place in a continuous process of information elaboration and negotiation between individuals and their social context through social interaction. Social interaction, as the day-by-day verbal and non-verbal communication among people and their relation with the physical and social environment, is the channel through which information is shared and interpreted. Individuals' personal factors such as demographic characteristics, previous travel experience, motivations, personality and preparedness are determinant to the formation of individual destination image and contribute to the shaping of social interaction. The personal state of the individual is also an intervening element. Personal state is influenced by intra-group social interaction; it mediates individuals' information interpretation and in turn feeds back into the evolvement of intra-group social interaction. The conceptual approach meets the last objective of the research project and synthesizes this work.

6. CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This study investigated the role played by social interaction within a group tour in the process of destination image formation in a vacation travel context. In the abundant body of literature, a number of areas were identified, which appeared to have been neglected and needed additional efforts. These were the investigation of destination image in its formation process, the dynamic nature of the phenomenon of destination image formation and the social context in which it takes place. In relation to the first two neglected areas, the examination of the literature showed that destination image had been investigated with a rather static approach; destination image was identified and measured at specific points in time and within specific, pre-established criteria. This approach is in contrast with the recurrent acknowledgment of destination image as multidimensional, relative and dynamic in nature. As for the third neglected area, it was evident that research focused attention on the object, i.e. the destination and its attributes. Destination image measurement was based on the individual's evaluation of single pre-determined attributes, which supposedly described the destination. Demographic characteristics and other personal factors, such as motivations accounted for the subject; whereby, subjects were treated as isolated and mostly independent units, while their social context was largely neglected. It was argued that individuals' sociability, which is intrinsic in human nature, cannot be ignored and individuals cannot be removed from their social context (Wolff, 1950).

Throughout destination image research, the social context and the social nature of the image beholder can be identified as an unrecognized determinant element transpiring through a variety of factors. Within the most explicit ones are word of mouth among the information sources and meeting people among the motivations for traveling. However, the social context in which destination image is formed and the social nature of the subject had not yet been considered as an autonomous component. Since vacation experience most frequently includes the company of others (Yarnal & Kerstetter, 2005), to neglect the inclination to socialization (Wolff, 1950) is to prevent in-depth understanding of the formation process of destination

image. In light of these neglected areas, a change in perspective to the investigation of destination image formation was required for uncovering additional insights.

In this work destination image was approached as a dynamic and ongoing phenomenon, rather than a static multidimensional concept. Destination image was understood as consisting of multiple and simultaneous influential forces, which nourish the components through continuous processes embedded in the physical and social context of the subject. The social context is determined by social interactions defined as the day-by-day, verbal and non-verbal unmediated communication among people and their relationship with the environment.

The novelty of this rather sociological approach to the process of destination image formation entails a lack of theoretical guidance within the available research. This condition constituted a challenge. This comes in addition to the lack of a solid conceptual framework constantly claimed by destination image research (Gallarza et al., 2002; Beerli & Martin, 2004; Tasci et al., 2007). With the purpose of receiving useful insights for the interpretation of the newly investigate process, the sociological theory of social representation was adopted, which provided theoretical support for this study.

The theory of social representation was formulated to explain the process through which populations make sense of what is part of their every-day reality. It theorizes that reality exists only through the peoples' representations of it and representations then inform peoples' behavior. The framework of interactive concepts forming representations is in continuous development in time and space; it is informed by various information sources, including media, social interaction and direct experience; and it takes place through social interactions including communication among people (Moscovici, 1963, 1984, 1988; Wagner, 1996). The many congruencies between the conceptualization of destination image to date and the conceptualization of social representations were highlighted. These included their main components and their sources of information. Social interaction was integrated as a source and channel for the process's development into destination image formation which allowed a more in-depth and dynamic understanding of the studied phenomenon.

This study investigated the role of social interaction in the process of destination image

formation in a group vacation travel context, in the frame of reference provided by the social representation approach. A group was defined as a gathering of individuals who engage in frequent face-to-face interaction through communication for a period of time of variable length and in the awareness of some significant commonality, in this case, the interest in the destination they are traveling to.

In order to answer the research question ‘what is the role of social interaction in the destination image formation process?’, three objectives were formulated. Firstly, to examine and report the process of destination image formation in its development in a group vacation travel context; secondly, to determine how intra-group social interaction contributes to the destination image formation process; and thirdly, to propose an integrated approach to the investigation of the destination image formation process in a group vacation travel context, which accounts for social interaction. In order to meet these objectives a change in the approach to destination image formation research, was required. The focus of examination had to shift from a static, destination-centered perspective to a dynamic, person-centered one. This change required both a paradigm and a methodological adaptation. An interpretive and social interactionist perspective that accepts multiple and co-existing interpretations and realities deeply rooted in the individuals’ connection with their environment (Purkhardt, 1993; Wearing & Wearing, 2001) allowed the flexibility required for eliciting new knowledge. Individuals were recognized as having both thinking and feeling abilities and being constantly under development through social interaction and communication (Yarnal & Kerstetter, 2005) indivisible from their societies which construct their understanding structures and inform behavior (Yarnal & Kerstetter, 2005). Moreover the research was led with an underlying pragmatist approach, meaning that the resulting theory aimed at contributing to the explanation of a phenomenon in real life situations (Charmaz, 2000).

A qualitative approach was adopted as the most appropriate for the purpose of this study. A ten-day group tour to Jordan, organized by an Italian tour operator and constituted by ten Italian travelers, excluding the group coordinator, the local tour guide and myself, represented the study participants and the group vacation travel context. Data collection was structured in

three consecutive phases: before visitation, during visitation and after visitation and two methods for data gathering were employed. Before visitation and after visitation, participants participated in semi-structured in-depth (SID) interviews. During visitation participant observation was conducted. These methods allowed to examine the process of destination image formation in a context in which the dynamics of mutual influence are observable through participation.

The dual nature, partly structured and partly unstructured, of the interviews presented a number of advantages. The structured and standardized techniques allowed for subsequent comparison across participants and the two points in time. While when information was sought on a largely unknown phenomenon, the unstructured method allowed unexpected information to emerge. Interviewing participants before and after visitation had a three-fold function. Firstly, in-depth interviews provide the occasion for privacy and individualized contact between the researcher and the participant. This condition allowed the elicitation of in-depth information. Secondly, the investigation of a process needs the establishment of a beginning and an end; the process in between can then be related to reference points for examination. Thirdly, in-depth interviews provide the occasion for clarifying any topic, doubt, question or inference the researcher might need to address; thus in-depth interviews acted as one among the multiple checks for the trustworthiness of this study. During visitation participant observation was specifically interested in the examination of the phenomenon of investigation while it was happening, i.e. social interaction in relation to destination image formation in the context of a group vacation travel. Participant observation allowed the gathering of insights about the processes involved in the travelers' vacation social context and how these relate to destination image formation.

