



“How Do You Like Iceland?”

The role of the Icelandic Foreign Service in Destination
Promotion

Anna Sigríður Þórðardóttir

Lokaverkefni til BA-gráðu í stjórnmálafræði

Félagsvísindasvið



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

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Leiðbeinendur: Silja Bára Ómarsdóttir & Jón Gunnar Ólafsson

Stjórnmálafræðideild
Félagsvísindasvið Háskóla Íslands
Júní 2011

Ritgerð þessi er lokaverkefni til BA-gráðu í stjórnmálafræði og er óheimilt að afrita ritgerðina á nokkurn hátt nema með leyfi rétthafa.

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Reykjavík, Ísland 2011

Útdráttur

Meginmarkmið ritgerðar þessarar er að varpa ljósi á hlutverk íslenskra sendiráða í landkynningu. Lögð er til grundvallar tvíþætt rannsóknarspurning. Í fyrsta lagi er spurt hvort að landkynning spili hlutverk í starfsemi sendiráða og ef svo, þá hvernig? Rannsókn er byggð á fræðilegum ramma sem tengir saman hugtökin “place branding”, “soft power” og “public diplomacy”. Eigindleg rannsókn var framkvæmd þar sem spurningalisti var sendur til íslenskra sendiráða erlendis. Einnig voru tekin tvö viðtöl við einstaklinga sem vinna hér á landi við að kynna Ísland í útlöndum. Umfjöllunin varpar ljósi á mikilvægi landkynningar sendiráða og hlutdeild menningar í landkynningu Íslands. Bankahrúnið sem átti sér stað árið 2008 og gosið í Eyjafjallajökli árið 2010 vöktu mikla athygli erlendis og hafa íslensk stjórnvöld þurft að endurskoða ímynd landsins á erlendum vettvangi. Mætti ætla að íslensk sendiráð gegni stóru hlutverki í þessu samhengi. Niðurstöður sýna að íslensk sendiráð erlendis þjóna ákveðnu hlutverki í landkynningu Íslands og jafnframt að þáttur þeirra er mismikill. Færð eru rök fyrir því að meiru væri áorkað ef fjárframlög til sendiráða væru aukin og starfsfólki fjölgað.

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to examine the role of Icelandic embassies in destination promotion. A research question is laid out asking whether destination promotion plays a role in the operation of embassies, and if so, how do they use it? A theoretical framework discussing the terms “place branding”, “soft power”, and “public diplomacy” is presented to provide a foundation for the research of this thesis. A qualitative research was carried out in which a list of questions was sent out to Icelandic embassies abroad. Furthermore, two interviews were conducted with individuals in Iceland whose occupation entails promoting Iceland abroad. The discussion illustrates the importance of destination promotion within embassies and the role that culture plays in the promotion of Iceland. The economic collapse that took place in 2008 and the volcanic eruption in Eyjafjallajökull in 2010 placed Iceland at the center of global attention and Icelandic authorities have been “forced” to reassess the image of the state abroad. Results show that Icelandic embassies pursue destination promotion in different proportions and in relation to different priorities. It is argued that with increased funding and more staff each embassy could increase their role in destination promotion.

Formáli

Ritgerð þessi er lokaverkefni mitt til BA prófs í stjórnmálafræði við Háskóla Íslands. Hún er metin til 12 eininga (ECTS) af 120 eininga námi í stjórnmálafræði og 60 eininga námi í ferðamálafræði. Leiðbeinendur voru Silja Bára Ómarsdóttir og Jón Gunnar Ólafsson. Þeim vil ég þakka fyrir góða leiðsögn og gott samstarf. Ég vil einnig þakka foreldrum mínum og systur fyrir allan þann stuðning sem þau veittu mér við skrifin.

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1. Introduction

It can be stated that many Icelandic citizens are not familiar with the role and importance of Icelandic embassies abroad. It may therefore be due to a lack of knowledge that people tend to argue that their tax money is not being well spent on the Foreign Service. Perhaps having been influenced by the media, many might be inclined to link embassies merely to luxury and cocktail parties. Some might also consider embassies to be outdated agencies that serve little or no purpose in modern society. While cocktail parties are in fact a crucial aspect of the job at an embassy in terms of creating relationships, there is a larger, more significant side to the occupation of an embassy official that most people are perhaps unaware of. It can be seen as the role of the government, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and its embassies to ensure that the citizens of Iceland understand the importance of their Foreign Service, since it is providing service for the people of Iceland. This service is paid by the state or in other words, paid by the tax payers in Iceland. Therefore it is possible to argue that it is important for tax payers to know what their tax money is being spent on.

The topic of discussion introduced here is too wide to examine adequately in this thesis but it is definitely an important and interesting topic for further research, i.e. the research on the attitude of the Icelandic people towards the Foreign Service and Icelandic embassies abroad. The main objective of this thesis is to look at one side of the previously introduced topic; the role of Icelandic embassies in relation to destination promotion and more specifically, the promotion of Iceland. Few people outside of the Foreign Service perhaps fully know and understand what the daily operation of an embassy entails. Therefore the input of embassy officials is significant to back up the framework constructed in the thesis. An original theoretical framework will be introduced in order to put the subsequent results of the research in a theoretical context.

This thesis is an original contribution to the academic field of public diplomacy. In order to explore the topic, it engages existing academic research on place branding, soft power, and public diplomacy. All three terms are directly related to the core of diplomatic relations and Foreign Service operations. These three fields are all relatively new and can be linked to modern foreign policy. In order to understand the role of an embassy it can be argued that it is crucial to obtain direct information from officials that work there. A list of ten questions was therefore sent out to a random selection of 17 Icelandic embassies and consulates in order to gain a perspective on how the staff members view the role of the embassy, i.e. both in terms

of their job and in terms of what they believe the operation and purpose of an embassy should be.

I believe that the topic of public diplomacy in relation to the Foreign Service is one that needs further research. The reason for my interest in this topic may be connected to the fact that I have personally lived abroad and witnessed the daily operation of Icelandic embassies. My father works for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and for that reason I have lived with him in both Vienna and Tokyo. Although cocktail parties were in fact part of his job at the embassy, I witnessed and understood the importance of that aspect of the job as well as many other sides to his role at the embassy. First and foremost and according to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, an Icelandic embassy is “a symbol and a representative, of the sovereignty of the state, of which it was sent. Its role is to conserve the sovereignty and guard, in every respect, the interest of Iceland towards other states.”¹

In the following pages, public diplomacy, place branding, soft power and smart power will be examined. The theoretical framework mainly focuses on the works of Simon Anholt, Peter Van Ham, Daryl Copeland and Joseph S. Jr. Nye. These four individuals are the most known contributors to the three concepts explored in this thesis. To narrow down the field of research I will solely be looking at the efforts of the Icelandic Ministry for Foreign Affairs, its embassies and its local agencies, Promote Iceland (Íslandsstofa) and ÚTÓN (Útflutningsskrifstofa Íslenskrar Tónlistar, referred to as Iceland Music Export in English), whose role will be clearly explained later in the thesis. Promote Iceland and ÚTÓN were picked due to the fact that they are institutions focusing specifically on the promotion of Iceland and are public institutions serving directly under the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

The thesis focuses on the daily operations of an Icelandic embassy² when it comes to destination promotion. Do Icelandic embassies use destination promotion and place branding? If so, why do they do it? How do they use it? The aim of the following theoretical framework is to provide a foundation for the research of this thesis.

¹ This definition is translated into English by the author. The definition is provided by the Head of Cultural Affairs at the Icelandic Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

² It has to be kept in mind that due to the small size of the state, Icelandic embassies are very few with not many employees.

2. Theoretical Framework

The following theoretical framework focuses on three concepts: place branding, soft power, and public diplomacy. In order to create a theoretical foundation for the responses obtained in the research, these terms need to be closely looked at. The interrelationship between place branding, soft power and public diplomacy is the focus of this framework. Although the connection between place branding, soft power and public diplomacy is becoming more apparent and a more common topic of discussion, “their relationship has never been clearly defined or described, mainly because there is little consensus on the definition of the terms” (Anholt 2010, 40).

To begin with, the concept of place branding will be examined. That discussion is subsequently followed by an analysis of the concept of soft power. Finally, the term that connects place branding and soft power; public diplomacy, will be closely looked at. Since culture plays an integral part in all three concepts, this thesis will examine what defines culture in terms of the three concepts in a subsequent discussion.

2.1. Place Branding - The United States of Coca Cola?

It can be argued that the world is one large place consisting of many smaller places with differing characteristics.³ The world consists of major powers and small powers, branded places and un-branded places. A question to be kept in mind is whether the image of a place can be seen as stable. Is it possible that a crisis can suddenly alter the image of a place? Authorities of each state pursue their foreign policy in different ways and therefore react to international crisis in different ways and manage their image in different ways.

Since the focus of this thesis is on Iceland, the state will be the case study throughout this chapter. Having recently gone through an economic collapse, Iceland has in the past three years had to focus on its image and the rebuilding of trust. As a Nordic country, Iceland has always been a sort of “model”; an ideal place of peace, happiness, and equality. After the financial crisis, it is safe to say that the country has gone through an identity crisis as well and in the times of crisis it is inevitable for a place to go through an introspective process, addressing its identity (Chartier 2010).

