

## **The role of brand elements in destination branding**

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# **The role of brand elements in destination branding**

## **Abstract**

This article evaluates the contribution of commonly used symbolic elements, namely destination name, logo and tagline to the establishment of the destination brand. The conceptual framework is developed combining suggestions on the role and significance of symbolic brand elements for commercial brands with the literature on destination and place branding and draws particularly on the recent identity-based approach to place brands. The article reports on field research that operationalized the theoretical framework to examine the perceptions of visitors to Greece. Although the name is clearly more influential, the overall contribution of the symbolic elements to the brand is proven to be limited. This implies that destinations need to prioritize other aspects of the branding effort.

## **Keywords:**

Destination branding, Place brands, Destination identity, Name, Tagline, Logo

## **1. Introduction**

Places, regardless of scale (country, city or smaller place) or perspective adopted (solely as a tourism destination or a wider perspective), are extremely complex in nature (e.g. Creswell, 2004). Thus, any discussion of branding

application to places is also very complex and needs to go beyond theories on product or corporate branding (e.g. Ooi & Stoeber, 2010). The import of approaches, terminologies and methods from the commercial world to the world of place development is not straightforward (Braun, 2012; Mabey & Freeman, 2012). This explains the fact that place branding has been approached from a variety of perspectives and with different aims and intentions. While it is not in our aims to classify all these approaches, four different perspectives can be distinguished, each of them creating rather autonomous theory and principles. These perspectives are the *country of origin* approach (e.g. Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2002), focusing on the role of the place in product branding; the *destination branding* approach (e.g. Morgan et al., 2002), primarily focusing on the tourism function and attracting visitors; the *public diplomacy* approach (e.g. Sevin, 2013), examining the relationships between the place's authorities and external stakeholders in order to enhance the place's reputation; and the *identity-based* approach (e.g. Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013), which focuses on interactions between internal and external audiences and how individuals attribute meaning to place brands. These trends are, of course, interrelated and have considerable commonalities, something that is again a result of the inherently multifaceted nature of places. While the trends are better examined in conjunction to each other, we find that significant conceptual developments occur within the identity-based perspective, and therefore it serves as a departure point for this particular study.

This study aims to contribute to a broader understanding of both the identity-based and the destination branding approaches by focusing on an important aspect of the destination branding effort, namely the role and significance of symbolic brand elements (brand name, logo and tagline). The main issue we are attempting to clarify is whether and to what extent the brand's symbolic elements contribute to the place brand altogether, which is an issue that remains unexplored. Indeed Pike (2016) identifies the lack of understanding of the effectiveness of slogans and logos as one of the main research gaps in the destination branding literature. The motivation behind the study and the intended contribution of this article is to provide a better understanding of the significance that visitors attribute to these elements in the formation and evaluation of the destination brand. We examine this issue through a preliminary study undertaken amongst visitors to Greece and aim to validate the findings with an in-depth approach across different destination brands in the near future.

## **2. Literature Review**

Place branding (e.g. Anholt, 2007; Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2010; Braun, 2012; Govers & Go, 2009; Hankinson, 2001; Kavaratzis, 2004;) deals with the application of branding principles to places and the adjustment of such principles to the specific conditions under which places undertake their branding. The most usual aim of place branding is to trigger positive associations with the place and distinguish it from other places (e.g. Hanna & Rowley, 2011). The field is surrounded by several significant unresolved issues (e.g. Gertner, 2011; Lucarelli

& Berg, 2011;), since two sources of challenges have particularly hindered refinement of place branding. The first challenge relates to the inherent differences between places and commercial products for which branding was initially developed (also Anholt, 2007; Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2009). These differences are significant and can be summarized in a few points that refer to the multiplicity of a place's stakeholders, audiences and 'creators', the lack of control over the place by the people responsible to brand it, the complexity of the interactions between the physical place and its psychological and emotional extensions and more (see Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013). A second source of challenges for place branding can be found in the discrepancies between theory and practice. Authorities and most consultants espouse only one element of place branding, namely promotion and disregard the wider branding prerequisites (e.g. Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2009 ; Govers & Go, 2009). Most of the practitioners continue to treat place brands as a simple case of conventional branding. In the dominant approach, place brands are understood in a rather static way, largely ignoring that places are not formed through one-way message transmission and cannot be subjected to manipulation in the same sense as commercial products or corporations.