Data analysis for both in-depth interviews and participant observation was conducted under the guidance provided by the analytical method suggested by grounded theory. Proceeding from a micro perspective to a broader one, data were coded towards the development of a conceptual framework (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This process was ideal for the exploration of a largely unknown phenomenon within the

destination image formation process research. This data analysis method contributed to the pragmatic objective of integrating a theory rooted or grounded in the phenomenon itself.

Ensuring the plausibility of the findings in a real life situation, and the credibility of the process employed to reach the study's conclusions was a priority throughout the whole research process. These criteria represent the pillars of a research's trustworthiness (Silverman, 1993; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Maxwell, 2013). The threats to this work's trustworthiness were identified in three categories: researcher's subjectivity, confirmability and transferability. Checks and measures for coping with the identified threats were planned so that every stage of the process was accounted for. Measures for monitoring researcher's subjectivity included keeping different types of memos, checking inferences with the group coordinator and seeking participants' checks in multiple occasions. Measures for ensuring confirmability included employing a combination of data gathering techniques, maintaining prolonged engagement with the participants and the phenomenon investigated, seeking repeated contact and employing participants' checks at different stages. The contexts under examination were described in relevant details and negative cases were reported and analyzed. Lastly, methods transferability was ensured by transparently explaining the adopted procedures during planning, data gathering, data analysis and check stages (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Hennink et al., 2011; Yarnal & Kerstetter, 2005; Maxwell, 2013).

In analyzing and reporting findings it was first established that participants' destination image underwent change. Social and individual destination images both before and after visitation were identified and reported. The main differences between the two social images were the precision and richness of details of the post-visitation social image over the vague and generalized pre-visitation social image. It emerged that the cognitive dimension was dominant in the pre-visitation social image of Jordan. While in the post-visitation social image an increase of both cognitive and affective elements was observed with no definitive predominance of either. The cognitive component bears more details and the affective component appears of stronger emotional weight.

After confirming that destination images displayed modification between the two reference

points, the process of destination image formation in its development in a group vacation context was examined and reported (objective 1). It included the development of intra-group relationships and conversations found relevant to the formation of destination image. Findings provided evidence that a group of individuals traveling together do influence each other's destination images during the trip. It was shown that some post-visitation image elements common to some individuals and not others could be traced back to on-tour social interaction patterns. The two participants that engaged the least in intra-group social interaction, reported somewhat different individual destination images, which did not present the correspondences that pooled other individuals' images. The differing results for these two participants highlighted the influence that social interaction played on the destination image formation of this group's participants.

According to the participants, emotions-sharing is the main form of communication within the group and it assumed different forms. In one form the emotions felt by the individual are found reflected in the other participants. This has the effects of strengthening the perceived personal connection between participants and intensifying individuals' perception of the reflected feeling; secondly, sharing emotions created a sensation of emotional well-being due to the positive social interaction within the group. Serene and positive social interaction creates a group ambiance in which the individual feels at ease. This personal state shapes the lenses through which the individual interprets new information about the destination and in turn, influences the further development of intra-group social interaction.

Participants emerged largely unaware of both the processes of social interaction and destination image formation they were involved in. In the post-visitation interview a minority of participants acknowledged their image of the destination to have been contributed to by information sharing through intra-group verbal communication. The majority of participants described emotion-sharing and non-verbal communication as more influential forms of social interaction in the process of destination image formation. It was discussed that the noticeable lack of awareness is plausibly related to the normality and ordinary occurrence of such processes. Individuals' everyday life happens through social interaction that individuals do not

normally analyze nor rationalize.

The examination of the process of destination image formation, approached with a social representation perspective, aided to determining how social interaction contributes to the process of destination image formation (objective 2). It was determined that social interaction lies at the root of destination image formation and it represents the channel of its evolution. Starting from the sources of information shaping destination image formation, to the elements most related to the individual members of a group, social interaction emerged as the medium channeling the whole process. It was discussed how word of mouth through friends and relatives goes beyond the role of source of information pre-visitation to encompass the whole visitation experience. Information from friends and relatives acquired before visitation, derive from social interaction that took place in one or multiple groups the individual belongs to. Since the group tour's members become acquaintances and friends, this phenomenon extends throughout visitation. Therefore, social interaction emerges as a continuous medium of information sharing and a tool for meaning creation and co-creation of the destination's image.

The examination of the process during its evolution through intra-group social interaction elicited that some factors strictly related with the individuality of the group members were influential in the process of social interaction and were in turn influencing the shaping of individual destination images. These were the preparedness of the participants in regards to the destination, individuals' personality and finally individuals' personal state.

Preparedness is strictly related to the sources of information feeding destination image. It was discussed how individuals' preparation about the destination appeared to determine individual destination image modification. Familiarity with the destination does not only determine the richness of details of travelers' destination image, it also determines the extent to which social interaction molds the individual's destination image.

Personality contributes to the process of social interaction by determining the individual's role in the group and influencing information exchange. Different personalities bring different contributions to the group's social interaction affecting the in-group ambiance and development of cohesiveness.

Finally, the perceived quality of intra-group social interaction emerged to be able of shifting the focus of the individual's perception between focusing on the positive or on the negative. The individual's personal state emerged as mediating individual destination image formation through filtering the new information received; it also fed back into intra-group social interaction shaping its further development.

It was shown how the adoption of the social representation approach contributed with deeper insights into destination image formation research. It was discussed that destination image is a multilayered social phenomenon. It displays a reference structure within which multiple and co-existent social destination images form and interact. It was discussed how the multiplicity of interactive layers and the processes through which they relate to one another, contribute to explaining the intra-cultural homogeneity and inter-cultural variations of a same destination's image consistently found in destination image literature.

Finally, the proposed integrated approach to the investigation of the destination image formation process in a group vacation travel context, which accounts for social interaction (objective 3), met the last objective and synthesizes this work. The approach displays destination image as a social phenomenon which occurs in a continuous process of information elaboration and negotiation between individuals and their social context through social interaction. Social interaction, as the day-by-day verbal and non-verbal communication among people and their relation with the physical environment, is the channel through which information is shared and interpreted. Individual's personal factors such as demographic characteristics, previous travel experience, personality, preparedness and motivations are determinant to the formation of individual destination image and contribute to the shaping of social interaction. The personal state of the individual is also an intervening element. Personal state is influenced by intra-group social interaction; it mediates individuals' information interpretation and in turn, feeds back into the evolvement of intra-group social interaction. This final chapter concludes this research by highlighting the contributions of the study, its scope and limitations; finally, it outlines some recommendations for future research.