³ In light of the various interpretations of a place, it is important to note that in this thesis, the word place will be used in all cases where the discussion is not specifically about a state. Whether it is a city, a municipality or a region that is being discussed, the word place will be the common name in the following pages.

In a continuously more globalized society, the relationship between states has become more intricate than ever. It can be argued that the image of a state has become more important and one can even go as far as to say that a state has become a brand when it comes to presenting its global image. In one way or another every region has become a part of this process of place branding. Places such as states, cities and regions have been promoting their attractions and their images throughout history. Places have felt the need to do this because, “they have always needed to attract settlers, customers, visitors, traders, investors and the category of people we today call ‘influencers’” (Anholt 2010, 1). Due to globalization it could be argued that places are increasingly feeling the need to concentrate on managing their image: “To stand out from the crowd and capture significant mind share and market share, place branding has become essential” (Van Ham 2008, 4). Also, the advance of globalization means that every state, city and region must compete with every other for its share of the world’s commercial, political, social, and cultural transactions. It therefore becomes critical for a state to have a brand image (Anholt 2010). Van Ham claims that the dynamics of international politics is affected by place branding, “and that a new “great game” of politics is emerging, this time not about oil and trading routes but about image and reputation” (Van Ham 2008, 147).

The term “place branding” has only emerged recently and has been a topic of academic discussion for approximately the past two decades. There is limited empirical research in the area of this topic and too little is known about place marketing practices and its tools. Copeland believes that the assessment of the success of place branding will be a major topic for research in the future. He wonders how we can find tools to evaluate the success of place branding in both qualitative and quantitative terms. This topic for research may be a complicated one, “since the world may be understood as a massive and complex communication network with multiple transaction streams (e.g., tourism, business, immigration, etc.), attempts to influence image and reputation are both difficult to achieve and near impossible to measure” (Van Ham 2008, 133).

As mentioned before, place branding is a new term and “there is still no agreement on what the concept is and whether a nation (state) can be branded” (Fan 2008, 155). According to Daryl Copeland, the term “branding” consists of the shared perception of a place, product, or person around which those interested can congregate (Copeland 2009). A state has the quality of being fair and impartial, it also has the power to shape and influence. The state’s image and brand are therefore key players in its international standing: “In this information-

saturated age, all countries – but especially those without significant economic and military power – have come to depend on their images and reputations, which is to say, their national brands, to achieve vital objectives” (Copeland 2009, 147).

It can be argued that the close connection between places and products has existed for a long time. Some international products are strongly linked to a place, either to where the product was made, where it was originally produced or where the product exists. Products can range from being material objects and food, to natural attractions and man-made attractions. In some cases where there is no specific place branding campaign, products and corporate brands can almost act as the ambassador for a place’s image in the world, and are a clear indication of the soft power⁴ practiced by the place. Some examples of corporate international brands that represent their state and vice versa are: Coca-Cola (America), Toyota (Japan), Nokia (Finland), IKEA (Sweden), and although a small brand, Skyr.is (Iceland). These are all examples of material product brands, but examples of cultural brands are the following: Elvis Presley (America), Pokémon (Japan), Sauna (Finland), ABBA (Sweden), and Björk (Iceland).

One could say that branding a place is much more than just finding a catchy slogan or having a cool cover image. It requires the study of a place’s soft power sources in order to exploit them effectively to promote the place’s image. Many places offer a very similar product: similar territory, infrastructure, system of government, educational system, etc. Due to this similarity, “places must compete with each other for investment, tourism, and political power, often on a global scale” (Van Ham 2008, 129). A state may decide to host a large international event to take on a large branding opportunity. For example it may host the Olympic Games or the FIFA World Cup. Another branding opportunity for a state may be when global corporations announce expansion plans. When it comes to place branding some scholars believe that a place needs a project of national visibility to be noticed (Van Ham 2008).

In today’s globalized world it is significant for a place to have good management in terms of governance, since good management could save the image of a place under negative circumstances. In the case of Iceland and the financial crisis, it is possible to say that it lacked good management: “The lack of importance the government placed on good communication affected its relations with both Icelanders and the international community” (Chartier 2010, 60). Poor management by authorities can in fact destroy the good image of a place. This type

⁴ The term soft power will be defined and discussed in a subsequent sub-chapter.

of image management can come from governments, the public sector, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, etc. In order to become successful in place branding, a place needs to make full use of its resources and without good leadership the resources are not exploited to their fullest potential. A place's image needs management just like a product or a corporation needs management: "There seems little doubt that if the world's governments placed even half the value that most wise corporations have learned to place on their good names, the world would be a safer and quieter place than it is today" (Anholt 2010, 43).⁵ According to Anholt, there is little or no evidence to suggest that private-sector marketing techniques can change national images (Anholt 2008). However, he has also stated that successful place branding practices require professional leadership, just like the professional management done at private firms or in terms of a business project.

Despite his incomplete and somewhat problematic explanation of a place brand and place branding⁶, according to Risen, "Anholt encourages governments to coordinate policy with trade, cultural relations and tourism to manage their image and reputation, which is important to furthering the aims of the government, industry and population in the era of globalization" (Risen 2005). Place branding is different from product branding as it is rarely under the control of one central authority, it usually has multiple stakeholders that have competing interests. The belief is that the bigger the "brand" the better known the place and it is likely that places that develop a popular brand image are more likely to attract more "place customers" than a location that has less brand familiarity. In order to be successful, it can be claimed that not only does a place need to have its own unique identity but it also needs to be visible to the rest of the world.

It can be argued that most states that we know are in fact branded. We connect them to a brand and this may be the reason we know them. There are however many states in the world that can be said to be "unbranded". The unbranded state can have a difficult time attracting

⁵ It could be argued that this statement lacks the basic understanding of what a state is. A state does not choose its "customers" or population. A person is born a citizen of the state and this person probably does not abandon the state as easily due to its bad image, unlike a customer might abandon a company.

⁶ Simon Anholt developed the concepts of "nation brand" and "place brand." In an interview in September 2010 Anholt clearly states that a nation brand should not be confused with the term of nation branding. He states that he did not coin the term "nation branding" and that it seems to contain a promise that if a country doesn't like its reputation, it can manipulate it using the techniques of marketing. "This promise is a lie. Places are judged by what they do and what they make, not by what they say about themselves" (Carey 2010, 95). This argument can be disputed since the term nation branding is widely used, in direct connection to the term "nation brand." Interestingly enough, the term nation branding can be found in some of Anholt's publications. This could show the incomplete definition of both terms. Followed by this observation, it can be argued that Anholt's theory on place branding is somewhat problematic.

economic and political attention (Van Ham 2008). The reason for this is that unbranded states stay under the radar and out of media attention. Just as most people know a branded state, few people know an unbranded state they have never heard of. All unbranded states have the risk of not being in charge of their image and reputation and therefore do not have full control over their own brand (Van Ham 2008). An example of a possible negative impact to an unbranded state is the state of Kazakhstan in relation to the film *Borat*. In it, the main character is a fictional Kazakh journalist traveling across the United States to make a documentary to show the people of Kazakhstan the life in America. The film proved popular and “makes the audience believe that Kazakhstan is a backward and anti-Semitic country” (Van Ham 2008, 142). Before the release of the film, Kazakhstan was practically unknown to the majority of the Western world. It can be argued that *Borat* “introduced” Kazakhstan to the people in the West. Bad publicity is what some might call it, but it was nonetheless publicity that made the country more visible on the global scale. The film *Borat* created panic within the government of Kazakhstan which spent a large sum of money on a campaign in an effort to reverse this negative image stamp: “Hence, their desired future image is one that encompasses its progress, aiming at establishing Kazakhstan as a respected partner considered an equal within the club of western nations” (Stock 2009, 186). This example shows clearly how much of an impact the role of media and globalization has in terms of place branding. It is debatable whether this impact was negative or positive for the state of Kazakhstan. In relation to this example it can be concluded that when a state receives publicity that does not portray its right image, it begins to focus on its image, takes measures and may even start a branding campaign.

In order to create or emphasize a place’s positive image, it can be said that it is important for a state to use soft power: “States as well as international organizations vie for political authority and loyalty in a dense and highly competitive market, embarking upon a quest for the hearts and minds of people both at home and around the world” (Van Ham 2008, 4). The term used to describe the way to grasp “hearts and minds of people” by means of culture, political values and policies is called “soft power”.

2.2. Soft Power – The “womanly touch” on foreign policy?

When looking for a definition for place branding it can be argued that it is theoretically impossible to overlook some of its key components. One component is a concept introduced by Joseph S. Nye Jr. and is called soft power. A place's brand is determined by its culture, political ideals, and policies. These factors are similar to Nye's soft power resources: “The soft power of a country rests primarily on three resources: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority)” (Nye 2004, 11). Soft power is a relatively new term and most existing literature on this subject matter is mainly focused on the United States and its ways of portraying soft power.