We argue that the core construct behind the dominant approach is a rather unfortunate understanding of place identity, which is thought to be the controllable outcome of a managerial process that leads to an improved identity accepted by target audiences. This approach highlights the importance of symbolic brand elements as communication vehicles for the destination's identity

and suggests the logo and slogan as the core of the brand and the main point of the branding effort. On the other hand, there is a second approach, advocated amongst others by Kalandides (2011), Kavartzis & Hatch (2013), and Mayes (2008), which recognizes place brands as dynamic, multifaceted, complex entities calling for a personalized and experiential approach, rather than declaratory to mass audiences. For instance, Lichrou et al. (2010) adopt a 'narrative' approach to place brands highlighting the importance of relating to the residents and letting their voice be heard. This is why it is important to incorporate the notion of 'sense of place' (Knez, 2005) in the conceptualisation of place brands (see Campelo et al., 2014) and in the way these are represented and highlighted by relevant brand elements. The reason why we suggest it is important to combine the destination branding approach with the identity-based approach is twofold: First, the place functions simultaneously as a place of visit and a place of residence or origin. Thus, the two (i.e. destination and identity) cannot be clearly be considered separately. Secondly, the ways in which internal and external audiences make sense of the destination brand are linked inexorably. Besides, there is considerable interaction between the two audiences (also see Hatch & Schultz, 2002).

The identity-based approach acknowledges the usefulness of symbolic brand elements for the effectiveness of the place brand but attributes to them significantly less importance than the dominant approach. In order to clarify further the role of symbolic elements, it is useful to acknowledge how the

definitions of brands and branding have evolved, both in a conventional commercial context and in a place context.

## **2.1. Defining commercial brands**

Significant variation is evident in the several different conceptualisations and definitions of brands offered. The most widely cited definition is that of the American Marketing Association (see Kotler & Keller, 2006, p. 274), where a brand is defined as *'a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of these, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors'*. Despite its popularity, this is for many an outdated definition (see for a critique Keller et al., 2008; Kornberger, 2010). Arguably, its main drawback is its excessive emphasis on the elements of name, term or sign. In a different mode, Gordon (1999, p. 324) sees the brand as *'a product or service to which human beings attach a bundle of tangible (functional) and intangible (emotional and symbolic) meanings that add value'*. Keller et al. (2008) also discuss the brand as adding to a product either *rational* and *tangible* dimensions (i.e. related to how the product performs) or *symbolic*, *emotional* and *intangible* dimensions (i.e. related to what the product represents) that differentiate it from other products that fulfill the same need. It is obvious that these tangible and intangible 'additions' to the product cannot be thought of as stemming only from a simple logo or tagline but from a variety of sources. As Keller et al. (2008) observe, the American Marketing Association (AMA) definition (N/D) does not account for the broader range of associations attached to a

brand. In this sense, it does not account for the range of tasks that branding performs. For instance, for Batey (2008) a brand can be defined as a cluster of associations concerning attributes, benefits and values. This idea is based on another very influential definition of brands offered by Aaker (1996a, p. 68), who defined brands as *'multidimensional constructs, consisting of functional, emotional, relational and strategic elements that collectively generate a unique set of associations in the public mind'*. These associations are formed in peoples' minds and they are not necessarily the associations intended by the branding authorities. Furthermore, the associations are created or enhanced by every contact or experience the consumer has with the brand (Batey, 2008) and not only by the logo or other symbolic elements. Reinforcing this point, Riezebos (2003) defines a brand as the totality of what the consumer takes under consideration before making a purchase decision. As Pickton & Broderick (2005, p. 242) put it:

*'As a marketing tool, branding is not just a case of placing a symbol or name onto products to identify the manufacturer; a brand is a set of attributes that have a meaning, an image and produce associations with the product when a person is considering that brand of product'.*

The American Marketing Association has recently updated its definition to reflect the more refined understanding we now have of what brands are and what branding entails. The updated definition is: *'A brand is a customer experience represented by a collection of images and ideas; often it refers to a symbol such as a name, logo, slogan, and design scheme'* (AMA Dictionary, N/D). The effort to put less emphasis on symbolic elements and incorporate the way in which



customers experience the brand is obvious. The new AMA definition further states that *'brand recognition and other reactions are created by the accumulation of experiences with the specific product or service, both directly relating to its use, and through the influence of advertising, design, and media commentary'* (AMA Dictionary, N/D). This updated AMA definition comes closer to the essence of branding but it still represents a very common view of brands as company assets and in this sense it is incomplete.

More recently, and based on different approaches to consumption and marketing influenced by post-modern ideas (e.g. Arnould & Thompson, 2005) or the Service Dominant Logic of marketing (Vargo & Lusch, 2008), cultural approaches to brands have been developed (e.g. Schroeder, 2009). Additionally, brands have been conceptualised as catalysts for corporate strategies (Hatch & Schultz, 2008) and also as interfaces that facilitate relationships between consumers (Lury, 2004). What becomes evident is that while earlier definitions of brands centred on the symbolic brand elements of name and logo, there was a gradual shift towards more encompassing understanding.

