SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS
AND MANAGEMENT
Lund University

Marketing the Beautiful Black Sheep:

Studying the Image Creation Process of Destinations with Social Problems
through a Dialectical Approach of Myth Makers
using Photo Elicitation and Story Telling

Claudia Guarin

Natalie Krainski

Christoph Luenser

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"Colombia – the only risk is wanting to stay!"

"Right, I heard about the story of the politician Ingrid Betancourt who was kidnapped for about six years and released by the Government from the grips of the "FARC" about one year ago. They say that the kidnapping risk is decreasing and the "FARC" is getting weak, hopefully. It would be a great step for Colombia. But wait – where am I? It's a tourism fair, right? So do those people really want me to think about kidnapping and the Guerrilla? That's kind of strange..." (Anonymous, ITB Berlin, 2009)

These thoughts are not totally surprising once you think of the violent history and bad reputation Colombia has suffered from during the last decades and in addition being confronted with a slogan telling you *"Colombia – the only risk is wanting to stay"*. But why did the Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs)[1] of Colombia choose such a radical and polarizing slogan? Something that is totally different from the recommended route all their successful 'big brothers' in tourism are taking? There must be a good reason behind choosing this virgin path that in the history of destination marketing has not been touched until now. Mexico, Brazil, Bolivia, etc., all of them have certain social problems in their countries as Latin America in general is considered to be risky. However, the DMOs of those countries use advertising campaigns that focus on modern myths by showing breathtaking and magnificent landscapes, beautiful and happy natives enjoying their time, spectacular sights, music, traditional dances, etc. These thoughts came into our minds while visiting the Internationale Tourismus Börse 2009 in Berlin[2] (ITB Berlin), constructing the base for an interesting journey into the image building process of destinations with social problems. This fair is one of the best opportunities for DMOs to present their countries in all its beauty, highlighting the unique characteristics that make these countries so special and a 'must go' for the next holidays. While looking at the numerous settings that have been created with passion and fantasy in order to bring something of the advertised country

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[1] Destination marketing organizations are non-profit entities aiming at the promotion of touristic offerings in order to increase tourism (Gretzel et al, 2006)

[2] The ITB Berlin is the world's biggest tourism fair with almost 11,000 companies from 184 countries and territories participating in 2009

into the minds and imagination of German tourists, it seems like most of the marketers use similar strategies to attract people's attention: they tell stories that are based on well established modern myths working as myth makers in order to promote their destinations, so that the tourists cannot wait to imagine their escape out of the grey everyday life and enter into the fabulous world of the unknown country.

But why are some countries more successful with these strategies than others? Do those countries offer more desirable and spectacular attractions or are the DMOs simply better story tellers? What myths do consumers construct by themselves? To understand the destinations' image building process, consumers' construction of their own images of destinations has to be considered, seeing consumers as myth makers when assessing the different destinations.

Since the aim of DMOs is to promote their countries, they are working with modern myths that allow them to portray positive images of the destinations in the advertising. Nevertheless, consumers work as well as myth makers where not only positive images constitute their overall image of countries. This becomes obvious when analyzing countries with social problems, as those countries are usually surrounded with negative perceptions.

1 Background

We take the departure in the research tradition of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) as it addresses "the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings" (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 868). In our research the marketplace for tourism is understood as the result of "*mass cultural production*" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1996 cited by Holt, 2002, p. 71) shaped by the DMOs using a "*set of techniques for rationalizing culture*" (ibid). The marketplace includes different mass culture industries such as television, consumer goods, music, film, internet, and advertising (ibid) which set the stage for the consumers to inform themselves. For instance there have been studies about the influential role of magazines such as National Geographic which construct representations about underdeveloped countries for 'Euroamerican' readers, creating uni-dimensional images through mass media (Parameswaran, 2002). Nevertheless, the most often used technique by DMOs to rationalize culture is advertising. According to Thompson (2004), the assumption of advertising as the main way to transfer cultural meanings into the consumers' lives is found in the extensive literature applied to consumption communities. This is the reason why advertising has been defined as "mythologizing" by Randazzo (1993 cited by Stern, 1995) who furthermore explains that "*advertising is the vehicle you use to access the consumer's mind, wherein you can create mythical worlds, which over time become associated with, and ultimately come to define, your brand*" (Johns & Gyimóthy, 2002, p. 322). Since such mythical worlds go further than simple communication by entering into the subconscious, they are interpreted and re-interpreted over time (Johns & Gyimóthy, 2002). DMOs, using the mythologizing character of advertisements, try to build the image of the destinations and to guide consumers' identities in a specific direction (Foucault, 1984 cited by Thompson, 2004; Johns & Gyimóthy, 2002).