Policies of public diplomacy⁷ and place branding can boost soft power and soft power can boost place branding as well as public diplomacy. As previously mentioned, soft power grows out of a state's culture, domestic values, and out of the state's domestic and foreign policies. A lot of the effects of a states' culture are outside the control of the government. In the case of China, which in its current economic boom is trying to use soft power to enhance a positive global image; it still “lacks the many non-governmental organizations that generate much of US soft power (for example)” (Nye and Wang 2009, 19). There is still a lot a government can do in terms of generating soft power as its role is not only to control but also to inspire. The notion of soft power entails getting others to want the same result as “you” want. That requires understanding how they are hearing “your” message and reacting accordingly. Some states accomplish almost all of their public diplomacy through actions rather than broadcasting.⁸ In general, it can be stated that soft power is about forming cooperation from others without threats or payments (Nye 2009).

In terms of place branding and soft power, a global popular culture is what most states try to attain. Continuing with the example of China; given the domestic problems that China must still overcome, there are limits to China's ability to attract others: “Culture has become a more important source of national solidarity and creativity and therefore becomes a factor of growing significance in the competition in overall national strength” (Nye and Wang 2009, 20). In relation to this observation it can be claimed that the asset of soft power is very important with regard to a state's foreign policy, diplomatic skills, and overall strength.

⁷ The concept of public diplomacy will be defined in the subsequent sub-chapter.

⁸ This idea will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent chapter on public diplomacy.

When it comes to power, it can be argued that soft power alone does in most cases not succeed. Another term becoming common in the discussion of public diplomacy is “smart power”. Smart power can be seen as a combination of hard and soft power. Hard power is often defined as the use of economic and military strength to make others follow “your” will. Hard power alone, just like soft power alone, does in most cases not succeed in relevance to foreign policy and global cultural popularity. According to Nye, great leaders know how to combine the two (soft power and hard power) to exercise smart power, “through which they generate trust and mobilize people around forward-looking agendas” (Coutu 2008, 56). The idea of smart power is not solely an academic discourse but has become a very notable and important concept in international relations. According to Wilson III, “the growing interest in smart power reflects two contemporary trends, one structural and long-term, the other short-term and conjunctural, driven mainly by the policies of the current administration” (2008, 111). This can be noticed in the emphasis that the current government of the United States places on the subject matter. Hillary Clinton is a good example of a leader that focuses on smart power. For instance, at her confirmation hearing as the United States Secretary of State, she emphasized the term smart power in order to point out the importance of soft power and underline the fact that she is tough and experienced:

We must use what has been called smart power, the full range of tools at our disposal—diplomatic, economic, military, political, legal, and cultural—picking the right tool, or combination of tools, for each situation. With smart power, diplomacy will be the vanguard of our foreign policy. This is not a radical idea. The ancient Roman poet Terence declared that “in every endeavor, the seemly course for wise men is to try persuasion first.” The same truth binds wise women as well (Hertzberg 2009).

Clinton emphasized the importance for the United States to reassert global influence, telling the Foreign Relations Committee of the United States Senate that the state cannot do everything in isolation (Lewis 2009). Using soft power, as part of her emphasis on smart power, Clinton often appears as a guest on popular television shows when she goes on diplomatic visits. For instance, during her visit in Indonesia in 2009, “Hillary Clinton began (the day) by appearing on a leading TV chat show in Jakarta, where she spoke of her favorite music - the Beatles and the Rolling Stones - and tackled world issues” (news.bbc.co.uk). In this way she focuses on cultural values and popular culture (media) in order to relate to the public of the state she is visiting.

As can be noted in her previous quote, Clinton links the side of soft power to a womanly touch in politics and foreign policy. Following the economic crisis in Iceland, many have come to believe that it was the masculine hard power tactics that led the state into turmoil. Despite its emphasis on egalitarian policies and conduct, Iceland's economy was mostly controlled by men. This relation could be considered as a metaphor. It could be argued that what was and is missing in terms of power in modern western society is soft power and maybe what would have worked and would work the best could be a mix of the two; smart power. The idea of smart power is still being developed and by itself provides for an interesting topic of research. Smart power, along with soft power and place branding are all part of a bigger concept, the concept of public diplomacy.

2.3. Public Diplomacy – Is foreign policy similar to a television show popularity contest?

The term “public diplomacy” is sometimes presented as an official policy turning soft power resources into action (Gilboa 2008). However, the characteristics of public diplomacy need basic national credibility in order to translate cultural resources into the soft power of attraction.

Public diplomacy bears similarities to the term discussed in the first sub-chapter, place branding, “a practice that, at its best, seeks to narrow the distance between perception and reality and keeps pace with identities in constant evolution by attempting to fix them, at least for a time, within an adaptable frame” (Copeland 2009, 170). Public diplomacy is the strategy of appealing to the core values of foreign audiences by using new techniques that are frequently directly derived from commercial practice (Van Ham 2008). In 1987, the U.S. department of State defined public diplomacy as a concept referring to, “government-sponsored programs intended to inform or influence public opinion in other countries; its chief instruments are publications, motion pictures, cultural exchanges, radio and television” (Sun 2008, 173). Conceptually, public diplomacy is related to place branding since both concepts combine foreign policy goals with internal soft power strategies. A significant element for place branding and public diplomacy is to build both personal and institutional relationships with foreign audiences by focusing on values. This attribute sets the two terms apart from classic diplomacy, which first and foremost deals with issues (Van Ham 2008).

Gilboa mentions that the knowledge available on the tools of public diplomacy is inadequate and therefore leaving considerable gaps. The little focus on public diplomacy and its characteristics of international exchanges and nation branding may be at the expense of the

great attention that international broadcasting and cultural diplomacy are receiving (Gilboa 2008). He believes, like other scholars of public diplomacy that progress in public diplomacy research is very much needed because of how it is increasingly becoming important in foreign policy and diplomacy: “Public diplomacy research cannot be sufficiently accumulated without theory design and implementation, and the best way to promote theory is to initiate a new scientific program dedicated to this effort” (Gilboa 2008, 75).

The current definition of public diplomacy comes in many forms and has been under development in the past years. The definition has changed and been contested. According to Bruce Gregory, “the term public diplomacy was adopted by practitioners in the United States in the 1970s as an alternative to propaganda, which had negative connotations, and as an umbrella label for the U.S. government’s international information, cultural relations, and broadcasting activities” (Gregory 2008, 275). It has also been defined as a term that describes how states, associations of states, and non-state actors understand cultures, attitudes, and behavior; build and manage relationships; and influence opinions and actions to advance their interests and values. Tuch for example, defined public diplomacy as “a government’s process of communication with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation’s ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and policies” (Tuch 1990).

The size of a state can influence the way it approaches public diplomacy. Small and medium-sized states face a different set of challenges than major powers for instance: “A major power is going to be the subject of discussion and controversy no matter what it does. Generally, the smaller powers do not enter the global public discussion unless a crisis or scandal envelops them” (Batora 2005, 6). A good example of a small state that gained increased attention due to a crisis is Iceland. The Icelandic political scientist, Gunnar Helgi Kristinsson is quoted as saying: “The only thing most people have ever heard about Iceland is that it went bankrupt” (Chartier 2010, 97). Shortly after the financial crisis, Eyjafjallajökull erupted, which placed Iceland at the center of global attention, again. The volcanic eruption stopped air-traffic which left many people frustrated and stranded in airports around the world. It is possible to say that the image of Iceland in the past three years has in fact been a negative one. On the other hand, it can be argued that Iceland received a lot of publicity, which as mentioned before can be good in terms of promotion.

Despite the lack of a concrete definition, many would probably agree that public diplomacy focuses on connecting with a population rather than a state. Governments promote

values, policies, and interests abroad by connecting with people and influencing public opinion of the international community (Copeland 2009). According to Nye, “public diplomacy is an instrument that governments use to mobilize these resources to communicate with and attract the publics of other countries, rather than merely their governments” (Nye 2008, 95). Just like place branding, public diplomacy cannot be reduced to slogans and images. Public diplomacy is based on a complicated relationship between three major sectors: the government, the media, and public opinion (Soroka 2003).

A government actively managing a global brand may just be a one-way flow of information, in which the full potential of public diplomacy is unlikely to be achieved: “Inherent in both perspectives is that effective public diplomacy is rooted in strategic people-to-people communication in the effort to establish a sustaining relationship” (Payne 200, 579). A crucial characteristic of public diplomacy is the conversation between people and therefore it can be said that public diplomacy is based on dialogue rather than monologue (Copeland 2009). When people are overwhelmed with the volume of information confronting them, it is hard to know what to focus on; and according to Nye, too much information turns attention into a rare resource (2008). It is possible to argue that public diplomacy as well as place branding should consist of acts of persuasion and not compulsion and therefore it is crucial to have professionals that are trained to apply these tools of soft power. Diplomats, who according to Copeland are indispensable for building bridges between people, can develop and manage the national brand, exercising its soft power in order to advance interest (2009). As will be highlighted in the research of this thesis, diplomats and embassy staff have direct influence on the concept and role of public diplomacy.