## **2.2. Defining place and destination brands**

As Gertner (2011) has emphasised, there is no agreement on what place brands are and what the process of place branding is. However, an examination of the relevant literature shows a shift in definitions which resembles the shift we saw above for general brands. In fact, the earliest definition of a destination brand offered by Ritchie and Ritchie (1998, p. 103) simply substituted the terms 'goods'

and 'services' with the term 'destination': '*A destination brand is a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that identifies and differentiates the destination*'.

The authors added that this symbol or logo also makes the promise of a tourism experience that will be memorable and that it will be associated with the particular destination only (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1998). The literature on destination branding shows that it is commonly understood as the communication of a distinctive and unique destination identity in order to differentiate it from its competitors (Blain et al., 2005; Qu et al., 2011 et al.).

More recently, the limitations of the AMA-inspired definition have been acknowledged and one can observe a gradual shift towards a more nuanced understanding and a reduced emphasis on symbolic elements like the logo and slogan (e.g. Ashworth & Kavaratzis, 2009; Govers & Go, 2009). Thus, place branding was defined as the process of building a brand for a place that is based on the place's identity and on the formation of a positive image in the minds of stakeholders (Anholt, 2010). Increasingly, we can also observe a transfer to the place branding field of cultural understandings of brands (e.g. Kavaratzis & Hatch, 2013; Warnaby, 2009) as well as more informed analyses of the cultural and local nature of destination brands (e.g. Campelo et al., 2014). These wider appreciations clearly take place branding to areas outside the role of symbolic elements. This is also reflected in a more compelling definition of place brands offered by Zenker & Braun (2010, p.5) who define it as '*a network of associations in the consumers' mind based on the visual, verbal, and behavioural expression of a place, which is embodied through the aims, communication, values, and the*

*general culture of the place's stakeholders and the overall place design*'. This definition highlights the challenges stemming from the multi- and cross-dimensionality of the place and the implied intricacy in developing the place brand.

An important concept within destination branding is destination brand equity (e.g. Cai, 2002; Gartner, 2014; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007;). The most widely cited definition of brand equity is given by Aaker (1991, p. 16) as *'the set of assets (and liabilities) linked to a brand's name and symbol that adds to (or subtracts from) the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or that firm's customers'*. According to Andehn et al. (2014), brand equity is a brand's ability to serve as a competitive advantage by conveying additional value to the 'branded' as opposed to 'non-branded' product, service or corporation. In a first attempt to review brand assets from a place-branding point of view, Kladou & Kehagias (2014) recently built upon Aaker's (1991) definition, and focused particularly on cultural brand assets of urban destinations.

While there are several approaches to brand equity, of crucial significance to destination branding is Keller's (1993) introduction of customer-based brand equity (CBBE). CBBE is directly related to the value of the brand as perceived by the brand's consumers (Boo et al., 2009), acquired by means of associations with the brand name and certain utility in relation to competitive brands (Florek, 2014). CBBE has been successfully transferred to destination branding studies with the works of Boo et al.. (2009) , Konecnik & Gartner (2007) and other scholars who further explore destination brand equity (see Kladou et al., 2015).

### **2.3. The role of Symbolic Brand Elements**

As becomes evident from the definitions and components of both place brands and brand equity, the influence of the brand's symbolic elements still remains to be confirmed. The challenge occurs due to the fact that the spectrum of the stimuli that generate the associations with the brand is very extensive. It ranges from associations related to the landscape and physical reality of the place in hand, to other non-tangible, cultural stimuli, as well as others that are merely constructed in an attempt to reinforce the meaning of the former. All these stimuli have their own autonomy and independence but they are combined in peoples' minds, in effect producing the network of associations that is at the heart of the brand (Aaker, 1996b). Part of this wide range of stimuli consists of the symbolic place brand elements, such as the name, logo, tagline and all other symbolic expressions of the place brand that represent the place in the mind of the person encountering it. As destination image studies have repeatedly shown, the images projected deliberately by Destination Marketing Organisations combine with many more images that are outside the control of marketers, such as various representations in the news, films, novels, documentaries, the internet or popular culture etc (e.g. Tasci et al.,2007). This compromises the importance of projected images and identity claims captured in slogans and logos and makes the role of planned symbolic brand elements complicated and this complexity is what this study examines. The objective is to identify whether the role of these elements is as significant as to justify their dominance in contemporary practice.

In corporate and general branding studies, these elements, particularly the brand name, tagline and logo might be considered crucial (although, as we saw above, this is under re-consideration). In a place context, symbolic brand elements still seem to seek their position in both the destination and the identity-based approach to place branding. The significance and the impact of the brand's symbolism in the effectiveness of the place brand are not established as yet and it is important to attempt to clarify them.