Baloglu & McCleary (1999 cited by Li et al, 2009) explained that the cognitive image formation process of consumers about destinations is influenced by external information and past experience as well as personal characteristics. The affective image which represents the feelings and evaluations of the destinations is influenced by the cognitive image. Both cognitive and affective image create the overall image of the destination (ibid).

Furthermore, Gunn (1997 cited by Li et al, 2009) differentiates between two kinds of images that can be formed from external information; those are 'organic' and 'induced' images. The former categorization is based on information from sources without commercial character including e.g. news, academic books and classes on geography and history, and represents taken for granted knowledge about destinations. Induced image is based on information from commercial sources, which corresponds to the efforts of DMOs to promote destinations. However, in the postmodern society of pop culture and internet the border between organic and induced image becomes blurred (Li et al, 2009). Thus, the overall destination image of consumers is formed through controllable, semi-controllable and uncontrollable inputs, depending on the level of control the DMOs have on the information transmitted to consumers (ibid). This furthermore influences *"pre-, during- and post-trip consumer behavior"* (Tasci & Gartner, 2007, p. 423 cited by Li et al, 2009, p. 2). Therefore, cultural meanings are constructed everyday through interaction of people and their environment (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Consumers actively rework and transform the symbolic meanings encoded in both, organic and induced images, forming their unique identity (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Gunn, 1997 cited by Li et al, 2009). Arnould & Thompson (2005, p. 869) furthermore state that this unique identity is reflected in *"conceivable action, feeling, and thought, making certain patterns of behavior and sense-making interpretations more likely than others"*. This transformation of symbolic meanings and the meanings consumers ascribe to their experiences shape cultural myths which are reproduced through story telling (Levy, 1981; Stern, 1995; Thompson, 2004).

We establish ourselves in the mythologizing literature in order to understand the image building process of destinations, since studies have proved that myths play a significant role in this process. Furthermore, as we are interested in this process applied to destinations with social problems our following literature review also includes destination marketing studies related to these cases.

1.1 Literature Review

In the research tradition of CCT several authors have focused on myths (see Belk et al, 1989; Belk & Costa, 1998; Hennig, 2002; Levy, 1981; Rook, 1985; Stern, 1995;

Thompson, 2004). Myth can be understood in an anthropological sense but also as a linguistic construct (Johns & Gyimóthy, 2002; Laing & Crouch, 2009).

Myths in the anthropological sense have always been based on words and images used since primitive time to explain and understand the world (Lévi-Strauss, 1978 cited by Johns & Clark, 2001 and Johns & Gyimóthy, 2002). Those myths or world explanations have been transmitted generation by generation; being culturally accepted as reality (ibid). Other authors define myth as *"a tale commonly told within a social group"* (Levy, 1981, p. 51); Hunter & Whitten (1976, p. 279 cited by Johns & Clarke, 2001, p. 335; Laing & Crouch, 2009, p. 128) refer to it as a narrative that is *"believed to be true by the people who tell it"*. It is the collection of ideas that are accepted by society and are represented symbolically in various forms of images and narratives, e.g. in literature, movies, art, and pop culture (Hennig, 2002). Lévi-Strauss (1963 cited by Levy, 1981) highlights that the myth's core is the story it tells and its purpose is to provide solutions to problems that in society are not understandable with the help of natural and social experiences (Hennig, 2002; Levy, 1981). Thus myths are tools that help us to arrange perceptions of the real world, influencing the consumers' lives (Levy, 1981). Slotkin (1973 cited by Thomspon, 2004) emphasizes that the credibility of myths depends on the suitability of a myth with the particular historical and environmental conditions of the particular culture which the myth is about. Therefore, advertising uses cultural codes that are mostly relevant for a particular 'interpretive community' (Scott, 1994 cited by Thompson, 2004; Stern, 1995).