According to Leonard there are three key dimensions to public diplomacy (2002). All three dimensions can be directly associated with the main research topic of this thesis, and it can be said that all should play a role in the public diplomacy, soft power and place branding of an embassy operation. The first dimension is daily communications, which involves explaining the context of domestic and foreign policy decisions. The second dimension is strategic communication, which develops a set of simple themes much as a political or advertising campaign does. The third and final dimension is the development of lasting relationships with key individuals over many years through scholarships, exchanges, training, seminars, conferences, and access to media channels. All of Leonard’s dimensions can be considered as the key characteristics of public diplomacy within the Foreign Service and the operation of embassies.

Places in general (states, cities, municipalities, regions, continents, etc.) depend on their international standing as ever before and along with place branding, public diplomacy and soft power play a crucial role in that standing. The aim of this framework was to decipher the interrelationship between the three terms of place branding, soft power, and public diplomacy. It can be argued that the three terms are characteristics of modern foreign policy and that public diplomacy acts as the leading characteristic. All three terms have a somewhat open definition and are very intertwined. Having laid the theoretical foundation, we now turn to the case study in the next chapter.

3. Research and Method- Culture, Promotion and the Foreign Service

As mentioned earlier in the thesis, the concept of culture plays an important role in the definition of place branding, soft power, and public diplomacy. The following discussion is a brief introduction to the role of culture in modern society. These ideas are based on the recently published book, *Icelandic Cultural Policy* by Bjarki Valtýsson. This book was chosen due to its specific focus on the link between modern discussions on culture and state policy in Iceland. The book was used to provide a foundation for the subsequent discussion on culture in terms of destination promotion within the Foreign Service.

Defining culture has been said to be a difficult task and the definition of culture can vary from person to person. It is a common discursive theme to distinguish between high culture such as literature, art, and education, which many argue appeals mainly to elites; and popular culture such as music and movies, which focuses on mass entertainment. It can be said that cultural promotion is a field of study that can have conflicting parties. The parties can be the state, the market, artists, producers, consumers, cultural institutions, companies, municipalities and bigger international corporations. The cultural policy of a state can be influenced by political means and a democratic discussion but the market's main goal is to earn as much money as possible in the shortest amount of time. The state needs to make sure of protecting and prospering cultural earnings as well as developing cultural awareness. The market, while trying to sell and earn money, is becoming more aware of the importance of culture and arts for positive imaging (Bjarki Valtýsson 2011).

Many studies have the aim to get closer to defining the term culture and discussions span from the term Matthew Arnold's idea of "high culture", to more modest definitions such as "popular culture", a more broad idea of culture, i.e. which surrounds our environment and affects all our actions, conversations, and events. The aim of the research to be introduced in the subsequent chapter of this thesis is to see how officials within the Foreign Service and officials within the promotional sector in Iceland view culture. More specifically, the aim is to see whether the officials merely think of high culture, such as art, music and literature when it comes to promoting Iceland in cultural terms. As explained in the previous chapter on soft power, popular culture has been gaining more importance in terms of foreign policy and public diplomacy. The example presented on Hillary Clinton doing guest appearances on popular television shows underlines that importance. It can be said that high culture has become only one aspect of a state's culture as popular culture increasingly reaches a wider audience.

According to the book *Icelandic Cultural Policy*, the positive view on globalization in terms of culture claims that, “an international melting pot of states increasingly enables individuals, societies, states and international organizations to exchange ideas, cultural diligence, human resources and technical inventions” (Bjarki Valtýsson 2011, 29). International corporations, international markets, international organizations (such as the UN, the EU, and NATO) and non-governmental organizations (such as the Red Cross) have a significant influence on global image, how we experience reality and develop a sense of identity. However, it can be said that the state still stands strong and little evidence suggests that this will change in the near future (Bjarki Valtýsson 2011). It can therefore be argued that international organizations still need the stability and the support of a state. The state is a leading force when it comes to funding and distribution of funds for cultural promotion. The state and the market compete for cultural authority in terms of public relations and image; this statement is to be kept in mind when looking at the research in the subsequent chapter, where the ways in which cultural promotion is currently being executed in Iceland will be discussed.

It can be claimed that the market wants to increase financial growth; and that the state wants the power to control cultural promotion of the society and shape a specific cultural awareness that holds the different individuals of modern society together. The cultural policy of the state is therefore not only there to inform and raise the public but also to maintain cultural boundaries and certain cultural values. A clear example of this is, “the emphasis that all the Nordic countries place on the development of national identity and uniformity in national culture to set them apart from the non-uniformity of international society” (Bjarki Valtýsson 2011, 63). This quote emphasizes the influence globalization has on the definition of culture and how culture has become something that the state may need to make sure to maintain and even protect. Therefore it can be argued that the state of Iceland, its authorities and in essence, its embassies have the power to shape and define the concept of Icelandic culture to the rest of the world. The concept of culture will be examined in relation to the research in the following pages.

3.1. Method

As previously mentioned, the aim of this thesis is to see whether and how Icelandic embassies use destination promotion and place branding in their operation. In order to gain some knowledge on the subject, a list of ten questions was sent out to fifteen Icelandic embassies

and two consulates that were on the contact list provided by an official at the Icelandic Ministry for Foreign Affairs.⁹ The questionnaire was sent out on February 25th 2011 and the respondents were asked to reply within three weeks. Six embassies and one consulate answered the questionnaire completely and some sent documents and reports as well. Three embassies did not respond. One embassy responded, but did not answer the questions. Two embassies referred to the head of Cultural Affairs at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. One embassy and one consulate requested a phone call so that they could answer the questionnaire verbally. Two embassies responded and stated that the staff had no time to respond to the questionnaire. Unfortunately, answers were not received from a couple of Iceland's larger embassies, which would have given the research a more solid foundation. This limitation must be kept in mind when interpreting the results.¹⁰

In order to gain knowledge on the view from “abroad” it was important to send out a list of questions to the embassies. However, in order to see more of a complete picture of promotional activity it was also crucial to gain some knowledge on what is being done “at home” in terms of destination promotion. While sending out a list of questions to embassies abroad, a list of similar questions was also sent to Auður Edda Jökulsdóttir, the head of Cultural Affairs at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. She responded to the questionnaire and attached numerous reports and files, which will be referred to in the following pages. Two individuals were interviewed in order to gain a wider perspective on the promotional projects “at home”. The first interview was with Andri Marteinsson, project manager at Promote Iceland, an agency under the Ministry for Foreign Affairs which oversees promotion of Iceland abroad:

Promote Iceland (Íslandsstofa) has the basic objective of strengthening Iceland's good image and reputation abroad, bringing together in one voice the promotion of Iceland in addition to supporting the competitive standing of Icelandic industries in foreign markets and attract foreign tourists and

⁹ The answers are kept by the author and can be obtained if a further comparison is to be made.

¹⁰ The neighboring states of Iceland (Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland) can almost be excluded from this research since only one embassy (Sweden) answered the questionnaire. A dominant discussion among the public in Iceland has been the one of the importance of having embassies in the neighboring Nordic states. Many people question the importance and believe that the embassies in those states serve little purpose. For this reason and in relation to this research, it can be said those embassies may even have had more of a reason to describe their daily operation.

investments into the country. Other objectives include marketing for the local industry and promotion of Icelandic culture abroad (islandsstofa.is).

Promote Iceland operates based on the “public-private” system, which is a system based on authorities and the economic life working together. With the establishment of Promote Iceland in 2010 all marketing aspects in the promotion of Iceland abroad were placed under the agency’s authority. The other interview conducted for this thesis was with Anna Hildur Hildibrandsdóttir, managing director at ÚTÓN (the Icelandic Music Export Office), which is also an agency under the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. These two individuals were chosen due to the fact they represent both agencies, Promote Iceland and ÚTÓN, which are directly under the Icelandic Ministry for Foreign Affairs and cooperate with some embassies abroad.¹¹

As mentioned before, a list of ten questions was sent out to several Icelandic embassies. Each of the following sub-chapters refers to a theme reflected in the answers to the questions.¹² The aim of this questionnaire was to receive first-hand information from embassy officials that are familiar with the daily tasks of an embassy. The list of questions along with the e-mail that was sent to the embassies is to be found in the appendix of this thesis.

Both the questions for the embassies abroad as well as the questions for the agencies at home were all formulated with the aim of receiving clear answers about promotional projects. Not only was the aim to receive a list of projects or a schedule of daily tasks; however, it was also to gain a perspective on how the respondents personally feel about their role in promoting Iceland and its culture. In order to understand the role of promoting a state’s culture, it can be considered significant for the individual that is performing the job of promoting to have a clear picture of what culture is.

¹¹ It is important to keep in mind that Promote Iceland is a much larger agency than ÚTÓN with a wider set of obligations and a larger number of staff.

¹² The following research was conducted in Icelandic and therefore have all quotations and other pieces of information been translated by the author.