6.1. Contribution

The study distinguishes itself from what has been mainstream in the literature so far by leaving aside the marketing/promotional (Baloglu, 1997, 2001; Jenkins, 1999; MacKay & Fesenmaier, 2000; Hanlan & Kelly, 2005; Grosspietsch, 2006; McCartney, et al., 2009), positioning (Gartner, 1989; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999a; Baloglu & Mangalolu, 2001), and performance evaluation purposes (Reilly, 1990; Pizam & Milman, 1993; Chaudhary, 2000; Joppe, et al., 2001; Hui & Wan, 2003; Hsu et al., 2004; O'Leary & Deegan, 2005; Tasci & Holecek, 2007) and rather focus on the phenomenon itself. Such a perspective shift brought along a methodological choice in relation to data gathering and analysis. This was also atypical within the methodological homogeneity observable in the field, which displays a striking preference for structured, quantitative approaches (Gallarza et al., 2002; Pike, 2002). The contributions of this study are mostly theoretical and interest especially destination image formation research. However practical and methodological contributions are also identified. These contributions are reported hereafter in this order.

6.1.1. Theoretical contributions

This in depth investigation has contributed the destination image formation research with an integrated approach to the investigation of destination image formation in a group vacation travel context, which accounts for social interaction. The introduction of a social perspective into the investigation of this phenomenon, allowed to uncover and show that travelers' social context during visitation plays an influential role in the process of destination image formation. The approach suggests that destination image is a social phenomenon which takes place in a continuous process of information elaboration and negotiation through intra-group social interaction. Social interaction is defined as the day-by-day verbal and non-verbal communication among people and their relation with the physical environment. This conceptualization contributes to shift the perspective of research from a destination-centered approach to a person-centered approach which acknowledges that social interaction is the channel through which information is shared and interpreted. This approach changes the conceptualization of destination image from being understood as an objective entity,

individually experienced as a stimulus-response mechanism, to being a social phenomenon, interpreted through the dynamic evolution of both the social context and the group members' relationship with the environment they are dwelling.

The integration of sociological knowledge into the approach to the investigation of destination image formation contributed to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Finding that destination image formation and evolution is a multilayered phenomenon may be of theoretical contribution on a macro level. Findings in the destination image change literature consistently report intra-culture homogeneity and inter-cultural variations of the image of a same destination. However, a conclusive explanation underlying these findings was lacking. It is possible that the commonly employed quantitative approaches did not provide room for deeper insights. This study provides a platform for examination of intra-group homogeneity of destination image while proposing a possible explanation for the inter-cultural variations of a same destination's image.

The sociological approach contributed some major insights into exploring determinant elements that contribute to shaping the process of destination image formation. Some important contributions interest the widened definition of the phenomenon word of mouth, the influential role of individuals' preparedness, personality and personal state to the destination image formation process. In destination image formation literature, the phenomenon of word of mouth had been acknowledged as the most influential among individuals' information sources before visitation. The insights provided by the current research extend the manifestation of the phenomenon and its influential properties to encompass the whole visitation experience. The group tour's members become friends and thus represent valuable information sources throughout the trip.

At the same time individuals' preparedness about the destination determines the nature of individuals' contribution to intra-group social interaction, while also determining how easily influenced their individual destination image is by others. Individuals' personality emerged as contributing to the development of social interaction within the group, and thus determining the individuals' role within the group. Through social interaction individuals might be invested

of authority as information sources more than others, for different reasons and social dynamics; however likes and dislikes appear to be quite a powerful mediator. This dynamics contribute to the development of group cohesiveness and to the creation of group ambiance, which were also suggested as determinant mediators in the acceptance of new information from other participants. Finally, the personal state of the individual is influenced by social interaction and contributes to its development. Personal state was found to act as a filter for information interpretation. These findings enrich the understanding of the process of destination image formation in a group travel vacation context.

6.1.2. Practical contributions

This study mostly uncovers neglected perspectives and processes in the phenomenon's conceptualization. However, its practical contributions are not less important. The deeper insights into the intra-culture homogeneity of destination image provides a platform for the examination of inter-cultural variations of destination's images. This is instrumental for channeling marketing efforts tailored to each target market. The need of tailored marketing campaigns is well-known (Crompton, 1979; Prebensen, 2007); this study provides an approach, or a platform for exploring the intra-group processes that make a marketing strategy fitting and successful for a specific culture group.

At a micro level, this study highlights the incisiveness of the social interactions within a real life group tour on vacation on the group members' destination image. This is not a minor detail. While enjoyment is already acknowledged as determinant of satisfaction with the trip (Bowen, 2002), social interaction was not regarded as a determinant in the shaping of destination image. These findings stress the crucial importance of the process of social interaction throughout the entire vacation and stay at the destination. This interests directly destination image management. Every destination hosts multiple group tours simultaneously and operated by a diversity of operators. Every group represents a stage of multiple processes among which social interaction and destination image formation also occur.

This study suggests that there are implications for both destination management

organization and for tour operators. The image of the destination in its target markets is strongly influenced by the destination image developed by these travelers during visitation and the overall experience they share upon return. This study highlights that word of mouth does not pause before visitation and start again after. Word of mouth is a form of social interaction in relation to the destination that gets intensified among directly interested actors during visitation. This study reveals that a positive image of a destination is greatly influenced by positive social interactions. These processes are continuous throughout the vacation and occur within every group tour.

For a positive word of mouth after visitation, these processes should be smooth and virtuous. It is challenging for a destination management organization to ensure the positivity of these processes consistently and continuously across group tours. However, tour guides have direct access to these processes and have the possibility of influencing them. The tour guide is acknowledged as crucial in travelers' perception of the places visited for being naturally invested of the authority of integrating information on the place in both its environmental and cultural aspects. Quiroga (1990) documented the crucial importance of the tour guide in providing guidance and protection and mediating the relationships between travelers and local; but the guide also fosters the group's social interaction. This study suggests that the intervention of the guide in the social dynamics can impact greatly group ambiance and either promote or jeopardize group cohesiveness. By manipulating these elements individuals' personal state is also altered and with it the flow and nature of social interaction. A tour guide who is negatively perceived by the group may influence negatively intra-group social interaction, jeopardize individuals' enjoyment and the formation of a positive destination image. Conversely, a guide whose personal characteristics, including personality and attitude are conducive to in-group harmony may foster a positive ambiance promoting group cohesiveness and influence positively the process of destination image formation.