In fact, both place branding and destination branding practice have been criticised heavily for this emphasis on designing new logos and their general focus on visual design (Munar 2011; Oliveira & Panyik 2015). This practice is not in line with the more recent conceptualisations we have seen earlier and there is actually evidence to suggest that symbolic brand elements are actually not important. To be specific, the study by Munar (2011) has found out that visitors do not actually incorporate formal brand elements in their narratives and interactions, especially over the internet. As she states, *'elements such as taglines, slogans or logos are virtually non-existent as part of Tourism Created Content* (Munar 2011, p. 302). For instance, in her investigation of tourist reviews of the countries of France and Greece in relevant websites, none of the occurrences investigated mentioned or referred in any way to the official logo or slogan of the two countries. The explanation provided by Munar (2011) is that perhaps contemporary branding campaigns cannot reach their internet-based audience. We argue that that the importance of these elements needs to be more holistically put in the scope.

### **3. Conceptual framework and propositions**

This study combines the destination and identity-based approaches to the branding of places in order to devise a conceptual framework that helps understand the significance of symbolic brand elements. The study utilizes the dynamic model of organizational identity (Hatch & Schultz, 2002) and the way in which this has been transferred into the place branding realm by Kavaratzis & Hatch (2013) (Figure 1).

-- INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE --

The main issue we are attempting to clarify is whether and to what extent the brand's symbolic elements contribute to the place brand altogether, which is an issue that remains unexplored. Kavaratzis & Hatch (2013) hint towards this when they highlight that '*...there is still an open question: in order to relate the Hatch and Schultz model to places and their brands, it is necessary to examine the role of branding in relation to their model*' (p. 78). As Hatch & Schultz (2002) argue, the brand is formed at the interplay of culture, image and identity and Kavaratzis & Hatch (2013) explain that the brand plays a role in the four processes of expressing, impressing, mirroring and reflecting (Figure 1). Therefore, we propose that place brand elements such as the name, tagline and logo - as part of the brand's symbolism - have an active role to play in all four processes. It is this fourfold role of brand elements that partly gives to the brand its meaning. At

the same time, this fourfold role of brand elements also (again partly) determines the brand's influence on peoples' behavioural intentions towards the destination. Figure 2 is the conceptual framework developed for this study and depicts the role of place brand elements in the identity-based view of place brands.

-- INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE --

Based on the model presented in Figure 2, our contribution addresses the importance of the brand elements on the four processes and on behavioural decisions. As can be seen in the figure, there are five relationships evident between the constructs examined here. These relationships form the five themes this study is investigating and are the following:

- a. *Brand elements as identifiers for leaving impressions on others:* Brand elements are key instruments in the sub-process of impressing, which refers to the way in which the brand leaves impressions in peoples' minds. It is considered here that the brand's symbolic elements (i.e. the name, logo and tagline) have the power to leave their 'marks' on the perceptions people hold of the branded place. These marks provide the ground for remembering the destination and for holding positive images of it. In order to investigate and ascertain this power of the brand elements, recall and recognition of them will be measured.
- b. *Brand elements as identifiers for mirroring images of others:* Brand elements also help the process of mirroring the images of others, which refers to the ways in

which people are affected by what other people (e.g. their peers) think in their evaluations of destination brands. This is best represented in the construct of brand reputation and since reputation is the outcome of the cumulative image, the Forbrum et al. (2000) Reputation Scale will be utilized in order to investigate the particular topic. Besides, a relationship has already been demonstrated between brand elements and reputation dimensions (visibility, distinctiveness, authenticity, transparency and consistency) in the context of an organization (Bosch et al., 2005).

- c. *Brand elements as vehicles of reflecting embedded identity in culture:* Brand elements are also supposed to assist the process of reflecting, which refers to the ways in which the ideas and images of outsiders in time influence the essence of the destination's identity becoming integral parts of the cultural understanding of the destination and its brand or, in other words, are incorporated in the destination's culture. This is not a straightforward theme, however. Our main starting position here is that, in order for culture to incorporate a certain identity proposition, this has to be understood as positive. A reliable indication of such positive character is evaluating the 'positivity' of different parameters of the proposition. Thus, the attitude parameters according to Henderson & Cote (1998) were chosen as indications to the particular topic. This, we argue, also shows the likelihood of the brand elements and the identity propositions behind them to be accepted and incorporated in the destination's culture and in this way becomes an indicator of the role of brand elements in the process of reflecting. It has to be noted that in line with the identity-based view of



place brands that follows socio-cultural understandings of tourism destinations (e.g. Galarza, 2010; Saraniemi & Kylanen, 2011) and in line with Hatch & Schultz's (2002) 'full stakeholder' perspective, we accept here visitors as an integral part of the destination system and therefore treat them as part of the destination's culture.