3.2. A View from Abroad

3.2.1. Embassy's cooperation with Promote Iceland

Since Promote Iceland was established in 2010 under the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, more emphasis has been placed on cooperation between the agency and Icelandic embassies abroad. Almost all embassies claimed that they have a positive relationship with Promote Iceland. Some have barely worked with the agency but are slowly increasing their cooperation with it., while others have a few successful projects behind them and are in extensive contact with Promote Iceland. There was however one embassy which expressed a negative relationship with the agency following a failed project. For this reason, the embassy has not contacted Promote Iceland again.

One of the larger embassies, the embassy in Berlin, has an office which an employee of Promote Iceland can use when staying in the city. The embassy in Tokyo cooperates with travel agencies and even has an office for one in the embassy itself. Despite this extensive cooperation with travel agencies, this embassy does not work much with Promote Iceland. While some embassies listed a couple of smaller successful projects in collaboration with Promote Iceland (e.g. smaller promotional events), others simply stated that good cooperation exists with agencies such as Promote Iceland.

3.2.2. The meaning of culture to the person and the job

As mentioned previously in the thesis, the meaning of culture is important to look at in terms of public diplomacy and the operation of an embassy. When looking over the responses there were quite different interpretations of what culture is. One mentioned that Icelandic culture is a tool to promote Iceland, therefore underlining the importance of culture in promotion.

The embassy in Berlin referred to a definition introduced by an Icelandic philosopher, Þorsteinn Gylfason, who stated that, “culture is that which is well done.” In relation to this quote and according to the embassy in Berlin, the embassy needs to present what is done well in Iceland and that can be success in literature, art, music, architecture and even success in terms of social and equal rights matters. This response indicates that one may connect political aspects to culture while others might see no relation between the two. Political values and the political environment are in most cases shaped by the people of a state. In most cases, people vote for political leadership and in that way express their needs and beliefs. Politics can be considered a form of expression, just like art is considered a form of expression. However, when referring to the definition of culture in the beginning of this sub-chapter, “culture is that which is well done”, it can be said that politics do not always fall under that

category. It can be argued that culture generally has a positive meaning, while politics often have a negative connotation. Since there is no clear definition of culture, it cannot be ruled out that political values can be part of that definition and embassy staff might consider it appropriate to promote or present these values in their work. When looking back at the concept of soft power which was examined in a previous chapter, one of its three main characteristics is in fact political values. This is a philosophical discussion which can be argued and would be an interesting topic of research.

Most respondents, when thinking of Icelandic culture mentioned art, music, literature, and film. Aspects of high culture seem to be the first to be mentioned when thinking of culture. According to Valtýsson, it can be stated that the most common definition of culture will be the one that has an impact on those decisions made in relation to culture. The consulate in Winnipeg for instance stated that art promotion and culture promotion are very closely related. This definition is reflected in the examples of promotional events held at the consulate, “we started the art/cultural project nunanow.com which will be held for the fifth time this year. We have had meetings with travel agencies, and host “Iceland week” with art-, tourism-, and food promotion.”¹³

Different states seem to have different interests in Icelandic culture. The embassy in Tokyo stated that, “Icelandic literature is popular in Berlin, while it is unknown here in Tokyo where Icelandic music is very popular.”¹⁴ It can be said that each embassy has a different role in terms of destination promotion, each embassy needs to be aware of the local “clients” interest. Locals of one country may be more interested in the Icelandic nature while locals of another country may be very interested in Icelandic design. Therefore it can be concluded that each embassy needs to “play it by ear” in terms of how they want to execute their promotion of Iceland.

According to the head of Cultural Affairs at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, there is no specific cultural policy for the embassies, however there are some guidelines that the embassies can follow. Some of the information provided by the head of Cultural Affairs presented an idea of what is taking place in terms of cultural promotion at embassies abroad. Three documents presented a plan for the promotion of modern art, literature, and design within embassies. Referring to the documents provided by the head of Cultural Affairs, it

¹³ The Consulate of Iceland in Winnipeg. E-mail. February 24, 2011.

¹⁴ The Embassy of Iceland in Tokyo. E-mail. March 3, 2011.

seems that the Ministry for Foreign Affairs is making plans to increase Icelandic cultural promotion within embassies abroad.

3.2.3. Daily job description

In order to understand the daily operations of an embassy, one of the questions in the questionnaire referred to the daily tasks at the embassy. In terms of service provided at the embassy, most respondents stated that it consisted of answering requests, either by phone, e-mail, or in person. In relation to promoting Iceland as a tourist destination, some embassies have meetings with travel agencies and other travel companies (the embassies in Tokyo, Berlin, and the consulate in Winnipeg). Most mentioned traveling brochures and CDs being available at the embassy and found it crucial to have promotional material available in the local language. In Tokyo for example, there is a special room available for people to listen to CDs about Iceland. One mentioned answering the media (i.e. presenting Iceland on television, in magazines and newspapers) and taking part in “travel expos”. Some embassies also assist Icelandic travel agencies to find business contacts in the host country. The answers obtained reflected that each embassy has different emphasis on destination promotion. This could depend on the location of the embassy, but it could also truly depend on the running of the embassy, who the ambassador is, and which employees work at the embassy.

Promotional duties are part of every embassy’s regular tasks, however each embassy has a different emphasis on the duty of promoting Iceland. A very interesting point that a couple respondents made was the fact that almost everything that the employers of the embassy do is promotion in one way or another. It could be interpreted that the general duty of an embassy is to promote the state. Only three embassies answered this question in the form of a percentage, in which the answers were 30% (Stockholm), 30% (Washington D.C.), and 10% (Brussels). These numbers can be considered very low in comparison to the emphasis the respondents placed on destination promotion. The rest of the embassies mentioned that it is difficult to give an exact proportion of promotional tasks and that the emphasis may vary depending on what projects are being focused on at the time. Some embassies mentioned the low number of staff and the large number of other projects as preventers in their promotion of Iceland. For example, the embassy in Washington D.C. stated: “In the past two years, the number of employees has been lowered by 1.30 occupations, while at the same time there has been an

increase in the number of projects if anything.”¹⁵ In general, most could not give a solid answer on the proportion of promotional projects. However, most mentioned a few projects currently under way and most realized the importance of promoting Iceland, but stated that staff shortage and lack of funding are the reason for it not being a large part of the embassies’ daily tasks. One ambassador discussed his personal efforts of promotion, “I, as an ambassador have placed emphasis on having promotional events at the ambassador’s residence or elsewhere on Icelandic literature or arts.” Here one can see the different interpretations made by embassy staff. While one person states that everything that is done at the embassy is promotion, another person states that very little is done in terms of promotion and another person underlines the importance of personal efforts in terms of promotional projects.

As can be noted in the following sub-chapter and the subsequent chapter on the interviews, both the respondents from the embassies abroad and the interviewees at home believe that promotion is important. Therefore it is peculiar that there is not done more in order to reflect that importance.

It is possible to conclude that the embassy in Tokyo for instance spends more time on destination promotion than the embassy in Vienna and Brussels for instance. Another important point is that some Icelandic embassies are the only place for locals to obtain information on Iceland: “The embassy is in fact the only place in Japan where the Japanese public can get to know Iceland and Icelandic culture.”¹⁶ It can be concluded that those embassies that act as the only representative of Iceland in an area should emphasize destination promotion, while other embassies can focus their attention on other projects. In most Icelandic embassies there is an employee who can answer questions from the locals in the local language. According to one embassy, these employees need to visit Iceland at their own expense to get to know the country. Since they are the ones promoting Iceland to the locals, it is crucial for them to be familiar with Iceland. The fact that embassies do not cover the expenses for the local employees to visit Iceland can be food for criticism.

¹⁵ The Embassy of Iceland in Washington D.C. E-mail. April 6, 2011.

¹⁶ The Embassy of Iceland in Tokyo. E-mail. March 3, 2011.

3.2.4. Importance of destination promotion in the operation of the Embassy

According to the responses, almost every embassy believed that destination promotion plays a crucial role in the operation of an embassy, and that it is more important today than ever. Some stated that due to the financial crisis and the need for an increase in tourists visiting Iceland, destination promotion is becoming more important. The competition for tourists is increasing in today's globalized world and that is a driving force within an embassy: "The image of Iceland where Icelandic embassies are located is shaped by the visibility of the ambassador and embassy and its hospitality."¹⁷ One mentioned the term "public diplomacy" in terms of today's emphasis on destination promotion and claimed it to be crucial in the operation of an embassy.

All embassies' responses suggest they are doing their very best to promote Iceland. The embassy in Tokyo mentioned that there is a constantly growing number of tourists from the country to Iceland. According to the embassy in Vienna more money is needed in order to create material with information on Iceland in Hungarian and in the Czech language to attract tourists from Hungary and the Czech Republic. Some embassies also mentioned that more could be done if there were more employees within the embassy.

It seems as if the interest of the employees to do more in terms of promotion is there. It is however, possible to conclude that the employees like to state that they are doing their very best in terms of promotion, but perhaps the lack of funding, lack of time and lack of emphasis on promotion within in the embassy or the Ministry for Foreign Affairs are standing in the way.