The role of the guide in contributing to the process of destination image formation not only in the role of information provider, but also as people manager should be acknowledged. This study suggest that destination management organizations renew attention to the selection and

training of group tour guides. Tour guides are the ambassadors of the destination. They have a powerful influence on the destination images of multiple people at the same time and repeatedly over the course of their service. Destinations would benefit from including group dynamics management into the tour guides' training in addition to destination-related knowledge.

Tour operators are equally interested in the guides' training. Positively perceived social interaction contributes to an overall positive experience and makes costumers satisfied. While there are a number of factors, such as prices, accommodation's type and style, transportation modes that can be controlled systematically, human interaction is a more challenging phenomenon to be controlled. Tour guides who are able to manage group dynamics in order to facilitate positive social interaction constitute an important asset for the tour operator as well. While in-depth knowledge of the destination is a necessary requirement, the guide's ability to manage the social context of each group may greatly improve satisfaction and enjoyment, encouraging positive word of mouth about both destination and tour operator.

6.1.3. Methodological contribution

The shift in perspective in comparison to previous research in the field required a methodological adaptation. This work successfully adopted a dynamic methodology that allowed the examination of a phenomenon while it was developing. The successful application of this approach encourages to reconsider the one-method-fits-all approach characterizing the destination image research panorama.

Within this dynamic methodology, this work applied the technique of collage creation as an elicitation tool for the in depth investigation of the tourist destination image of Jordan. The performance of the tool uncovered the potential of collage creation in tourism academic research. Tourism research often faces challenges posed by the investigation of non-tangible phenomena. Tourist destination image and cultural stereotypes are two examples. Perceptions, memories, personal experiences, emotions and attitudes also pose the challenge of investigating connections that can be non-conscious and knowledge that can be non-verbal and not rationally elaborated. This work contributes to tourism research by presenting collage

creation as an additional tool, found effective through application, which reaches deeper strata of individuals' cognition.

6.2. Scope and limitations

This study focused on a specific dynamic of the phenomenon of destination image formation. It investigated the role played by social interaction in the process of destination image formation within a group tour in a vacation travel context. The scope of this study provided the focus of efforts, but also the boundaries of the current investigation.

Some observations need to be made in this respect. First to be mention is the researcher's bias; secondly, the current study explored the implications of a newly introduced element in the conceptualization of destination image formation. Thirdly, the methodology employed by the investigation is of qualitative nature. Aiming at in-depth examination of a specific phenomenon, the investigation focused on one group tour only. This group traveled with a tour operator, which advertises a specific product to a well-defined target market.

Dadgostar and Isotalo (1995) recognized that destination image depends on a numerous and varied set of parameters such as the destination, the benefits sought or motivations for traveling and individuals' personal interpretation of what they experience. But also the attributes that the researcher chooses for testing and importantly the researcher's interpretation of the data gathered. All these elements are unavoidable, since they are all integral to the destination image investigation. Moreover, the chances of the researcher being able to get rid of her/his own understanding structures are close to none and it is a limitation of every research (Pearce et al., 1996). However, systems can be put in place in order to reduce the interference of the researcher bias by accounting for it. In this study, efforts were made in this sense. The trustworthiness of this research was assessed through literature-driven methods (Silverman, 1993; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Yarnal & Kerstetter, 2005; Hennink et al., 2011; Maxwell, 2013).

Social representations are products of everyday social interactions with other individuals and the environment through time. Participants to this study had their own set of social

representations or understanding structures informing their social interactions and their behavior, which are reflected in their communication (Moscovici, 1984, 1888, 2000). In order to avoid that the researcher's own set of understanding structures jeopardized understanding, the research population was chosen of the same nationality of the researcher, i.e. Italian. In doing so it was ensured that social norms, background and language were shared. They provide common ground for communication and behavior and thus allowed for understanding the unsaid. Had these not been common to both participants and researcher, it would have been challenging to consider interpretations plausible. Important underlying concepts would have been missed by the researcher and lost in the unsaid.

Social interaction was a new element introduced in the investigation of destination image formation. In order to examine it in depth it was delimited by defining it for the purpose of the study as the day-by-day, verbal and non-verbal unmediated communication among people and their relationship with the environment. This definition clearly excludes communication through social media also including mobile technology. While it is acknowledged that this is constant part of nowadays individuals' social life it was excluded for two main reasons. Firstly, the novelty of the element made it necessary its delimitation in order for examination to be carried out in depth; investigation was narrowed to face to face on-trip interaction because it was the most observable form of communication with the least intrusion, while also constituting the most natural way individuals communicate. However, in relation to this study context, participants' use of social media and mobile technology was limited. Internet access was limited to mobile access through Wi-Fi available only at some of the accommodations we stayed at. Therefore, on-trip influence of these means was relatively contained.

Only one group was used for investigation of the process for allowing in-depth understanding of it in one context, to begin with. The scope of this study excluded comparison with other contexts. The selection of this tour operator also causes the selection of a travel market. The tour operator caters for adaptable and supposedly adventurous people and encourages to create a sense of belonging and group spirit within the group tours. Different tour operators have different products catering to different markets and promoting different

traveling cultures.

On a last note, this group created a very positive in-group ambiance, built group cohesiveness and its members developed affection for each other. These conditions are not common to every group tour. In fact, it is not granted that individuals traveling together develop into a cohesive group (Quiroga, 1990). The nature of social interaction is determined by individuals' personal factors and their personal state; it is the nature of social interaction informed by these that determines the group's level of cohesiveness.

These elements contribute to pose questions of generalization. This study does not seek to be generalized nor generalizable, at this stage. It examined the role played by an integral process of human nature, social interaction, which had been latent, but neglected in the investigation of destination image so far. As such, what was sought was the identification of the phenomenon and the understanding of its role in the process of destination image formation in this travel context. However it is maintained that the level of abstraction achieved makes these findings generally plausible and conceptually transferable to comparable contexts. This investigation did not seek to comprehensively explain the processes of destination selection and decision making and the destination image formation process prior to visitation. Nor it attempted to theorize or draw conclusions on the recollection processes and the word of mouth initialization after the trip completion.

