Do you feel sLOVEnia?
The image of Slovenia among Icelanders

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Do you feel sLOVEnia

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10 ECTS thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of a
Baccalaureus Scientiarum degree in Tourism studies

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Do you feel sLOVEnia
Slovenia as a travel destination for the Icelandic population
10 ECTS thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of a
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Abstract

The destination image of a place is an important factor that influences the consumers decision-making behaviour as well as the experience of the consumer at the destination. A strong destination image is very important both for the success and the competitiveness of the destination, that’s why it’s important to create a distinguishing image based on the characteristic of that specific destination which is later accurately presented to the right target group. Since a positive destination image is vital for Slovenia’s tourism to keep booming, Icelanders have visited Slovenia in the past and that number has been slowly increasing during the years. The goal of this research is to try and understand the perceived image that the Icelanders have of Slovenia, and if the image Slovenia wishes to portray of itself, which is Green, Active and Healthy matches to that image that the Icelanders have. The results of the research show that the image of Slovenia is positive among the Icelanders regarding the categories of being Green and Healthy however it lacks strength in the category of being Healthy.

Keywords: Slovenia, Destination image, Travel destination, Decision making, Marketing of a destination
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1 Introduction

Tourism is developing more and more each year and with it presents many challenges for the industry. Competitiveness among destinations is one of the main challenges, since the consumer has more and more destination to choose and eventually decide to travel to. For a specific destination to be able to compete and even distinguish itself from other destinations it is important for it to present itself with a strong and positive image based upon the characteristics that it possesses (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003). Destination image is one of the factors that plays a big role into pushing the people to visit a certain destination, especially now, where the ability to travel between destination has been made very easy (Robinson, 2012). The image which is developed from the persons experience, perceptions and knowledge can lead them to decide whether to travel to a specific destination or not (Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert, & Wanhill 2013). Images of a destination have been the reason of many studies during the last couple of decades (Pike, 2002; Tasci, Gartner and Cavusgil, 2007), it has also been proven that the destinations which include a positive image are much more willing to be chosen to travel to (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003). Slovenia which is a small country in the center of Europe has been visited by Icelanders before. The number of Icelandic visitor is increasing every year more and more (Slovenian Tourism Board, 2018). It is with that in mind that the author of this research decided to focus on the image and perception of Icelanders regarding Slovenia as a tourist destination.

The purpose of this research is to find out what the image of Slovenia as a tourist destination is among Icelanders and to analyse if the image that they have about Slovenia as a destination matches with the one that Slovenia wishes to present itself with. The questions of the research are two and are:

“How is the image of Slovenia perceived as a tourist destination by the Icelanders.”

“Does the image that the Icelanders have of Slovenia match the one that Slovenia wishes to portray itself with.”

In order achieve this goal the author decided to conduct a research among Icelanders with the help of a questionnaire survey. The survey which includes 17 structured scaled questions
and three open questions with the purpose of achieving a deeper understanding about the image of Slovenia.

The structure of the research is as follows. First a literally review will be made from theoretical sources about the subject where many concepts will be presented regarding to destination among them the image, and marketing of the destination. Afterwards a brief chapter about Slovenia as a tourist destination. The third chapter will emphasize on the methodology of the research, the research design, sample and population and the processing of the data acquired. Chapter four is the discussion chapter where the results of the questionnaire survey will be presented. At the end the discussion chapter which will include the answer from the before mentioned questions.
2 Literary review

The literary part is divided into eight parts. It includes a brief introduction of tourism, which later goes into the definition of image and destination, the chapter after that is the destination image and the formation of it. Following is the destination image measurements and the destination branding and its importance. Continues into the decision-making behaviour and ends with the marketing of a destination.

2.1 Tourism

Tourism is a worldwide phenomenon that includes various type of businesses and government units. It’s a foundation of important economic and even social consequences (World Tourism Organization UNWTO, 2017). Regarding to tourism as an industry there can be no tourism without tourists. Tourists visit and might find new attractions even when the locals or the entrepreneurs haven’t found or promoted them yet. Many countries rely on tourism as one of their main economic drivers (Marshalls, 2008). Tourists are often thought as a person or a group who travel or are enjoying a vacation somewhere away from home. The reasons for travelling may vary as it may be for business reasons, visiting friends and family, education or simply for pleasure (Lew, Hall, & Timothy, 2008). Tourists have a specific image of a destination which can be a decisive factor when choosing where to travel next (Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert, & Wanhill 2013). The following chapters will include and explain the concept of image and destination and the formation of the destination image.