Most embassies answered that it would be nice to have embassy staff whose only role would be to focus on destination promotion. However, most also believed that there is not enough funding for that to happen. Others said that it would be good to have an employee who oversees everything that has to do with destination promotion, whether as a full or part-time job. The respondent at the embassy in Tokyo stated that the embassy had recently hired a salaried employee having the title tourism representative. The consulate in New York also has a tourism representative on its staff. This fact could create some confusion, and it is possible to wonder whether the embassy in Tokyo and the consulate in New York received a dispensation from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Another explanation may be that the embassy and consulate managed their funding in such a way that made it possible to hire a

¹⁷ The Embassy of Iceland in Brussels. E-mail. March 15, 2011.

tourism representative as opposed to hiring an extra embassy employee or spending the money on another matter.

Almost all embassy responses emphasized that the importance of destination promotion is increasing rapidly. A clear answer was given by the embassy in Brussels: “The short answer is yes, and its importance is increasing due to increased globalization and global cooperation.”¹⁸ In addition, the embassies found Icelandic destination promotion growing in importance due to the financial crisis and volcanic eruption in Eyjafjallajökull.

3.2.5. Budget for promotional purposes

Most of the embassies repeatedly stated in their responses that limited funding is provided for promotional purposes. This statement was then usually followed by the reason that a financial crisis is taking place in Iceland. No embassy receives a specific amount merely for destination promotion purposes. They do however receive an amount for cultural purposes and they can also apply for a special disbursement for certain projects relating to destination promotion. According to the head of Cultural Affairs at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, embassies do not receive specific funding for promotional activities, “they receive funding based on a cultural plan and disbursement applications, and are required to send in a financial report at the end of the year.”¹⁹

There are some key similarities in the answers given. When asked about funding for destination promotion every embassy answered that there is insufficient funding. As well as mentioning that there is not enough funding, almost all answered that it is hard to request increased funding due to the current financial crisis: “Looking at the situation today, it is clear that not much money is being spent on destination promotion at the embassy. This probably reflects the financial environment in Iceland today. Hopefully funding will increase as soon as the economy improves.”²⁰

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ The Head of Cultural Affairs at the Icelandic Ministry for Foreign Affairs. E-mail. March 8, 2011.

²⁰ The Embassy of Iceland in Vienna. E-mail. March 18, 2011.

3.3. A View from Home

3.3.1. Cooperation between Promote Iceland, ÚTÓN and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and its embassies

Both individuals interviewed at home mentioned that they do not cooperate with all Icelandic embassies, and that in fact cooperation only exists with a limited number of embassies. Promote Iceland's main focus is on the importance of enabling and spreading Icelandic business to other places around the world. Its primary focus is on business opportunities, while the operation of ÚTÓN is focused solely on the promotion of Icelandic music abroad. Promote Iceland is mainly in cooperation with the embassies in Berlin, Beijing and the consulate in New York. It should be noted that most of Promote Iceland's collaboration is with the eight embassies which have a hired business representative on their staff. A meeting between Promote Iceland and a business representative from an embassy takes place twice a year. Ambassadors are also invited to a meeting at Promote Iceland once a year. According to the project manager at Promote Iceland, it seems that the ambassadors are increasingly becoming aware of the advantage of cooperation with the institution and are seeing greater opportunities for Iceland in the world market: "They are acknowledging the gain in meeting with companies and hearing what the economic life has to say. It varies how much they can follow up on this matter; of course they are running an embassy abroad and do not have the so-called business representative that oversees these business-oriented matters. They try to help as much as they can."²¹

When discussing some successful projects with Icelandic embassies, the project manager at Promote Iceland mentioned a project called "Made in Iceland" which is currently being promoted in Beijing, China. The project, which was the embassy's initiative, is a website and a trade directory for Icelandic companies to promote themselves in the Chinese market. All the information is also available in Chinese. The representative from ÚTÓN mentioned how important it is to have an employee at the embassy who speaks the local language, especially at embassies that are located in states far away from Iceland. Along with this employee it is also important to have information available in the local language in order to reach the most people. As seen in a previous chapter of the research, embassies also emphasize this importance.

²¹ Project Manager at Promote Iceland. Interview by author. Reykjavík, Iceland. February 17, 2011.

In general, Promote Iceland tries to create a platform for Icelandic companies abroad. ÚTÓN does a very similar job, but focuses exclusively on creating a platform for Icelandic music abroad. In some cases, cooperation with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and its embassies is necessary, but sometimes they play no role in the promotion.

3.3.2. The meaning of culture to the person and the job

Culture plays a significant role in the marketing aspect in Promote Iceland. While the more business oriented employer at Promote Iceland considered it difficult to define Icelandic culture, the more art oriented employer at ÚTÓN linked culture to “where she comes from and why.” She felt that Iceland has a good image due to the exciting culture and high levels of creativity. When discussing the term of destination promotion and culture (in this case, musical culture), she stated: “when talking about destination promotion it is usually connected to tourism, and then music is being used to decorate some event to promote Iceland. That is not music promotion.”²² She claimed that there is a large difference between a destination promotion where an Icelandic musician plays a few tunes and music promotion where the sole purpose is to promote the musician. Despite this statement, the managing director at ÚTÓN did not consider it negative to have Icelandic music as part of the state’s promotional event; however, she believed that ÚTÓN should not serve that purpose. The lines appear to be clear to her, but are they clear to everyone? This can be considered as the view from the outside in, the view from the artist that is serving his/her own interest. The embassies may however view Icelandic music as part of the culture and therefore use it as promotion.

The official at Promote Iceland believed that the line between culture and business is unclear. He stated that Icelandic culture creates national awareness, “currentl we are the featured guest in the Frankfurt Book Fair in Germany. There, our culture certainly gets introduced through the written language.”²³ Following the book expo the plan is to introduce Iceland as a tourist destination to the German public. This demonstrates the connection between culture and business, and how one can support the other.

²² Managing Director at ÚTÓN. Interview by author. Reykjavík, Iceland. March 11, 2011.

²³ Project Manager at Promote Iceland. Interview by author. Reykjavík, Iceland. February 17, 2011.

3.3.3. The role and importance of embassies in the operation of Promote Iceland and ÚTÓN

An interesting point was made by the representative of ÚTÓN who considered embassies to be more of a support system rather than a key player when it comes to promoting Icelandic music. She even questioned why embassies should play a role in introducing Icelandic music to the international market. She believed that people specialized in Icelandic music should be the ones to promote it, and that it is hard for understaffed embassies to have this specialized knowledge. Despite this thought, ÚTÓN does cooperate with some Icelandic embassies, mainly with ones in London, Berlin, Tokyo, as well as the consulate in New York.

The project manager at Promote Iceland believed that increased funding is needed in order for embassies to do more in terms of promotion. Both sources were adamant that too little money is spent on promotion, both in terms of their operation as well as the embassies' operation. Despite the lack of funding, the project manager at Promote Iceland stated that he has noticed an increase in cooperation with embassies as well as a more professional level of cooperation with them. When comparing the answers of both interviewees, it can be concluded that embassies play a disproportional role within the two agencies. With some embassies having a business representative on their staff, it can be claimed that it is important to have an employee at an embassy specialized in the field being promoted. The point made by the managing director at ÚTÓN on the importance of specialization in the subject of music is emphasized here; however, it can be claimed that hiring a business representative at an embassy might make more sense than hiring a music specialist. It can be argued that the idea of having a music specialist or an art specialist for instance, may be too limited of a specialization for the small Icelandic embassy.

3.3.4. The importance of destination promotion today

Both sources believed that promoting Iceland is very important and has become more important due to the financial crisis and the volcanic eruption in Eyjafjallajökull. The “Inspired by Iceland” campaign launched by Promote Iceland after the eruption has been a success according to the project manager and Promote Iceland will continue with that campaign in the next months.

ÚTÓN claimed that the Icelandic music industry has never had to deal with an “image crisis,” despite the financial crisis and volcanic eruption in Iceland. The managing director at ÚTÓN believed that Icelanders have become more aware of the “treasure” that they possess

after the financial meltdown in 2008. The treasure is the Icelandic culture, which is so rich and has many fans all over the world.

4. Discussion

As stated in the introduction, the aim of this thesis is to see whether and how Icelandic embassies use place branding and destination promotion in their daily operations. The theoretical framework on place branding, soft power, and public diplomacy provided the foundation for the research. The following sub-chapters discuss the results of the research.

4.1. Destination promotion and place branding, easier said than done?

The view from home and the view from abroad both expressed a positive outlook people have on destination promotion. Almost everyone believed that the importance of promotion is increasing and this point is clearly reflected in the theoretical framework. The importance of public diplomacy along with place branding is increasing in the modern globalized society.

Despite this agreement on its importance, it seems that it is difficult for embassies to commit fully to destination promotion. The lack of funding was the primary obstacle most respondents mentioned, the lack of staff came second, and time shortage was a factor as well. As can be noted earlier in the thesis, the percentages given by a couple of the embassies on the proportion of destination promotion were very low. These percentages contradict the statements made about the increased importance of promotion within the embassies' duties. It can be reflected that embassy officials realize the importance of promotion in the role of the embassy. On the other hand, it can also be reflected that the lack of funding and lack of staff is preventing embassies from increasing promotional projects.