The linguistic concept of myth is a special type of speech in which a sign is considered the amalgam of a signifier and what is signified (Barthes, 1973 cited by Corrigan, 1997; Johns & Clark, 2001; Johns & Gyimóthy, 2002). For example: the word 'paradise' has no particular meaning until the hearer associates it with other concepts like untouched beaches or clear water. After these associations the word paradise suggests a particular kind of holiday destination. Furthermore, not only words but as well tangible objects like images, other people and artifacts work as signifiers, being often referred to as 'things of this sort' (Johns & Gyimóthy, 2002; Martin et al, 2007); e.g. pictures of natives, jungle, and 'things of this sort' are associated with untouched natural destinations. Through the analysis of these linguistic constructs unspoken ideas come to the surface. It is the hearer who connects the different concepts with either positive or negative emotions, as every hearer is an

individual human being with different associations and interpretations in mind (Johns & Clark, 2001; Johns & Gyimóthy, 2002). This explains the changing and dynamic character myths can have (ibid). It can be inferred that myths take departure in culturally transmitted realities and may evolve with every individual interpretation.

Thus, it is understood how words, images (in the anthropological sense) and associative linguistic concepts work together in advertising, suggesting magical proportions and activating the deepest areas of imagination, becoming a strong motivator for travelers (Johns & Gyimóthy, 2002). Words, artifacts and images working as signifiers complement and sometimes are more important than the offerings' qualities. As explained by Baudrillard (1998 cited by Johns & Gyimóthy, 2002, p. 321) *"need is never so much for a single object as the desire for social meaning"*.

Holt (2003 cited by Martin et al, 2007 and Hsu et al, 2009) refers to icons as encapsulated myths and argues how brands can become icons through a five-step strategy. This strategy was adapted later on by Martin et al (2007) and Hsu et al (2009) to build destinations as iconic brands in which the overall strategy is to take the consumers' own interpretations of their experiences of the destinations to understand the myths and encapsulate them into icons. Touristic sites can be seen as icons for certain destinations, e.g. the Eiffel Tower for Paris. Additionally, certain destinations can become icons themselves, e.g. the big apple as the icon for New York (Hsu et al, 2009; Martin et al, 2007).

The myth's function to organize and interpret experiences has been applied to tourism by several authors (Johns & Clarke, 2001; Johns & Gyimóthy, 2002; Laing & Crouch, 2009; Shields, 1991). Hennig (2002) points out that tourism is related to myth as it is enacted partly in the real world and partly in the consumers' fantasies. According to Corrigan (1997) tourists are not looking for the true experience, but instead are watching for pre-established signs of tourism (icons) that have been taught to the consumers, producing organic and induced images, classified as the *"tourist gaze"* by Urry (1990). He elaborates on the tourist gaze as the connection of typical activities with certain destinations, e.g. the kissing couple in Paris is a sign for the romantic city of Paris. In Urry's work from 1992 he alters the tourist gaze and talks about different kinds of gazes, depending on what the tourists are searching for. A great part of tourism involves sightseeing, a search for sites

that have been marked as important by travel books and guides, DMOs and the local tourism industry, shaping the consumers' meanings by telling them what signs are worth taking a picture of or sending a postcard with the special motive. For Urry (1992) the act of gazing as a tourist is a historical process in which tourists consume signs of told histories. He establishes a connection to myths as stories that are commonly told within a social group (Levy, 1981) by stating that *"different tourist gazes involve particular processes by which the collective memory of a society is organized and reproduced"* (Urry, 1992, p. 184). In his work 'The Tourist Gaze "Revisited"' Urry (1992) claims that people nowadays often feel embarrassed if their main objective of traveling is sightseeing and a chase of pictures of famous places, supporting MacCannell's thoughts about staged authenticity and the tourists' search for the back stage.

MacCannell (1973) introduces the classification of tourists into non-ironic tourists, the tourists searching for authenticity in the back stage or postmodern tourists who move in the front stage, looking rather for staged inauthenticity. Likewise Jameson (1990 cited by Goulding, 2000, p. 839) describes the postmodern tourists as searching for *"historical past through pop images and stereotypes"*. Johns & Clarke (2001, p. 357) furthermore characterize postmodern tourists as people who are living up to the expectations one has to fulfill while traveling by *"doing what you are supposed to"* according to what is shown in the postmodern consumer society of the spectacle and the media (Goulding, 2000). MacCannell (1973) elaborates on Goffman's categorization of front and back regions in tourism, talking about staged authenticity. He bases his argument on every tourist's desire to get involved with the foreign society and culture, as anything else is not accepted in our society because it is seen as a too superficial experience (MacCannell, 1976). The front stage can be compared with a reception where tourists are received or a restaurant tourists are dining in. The corresponding back stages are the employees' rooms where they relax during their break or the kitchen in which the meals are prepared for the tourists sitting outside in the front stage. In the front stage everything is a scenery that has to correspond to the tourists' expectations, e.g. seeing a performance of typical dances in a foreign country. At the back stage on the contrary the real life of the performers is taking place, maybe preferring other dances than the ones shown on the front stage. MacCannell (1973) claims that the front stage is constructed for tourists who do not want to get in touch with foreign