2.2 Image & Destination

In many studies academics have argued with the concept of image being formed from two major components: perceptive and cognitive. The first being derived from the customers own knowledge and belief of an object and the other one being the emotion that the customer has towards a certain object or it this case the destination (Baloglu & McCleary 1999). Destination is a complex concept and it’s difficult to define. Destination is considered to be the essence of a wider tourism system as it provides tourism experience to its visitors. For many tourists it is considered to be the principal motivation in their purchase behaviours.
Various types of destinations can be found but the basic three are coastal destinations, urban destinations and rural destinations (Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert, & Wanhill 2013). A strong and positive destination image is important as it is a factor that influences the customers purchase behaviour (Morgan & Pritchard 2004).

2.3 Destination image

The destination image is a complicated concept and many studies have been made to define it. Hunt (1975) was one of the first to have determined the concept as an important factor in attracting consumers to destinations. The concept of destination image has later received a lot of attention from various academics and has been the base of many researches however a precise definition still hasn’t been determined (Gallarza, Gil & Calderón, 2002; Echtner & Ritchie, 2003). Crompton (1979) for example stated that it is “the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination”. Crompton’s statement (1979) however refers only to a single person. Phelps (1986) said that a destination image is “the perception and impressions of a place”. Gartner and Hunt (1987) believed that it is “the impression that a person holds about a state in which they don’t reside”. Lawson & Bovy Baud (1977) definition of destination image will be used for this research which states that the destination image is “the expression of all objective knowledge, impressions, prejudice, imaginations, and emotional thoughts an individual or group might have of a particular place”. As it applies to both individuals as it does to groups. Even though many definitions have been acquired, the overall idea behind the definitions is the perception or an impression of a certain destination (Echnter & Ritchie, 2003). Those images of a destination play a role when it comes to the decision-making process since the image that a consumer has of a destination has also an effect on the consumers experience at the destination (Chon, 1990; Gallarza, Baloglu & McCuearly 1999; Gil & Calderón, 2002). The following chapters will the destination image formation and measurements will be elaborated to create a better understanding on the destination image.

2.4 The formation of destination image

Reynolds (1965) has criticized that the process of creating a destination image is the development of a mental construct which is created from the information received. When it comes to image, the information can be acquired from various sources from promotional literature (handbooks, posters), from other people’s opinions (family, acquaintances) to the
general media (paper, journals). J. D. Hunt (1975) believed that the role of image could have a significant effect on the wellbeing of a specific area as a tourist-recreation region. J. D. Hunt (1975) stated that what the potential consumers think about the atmosphere, climate and even the population of that region may shape the image of the area and even detract them from successful development. Even though an area would have a wide range of tourist-recreation activities, an inaccurate image may weaken the potential use or diminish economic development of that specific area. According to Jenkins and McArthur (1996), a person’s image of a destination or a place is a unique mix of memories and their own experiences. In the tourism context, a traveller’s image can be altered upon the information received of the place and the experience after the actual visit. In the past researches have shown that a destination image has an important role in the selection process in choosing a destination to visit (Baloglu & McCleary 1999). However, to keep a positive image it is essential for every destination to attract tourist and thus giving the destination a competitive advantage (Chon 1990; Marshalls 2008). There are many factors that shape the destination image some of them are the history, music, art and the geographic position of a place. All of those could have been shaped with the help of various sources of information. Newer researches have shown that the climate and the distance from the destination are also factors that shape the destination image and proven that people that reside in colder places are more motivated to travel to warm destinations (Gallarza, Saura & Garca, 2002; Marshalls, 2008).

Gunn (1988) developed a model that shows how the destination image is made and how the effects of various information sources and their purposes effect the development of the destination image. The model (figure 1) is divided in three stages: Organic, Induced and Modified – Induced image.
The first stage is the so called Organic image where the information is received and provided from non-commercial touristic references such as opinions of friends and relatives, school and the media. The second stage is named Induced image where retrieving various information from tourist agencies, travel books and poster would lead to the changes of the organic image. The third stage is where the choice is made and the fourth, fifth and sixth is where the users experience plays a role in the modification of the image where the experience begins with the travel to the destination and ends with the homecoming of the consumer (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003; Kotler, Bowen, & Makens, 2014). The seventh stage includes the actual travellers experience which is later used to modify the induced image because of this first-hand experience researches have shown that the images of actual visitors tend to be more realistic (Pearce, 1982; Murphy & Hodel, 1980; Phelps, 1986; Chon, 1987). The consumers images that have visited the destination may have a different image portrayed that the ones that haven’t visited, because of this it would be important to separate those customers that have visited the destination from those who haven’t when researching the destination image (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003).