d. *Brand elements as vehicles of expressing cultural understandings:* Brand elements are also supposed to act as key instruments of expressing the place's culture and making it known to others. This is a major function of all brand symbolism and it is a role of destination brands that is widely accepted and endorsed in practice. A common branding device, namely the positioning statement was instrumental in this part of the study as the anchor for the destination's culture. The place positioning statement has been utilized in order to examine the capacity and suitability of different brand elements to express cultural understandings. In this way the role of brand elements in expressing the destination's culture was captured.

e. *Brand elements' influence on behavioural intentions:* One of the major justifications of all branding efforts and the investment they demand is the potential of the brand to influence the behaviour of consumers. The existing correlation between favourable brand image and behavioural intention is indisputable (Leisen, 2001). When it comes to destinations, the image and brand formation is a complex process, which embodies various messages and their interactivity (Moutinho, 1987) but is also considered to influence visiting intentions. For instance, Kotler & Gertner (2002) assert that the country image

influences peoples' travel decisions and destination brands are considered important in persuading people to visit certain places (e.g. Morgan et al., 2002). We, therefore, infer that brand elements also play a role in this and to some extent influence the behavioural intentions. The impact of the place brand elements on behavioural decisions was investigated by addressing direct questions regarding the power of brand elements to influence the intention to revisit the destination and the intention to recommend the destination to others

#### **4. Research Methodology**

Greece, a country consistently ranked among the most popular tourist destinations worldwide, is used as the referral country for empirical validation in this study. Greece provides several relevant advantages: Apart from being among the most well-known destinations worldwide, the nation boasts of a centuries-old history and, consequently, reputation; its location can be identified by both European as well as other citizens/tourists from the East; again, thanks to the country's location, access is relatively easy for most international 'heavy travellers' (Timetric, 2014).

The structured questionnaire aimed at exploring the above themes of investigation. Given that the evaluation of a logo / brand element is affected by the pre-existing attitudes and relationship toward the brand, the fact that the respondents are already visitors indicates their positive disposition when asked to evaluate the brand. Before conducting the main study, the respondents were asked to recall the tagline/logo they remembered best and which related to the

country. The brand elements used in the study were drawn from several recent campaigns of Greece designed by the Greek National Tourism Organisation (see Appendix A). For pre-testing purposes, the questionnaire was administered to a small group of ten respondents who were visitors to Greece. In this phase, the clarity of the questionnaire and the time required to fill it in were tested. The study was then realised during the period between late spring and early autumn in 2012, which marks the peak of the tourism season in Greece, including Athens. Athens was specifically chosen for the hereby presented preliminary study, given its number of international arrivals (Hellenic Statistics Authority, 2011).

After checking TripAdvisor - as a popular travel social media - and official stakeholders' websites (e.g. the Greek Tourism Organisation), the areas where this study should take place were identified based on their popularity for international tourists. Given time limitations of this preliminary study, data collection addressed a convenience sampling in popular tourist areas only in Athens (e.g. Plaka and Monastiraki). International tourists were approached randomly, while they were strolling around these areas. The sample was selected by adopting a convenience sample based on parameters such as the ability to speak English, accessibility and willingness to participate in the research. According to the Hellenic Statistics Authority (2011), Athens receives approximately 3 million international tourists annually. This implies that 384 questionnaires were necessary to target a 5% confidence level (Saunders et al., 2009: 219). A total of 201 fully completed questionnaires were returned, a relatively small size but nevertheless compatible with other studies with a similar

topic (Stephens et al., 2011). Subsequent analysis in SPSS evolved around frequencies and means and helped us analyse responses in line with the research objective and investigated propositions.

## **5. Results and discussion**

Starting with a description of the sample, both genders were almost equally represented, as 49.7% were men and 50.3% women. Furthermore, the vast majority of the sample was between 28 and 59 years old (in detail, 32% belonged to the 28-37 age group, another 25.8% to the 50-59 age group and the 21.2% to the 38-49 age group). As far as the country of origin is concerned, the majority came from Italy (28.9%), 18.9% from the UK, 10% from the US and the rest from 35 other countries. For 40.2% of the respondents it was their first time visiting Greece, while another 28.6% had visited Greece more than 4 times.

Furthermore, 72.1% of the respondents recognised friends/ relatives as a valuable source of information prior to their trip, while only 10.9% sought information over travel agencies and brokers, 6.5% on the official website and 2.5% on the internet in general (e.g. unofficial forums, blogs).