people but prefer to 'sight-see' them. Only by entering the back stage one can experience the reality and see the authentic and real life of the people. Tourists are getting more aware of this distinction, often pointing at the front region as the 'typical tourist attractions' in order to distinguish themselves from the 'ordinary tourists', emphasizing their quest for authenticity. Urry (1992, p. 183) additionally elaborates on consumers' perception of authenticity: *"This is what people mean by authenticity, that there is a consistent relationship between the physical and built environment and a given historical period"*.

MacCannell (1976; 1973) furthermore studied the search for authenticity as a way of escaping from everyday life experiences, as finding otherness is a central theme in tourism (Costa, 1998). Ryan (1991 cited by Goulding, 2000) and Urry (1992) characterize the tourist experience in this sense, stating that the tourists want to see and experience something unlike from the ordinary life activities. Urry (1990) additionally states that the distinction between the usual and the extraordinary is the source of tourism. McCabe (2002) adds that society is imposing us to refer to our travel experiences as something outstanding, describing it as more meaningful than everyday life. Moreover, Urry (1992) elaborates on the distinctiveness of the visual environment as the source of attributing a different character to touristic signs, pointing out that "*the most mundane of activities, such as shopping, strolling, sitting having a drink, or swimming, appear special when conducted against a striking visual backcloth*" (Urry, 1992, p. 172). Nature, history and culture play an important part in offering the extraordinary the tourists are searching for. History is connected to a travel in time, suggesting the tourists to discover a different time of life (Corrigan, 1997) often accompanied by a feeling of nostalgia (Johns & Gyimóthy, 2002). Goulding (2000, p. 837) adds that *"one form of escape from the anxieties of contemporary life is the experience of the past, packaged and sold as authentic"*. Nature on the other hand is an opportunity to travel in space and see something you cannot find elsewhere. It is another form of escape; an escape from the modern orchestration of culture into the cultural opposition of the pure experience of nature (Corrigan, 1997). Likewise, Hennig (2002, p. 174) builds on these ideas and states that modern myths such as *"nature"*, *"the noble savage"*, *"art"*, *"individual freedom and self-realization"*, and *"paradise"* are significantly important in tourism.

The modern myth of *nature* has come to its importance in the 18th century when its aesthetic meanings have been portrayed in experiencing a romantic sunset or beautiful untouched nature (Hennig, 2002). The concept of recreation through nature furthermore supported the focus on this modern myth. In a variety of advertisements nowadays untouched nature is shown and an increasing awareness to protect unspoiled nature is apparent in today's society. Tourism advertising is working with the experience of untouched nature, inviting the tourists to explore virgin flora and undiscovered fauna (ibid) and through this experience travel in space, which is in line with Corrigan's (1997) concept about the meaning of nature in tourism. Intense natural contact is achieved by outdoor sports like climbing, surfing, skiing, paragliding, diving, swimming, and rafting (Hennig, 2002). Although this might be mundane activities for some people in their everyday lives, in another visual context these activities appear even more special and have a more recreational and natural touch, as stated by Urry (1992).

The native inhabitants of travel destinations are characterized by the tourists as peaceful, content and happy people who live a carefree life in harmony with nature and do not demand anything else than what they possess (Costa, 1998; Hennig, 2002). This so called *noble savage* lives in a total contrast to the stressful, modern and demanding life of the tourists, portraying an alienated and idyllic pre-industrial life that fascinates the tourists as it is another opportunity to escape from everyday life by searching for otherness (ibid). Looking at tourism advertising, guidebooks or other media that DMOs use to promote their countries, smiling and cheerful natives dressed in traditional dresses or costumes either celebrating a traditional feast or following pre-industrial activities like fishing or creating handicrafts, can be found (Hennig, 2002). In the tourists' ongoing search for authenticity (MacCannell, 1976) traditional feasts offer a perfect opportunity to get in contact with natives or even live the life of a noble savage for a moment through eating traditional food, participating in rituals, or buying handmade art; in short: through consumption (Costa, 1998; Hennig, 2002).