A reflection on the framework employed in this research work, identifies another threat to conclusions (Maxwell, 2013). This study is, for a major part, theory driven, i.e. previous knowledge from empirical studies and proposed theories, was integrated with a system of concepts. This integrated model was proposed as a theoretical model, which allowed to explain processes previously neglected. Endorsing theories to guide a study has its strengths and its weaknesses. A theory is a tool that in combination with the researcher's insights, highlights focal concepts which would otherwise risk to be overseen. However, it poses the threat of constricting the elicitation of new knowledge; it can also impede the researcher to notice previously uncovered phenomena and prevent her/him from seeing an alternative way of interpreting the phenomenon under investigation (Maxwell, 2013). In order to reduce this risks,

the analytical strategies proposed by the grounded theory approach were employed without making of it the main approach to this research. Finally, in light of the scope and limitations of this work recommendations are made for further research.

6.2.1. Future research

The novel approach conceptualized the process of destination image formation as a social phenomenon embedded in the social interaction between individuals, groups and their degree of involvement with the destination. It uncovered neglected element of the process, which now need to be further examined. Areas recommended for further research are identified in relation to the group constitution, the identified determining elements to the process of social interaction and the challenging definition of tourist experience within the frame of reference provided by a sociological approach.

Future research should investigate the phenomenon in a different context before attempting generalization. Exploring the process in a group tour traveling to a different destination and of a different nationality might uncover additional insights into the intra-group social interaction phenomenon; also a different group size and nature of the vacation travel might play a role. In fact, one main determinant might be constituted by the social behavior intrinsic in Italians, which might be drastically different to that of Chinese travelers for example, in a group tour and in a vacation travel context.

In relation to the constitution of the group tour Baloglu (1997) found that the evaluation of some measurement items of the destination US for West Germany travelers, was significantly influenced by the size and composition of the traveling group. Baloglu's (1997) study findings suggest that smaller traveling parties have more positive perceptions. The author does not provide a justification for this outcome, even if group cohesiveness was found in this study as a plausible explanation. Quiroga (1990) in a study of group dynamics in coach group tours found that smaller groups appear more prone to share positive feelings; moreover, more cohesive groups create more conducive conditions for in-group interaction. This translates into increased influence of the group on the individual and vice versa and increased motivation to actively participate in the happiness of the group.

Further investigation of the process in different group sizes would also shed some light on the variations that social interaction can assume. It was found with this study that the minibus was a conducive environment for the development of social interaction and the cultivation of group cohesiveness. These findings supported Quiroga's (1990) conclusions that the conditions provided by a bus can be optimal to group cohesiveness if the ratio between available space, seats and people also allows for some personal space. However, different types of tours and means of transportation might create different dynamics.

Group ambiance, cohesiveness, participants' preparedness, personality and personal state, were highlighted multiple times for their potential as contributors to the process of destination image formation and also as mediators in the individuals' interpretation of new information. However, future research should pay dedicated attention to these elements, which are rather challenging to define, measure and observe in action. This study's findings suggest they may have crucial roles in the process.

Finally, the distinction between tourist experience and individual destination image was found confusing at times. The found evidence of the fundamental role of social interaction in the process of destination image formation and the suggested mediating effect of individuals' personal state, mood and enjoyment, discourages attempting to isolate and extract experience from destination image formation research. However, the conceptualization and role of experience into the process approached from a sociological perspective needs focused inquiry.

Appendix A - Interview guide

The interview guide is informed by the literature of destination image formation for the questions 1 to 7, therefore the influential sub-components identified in the literature (see Figure 6) are informing these questions. While the subsequent questions explore social aspects of the individual's character. Table 10 below explains the rationale behind the formulation of the interview questions.

Table 1 Interview questions' rationale

Objective	Section	Question number
To identify the functional-holistic, psychological-holistic and unique elements composing the individual's destination image. The investigation is not especially interested in any specific attribute or attraction, but only in the holistic destination image held by the participants based on the elements or characteristics which are salient to them in relation to the information they have or think they have	Opening questions	1, 2 & 3 Source: adapted from Echtner & Ritchie, 1991, 1993
To provide some context and indications about what type of information participants have or think they have about the destination, in what way they gathered them and how do they feel about them	Information sources and Visitation	4 & 5 Refer to synthesis of destination image literature (Figure 6)
To contextualize the individual's relationship with Jordan. The information can reveal more about the image of the destination given the traveling motives and the expression of the need that is to be satisfied with the trip	Personal and social factors	6 & 7 Same as above
To foster the emergence of some personal social characteristics of the participant, which might help the understanding and interpretation of the social interactions during the trip	Personal and social factors	8, 9 & 10 Same as above
To contextualize demographically the group members	Background information	11, 12 & 13 same as above

SOCIAL INTERACTION AND DESTINATION IMAGE

Interview Guide

Opening questions

1. What images or characteristics come to mind when you think of Jordan as a vacation destination?
2. How would you describe the atmosphere that you would expect to experience while visiting Jordan?
3. Please list any distinctive or unique features that you can think of in Jordan.

Information sources (pre-visitation)

Questions aimed at identifying the sources which contributed to form their destination image

4. How did you learn this information about Jordan?

Probe: magazines, friends, the news, the Internet

→If friends, or others:

- a. what is the relationship with these people
- b. what did they tell you?
- c. what (do you think) is their opinion about Jordan?

Visitation (pre-visitation)

5. Have you ever visited Jordan before?

Follow up: have you ever visited other countries of the Middle East before?

Personal and social factors (re-phrase post-visitation)

Questions about the individual's relationship with the destination

6. How did you decide to visit Jordan?

Probe: any specific incident, any specific interest, particularly influential friends?

7. Why have you decided to travel to Jordan? Why do you want to go to Jordan?

8. How would you describe your travel experience?

Probe: very experienced, moderately experienced, not so experienced?

Follow up: based on what criteria? How many domestic and/or international trips have you taken in the past 5 years? How many of these were group tours? What destinations did you travel to? How would you describe someone who is the opposite of you in terms of traveling experience?

SOCIAL INTERACTION AND DESTINATION IMAGE

Questions aimed at eliciting some social attitudes and individual's character details (rephrase post-visitation)

9. How do you expect the group you will be traveling with to be?

Probe: what kind of people do you expect to be on the tour with you?

10. How would you describe the atmosphere you would expect to be formed within your traveling party?

Probe: friendly, formal, distant?

11. How do you imagine your relationship with the rest of the group to be?

Probe: friends, reserved

Collected background information

12. Travel companion

13. Gender

14. Age range 18 – 25; 26 – 35; 36 – 45; 46 – 55; 56 – 65; 65+

15. Education level?

Appendix B – More on collage creation

In order to provide more details about the collage creation elicitation tool, I attach a paper proceeding from this work and focused only on this method.