The reason(s) for choosing this particular destination were also explored. In this the answers were revealing, since the traits and characteristics of the destination itself were mentioned as the very reason -or an extremely important one- for having chosen the destination. On the other hand, reasons related to the promotion and/or online presence, i.e. reasons highly affected by identifiers such as logo and tagline, scored significantly lower (see Appendix B). In more detail, in

a 5-point scale from '1 = Not influential at all' to 5 = 'Extremely influential reason', the highest mean score (3.67) is attributed to reasons related to traits and characteristics of the destination itself. The second most important reason relates to location (e.g. physical distance from home country) and the third most important reason is the price. This provides a clear argument for the significance and effectiveness of branding elements through improving the destination rather than through unsupported identity claims (e.g. Kavartzis & Hatch, 2013 ; Murray, 2001) and is in complete accordance with the identity-based approach to place brands which is considered in this article.

At this point and in order to address the research objective, findings can now be presented and briefly connected to relevant implications in relation to the five themes recognised in the conceptual section 3.

### **5.1. Brand elements as identifiers for leaving impressions on others**

Before proceeding, it should be mentioned that due to the fact that the country bears two distinct names, Greece and Hellas, the respondents were asked how they would call the country. The vast majority (92%) answered 'Greece', while the rest (8%) used the name 'Hellas'.

In order to measure the strength of leaving impressions on others, we then employed an indicative question that measured recall and recognition of the tagline and the respective logo. The fact that 96% of the respondents were not in a position to recall any tagline indicates that taglines may not be very powerful and strong-impression builders. In detail, out of those who could recall at least

one tagline, 3 people (1.5% of the respondents) could mention one tagline, while the remaining tagline options were mentioned only by one respondent (thereby implying the tagline can be recalled by 0.5% of the sample). The taglines / logos that were mentioned are presented in Table 1.

--- INSERT TABLE 1 HERE---

Interestingly, when the respondents were asked to identify the investigated brand elements, the prompted recall revealed a mixed picture: the tagline from a particular campaign could be recallable, while the logo of the same campaign not. In any case, the prompted recall that asked respondents to classify whether each logo/ tagline would be their first, second or third option, the choices mostly mentioned scored quite low (27% of the respondents) in terms of the taglines, and much higher (45% of the respondents) in terms of the logos (see Appendix A).

To sum up, focusing on the role of brand elements in leaving impressions, the field study shows a rather low potential. Overall, visitors do not seem able to recall the logo and the tagline, which makes a strong case against the importance attributed to these devices in the destination branding practice. Although more in-depth investigation would be required, even the country name does not seem to be a crucial factor: People use two different names for the country (Greece and Hellas), although, naturally, 'Greece' is a much more widely

adopted name. In this sense, then, the brand elements under scrutiny here do not prove to be vital factors of place branding.

## **5.2. Brand elements as identifiers for mirroring images of others**

The Forbrum et al. (2000) reputation scale was employed using 5-point Likert items. The perceived contribution of each element is presented in Table 2 below. Findings reveal that the three brand elements have a limited contribution to the process of mirroring. Once again, the most significant role is held by the country name, whereas the tagline and logo are considerably weaker. Despite the overall low scores, we can reach to several valuable conclusions. The logo's major contribution seems to be in terms of making the brand and the destination more visible rather than reinforcing authenticity or transparency. This might be a good indication for tourism authorities in terms of the type of logos they design for their destinations. The tagline, on the other hand, seems to be able to contribute at a moderate level to the distinctiveness of the destination. Therefore, it might be useful for tourism authorities to consider taglines that highlight this distinctiveness.

--- INSERT TABLE 2 HERE ---

## **5.3 Brand elements as vehicles in reflecting embedded identity in culture**

This proposition can be adequately addressed by building upon the Henderson & Cote (1998) 7-point semantic scale which allows for an evaluation of important

attitude parameters. Such dimensions are aspects that allow the brand element to exert influence on the evaluation of the destination and the visitor decision making. Thus, the respondents were asked to use these dimensions in order to evaluate the brand elements that have influenced their attitude the most (i.e. whether the name, tagline or logo). It is admittedly very difficult to capture this 'reflecting' function of the brand elements but the rationale of this question and the scale used was that, as mentioned above, the significance attributed to brand elements is also a good indication of the likelihood of the brand elements to assist the reflecting process described in the conceptual framework. Table 3 below presents the mean scores of the respective answers. The results in this part of the investigation reinforce the relative strength of the name as a branding device compared to the logo and the tagline as the name scores much higher in all parameters. It seems that, in this sense, the name is the part of a brand's symbolism that is able to capture and transfer most meaning and reflect it into the essential culture of the destination.