Hennig (2002) compares *art* tourists with medieval pilgrims as those tourists are in quest of seeing the great works of art personally, standing in front of it and at least watching it with their own eyes to then take a postcard or books of the seen artwork with them. The art tourists want to see the original and do not feel content with a copy or a picture. This

phenomenon does not exist because of aesthetic reasons as usually you cannot distinguish between a good copy and the original; rather the tourists want to experience the 'bonus' that has been added by the 'hand of master' to his work of art. Where to find the important and original artworks is usually described in guidebooks or taught in school. The importance of art in our society is well portrayed when looking at DMOs marketing birthplaces of famous artists or cemeteries with graves of them. Although often no artworks can be found at those places they are surrounded by a special magic that attracts tourists. This is in line with Corrigan's (1997) concept of history that offers the opportunity for tourists to travel in time in order to experience past times.

The myth of *self-realization* is as well based on the described theory of finding distinct experiences from everyday life during holidays (Corrigan, 1997; Hennig, 2002). Tourists can forget about their duties and can find the time to discover themselves, constructing a trip to a world full of their own preferences, not obeying to social responsibilities (Costa, 1998; Hennig, 2002).

According to Hennig (2002) the modern myth of *paradise* is a combination of the before described myths of nature and the noble savage, portraying a contrast to our over civilized and rational society and being topics frequently portrayed in travel advertising. The traditional myth of paradise in contrast was the one of an "*ordered garden*" (ibid, p. 183). Therefore, tourist destinations that offer landscapes that have not been touched by modernity and offer a contrast to the modern world where the noble savage lives in unspoiled nature are usual images of paradise (Borgerson & Schroeder, 2003; Costa, 1998; Hennig, 2002). For the tourists the self-realization myth plays an important part in their imaginations of paradise as the escape from the everyday life routines and obligations results in a 'paradisiacal' feeling (Costa, 1998). Hennig (2002) furthermore compares this feeling with the one people usually only feel when they fall in love, with the difference, that a journey into 'paradise' can be booked easier and more frequently.

Tourism advertising is often based on the myths such as the ones described above in order to create exciting stories (Thompson, 2004) and promote the travel destination. DMOs are aware of the power of tourism to create a fantasy world that can become true by physical enactment of the myth and therefore offers the possibility for the tourists to confirm the

myths shown in the advertising and stories told (Hennig, 2002). "*Thus a myth, as part of the imaginary world, can become 'reality' in tourism*" (ibid, p. 185) which is "*a much more powerful way than by television, movies or books*" (ibid).

Within the literature review of destination marketing only a limited number of studies are applied to destinations with social problems, political risks, crime and terrorism (see Beirman, 2003 cited by Ladkin et al, 2007; Blake & Sinclair, 2003; Cothran & Cothran, 1998; Drabek, 1995; Fall, 2004; Frisby, 2002; Gretzel et al, 2006; Poirier, 1997; Richter, 1994; Richter & Waugh, 1986; Young & Montgomery, 1998). The basic outcome of these articles is that governments as well as the tourism industry as a whole need to be aware of not only the promises of tourism, but also have to keep in mind the growing political and security instability that threatens the tourism industry. Despite the growing awareness of these problems, especially after 9/11 and the following terrorist attacks in e.g. London and Madrid, many DMOs still lack sufficient crisis management tools. This led to some studies aimed at helping DMOs to overcome those dangers and not to loose their position in the tourism industry through the development of theories about risk management, destination recovery and crisis management (Ladkin et al, 2007). Those studies are basically focused on proactive anti-terrorist strategies and risk analysis in which DMOs work together with governments to decrease the vulnerability of the tourism industry (Paraskevas & Arendell, 2007; Poirier, 1997; Richter & Waugh, 1986). The suggested destination recovery strategies include mainly product and market innovations and improvements in the infrastructure in order to maintain the interest of the tourists and motivate them to keep on traveling to the destination (Ladkin et al, 2007; Schlüter, 1991). The above mentioned studies are focused on destinations that are usually not recognized as countries with social problems. Contrary, a study from Echtner & Prasad (2003) works on the DMOs' myth creation of Third World Countries. The underdevelopment of such countries is considered as a social problem that DMOs manipulate in order to emphasize stereotypes such as '*the Unchanged*', '*the Unrestrained*' and '*the Uncivilized*' that are attractive to their target market (the First World) due to their postcolonial character. These myths are used by the DMOs because they replicate the colonial forms and emphasize binary oppositions between the First and Third World and furthermore maintain geopolitical power structures (ibid). Echtner & Prasad (2003) list former studies that deal with the explanation of the content of