Collage creation as an elicitation tool in tourism academic research

Anna, Pavesi, Basak, Denizci-Guillet, Rob, Law, Ryan Smith

Abstract

This paper aims at proposing collage creation as an elicitation tool of underexplored potential in tourism research by presenting its noteworthy contribution to a research project.

Research that requires richness of in-depth and detailed information constitutes a challenge: when information is not entirely rationally elaborated by individuals (e.g. destination image, ideal experience, etc.) traditional elicitation techniques (e.g. words association) are not enough, at times.

Collage creation was included as an elicitation tool within the methodology of an exploratory research investigating the destination image of Jordan. This work focuses on the challenges and the solutions adopted in relation to the tool development, and stresses the assessment of the tool-related trustworthiness, in this specific application.

Collage creation as an elicitation tool proved efficacious in encouraging participants' thoughts elaboration, aiding self-expression and disclosing preconceptions and stereotypes. Both tourism and hospitality research could benefit by its potential through further tool development.

Keywords: Collage creation, destination image, elicitation tool, qualitative research method, research tool development

Introduction

This paper suggests collage creation as an elicitation tool of great potential in tourism academic research by reporting one application investigating tourist destination image.

Collage creation is defined as the selecting, cutting and pasting of pictures, texts or fragments of any material and proceeding from any source, onto a flat surface (Davis, 2008; Butler-Kisber, 2010). It is considered a projective technique included in art informed research (Davis & Butler-Kisber, 1999), exceptionally accessible, flexible, and capable of retrieving conscious

and unconscious connections and feelings (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Davis, 2008), as well as visual and non-visual knowledge (Koll, Wallpach, & Kreuzer, 2010). Despite its impressive potential, it remains almost unknown in tourism research.

Tourism research rarely employs art informed techniques. The widely researched tourist destination image for example has not explored the potential of this tool for investigating the multiple facets of the concept. The use of pictures in tourism research is not new, and examples of the use of picture association (MacKay & Fesenmaier, 2000; Prebensen, 2007) and visuals examination (Nicoletta & Servidio, 2012) aim at the identification of common images associated with a tourist destination or the influences of promotional material and other information sources on a destination's image.

Destination image has been consistently recognized as a complex construct, multidimensional and comprising cognitive and affective, conscious as well as unconscious elaboration of stimuli, making destination image a non-tangible outcome of a non-tangible process (Gallarza, Saura, & Garcia, 2002; Echtner & Ritchie, 1993; Tasci, Gartner, & Cavusgil, 2007). This approach implies that the individual is not a logical thinker, able of logically elaborate the thinking process and be aware of it, it rather implies that some determining elements of destination image are not available at the awareness level. For the complexity of its construct, destination image poses a challenge to researchers who aim at investigating destination image in its complexity, which requires reaching below the common images readily accessible at the surface of awareness.

This difficulty interests a range of research areas comprising non-tangible and not-observable phenomena: perceptions, memories, personal experiences, emotions and attitudes are just a few examples. The challenge calls for a tool that reaches deeper strata of individuals' cognition, and is capable of retrieving information that might not be rationally elaborated. The collage creation tool for free elicitation constitutes one plausible answer to this challenge.

Literature Review

Examining the literature on collage creation it becomes readily apparent that there is no method development thread. One would expect to find a series of subsequent applications being discussed, adjusted and improved building on reported experiences: it is not the case with collage creation. Different applications have remained isolated in their disciplinary silos. Studies which employed the tool belonged to different fields of knowledge and research and do not refer to each other's works across disciplines.

The praised potential

The technique of collage creation is often employed as a channel of expression in therapeutic

and recreational fields (Davis, 2008). Its applications in academic research appears sporadic and mostly concentrated in fields such as psychology, nursing and education (Butler-Kisber, 2008, 2010; Davis & Butler-Kisber, 1999; Davis, 2008; Mannay, 2010). The researchers who employed it appreciate collage creation for the ability of succeeding where language and text fail. These are communication channels that allow the elaboration of one thought at a time only, which the individual has to be rationally aware of in order to communicate it. This is not necessary in collage composition. The creative activity of selecting fragments their re-shaping, juxtaposition and combination produces a visual representation of the complex inter-related determinants that the composer attributes to the object being represented. It is the creative process that retrieves attributes of verbal and non-verbal nature, which might be present at both a conscious and unconscious level (Davis, 2008; Butler-Kisber, 2008). This property makes collage creation a powerful tool in a therapeutic and pedagogical environment, and for the same property it constitutes an option worth exploring for the investigation of non-tangible concepts such as tourist destination image. The technique is rarely found in academic research and in tourism there are only a couple of examples (Prebensen, 2007; Wagner & Peters, 2009).

Collage creation modes of application

Collage creation is found either as an elicitation tool for the researcher's personal use, or introduced to the study participants. While the two modes have different objectives and application methods, both highlight and appreciate the same multiplicity of characteristics displaying the versatility of the tool.

Its application for personal use of the researcher is mostly to be found in the fields of psychology and education. Davis and Butler-Kisber (1999) suggest collage creation as a strategy for contextualization in data analysis for facilitating uncovering relationships within the data thus encouraging a deeper and more holistic understanding of it. Donna Davis (2008), applied it to a self-study on eating disorders and self-body image. It allowed her to uncover verbal and non-verbal meanings, as well as conscious and unconscious connections established within her own self, in relation to the addressed matter.

A different approach is to present participants with the activity for them to compose a collage. Mannay (2010) presented it to a group of working-class mothers and their daughters who were asked to compose a collage illustrating their everyday life experience in the context of social housing in an outskirts area in England. Collage creation allowed to turn a situation personally familiar to the researcher into an unfamiliar form: the researcher was able to approach the research topic almost as an unknown phenomenon and mitigate the risk of introducing personal biases.

Other isolated examples can be found in the research areas of product development (Sanders, 1992) branding (Koll et al., 2010) and tourism (Prebensen, 2007; Wagner & Peters, 2009).

Sanders (1992) maintained that products' failures were to be attributed to the inadequacy of tools employed by scholar and practitioners for retrieving costumers' latent needs not retrievable from the individuals' awareness sphere; moreover they could not accommodate different types of intelligence that understand through different processes and communicate through different modes. Sanders (1992) maintained that collage creation as a participants' activity improved the traditional verbal and text methods due to the ambiguity inherent in the visuals which enabled a multiplicity of interpretations and connections. Koll *et al.* (2010) concluded that among three elicitation methods, including words association, storytelling, and collage creation, collage creation emerged as the technique retrieving the largest amount of brand knowledge per participant, while also eliciting feelings, previous experiences and unconscious and non-verbal knowledge.