2.5 Destination image measurements

Researches regarding destination image have been conducted in the past e.g. Hunt (1975), Crompton (1979), Phelps (1986) however most of the did not prove to be successful since most of the researches that have been conducted consisted of structured methodologies
(Echtner & Ritchie, 2003). To be able to measure the destination image as accurate as possible Echtner & Hunt (2003) suggested that both structured and unstructured methodologies should be used and have also been taken into consideration in many subsequent studies (Tasci, Gartner, & Cavusgil, 2007; O’Leary & Deegan, 2005; Stepchenkova & Morrison, 2008). With the help of the structured methodologies and scales it’s possible to research the emotional and the awareness of the destination. As for the unstructured questions it is possible to research the image that a consumer has of a destination as well as the unique characteristics of a destination (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003). Their approach to measuring destination image has been well accepted and used by many scholars (Gallarza, Gil & Calderón, 2002; Tasci, Gartner and Cavusgil, 2007; (O’Leary & Deegan, 2005) and it will also be the base in this research.

Many frameworks have been developed from academics to measure the destination image some of them are Hunt (1975), Crompton (1977), Phelps (1986) etc. (Echnter & Ritchie, 2003). For this research the model developed by Echnter & Ritchie (2003) will be used (figure 2). They argue that to measure a destination image it should be viewed from three dimensions (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003).

![Figure 2: The components of destination image (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003)](image)

The first dimension being functional-psychological where the more tangible and intangible components of a destination image are located. The functional characteristics being measurable, such as price or attractions and the psychological being unmeasurable such as friendliness or safety at the destination (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003).
The second dimension is the physical attributes such as the climate and the accommodations at the destination. As for the holistic images being those mental pictures of the destination (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003).

The last dimension is the common-unique dimension which is builds the image from common and unique features of the destination. Some of the unique characteristics can be the emotions, friendliness, atmosphere, reputations and on the other side of the dimension the common characteristics can be commodity prices, transportations, accommodation and security (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003).

### 2.6 Destination Identity and branding

To help promote a product or in this case a certain destination, destination branding is required. It has a deeper meaning for the tourists, a lifestyle fulfilment and experience rather than the traditional perceptible aspects that the destination has to offer like accommodations and attractions (Morgan & Pritchard, 2004). In Qu, Kim and Im (2011) state that studies have criticized that for a successful destination brand both brand identity and brand image are necessary. There can be a confusion between the two concepts as they are created from two different perspectives. The brand identity from the givers perspective and the image from the receivers (Qu, Kim & Im, 2011). The process of branding begins when there is an emotional connection with the specific image of the destination. emotional value can differ for a particular person or a group. It can be said that branding is the emotional factor regarding to destination image since every destination can have a name but not every destination has a brand that has an emotional connection attached to it (Ekinci, 2003).

For a successful branding, the basic needs of the traveller must be fulfilled (Morgan & Pritchard, 2004). A specific brand can be friendly, one of a kind etc. (Ekinci, 2003). These characteristics can help the brand by developing an amusing brand personality (Morgan & Pritchard, 2004). examples such as Las Vegas can be branded as lively and entertaining or Paris as the most romantic capital etc. (Ekinci,2003). These are good examples that show how these characteristics can help the destinations attract tourists on an emotional level, since the brands with the richest characteristics are known to be the strongest brands (Morgan & Pritchard, 2004). The brand of a destination points towards the characteristics that are specific for that destination. The brand should provide the real characteristics of the
destination of which it represents and even provide a sense of emotional value towards the consumers (Anholt, 2010).

2.7 Decision-making process

It is important to understand that the consumer decision-making process is complex, not only is it influenced by the tourists’ characteristics but also from the image that the tourist has of the many destinations available (Cooper, 2012). Motivation has been researched as the vital factor of the tourist behaviour. Identification of motivations is the beginning of creating travel plans because they explain why tourists make decisions that they make and the type of involvement, destination or action they want (Kim, Lee, & Klenosky, 2003). To be able to influence somebody’s behaviour it is important to try to figure out which factors influence the image of an individual or a group regarding a destination image (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999).

As it was mentioned before the image of a certain area is one of the main factors when tourists are choosing which destination they want to visit. The choices that are made express which destination appeals emotionally to them and gives suggestions about their lifestyle (Morgan & Pritchard 2004). Researches have shown that when it comes to the decision-making process in not a single stage but rather a multiple set of stages that the consumers go through (Chon, 1990).