these myths (see e.g. Britton 1979; Echtner 2002; Mohamed 1988; Silver 1993; Sturma 1999; Wilson 1994). These two authors complement former studies with the explanation of '*why*' those myths have been perpetuated over time through advertising and associate these three myths with destinations' categories of '*Oriental*', '*Sea/Sand*', and '*Frontier*'. The first category includes countries like Egypt, India, and China and the corresponding myth of *the Unchanged*, whereas the second one includes e.g. Thailand, Jamaica, and Costa Rica with the myth of *the Unrestrained*; the third category includes e.g. Ecuador and Kenya where the myth is the one of *the Uncivilized*. The myth of *the Unchanged* keeps the destinations in the past and transforms them into timeless places. Tourists are taken to ancient civilizations where relics and ruins are the main attractions for the tourist gaze. In order to keep this myth alive, advertising avoids verbal and visual representations of modern architecture and people, emphasizing mystical secrets and exotic people. Thus, tourists are motivated to discover those places. Luxurious lands of sea/sand destinations are the main theme of *the Unrestrained* myth. DMOs show attractions like tropical beaches, exclusive resorts, happy natives, and pristine nature as a present paradise, which is in line to the definition of the paradise myth of other authors like Hennig (2002). *The Uncivilized* myth is based on primitive people, wild animals and savage nature that can be found in the destination. The fascination of the Western society for pureness and raw sensuality of these destinations is understood as a quest for different experiences and otherness as explained by MacCannell (1976; 1973) and Costa (1998). In this study the authors refer to the manipulation of these postcolonial stereotypes in which the social problems of Third World countries are hidden in order to attract tourists based only on what is interesting for them. In the same way everything that contradicts the myth is silenced, showing only one side of the destination to the tourists. *"These marketing representations provide an influential framework for expectations, attitudes and actions in Third World destinations"* (Echtner & Prasad, 2003, p. 679). As only one side is shown, the general community of these destinations is immediately associated with the degrading concepts of savage and uncivilized (Ashcroft et al, 1998 cited by Echtner & Prasad, 2003).

From the above it can be inferred that within destination marketing literature about destinations with social problems most of the studies are focused on traditional marketing

techniques to overcome the effects that terrorism and other social problems can have on tourism rates and the leading position within the industry. Those techniques are mainly focused on the reinforcement of landmarks, new products and destinations' offerings and general efforts to reach tourists' satisfaction, assuming that consumers have only logical preferences based on the evaluation of the offerings' quality. As mentioned above, the influential role of myths has been considered in the literature about general destination marketing strategies in which positive and attractive myths are portrayed in advertising. Even though Young & Montgomery (1998) claim that tourism crisis can be self-perpetuating in the media, which often exaggerates the situation, the literature about destinations with social problems has neglected the subjective and intangible aspects of the destination such as fears, reflected in negative myths. This is supported by Echtner & Prasad (2003) who state that surrounding social problems of destinations like poverty, cruelty, laziness, exploitation and negative imagery are avoided by the DMOs of such countries because of their interest to sell the destinations, but are frequently emphasized in media and pop culture. In the literature we have seen the influential role that media plays in the destination image creation process, since media influences both DMOs and consumers, and motivates them to react and elaborate on the ideas it presents. Furthermore, as explained by Li et al (2009) a distinction between organic and induced images becomes more difficult since it is increasingly impossible to find noncommercial information in mass media. Under this contradiction between DMOs and media, consumers make their own interpretations of the destinations creating and transmitting their own myths. This dialectical image building process of destinations where DMOs are myth makers to promote the countries and consumers are myth makers to assess the countries, both influenced by and reacting to media, has been neglected in the literature.