In tourism research, Prebensen (2007) appears as the pioneer of this tool's application. The author aimed at evaluating the ability of three elicitation methods, including pictures association, words association and collage creation within and in-depth interview, in identifying the image of a destination. The researcher finally evaluated positively the combination of elicitation methods for their ability of eliciting different types of images in comparison to one single method. Wagner and Peters (2009) followed on Prebensen's (2007) footsteps applying collage creation to the investigation of destination internal branding research and praised its ability of enabling different voices to emerge while uncovering in-depth insights.

Methodological questions

When we looked for indications of what guidelines were provided to the participants however, we found that they were only briefly mentioned. For example, there was generally no indication on what type of background was provided, what colors, whether participants had to comply with a standardized size for the collage outcome. From the studies' methodologies it transpires that the material provided for the task completion, such as magazines, for pictures and text, was generally not standardized, implying that participants were composing their collages with varying stimuli across the sample. The cross-disciplinary literature exposed a deficiency in the clarity of exposition of the tool application and highlighted that there is no tool development thread: the works featuring collage creation do not refer to each other and present noticeably different applications of the tool.

Large differences and lack of clarity in reporting were noticeable also for data analysis: the majority of the works do not explain how data analysis is conducted at all nor by whom, a unique exception is represented by Koll *et al.* (2010) who mention data analysis was carried out by two research assistants coding independently first, and then discussing towards consensus; some of these studies asked participants to interpret their own creations on a

voluntary basis (e.g. Sanders, 1992) or as a task's guideline (e.g. Prebensen, 2007 and Wagner & Peters, 2009): this practice has finally been acknowledged as most desirable in order to mitigate the risk of meaning distortion (Koll et al., 2010) given the intrinsic ambiguity of the method.

The variety of application and especially the lack of clarity in the methodological choices and the rationale behind them emerged as the biggest challenge when attempting to develop a robust and trustworthy collage creation tool for application in academic research.

In light of the difficulties found in applying the tool and the resulting added value it brought to the research project in which we implemented it, this work reports a practical application of the tool in academic research. With the twofold objective of presenting collage creation as a valuable tool with under-explored potential in academic research and providing a point of reference for other researchers, this transparent account focuses on the collage creation tool development and application, its contribution to the research project and its trustworthiness as a research tool for data of qualitative nature.

Method: tool development and application

The application of the tool was intended for a work interested in the elicitation of in-depth, verbal and non-verbal, conscious and non-conscious knowledge of Jordan's destination image subsequently aiming at cross-sample comparability. In light of this requirements we developed the collage creation tool through post-literature review discussion. While a creative activity without defined guidelines maximizes the spontaneity of knowledge elicitation, we settled on creating a set of clear guidelines. For the sake of cross-sample comparability, homogeneity of conditions was considered most desirable. Guidelines comprised the selection and nature of visuals in respect of pictures copyrights, background surface for the composition, its inclusion within an in-depth interview and data analysis, while continuously assessing tool-related trustworthiness.

In order to clearly identify any additional value brought by the novel tool the collage creation activity was preceded by, and clearly distinguished from a series of open-ended questions. These were adapted from the work by Echtner and Ritchie (1993) who focused on developing a standard for destination image investigation.

Tool development: material and guidelines

Pictures selection was planned in order to eliminate the concern of potential copyright violation and mitigate two major risks of bias introduction, i.e. researcher's personal preference and leading participants' choices. Pictures were retrieved from a website providing free images for public use. The website presents images divided into albums. In order to mitigate researcher's pictures preference we selected a mixed subjects' album and selected

every tenth image. From this first collection repeating subjects were eliminated by choosing the one which appeared first in the on-line album. This procedure left us with a set of 40 images: we judged this an appropriate amount allowing for enough choice without becoming overwhelming.

The mixed subjects' album provided a variety of portrayed subjects and scenes which were unrelated to the destination. While in some cases pictures displaying destination's attributes might be the desired condition (Prebensen, 2007), in our specific case a mix of pictures unrelated to the destination was considered most appropriate in order to decrease leading participants' choices. In addition, informing the participants that the pictures were not portraying the destination in any of its parts proved to decrease apprehension of being tested on their preparation.

The last visual item for the composition activity is represented by the background surface. We agreed on providing the same six-cardboard set to every participant: colors were black and white, red and green, blue and yellow, also known as the psychological primary colors (Hurvich & Jameson, 1957; Krantz, 1975) and the cardboards measured 33cm x 24cm.

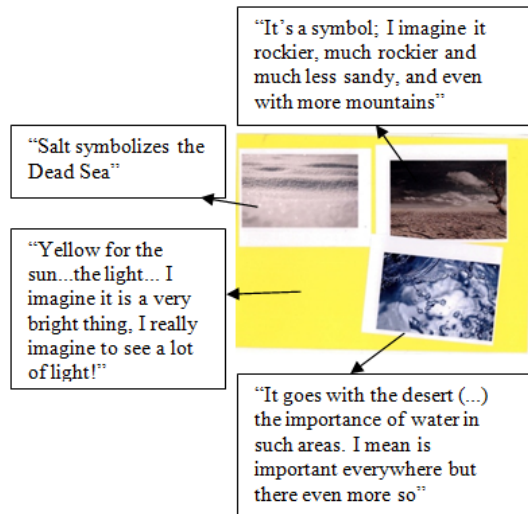
The collage creation activity is meant to be a tool for free elicitation aided by pre-selected visuals: minimal guidelines were provided for the task completion. Participants were asked to compose a collage displaying their image of Jordan by using the provided material. The only limitations were that the choice of visuals was limited to the provided set, the final outcome should measure the size of one cardboard and they were required to explain their choices and thoughts throughout the composition. Otherwise researcher's intervention was limited to asking questions in case some emerging point required further elaboration.

To summarize, the interview started with open-ended questions aimed at getting the participant to talk and elicit conscious and verbally available knowledge and feelings; subsequently every participant was introduced to the collage creation activity in form of a game. The interview would tackle the challenge posed by the multiplicity of interpretations possible, while the interview structure enabled the identification of the tool added value.