The decision-making process from Kotler (2014) contains five stages:

- The need for recognition
- Search of information
- Evaluations of other options
- The decision of purchase
- Post purchase behaviour

The process starts when the consumer recognizes a need or is in search of some change. The second stage is when the consumer is in search of information regarding the product that it wants to purchase. By doing so the knowledge of the product is increased. If the needs of the consumer are strong it is more likely that he will buy the product at the moment. The third stage is the evaluations of options where the consumer evaluates the various products – in search of those that fulfil their needs. The penultimate stage is the decision of
purchase stage where the consumer decides on the purchase of the evaluated product. When the purchase has been made the last stage takes place which is the post purchase behaviour where the consumer will compare their products with their expectations and be wither satisfied or dissatisfied. Whether the consumer is satisfied or not is also important for the products wellbeing since the experience may be shared with others (Kotler, Bowen, & Makens, 2014).

The process shows that the need or wants of a product starts long before the actual purchase. This model suggests also that the consumers passes through each and every stage, however in more frequent purchases some of the stages are skipped or reversed (Kotler, Bowen, & Makens, 2014).

2.8 Marketing of a destination

With the increase of tourism many opportunities have arisen for a destination to be popular in the tourism industry. For a destination to be successful, it should separate themselves from its competitors with specific characteristics that the destination has (Echtner & Ritchie, 1993). In order to provide a good image of a destination it is necessary to know both the strengths and weaknesses of a destination so that the focus is put on the right characteristics. The image of a destination must be built on real characteristics of the destination, so the expectation of the tourist is fulfilled when visiting that destination (Kotler & Gertner, 2002).

It is also important that the those who provide the marketing of a destination know what image the users have of the destination, by doing so it is possible to see whether there is association with the image that the consumer has of a destination with the one that the country wishes to provide (Pike, 2004).

When it comes to advertising of a destination, image is one of the key factors since it influences both the supply (destination) and the demand (focus group) in regard to marketing (Tasci & Gartner, 2007). Consumers have different needs and they come from different places with different lifestyles which all has an influence on how they perceive the world and when and where they want to travel. It is because of that the marketing should be constructed in such a way that it provides a precise message, to the right people at the right time (Pike, 2004; Kotler & Gertner, 2002)
3 Slovenia as a tourist destination

This chapter consists of a brief introduction of Slovenia and the characteristics that Slovenia presents to others regarding its image, which will lead into a better understanding in Slovenia as a tourist destination.

Few researches have been made regarding the image of Slovenia as a tourist destination. One of the first empirical researches that has been performed was created by Maja Konečnik (2005). Her research consisted in finding out how is Slovenia as a tourist destination perceived by tourism representatives closest to Slovenia (Italy, Croatia, Austria, Hungary…). In her research she concludes that Slovenia’s image is related to interesting mountain and lakes, breath-taking natural attractions interesting and friendly locals and that it has a very relaxing atmosphere (Konečnik, 2005).

Slovenia is in the southern Central Europe. Situated between Italy, Croatia, Hungary and Austria and with roughly 40 km of Adriatic coast (SORs, 2010). With regards to the image of Slovenia as a tourist destination presents itself to the world in three categories which are as follows (Vlada RS, 2012):

- **Green** (forests, clean waters, landscapes, nature, friendly)
- **Active** (hiking, water sports, spending time in close encounters with nature)
- **Healthy** (spas, wellness, oceanic and mountain climate)

In 2012 the Slovenian tourist board conducted a research where the purpose of the research was to figure out the perceived image of Slovenia in the eyes of the selected markets which in this case were Italy, Austria, Germany, Great Britain and Japan. The result showed that the most common features that people connected Slovenia to were Natural landscapes, mountains, seas and the friendliness and kindness of the locals (Uradni slovenski turistični portal). However Slovenian academics (Jančič, 1998; Brezovec, 2001; Konečnik, 2007) agree that there is need of more empirical researches which would in their opinion provide a better definition of the image of Slovenia as a tourist destination.
The unspoiled nature is a key characteristic in competing with other destinations that Slovenia uses to its advantage for the development of the tourism offer. Derived from its green, active and healthy characteristics the brand ‘I FEEL SLOVENIA’ was born (Uradni slovenski turistični portal).
4 Methodology

This chapter includes the research methods that were used in order to conclude this research.

4.1 Research design

The research method that is used in this research is of a quantitative method as it is known for a more effective way to retrieve the information needed from a wider group of people in a short period of time (Bryman, 2016). As mentioned before, both structured (closed) and unstructured (open-ended) types of question will be used to provide a more accurate answer regarding the image of the destination (Echtner & Ritchie, 2003).

A questionnaire survey will be posted online as it is best suitable for this research in order to get the information regarding the perceived image of Slovenia among Icelanders.