It seems as if in order to pursue destination promotion to fulfill the demand, the state through the Ministry for Foreign Affairs needs to supply more capital for promotional projects. Ever since the economic collapse in Iceland and the volcanic eruption in Eyjafjallajökull, the increase in destination promotion has become a high priority among government officials: "The plan is to drastically increase marketing abroad and strengthen the foundation for tourism" (Guðni Einarsson 2008). Although this has been stated, authorities need to carry out their plans in order to increase the promotion of Iceland.

4.2. Is modern destination promotion too intricate for the small Icelandic embassy?

The duties of an embassy are in most cases in accordance with what is currently taking place in society. With the recent establishment of agencies such as Promote Iceland and ÚTÓN, it can be stated that the role of embassies in promotion has diminished. Perhaps the duty of promotion has become too extensive for an embassy to execute by itself and other agencies

need to pursue promotion of Iceland. It can however, also be argued that a crucial aspect of promoting Iceland is having promotional events and information available in the area in which Iceland is being promoted. This is the role that an embassy plays. In modern society a lot of exchanges take place through the internet or the telephone. Although the globalized world has become more technically advanced, it can be argued that “people to people contact” is in most cases a more effective approach when it comes to building relationships. It can therefore be concluded that it is also a more effective approach when it comes to public diplomacy and destination promotion. This concept was explained in more detail in a chapter in the theoretical framework focusing on the term “public diplomacy”. It can be stated that an embassy always has an advantage in terms of location when it comes to promotion, it has the authority to initiate a promotional event and shape the way it promotes Iceland to the locals of its host country.

Since this thesis only focuses on Icelandic embassies, it is impossible to make a generalization for all embassies around the world. Some large embassies of major powers such as the United States or China might have employees at the embassy that specialize in one subject. Cultural promotion for instance, may play a little role in their embassies’ operation while they might find business promotion more appropriate to promote their state. They might also place more emphasis on different aspects of destination promotion or they might even place very little emphasis on promotional events and projects. Icelandic embassies are quite few, with few staff members that have to oversee many different projects. These factors are not to be overlooked when examining the large task and large obligation of modern destination promotion.

When asking whether the task of destination promotion has become too intricate for the small Icelandic embassy, it can be said that this depends on the embassy. For example, the Icelandic embassy in Tokyo can be viewed as a role-model for other Icelandic embassies in terms of destination promotion. A tourism representative, an office for a travel agency, cooperation with airlines, numerous promoting events and an array of available information on Iceland in Japanese reflect that the embassy in Tokyo places much emphasis on promoting Iceland. While Tokyo places a lot of effort on destination promotion, Vienna, which has more of a focus on OSCE matters for instance, does not seem to have much time to spend on promotional tasks. Therefore it can be said that each embassy has its own way of operating and in some cases the task for destination promotion may be too large or complicated for an embassy to execute on its own.

4.3. How significant is culture when it comes to destination promotion?

Referring back to the theoretical framework of this thesis, place branding has become a more commonly used term in public diplomacy. It cannot be stated that a place is a brand or that a brand can act as an ambassador for a place. However, as previously mentioned, in contemporary society people tend to link a brand to a place and vice versa. Due to globalization it can be said that people around the world are more aware of other states and their cultures. This increased interconnection between people has perhaps changed the way in which people view culture and how they define culture. Ranging from pop culture to high culture, culture means different things to different people. In terms of destination promotion, it can be stated that culture should be something that “sells” and for it to sell, “other” people need to be familiar with it and link it to the place specifically.

In a recent article in *Fréttatíminn* published in January 2011, an interview was conducted with the director of marketing at Promote Iceland. According to the director there is a new ideology at Promote Iceland which is based on the idea of not only attracting tourists to Iceland based on the beautiful nature but that Icelandic products and service should encourage people to visit Iceland, i.e. culture, design and various other products. According to this article, the products and brands linked to Iceland are: banks, woolen clothing, Eve Online, fish and fish products, Sigur Rós, Björk, etc. This is emphasizing the point made about the link between products and places, which is discussed in the chapter on place branding in the previous theoretical framework. People tend to link products -both material products and cultural products- to places and vice versa. One can also conclude that products and brands are cultural aspects that play a significant role in destination promotion. For instance, the products mentioned in the article in *Fréttatíminn* can be said to reflect Icelandic culture.

An opinion poll conducted by Promote Iceland was presented in the previously discussed article. People from Denmark, the United Kingdom and Germany were asked what they thought of when thinking of Iceland. Most respondents primarily linked Iceland to nature. Other common answers were: volcano, economy, geography, and culture. When the same poll respondents were asked what Icelandic culture is, the most frequent answers were: Björk, Vikings and Iceland Airwaves (a yearly music festival held in Reykjavík). According to these results, history seems to play a large part in Icelandic culture in the eyes of non-Icelanders. None of the embassies in the research of this thesis mentioned history as being part of Icelandic culture. This emphasizes the point that each embassy decides what it presents as Icelandic culture. Perhaps the embassies base it on what aspects of culture they believe will

“sell”. According to the director of marketing at Promote Iceland there is a need to incorporate Icelandic culture and products to the promotion of Iceland. It can therefore be concluded that in the modern globalized society, Icelandic nature can no longer “sell” Iceland on its own.

Referring to the cultural discussions based on Valtýsson’s book at the beginning of this chapter, one of the main arguments made concerns the difference between the market sector and the state sector when it comes to culture. As mentioned earlier, the state and the market compete for cultural authority in terms of public relations and image. The “public-private” arrangement at Promote Iceland encourages the two sectors to work together and may therefore increase the success of promoting Iceland and its culture.

5. Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, the aim of this thesis was to see whether and how Icelandic embassies use place branding and destination promotion. The aim of the theoretical framework on place branding, soft power, and public diplomacy was to present and construct a foundation for the research conducted in the thesis.

Since not all embassies answered the questionnaire it is difficult to convey a complete picture of the role of Icelandic embassies in destination promotion. As mentioned earlier, answers were not received from a couple of Iceland's larger embassies as well as from the majority of the embassies located in the Nordic states. Answers from those embassies may have given the research a more solid foundation. This limitation must therefore be kept in mind when interpreting the results.

It can be concluded that Icelandic embassies do use place branding and destination promotion in their daily operations. On the other hand, with limited funding and lack of staff each embassy has a difficult time doing as much as they would like in terms of promoting Iceland. Despite the limited funding, each embassy pursues destination promotion in different proportions and in relation to different priorities. For example, instead of focusing on destination promotion the embassy in Vienna spends more time focusing on projects in relation to international organizations such as the UN and the OSCE. Both the embassy in Washington D.C. and the embassy in Stockholm stated that 30% of the embassy's operation is dedicated to destination promotion, and as mentioned earlier, the embassy in Tokyo spends a significant amount of time on destination promotion. Despite embassies not spending much time on destination promotion one cannot claim that they are being inefficient as their emphasis may be placed elsewhere.

As previously discussed, each state's interest in the state of Iceland may vary and therefore each embassy needs to meet different demands and operate accordingly. Although having the same core duties, each embassy operates in a different way. They place disproportional efforts on promotional tasks and also place a different emphasis on what aspect of Icelandic culture should be promoted. The locals of the host state can be seen as clients and the embassy needs to fulfill the clients' needs. Therefore it can be said that the Icelandic embassy acts as a brand representative (the brand being Iceland) when speaking in place branding terms.

The concept of an embassy has existed for many years while the three modern concepts of place branding, soft power, and public diplomacy are very new. It can be concluded that

the role of an embassy is directly linked to what issues are dominant in the foreign policy of the state that it is representing. Embassies can be considered as flexible institutions in terms of promotional tasks. There is no specific requirement made by the Icelandic Ministry for Foreign Affairs about the proportion and the way in which an embassy should promote Iceland. It can therefore be said that the ambassador of each embassy (the boss within the embassy) is also the head of destination promotion within the embassy.²⁴

When looking towards the future it can be said that it is important for embassy officials not only to state and realize the importance of destination promotion, but also to execute on that matter. It seems that some embassies are initiating projects connected to destination promotion, both on their own and in cooperation with agencies such as Promote Iceland; however, according to the research, destination promotion is only a small proportion of the daily operation of most Icelandic embassies. Since the Icelandic government has placed increased emphasis on tourism following the financial crisis and the volcanic eruption in Eyjafjallajökull, it can be stated that this applies to embassies as well. In order for authorities to carry out their plan on stimulating tourism in Iceland, it can be said that they need to realize the importance of enhancing the role of embassies in terms of promoting Iceland as a tourist destination.

When it comes to promotion, the emphasis generally seems to be more on the business aspect of promotion rather than the cultural one. This is reflected in the research that shows that embassies seem to be more inclined to hire business-oriented employees rather than art-oriented personnel. According to the previous discussion on the article on Promote Iceland in *Fréttatíminn*, it seems that the focus at Promote Iceland is to increasingly incorporate Icelandic culture and products in destination promotion. With agencies such as ÚTÓN, more specialized cultural promotion is being introduced and this type of promotion may increase in the future. A question to consider is whether this type of specialized promotion will be integrated into the operation of an embassy.