With this study we aim to understand how the interrelationship of DMOs and consumers working as myth makers create the overall image of a destination with social problems where usually negative imagery is avoided by DMOs. By using a dialectical approach we contribute to the research tradition of CCT by offering a thick understanding of this image creation process of destinations with social problems, as this dialectical approach still does not exist in the literature. In the same way we contribute to the traditional marketing domain of destination marketing by taking the departure in mythologizing literature,

belonging to the research tradition of CCT. Furthermore, Li et al (2009, p. 2) emphasizes that *"despite its importance and attraction to a growing number of scholars, destination image studies are still considered atheoretical and lacking in conceptual frameworks"*.

1.2   Structure of the Paper

After presenting the background and literature review we will in the following chapters describe the methodology applied for this study and its limitations. Next, we develop the dialectical analysis considering on the one hand the myth making process of DMOs and Travel Agencies / Tour Operators (TA / TO) and on the other hand the myth making process of Consumers. After this, we discuss the dialectical image building process of destinations with social problems and finally state the conclusions of the study as well as suggest managerial implications and areas of further research.

2   Methodology

The nature of the underlying research problem is categorized as *reflection* counting for one type of pure research (Easterby-Smith et al, 2002) as it re-examines the existing destination marketing theories and CCT ideas and puts them together in order to lead to theoretical development. Specifically, a middle-range theory, a theory that *"attempts to understand and explain a limited aspect of social life"* (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p. 8), will be developed since the object of this study is to understand the dialectical image creation process of destinations with social problems.

It is believed that meanings are constructed everyday through interaction of people and their environment. Consumers do this by actively reworking and transforming the symbolic meanings encoded in advertisements, brands, retail settings or material goods forming their unique identity (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Furthermore, it is assumed that everyday people interactions determine social order and reality, which corresponds to the constructionist ontological position presented by Bryman & Bell (2007). Under this position, it is understood that daily used categories (e.g. beautiful vs. ugly, safe vs. risky) are agreed upon in a social context and taken for granted as reality. Additionally, this constructionist position argues that there is a constant change characteristic in this process; hence categories like "safe" will vary according to both time and place (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Likewise, according to the nature of the research problem, this study requires an interpretivist epistemological position that recognizes the "distinctiveness of humans" instead of a positivist position that believes that a natural science model can be applied for the study of society (Bryman & Bell, 2007). This interpretivist epistemological position is characteristic of the marketing research tradition of CCT, but it still leaves space for methodological and epistemological variety in order to share the common goal of leading to studies of cultural complexity (Arnould & Thomopson, 2005).

Due to contributions from phenomenologist and symbolic interactionist views, this interpretivist position states that the elements and actions that constitute the social reality are meaningful for people. Then, as explained by Bryman & Bell (2007, p. 20): "*they* (human beings) *act on the basis of the meanings that they attribute to their acts and to the*

acts of others". By assuming this, the study aims at understanding how the target customers interpret the world around them (tourist destinations) and subsequently to place those interpretations within a social scientific frame.

2.1 Procedure

In order to understand the dialectical image creation process of destinations with social problems a grounded theory approach, which is characteristic for CCT studies, is implemented. Even though we are familiar with prior developed literature in the field of CCT and destination marketing before the beginning of the study, we do not pretend to test any specific or formal hypothesis. Thus, ideas and theory will come out from the data, as outlined by Glaser (1978; 1992 cited by Easterby-Smith et al, 2002). Even though prior research might be considered as a deductive element, theory will be developed through an inductive study, as explained by Bryman & Bell (2007, p. 14): "*Once the phase of theoretical reflection on a set of data has been carried out, the researcher may want to collect further data in order to establish the conditions in which a theory will and will not hold*". This iterative strategy (back and forth between data and theory) also stated by Bryman & Bell (2007) is characterized by a sense-making and skeptical analysis where the gathered data is interpreted in the light of existing theories in order to go further than mere interesting empirical generalizations; also generating findings with theoretical significance to the field of CCT.

The research design of a case study is used. More specifically, polar case studies, aimed at developing theory (Eisenhardt, 1989). Case Studies offer the possibility to conduct rich, empirical descriptions of certain aspects of a phenomenon, using different and diverse methods of data collection (Yin, 1994 cited by Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Since the dialectical image creation process of destinations with social problems is a complex social process that has to deal with myths and stereotypes, qualitative data generated through a case study methodology is needed in order to get an insight into the social constructs and solve the research problem.