The questionnaire is short and simple to answer. It consists of 11 questions and it includes questions regarding Slovenia as a tourist destination, the participants travelling habits as well its sociodemographic characteristics. The questionnaire is divided into four parts where the first part includes the sociodemographic characteristics of the participant (gender, age and occupation). The second one is their traveling habits. The third stage consists of three open ended questions where the participants can answer freely. In the making of those questions suggestions by Ecthner & Ritchie (2003) were considered and the following three questions were created:

- What image or characteristics come to mind when thinking of Slovenia as a tourist destination
- What kind of atmosphere would you expect while visiting Slovenia for a holiday in the summer?
- Name any (unique) characteristic that you can think of when thinking of Slovenia as a tourist destination

With the answers of these questions, the author of this research believes that it will provide the information needed regarding the destination image of Slovenia from all three dimensions of the model by Echtner & Ritchie (2003). The final part of the questionnaire
includes structured questions where the emotional component of the destination image was measured. The question consists of 17 characteristics that were best suitable for this research of the destination image. With the help of the Likert scale the participants were able to mark from scale 1-5 how strongly they agree or disagree with each characteristic, ‘I don’t know’ was also an option to choose when answering these structured questions. The characteristics will be then divided in groups to see if the perceived image of Icelanders is the one that Slovenia deems to have for itself (Vlada RS, 2012).

4.2 Sample and population

The sample that was used in this research is the quota sample. The characteristics of this sample are that it aims to produce a sample that is related to groups in different proportions such as age, gender and occupation (Bryman, 2016). The population used for this research were Icelanders who were friends of the author on Facebook that are 20 years and older. The survey was also available to be shared if some of the participants wished to do so. Among the people who decided to participate in the survey 2 decided to share the survey on their Facebook page. The sample of this research are Icelanders who have never visited Slovenia, since as it was mentioned before, in order to gain the most accurate image of a destination the participants should be separated from those who have visited the destination from those who have not (Echtner and Ritchie, 1993).

4.3 Gathering and the process of data

In order to simplify the research for participation a self-administrated questionnaire survey has been created. The advantages of this kind of surveys are that they are quicker to administer them to the participants, they can decide about the time of answering it and how long they wish to take for a question (Bryman, 2016). When the survey has been made a preliminary test was first conducted with the help of 5 participants. By doing so it was possible to see if the questions were understood in the right way. After receiving the preliminary survey, it was adjusted in a manner that was understandable before it was posted online. The questionnaire survey was made with the program google sheets and posted by the author of this research online on 29.08.2018 and it was open for 3 days to participate. The survey was posted on Facebook where friends of the author could participate in answering it. The author also wrote that it is possible to share the survey if anybody was willing to do so. Two participants decided to share the survey which helped further with the
gathering of the information. The survey was translated to Icelandic, so that the Icelanders would be more willing to answer it. The beginning of the survey included a brief introduction of the author and what the survey was meant for and later asked to answer the survey as best as they can. The data acquired from the survey was processed with Microsoft excel where with the help of the program descriptive image was performed and graphs were made in order to show the results of the survey.
5 Results

The following chapter include the results if the questionnaire which will be presented with the help of tables and graphs.

5.1 Participants of the survey

The participants were all together 320 and out of those 48 of them have visited Slovenia and are excluded from the results. The participants left are then 272 and in the next table is it possible to see the ratio between men and women. As is it visible from the table, there were far more women that answered the survey that that there were men.

*Table 1: Breakdown of participants by gender*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The next table includes the difference in age of the participants. Most of the participants were between the ages 20 – 40 which can be the result of posting the survey online.

Table 2: Breakdown of the participants by age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20 - 30</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 - 40</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 - 50</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 years and older</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next table includes the employment status of the participants in the survey. It shows that more than half of the participants were fulltime employed 66% followed by students and part time employed together 25% of it and later unemployed and other 9%.

Image 1: Breakdown of the participants by occupation
5.2 Travel experience and influence

The first table shows the yearly travel frequency among the Icelanders that took part in answering the survey. From the table it is possible to see that most of the respondents (66%) travel 1 – 2 times per year. 20% of the participants travel 3 – 4 times per year and 4% of them travel more than 5 times per year. The result of the chi-square test show that there is significant relation between the age and travel frequency where \( P=0.005 \).

Image 2: Travel frequency of the participants by year (%)

The next table shows what influences the destination image of Slovenia as a tourist destination. 259 participants decided to answer this question, however more than one answer was possible in this question. As it is possible to see from the table, TV, magazines and radio have the most influence on portraying an image about Slovenia where it was chosen 121 times. Followed by social media with 89 times and family and friends with 79 time. Tourist agency was only selected 51 times and school 17 times. Under the category other were included answers like nothing changed my image regarding Slovenia and little is known about Slovenia.