This thesis is an original contribution to the study of public diplomacy in relation to the Foreign Service in Iceland. It may not portray an exact picture of how Icelandic embassies work. Nonetheless, it provides us with a view of the way they conduct public diplomacy. The research shows that Icelandic embassies do not spend as much time as they would like on

²⁴ This may not be the case in the Icelandic embassy in Tokyo and the Icelandic consulate in New York, in which a tourism representative may act as the head of destination promotion.

destination promotion. In fact, destination promotion does not seem to be a high priority at the majority of the Icelandic embassies. However, if referring to what a couple of the embassies stated, everything that an embassy does is promotion in one way or another.

It can be difficult and even considered confusing to figure out what destination promotion entails. If the embassies are not promoting culture, are they promoting business? When looking back at a previous discussion it can be said that business, brands and products are in fact part of the state's culture. Is it possible to say that destination promotion always involves promoting culture, in one way or another? These questions would be an interesting topic for further research. It can be concluded from this research that there is no clear definition of culture in terms of destination promotion in the Icelandic Foreign Service. This may be considered negative when referring to the chapter on culture based on Valtýsson's explanation; since Icelandic embassies have the authority to promote Iceland and its culture, it can be said they need to have a clear idea of what culture is in terms of their job since that is the culture that is promoted.

After researching the topic of promotion in relation to embassies, it would be very interesting to research the general duties of an embassy instead of solely focusing on one aspect. Examples that can be examined in further research are: employees and careers in an embassy and the Foreign Service, the role of embassies in larger international organizations, etc. This thesis focuses on the research of how embassies serve the public, but the ones mentioned here are examples of how embassies serve different audiences.

In order for the citizens of Iceland to understand the role of their embassies further research needs to be done. Further research on this matter could then be presented in a manner that would enable the public to ask questions and receive fulfilling information on its Foreign Service.

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Appendix I

Icelandic version

Bréf hér að neðan ásamt spurningalista var sent til eftirfarandi íslenskra sendiráða og sendiskrifstofna: Sendiráð Íslands í Vínarborg, Sendiráð Íslands í Brussel, Sendiráð Íslands í Kanada, Sendiskrifstofa Íslands í Winnipeg, Sendiráð Íslands í Kaupmannahöfn, Sendiráð Íslands í París, Sendiráð Íslands í Helsinki, Sendiráð Íslands í Berlín, Sendiráð Íslands í Indlandi, Sendiráð Íslands í Tokyo, Sendiskrifstofa Íslands í New York, Sendiráð Íslands í Peking, Sendiráð Íslands í Osló, Sendiráð Íslands í Moskvu, Sendiráð Íslands í Stokkhólmi, Sendiráð Íslands í London og Sendiráð Íslands í Washington D.C.

Ágæti sendiherra,

Ég heiti Anna Sigríður Þórðardóttir og er að ljúka námi í Stjórn málafræði við Háskóla Íslands núna í vor. Lokaritgerð mín fjallar um framlag utanríkisþjónustunnar og sendiráða sérstaklega til að styrkja ímynd landsins með land- og menningarkynningum. Það virðist vera mikil vanþekking á starfi sendiráða hvað þetta varðar á Íslandi. Það er því afar mikilvægt að fá vitneskju um umfang þessa starfs frá fyrstu hendi. Því leyfi ég mér að leita til þín um aðstoð og væri afar þakklát ef hægt væri að svara eftirfarandi spurningum. Ég bið annaðhvort þig eða annan starfsmann sendiráðsins að svara þessum spurningum, það væri frábært ef að sá aðili sem mest er inn í landkynningarmálum myndi svara spurningunum. Allt annað efni og ábendingar um efnið væru vel þegnar.

Ég hef sjálf búið erlendis, ég er diplómatabarn og reynsla mín af sendiráðsstarfi sýnir að þessi þáttur í starfi sendiráða sé mjög vanmetinn á Íslandi, því langaði mig að skoða þessi mál á vísindalegum grunni.

Spurningarnar eru bæði hér fyrir neðan og í word-skjali sem viðhengi. Ég mun skrifa ritgerðina á ensku og ef þið viljið svara spurningunum á ensku þá væri það líka vel þegið. Vegna úrvinnslu væri gott að fá svörin fyrir

15.mars.

Virðingarfyllst,

Anna Sigríður Þórðardóttir

Spurningar:

- 1) Gætir þú sagt mér frá samstarfi sendiráðsins við stofnanir eins og Íslandsstofu? - geturðu nefnt mér dæmi um vel heppnað verkefni? Af hverju gekk það vel? En eitthvað sem gekk ekki sem skyldi? Af hverju gekk það illa?

- 2) Hvað þýðir íslensk menning fyrir þér? Hvað þýðir íslensk menning í samhengi við þína vinnu í sendiráðinu?
- 3) Hvað felst í þínu starfi (beint að fulltrúa sendiráðsins sem er mest inn í landkynningarmálum)?
- 4) Hvernig finnst þér sendiráðið ykkar og íslensk sendiráð almennt vera að standa sig þegar það kemur að því að kynna Ísland sem ferðamannastað?
- 5) Gætir þú sagt mér frá því hversu stór hluti af starfsemi sendiráðsins fer í landkynningu?
- 6) Hvernig kynnir sendiráðið Ísland sem ferðamannastað? Hvað er í boði fyrir heimamenn í sendiráðinu til að kynna sér Ísland?
- 7) Telur þú landkynningu skipta máli í starfsemi sendiráðs? Finnst þér landkynning skipta meira eða minna máli í dag en hún gerði áður?
- 8) Finnst þér nauðsynlegt að hafa einn fulltrúa innan sendiráðsins sem sinnir fullri stöðu í sambandi við landkynningu? Af hverju?
- 9) Finnst þér mikilvægi landkynningar vera að aukast? Af hverju?
- 10) Fær sendiráðið vissa upphæð til að nota í verkefni í tengslum við landkynningu? Ef svo finnst þér upphæðin vera of lítil eða of stór?

Appendix II

English Version

The letter below along with a questionnaire was sent to the following embassies and consulates: The Embassy of Iceland in Vienna, The Embassy of Iceland in Brussels, The Embassy of Iceland in Canada, The Consulate of Iceland in Winnipeg, The Embassy of Iceland in Copenhagen, The Embassy of Iceland in Paris, The Embassy of Iceland in Helsinki, The Embassy of Iceland in Berlin, The Embassy of Iceland in India, The Embassy of Iceland in Tokyo, The Consulate of Iceland in New York, The Embassy of Iceland in Beijing, The Embassy of Iceland in Oslo, The Embassy of Iceland in Moscow, The Embassy of Iceland in Stockholm, The Embassy of Iceland in London, and The Embassy of Iceland in Washington D.C.

Your excellency,

My name is Anna Sigríður Þórðardóttir and I am completing my studies in Political Science at the University of Iceland. My final B.A. thesis discusses the contribution of the Foreign Service and embassies to strengthen the image of Iceland through destination promotion. There seems to be little knowledge in Iceland on the role of embassies in relation to this matter. Due to this reason it is very important to gain first-hand knowledge on this subject. Therefore I allow myself to ask you for assistance and I would be very grateful if you could answer the following questions. I ask either you or another staff member at the embassy to answer these questions. It would be great if the individual that is mostly works on destination promotional projects would answer the questions. All other documents and references on this subject matter would be greatly appreciated.

I have personally lived abroad, my father is a diplomat and my experience of the operation of an embassy shows that this aspect of the operation is underestimated in Iceland. Therefore I wanted to examine this subject based on an academic foundation.

The questions are listed here below and are also in a word document as an attachment. I will be writing my thesis in English and if you would like to answer the questions in English that would also be appreciated. Due to the analysis of the data it would be good to receive answers before March.15th.

Respectfully,

Anna Sigríður Þórðardóttir

Questions:

- 1) Could you inform me on the cooperation between the embassy and agencies such as Promote Iceland? Can you give me an example of a successful project? Why was it successful? How about a project that was unsuccessful? Why was it unsuccessful?

- 2) What is Icelandic culture to you? What does culture mean in terms of your job at the embassy?
- 3) What does your job entail?
- 4) How do you feel that your embassy and Icelandic embassies in general are doing when it comes to promoting Iceland as a tourist destination?
- 5) What proportion of the operation of the embassy goes into tasks related to destination promotion?
- 6) How does the embassy promote Iceland as a tourist destination? What is offered to the locals at the embassy in order for them to get to know Iceland?
- 7) Do you consider destination promotion important in the operation of an embassy? Do you feel that the importance of destination promotion is greater today than it has been in the past?
- 8) Do you find it crucial for an embassy to have an employee that works full-time on tasks related destination promotion? Why?
- 9) Do you believe that the importance of destination promotion is increasing? Why?
- 10) Does the embassy receive a specific amount of funding to use for projects in destination promotion? If so, do you feel that the sum is too low, too high?