Tool development: data analysis

While the ambiguity inherent to the visuals and multiplicity of potential interpretations possible represent part of the potent elicitation potential of the collage creation tool, it also represents a major threat of meaning distortion. The potentially infinite plausible interpretations of both the individual visual items and the final composition outcome make unthinkable a confidently accurate interpretation by the researcher, or a third party. Recognizing the unsuitableness of the researcher for the interpretation task, the collage creation activity was paired with an in-depth interview. Demanding the explanation during the

actual creation has the advantage of retrieving the thought process of the participant leading



to her/his choices as well as her/his personal interpretation of the final result of the creative effort. Data analysis was conducted by the leading author by coding the elicited knowledge items, themes and their characteristics from the interview transcripts data; data elicited by the open-ended questions and the collage activity were maintained separately. The visual outcome of the composition process was coded by picture through the participant's own explanation.

Figure 1 Illustrating sample

Participants

The study participants were ten individuals forming a group scheduled for the same ten-day group tour to Jordan within a week time. Participants did not know all of the other participants to the tour: some were traveling in pairs while the majority were joining the group singularly.

Results

Having documented the tool development and application throughout the previous section, this section aims at showing the contribution of the tool to the research project. Given the focus of this paper and the space limitation, we will report only the aggregated general findings and a selection of two distinguished examples out of the sample.

General findings

Participants tended to first choose one cardboard or a combination of cardboards' fragments forming the background of the composition. While the common color was yellow, nobody choose black nor white. On average the collage activity took one third of the total interview time. The activity was received skeptically at first, but gained participants' favor throughout the task.

Data analysis of the interviews distinguished between open-ended questions and collage creation present some congruencies and some differences in the images' retrieved. In order to illustrate the tool's contribution we selected one among the most eloquent samples, and one theme, that of stereotyping, as it emerged from one other sample participant. These are reported hereafter.

Illustrating Sample

After long hesitation at the question about what are the images coming to his mind when thinking of Jordan, Alex stated that the only image was a reinforced concrete building in the

middle of a bare square. It took a number of subsequent probing questions for retrieving that Jordan is a tranquil place, with honest people; there is also a desert which attracts his interest and Petra, which is some famous archeological site.



Figure 2 Theme example

From the collage creation activity emerges (Figure 1) that Alex's Jordan is a very sunny place flooded with strong and bright light. In this occasion he accompanies a description of the desert: it is not a sandy one, it is rather rocky and scattered with mountains, or rock formations. The desert is not just a location within the destination, it is a general climatic condition generalized to the entire country, in fact water is scarce and it represents a source of concern there. An additional feature, or natural attraction of the destination emerges, the Dead Sea is a unique characteristic of the destination. Petra however is not mentioned anymore.

Theme example

Answering the initial open-ended questions, Mila describes Jordan socially as Arab, which turns out to be a difficult concept to describe.

During her collage creation, Mila notices a picture and exclaims: "this is very Arab" (See Figure 2). Now Mila is able to define some more what "Arab" means to her, and partially it has to do with physical features, such as a darker skin color compared to hers, wearing colorful clothes and tunics, an economy based on small scale stall-based markets, a mostly obsolete urban-development and living in a societal structure informed by the Islamic religion.

Discussion

At the end of the activity Alex exclaims in surprise: "you see that a lot of things are coming out?!" referring to the fact that before starting the collage he felt at difficulty in describing any thoughts about Jordan. The creative activity not only aided the elicitation of latent cognitive image items, such as the description of the desert and the existence of the Dead sea, it also retrieved non-verbally expressed feeling of concern and empathy for the country's situation in terms of water availability indispensable to life. It also highlighted that Alex's main interest is the natural environment of the destination.

Alex's case was striking because at the start of the interview he seemed to have no accessible image of the destination at the awareness level. As maintained by Sanders (1992) it was also possible that his communication mode was so synthetic that was preventing any message from coming through, or that it needed different vehicles different from only verbal recollection. The "Arab" theme emerged from four of the collages. All of these participants mentioned Arab as a descriptor of the social component of the destination presented as a primary concept

difficult to explain. The probing questions aimed at opening the concept proved to frustrate the participants. Like in Mila’s case, the creative activity aided at least partial disclosure of a concept which contains stereotypes and preconceptions in relation to the local social and economic environment.

Collage creation contributed to the research project by retrieving a wider range of image’s elements and especially much more detailed compared to the open-ended questions. Some items were excluded from the collage, suggesting a lower prominence in the bigger picture; some elements re-emerged and were expanded upon and some new elements emerged: among which some were latent but cognitively accessible, while others were not verbally explained e.g. empathy, nor rationally elaborated, e.g. stereotypes.

The research findings confirmed the tool’s praised characteristics found in the literature, and also shows the valuable contribution in tourism academic research.

Lastly, the concerns and threats we faced during tool development and implementation are hereafter brought together: the tool-related trustworthiness assessment was planned with the tool development and is addressed hereafter.

Trustworthiness

Table 1 Trustworthiness assessment

Threats	Dimension	Strategy
Multiplicity of interpretations	Meaning distortion	Interviews Participants’ check
	Study repeatability	Method’s trail
Researcher’s bias	Participants’ voice Researcher’s reflexivity	Face-to-face interview Notes about personal reflection Minimal interference in creation process

The trustworthiness of a study is determined by the plausibility of its findings and the credibility of the processes employed for reaching them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Table 1 displays the threats identified in relation to this specific application. For every threat we identified the affected dimension menacing trustworthiness, and we present the strategy we adopted for tackling the threat. For example, findings’ plausibility might be compromised by the multiplicity of possible data interpretations. In order to allow the study repeatability we documented meticulously the tool development and implementation and we make it available to scrutiny and reference.

This paper has reported an application of collage creation as an elicitation tool in a research project investigating the tourist destination image of Jordan. With the main purpose of presenting the great potential of collage creation in tourism academic research this paper showed the valuable contribution of its implementation and its trustworthiness as a tool in tourism research. Tourism research often faces challenges posed by the investigation of non-tangible phenomena: tourist destination image and cultural stereotypes are two examples. Perceptions, memories, personal experiences, emotions and attitudes also pose the challenge of investigating connections that can be non-conscious and knowledge that can be non-verbal and not rationally elaborated. This work contributes to tourism research by presenting collage creation as an additional tool, found effective through application, which reaches deeper strata of individuals' cognition.

This study is a first attempt of a rigorous application of the tool intended to provide an incisive contribution to its development. We suggested that further experimenting with its application would contribute to the improvement of an efficient collage creation practice for academic research, which could benefit both tourism and hospitality research: exploratory research designs or mixed method research projects including preparatory phases would benefit by the application of the collage creation tool as it represents one plausible response to the challenges that investigating a non-tangible process presents.

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