Image 3: Influencing factors of destination image
5.3 Unstructured questions

The next three tables represent the open question of the survey. The open question included answers from one word to a whole sentence as the participants were free to write what they wanted. The first question measured the functional - physiological characteristic of the destination. Out of all the participants 155 chose to answer the first question. The various answers were later categorized into groups that fitted most appropriate. The table below shows the answers of the first open-ended question.

![Image 4: Functional - physiological characteristics of the destination image](image)

Most of the participants wrote about Slovenia as being beautiful followed by hot and later adventurous and connected it with nature.

The second open ended question was regarding the physical attributes regarding the image of Slovenia. With this question participants were asked to answer what kind of atmosphere they would expect when visiting Slovenia. 165 of the participants in the survey decided to answer this question. As it was done before the most common answers were put into categories and in the next table is it possible to see these categories.
Answers like nice and beautiful were put in the “beautiful group”. Attributes that were connected to the kindness and friendliness were put in the “friendly category” followed by the “relaxed” group which included attributes like chill and relax. The “unique” group included attributes like Eastern-European and different culture.

The third open-ended question was used to see if the participants could name any characteristic destination or tourist attraction when thinking about Slovenia. This question received very little attention where out of 272 participants only 65 decided to it.

As it is visible from the table above the most common answers were Ljubljana, followed by Lake Bled and the mountains.
5.4 Structured questions

The next figures include characteristics about Slovenia and they were categorized regarding the image that Slovenia wishes to present itself with. By doing so it is possible to see if Icelanders are aware about the destination image of Slovenia. The categories were **Green, Active and Healthy**. Each category includes a couple of questions regarding their perceived image of Slovenia. The participants could choose from (1) totally disagree to (5) completely agree, (6) I don’t know was also included as an option. The reason behind these questions was to see what the thoughts of Icelanders were regarding on what Slovenia has to offer as a tourist destination.

Out of 272 participants that took part in this survey around 30% of them considered that they didn’t have the information necessary to be able to answer these questions. However, the focus will be on the information provided excluding the ‘I don’t know’ option. In the first characteristic the answers were evenly distributed and most of the people agreed (18%) and were neutral (17%) regarding Slovenia being a child-friendly tourist destination. Approximately 38% of the participants totally agreed that Slovenia has beautiful villages and cities. Regarding the beaches in Slovenia the answers were similar where the most common answer was agreed with 22% followed by totally agree where 21% participants chose this.
answer. Most of the participants agreed about Slovenia being a friendly tourist destination where 24% of the participants answered so. Regarding Slovenia having many natural sceneries and lakes 35% percent of the participants totally agreed with this characteristic. To conclude most of the participants, agree that Slovenia is a green country, the two things that they disagree most with however are Slovenia being a child-friendly destination and having beaches that they would like to spend their time with.

The next table includes answers from the ‘active’ characteristics that Slovenia presents itself with. As it was mentioned before the ‘I don’t know’ answer will be excluded from the results which are approximately 35% of the participants answers.

![Image 8: Active category (%)](image)

In Slovenia has an easy access to tourist attractions the most common answer was neutral 18% followed by agree where 17% of the participants choose that option. 26% of the participants agreed that Slovenia is an economically developed country. Regarding Slovenia having friendly local people were the answers similar where 21% of the participants both totally agreed and agreed about this statement. Out of all the participants 19% of the participants agreed that Slovenia has good nightlife experience and entertainment. The most common answer for Slovenia having good offers of nature-based activities on land was agree (21%) followed by totally agree where 19% of participants chose this option. As it can be noticed from the table 31% of the participants totally agree with Slovenia having many possibilities for adventure. Regarding Slovenia offering many possibilities for sports and
recreations were the answers evenly distributed where 19% totally agreed, 17% agreed and 17% were neutral about it. To sum it all up most of the respondents agree that Slovenia is an active tourist destination. Slovenia being an economically developed country is the thing that participant seem to totally disagree with the most.

The last characteristic that Slovenia presents itself with is by being healthy. The ‘I don’t know’ answers will be excluded from the results where around 35% of the participants answered with or in one occasion 50%. The next table includes these characteristics.