--- INSERT TABLE 3 HERE ---

#### **5.4. Brand elements as vehicles of expressing cultural understandings**

This study seeks to contribute to the identity-based approach of place branding by exploring the significance of brand elements. Still, it was out of the scope of this preliminary study to attempt to determine a common ground for the cultural understandings in terms of exploring the participants' perceptions. Therefore, we



attempted to explore the capacity of the brand elements to assist the 'expressing process' in relation to something that would 'anchor' the destination's cultural understanding. This has led to a positioning statement that best expresses the cultural 'sense' of Greece as a tourism destination. This positioning statement provided a common point of departure for the cultural meanings of the destination. The statement that was presented and read to the participants was the following:

*'For the experience seekers, the country is the European destination that offers an infinite experience space where everything began. The country combines in harmony different cultures and ways of life, the ancient rooted traditions adjusted to the European style, the Mediterranean temper with a touch of the Orient paint, all along with the complexity of its physical attributes. These attributes include sunny beaches, mountains and wilderness, together with islands that offer a unique awakening of the senses'*

We then asked respondents to choose the elements that are compatible with this positioning statement. Table 4 below presents the percentage of the respondents who thought each specific element to align with the positioning statement. Surprisingly, when asking the destination name that is most compatible, suitable and fitting for the country described by the positioning statement, 72.1% preferred the name 'Greece', 26.9% 'Hellas' and 1% claimed that neither 'Greece' nor 'Hellas' is the most appropriate name. This means that

92% may recall the country as 'Greece' and only 8% as 'Hellas' (see section 5.1), yet, when the focus is on cultural positioning, the greater disagreement over the name of the country suggests that we should question the effectiveness of the destination name as a brand element too. It must be noted though that this result might have been influenced by the content and phrasing of the positioning statement and should, therefore, be treated with caution.

--- INSERT TABLE 4 HERE ---

The respondents were then asked to evaluate how compatible the position statement was with the name, tagline, logo and the desired country image. As Table 5 reveals, the majority of the participants recognised a good fit among these variables. Overall, the results of this part of the study show a certain amount of potential for the brand elements to express the culture of the destination. In this sense, they provide some support for the use of these brand elements in the attempt to express to the outside world what the destination is about. In combination with the findings in other parts of the study, we can conclude that this might be best undertaken using the name of the destination rather than taglines or logos.

--- INSERT TABLE 5 HERE ---

## **5.5. Influence on Behavioural Intentions**

As far as the relative impact of each element on important decision-related indications is concerned, the results on a 5-point scale are presented in Table 6. The results confirm the relatively stronger potential of the destination name to exert some influence on consumers' behavioural intentions compared to the other two elements. As can be seen however, the results do not support a strong influence of the brand elements altogether.

--- INSERT TABLE 6 HERE ---

## **6. Conclusions**

This study helps to draw useful conclusions on the issues of brand formation and the role of brand elements partly also because it addresses actual visitors, when studies on the success of largely visual stimuli and their meaning most usually take place in laboratories (for instance by using eye-tracking methodology; see Scott et al., 2016). In our study, addressing actual tourists suggests the success of the destination in attracting international visitors (surpassing other destinations) and provides a chance to examine the role of brand elements in this success. A second differentiation of this particular empirical investigation lies at investigating the relative strength of different elements towards a fixed / common reference point (which, as mentioned in section 3, holds a positive position in the visitors' perception). The third methodological contribution of this research

concerns the link and assessment of alternative brand elements within a new concept, namely the identity-based approach.

Based on the empirical material presented above, certain potentially valuable conclusions about destination branding can be drawn. Regarding the overall importance and role of the three examined brand elements, all three score on a moderate level. This we see as a clear indication of the relatively lower significance of these elements within the destination branding effort and the rather limited potential that these elements have to make a big difference in the final evaluation of the place brand. Regarding the relative importance of the elements, “name” comes out on top. This might be an indication that the place’s name is indeed all that the place branding effort can be based on in terms of symbolic elements, particularly since places already have names and authorities do not need to forge new ones. The relatively higher significance of the name is interesting for new destinations or new tourism offerings that are at the early stages of their branding efforts. For a new destination, for example, or for a new route that combines different destinations, the name is clearly a more important consideration than the logo and the tagline. Therefore, authorities responsible for brand development in these cases are better advised to carefully consider the chosen name for their destination rather than hiring brand consultants to design ‘catchy’ slogans (taglines). For more established destinations, the lesson might be that there is greater value to be gained in designing brand tactics and promotional devices that emphasize the name of the destination rather than changing the tagline or re-designing the logo.

A significant issue that our study highlights is the empirical support it offers to the view that traits and characteristics of the place itself are the most influential decision-making factors. This is evidenced in that the impact of the three most outstanding brand elements (name - tagline – logo) is shown to be low. This supports the argument that has been made repeatedly in the place branding literature that promotional campaigns and devices on their own are not sufficient (see Anholt, 2007; Govers & Go, 2009). Such devices are useful only as reinforcement of a branding effort that concentrates on the whole wide range of elements that combined actually form the place brand (see Kavartzis, 2004) and incorporates what residents think and feel about their place (e.g. Lichrou et al., 2010). Overall, our research confirms that the potential impact of the destination brand elements on the visitors' behavioural decision remains relatively limited, contrary to the tendency of destination branding practice to be heavily focused on precisely these elements. Thus, we believe that the material presented here provides adequate proof of the need to move destination branding beyond the design of taglines and related promotional campaigns towards different directions that incorporate more indicators as the identity-based approach has revealed.