![Image 9: Healthy category (%)](image_url)

According to the table above, most of the participants agreed on Slovenia having a good value for money where 22% of the participants chose this option. In the question of Slovenia having various restaurants with good local food where the most common answer chosen was totally agree (24%). The question with Slovenia having modern health resorts had the lowest number of answers where only 134 of the participants answered it. Those who have answered it though were neutral regarding it where 19% chose this option. 21% of the participants agreed with the fact that Slovenia has a clean and uncontaminated environment. Regarding to the climate in Slovenia 26% totally agreed with the fact of it being pleasant followed by 24% of participants choosing to agree with it. In conclusion most of the participants seem to agree with the fact of Slovenia having a healthy characteristic apart from the health resorts and spas. In order to provide a deeper understanding of the data provided, weighted average
graphs were made where the ‘I don’t know’ option was excluded. The first image includes the weighted average for the green category. As is it possible to view from the image the participants were agreeing most with Slovenia as having beautiful villages and cities followed by natural sceneries and lakes.

**Image 10: Weighted average for green category (%)**

The characteristics that are believed do not fit the image of Slovenia or are not accurate are those that Slovenia is an economically developed country, that is a child-friendly destination and that it has modern health resorts.

**Image 11: Weighted average for active category (%)**
In addition, a standard deviation for each feature was calculated to get an overview of the distribution. The results show that the distribution was least on the characteristic of Slovenia being a safe tourist destination where the distribution was 1.04 after that followed the characteristics of Slovenia offering good nightlife experience and offering good nature-based activities on land where the distribution was 1.06. The biggest distribution was in the characteristic of Slovenia having beaches where people would like to spend their time with the distribution of 1.23 and following with a distribution of 1.21 was the characteristic of Slovenia being a child-friendly tourist destination. The other distributions were pretty similar between the characteristics.
6 Discussions

The purpose of this research was to examine what the Image of Slovenia is as a tourist destination in Iceland. The sample included only those people who have never visited Slovenia. The questions of this research were the following:

1. How is the image of Slovenia perceived as a tourist destination by the Icelanders?
2. Does the image that the Icelanders have of Slovenia match the one that Slovenia wishes to portray itself with?

The Icelanders who took part in answering the survey were asked to answer a questionnaire which included three open questions and later structured questions which were used to measure the emotional component of the destination were the participants would answer them with the help of a scale. All the questions were used to achieve a deeper understanding of the image of Slovenia as a tourist destination.

After the sociodemographic questions followed a question regarding the frequency of travel per year. Most of the participants (66%) of them travel 1-2 times per year, followed by 3-4 times per year where 20% of the participants chose this option. By connecting this to the decision-making process from Kotler (2014) it is possible to see that the need for recognition is big among the Icelanders. With that in mind, the following question was about the factors influencing the image of Slovenia as a destination, where the induced image is mostly shaped is through TV, radio, newspaper and social media. By strategically positioning advertisement about Slovenia among those things the author believes that it would reach a wider target group than by using other means of advertisement. Which will eventually lead into a stronger image of Slovenia as a tourist destination.

Following the open-ended questions most of the answers included were 1 word to 1 sentence descriptions which were categorized into groups. The results of the first question show that the image of Slovenia among Icelanders is perceived as beautiful and hot as a tourist destination (Figure 8). The only bad characteristic that has been acquired from that question
is that people think of war when thinking of Slovenia however that was only mentioned by 5 of the participants who answered.

The second question was used to provide the answer to the physical attributes of the image and were the answers again categorized into groups (Figure 9). The most common answers provided by the participants were beautiful followed by friendly and later relaxed.

The third open-ended question was used for the participants to name a unique destination or a unique attraction regarding Slovenia (Figure 10). Many of the participants decided to skip this question as there were only 65 participants that choose to answer it. The most common answer in this question was the capital Ljubljana, the second most common answer was Lake Bled followed by the mountains and the beaches.

Upon reviewing the structured questions and excluding the ‘I don’t know’ option from it, it is possible to say that the results are somewhat positive and regarding the deviation of the answers it is possible to say that the participants have a similar opinion regarding the characteristics. Regarding to the first open question the participants answers we more on the physiological side of the image where they perceive Slovenia as being beautiful and hot as where the only functional characteristic that was mentioned was cheap where it was only mentioned 6 times. The second open-ended question was bending more towards the physical attributes of the dimension where the participants were relating Slovenia to beautiful, friendly and relaxed. The last open-ended question which was used to measure the uniqueness or the commonness of the image. This question included very few answers and were related to the general knowledge of Slovenia such as the capital Ljubljana and Lake Bled. Very few unique characteristics were named in that question.

When the results of the questionnaire are compared to the categories that Slovenia wishes to present itself which are Green, Active and Healthy (Vlada RS, 2012), it is possible to notice that there is some consistency between them. The results show that the Icelanders image of Slovenia is largely based on the beauty, friendliness and adventurousness that the destination has to offer. Which can be linked to two of the categories that Slovenia wishes to present itself with. The image of Slovenia however lacks the strength in regard to healthy category where with the help of advertising could provide information needed in order to attract more customers. On the other hand, it also shows that not so many participants know about
Slovenia as there was a high number of participants that choose not to answer those questions.

The image of Slovenia among Icelanders can be stated as being positive. With the help of the open questions it was possible to research that the image that the Icelanders have when thinking of Slovenia as a tourist destination is beautiful, adventurous and friendly.
7 Conclusion

Slovenia, a small country with a lot to offer whether is a mountain hike, a day at the beach or even a day in the big city is a pearl of a country in the middle of Europe. It is reasonable that with the increase of tourism Slovenia too wishes to get a piece of that cake. It is often said that the best commercial is the mouth to mouth recommendation. However, as it was visible from this research TV and social media play an important role in portraying a specific image of a destination for people. The purpose of this research was to understand what the perceived image of Slovenia among the Icelanders was.

The results of the research showed that the image that the Icelanders have about Slovenia are positive since it is constructed on the real characteristic of the destination and matching the image that the destination wishes to present itself with. Which tells that the experience that the consumer would have at the destination would be positive and thus fulfil their expectations. Since the image that is realistic and fulfils the needs of the consumer provides results.

Lack of information about Slovenia was a factor in this research. Regarding to marketing and positioning of the destination most of the participants have heard and got the image shaped through the TV, radio and social media and it is there that Slovenia should focus in order to present itself in a positive manner and by doing so attract more visitors. The author of this research believes that the with spread of information about Slovenia among the Icelanders could lead in an increase in visits to that specific destination.

The limitations of the research conducted were not that many, one of them was in the structured questions section, where the ‘I don’t know’ choice should have been skipped. By doing so it would lead the participants to think about the destination which could provide better results for this research. Another limitation was that because the survey was posted online, the author could not control the sample ratio. The sample of the research was big and various, and it would have been more practical to shrink the sample and research the Icelanders that would wish to visit Slovenia in the future.
What could be also interesting is to try and research the image of Slovenia as a destination among the Icelanders that have already visited Slovenia to have some sort of comparison between those who have and those who have not visited Slovenia.

The author believes that the research would have been conducted better with a more specific sample and by being more organized and having more time to gather data and get more participants, the research would obtain a more meaningful outcome.
Bibliography


Your gateway to information on Slovenia. Url: http://www.slovenia.si/visit. Accessed: 15th of August 2018
Appendix – Questionnaire

Dear recipient,

My name is Luka Druscovich (Lud2@hi.is) and I am a student of life and environmental sciences field at the university of Iceland. Thank you for taking your time in participating and answering this survey. I would like to receive information regarding your perceived image of Slovenia a tourist destination. The survey contains 13 questions and it will take only a few minutes of your time to complete. Rest assured that all the information acquired from the answers provided will be solely used for educational purposes.

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

1. What is your gender?
   ( ) Male
   ( ) Female

2. How old are you?
   ( ) 20- 30 years
   ( ) 31- 40 years
   ( ) 41- 50 years
   ( ) 51 and older

3. What is your employment status?
   ( ) Full-time employed
   ( ) Part time employed
   ( ) Un-Employed
   ( ) Retired
   ( ) Student
   ( ) Other
The following questions are regarding your travel experiences and Slovenia as a tourist destination

4. How many times per year do you travel outside of your home country?
   ( ) 0
   ( ) 1 – 2
   ( ) 3 – 4
   ( ) 5 or more

5. Have you ever travelled to Slovenia?
   ( ) Yes, I have travelled to Slovenia
   ( ) No, I have not travelled Slovenia
   ( ) No, but I am willing to travel to Slovenia sometime in the future

If your answer in the previous question was “NO” you can skip questions 6

6. How likely are you to recommend Slovenia to family and friends?
   Not likely   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10   Very likely

7. Did any of the following effect your original image about Slovenia?
   More than one answer can be chosen
   ( ) Friends and family
   ( ) Tourism agency
   ( ) Social media
   ( ) School
   ( ) TV, magazines, radio
   ( ) own experiences
   ( ) other__________

The next three questions are open-ended, and you can answer them freely. There is no wrong answer and they can be as long as you want

8. What characteristics come to your mind when thinking about Slovenia as a tourist destination?
OPEN QUESTION

9. What kind of atmosphere would you expect while visiting Slovenia for a holiday in the summer?

OPEN QUESTION

10. What special (unique) characteristic do you think of when thinking of Slovenia as a tourist destination

OPEN QUESTION

11. This following question contains characteristics about Slovenia. Please mark with the one that you think suits best. The scale goes from (1) totally disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, (5) totally agree and (6) Don’t know. The answers provided are those regarding your perception of Slovenia, so there can be no wrong answer

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