## **7. Limitations and Future Research Directions**

This preliminary study does not come without limitations though. First of all, being a preliminary study means seeking primarily to set the ground for a larger study. Therefore, this study has been put into action in a limited geography and did not

aim at reaching out for a larger sample. Findings also call for a more in-depth interpretation. For instance, the study was built upon the initial ability to recall a brand element, while alternative information sources (e.g. word-of-mouth, the internet) may have varying importance on tourists' involvement with the official branding elements. Therefore, future studies should attempt to address such issues and, preferably, interpret quantitative findings with qualitative insights. Along these lines, the major conceptual question that is still overhanging is whether a place brand is merely its name or something wider. The particular question should be addressed to several place and/or destination stakeholders, aiming at investigating whether they recognise the name as “an identifier for leaving impressions”, as ‘a vehicle of reflecting embedded identity’ or one ‘of expressing cultural understandings’.

Undoubtedly, future research could further examine direct questions like the exact definition and relative effect of the ‘other aspects’ of the branding effort that could be emphasized rather than staying with the traditional brand elements. Various suggestions of such other elements are given in the literature. For instance, the framework of Kavaratzis (2004) suggests organisational measures, infrastructure and the place’s landscape character as equally important for the branding effort such as logos. Similarly, Hanna & Rowley’s (2011) model of strategic place brand management suggests infrastructure, stakeholder engagement and brand architecture as elements beyond traditional communications. Consequently, future studies could examine the relative significance of these or other elements and compare them to traditional. This

would inform policies for the management of place brands that would then be tested and verified. In conjunction with the theoretical framework regarding the symbolic elements that affect the establishment of a distinctive place/destination brand, the notion of country of origin could also 'lend' aspects that hold symbolic value, like design and fashion, thus enhancing the knowledge around destination branding.

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Appendix A:

**TAGLINES**

**LOGOS**

“Explore your senses”



1	2	3
27.6%	23.3%	15.2%

1	2	3
23.4%	17%	15.6%

“Greece. Kalimera”



1	2	3
16.4%	11.6%	12.1%

1	2	3
5.4%	12.8%	15.6%

“Greece 5.000 years old: A masterpiece you can afford”



1	2	3
6.9%	7%	12.1%

1	2	3
4.5%	4.3%	6.3%

“Live your myth in Greece”



1	2	3
23.3%	23.3%	15.2%

1	2	3
45%	21.3%	12.5%

“[www.visitgreece.gr](http://www.visitgreece.gr)”



1	2	3
24.1%	18.6%	18.2%

1	2	3
18.9%	29.8%	15.6%

“True experience”



1	2	3

1	2	3



1.7%	14%	24.2%
------	-----	-------

1.8%	10.6%	21.9%
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“Your Best time yet”



<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
-	2.3%	3%

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
0.9%	4.3%	12.5%

## Appendix B

	NOT AT ALL	SLIGHTLY	MODERATELY	VERY	EXTREMELY	Mean
<b>REASONS RELATED TO TRAITS, CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DESTINATION ITSELF</b> (i.e. sea, sun, monuments,...)	9.5%	3.5%	16.6%	<b>51.3%</b>	<b>19.1%</b>	<b>3.67</b>
<b>REASONS RELATED TO PLACE</b> (i.e. closeness)	16.2%	8.6%	<b>27.8%</b>	<b>36.9%</b>	10.6%	<b>3.17</b>
<b>REASONS RELATED TO PRICES</b> (i.e. low rates...)	23.6%	17.1%	<b>31.7%</b>	<b>22.6%</b>	5%	<b>2.68</b>
<b>REASONS RELATED TO e- EVIDENCE</b> (i.e. website appearance,...)	<b>39.3%</b>	<b>17.9%</b>	24%	14.8%	4.1%	<b>2.27</b>

<b>REASONS RELATED TO REPRESENTATIVE PEOPLE/AGENTS OF THE DESTINATION</b>	<b>41.2%</b>	<b>17.1%</b>	22.1%	14.6%	5%	<b>2.25</b>
<b>REASONS RELATED TO PROMOTION</b> (i.e. heavily advertised, strong word of mouth,...)	<b>39.7%</b>	<b>16.1%</b>	28.1%	14.6%	1.5%	<b>2.22</b>
<b>REASONS RELATED TO PROCESS</b> (i.e. convenient booking, prior travelling procedure,...)	<b>42.2%</b>	<b>16.1%</b>	27.6%	11.6%	2.5%	<b>2.16</b>