Polar types[3] are especially applicable to explain the research problem. Mexico and Colombia are two countries that offer a great diversity to the tourists, operating in the same regional area with the same climatic conditions, similar landscape, cultural heritage and intercultural exchange. Furthermore, both countries suffer from social problems and a difficult history of violence and safety. Nevertheless, Mexico's number of tourists (22.6 million in 2008) is significantly higher than Colombia's number (1.1 million tourists in 2008) (Arge Lateinamerika, 2009). Most Latin American countries have democratic governments since a long time, which allows us to assume that they all generally offer beneficial environments for the tourism industry (Cothran & Cothran, 1998). However, Colombia is a special case and serves well as an example that a democratic government does not always guarantee stability or positive leadership (ibid). Mexico on the other hand has as well faced serious political problems for numerous times. Nevertheless, the tourists rarely got to notice these problems as they have been isolated from the 'real Mexico' and channeled into safe areas without daily crime (ibid). Apart from the political and social instability, Latin American countries have to deal with a negative image created by mass media in Western countries, as it focuses mainly on distributing the negative news (Richter & Waugh, 1986). Therefore, Mexico is the perfect example of a typical tourism destination that succeeds in constructing a positive image despite its social problems and therefore acts as the successful case in this research. In contrast Colombia still struggles with a bad reputation and is not yet perceived as an attractive travel destination. Thus, Colombia serves as the deviant case in this study.

Since the case study methodology applied is intended to a theoretical abstraction rather than statistical probability, the complexity of the research problem will be analyzed by choosing a small number of people instead of a large number randomly selected (Easterby-Smith et al, 2002). Consequently, theoretical sampling is used, referring to an iterative data collection process as it is controlled by the emerging theory.

The appropriate methods help us to access the object of study. The methodology of case studies offers the possibility to combine several quantitative with qualitative methods.

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[3] Eisenhardt (1989, p. 537) refers to polar types as *"one case of clearly successful firm performance and one unsuccessful case"*. In our research country performance is equivalent to firm performance.

Nevertheless, the focus of this research is on qualitative data and hence in line with the object of the study, the inductive research orientation, as well as the taken ontological and epistemological positions. Thus, a deep understanding of consumer behavior is the main driver of the research.

2.1.1 Data Collection from Destination Marketing Organizations and Travel Agencies / Tour Operators

According to Bryman & Bell (2007) and Easterby-Smith et al (2002) interviewing is a fundamental and the most frequent used method in qualitative research. In order to fulfill the purpose of this study, semi-structured interviews with DMOs and TA / TO from Colombia and Mexico are conducted to get a picture of their strategies to reach for their target customers. These interviews are carried out during the ITB Berlin, where representatives from all over the world are presenting their countries. Two interviews with DMOs are performed: one with the associate director of the Mexican tourism office in Germany, Sandra Morales, who is coordinating all touristic activities of Mexico in Germany, and one with Juliana Uribe, the marketing director of ProExport Colombia, the institution in charge of promoting Colombian non-traditional exports, international tourism and foreign investment to Colombia. Additionally we set up interviews with three TA / TO from Colombia to get complementary information from the business perspective. Likewise, we contacted TA / TO from Mexico. However, in this case the response rate before the ITB Berlin was zero. Nevertheless, we approached the TA / TO South Hope personally at the ITB Berlin and conducted a semi-structured interview. Furthermore, we participated in the "Latin America Forum: Chances in the Crisis - Specialization and Quality: Key issues for tourism in Mexico and Latin America?" which gives an overview of the currently important issues of this topic. Moreover, we talked to the president of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft LateinAmerika, Andreas M. Gross, a foundation working for tourism promotion of Latin America in Germany who has a special knowledge of tourism in Latin America.

Additionally, photographs, brochures and information material handed out to customers are analyzed. Observations of advertising activities and customer interaction at the Colombian and Mexican encounters add to the overall picture of the marketing strategies of the DMOs of these two countries. Finally, documentation provided by ProExport regarding the

strategic plan implemented to market Colombia under its new country brand "Colombia is passion" is studied.

2.1.2 Data Collection from Consumers

The first step in the data gathering process is to get to know the target groups of Colombian and Mexican DMOs in order to later, in a second step, approach these target groups to get access to the corresponding data. Being aware of the target groups of Mexico and Colombia, appointments with people belonging to these groups were set up. From the interviews at the ITB Berlin, it is concluded that the target group of Mexico and Colombia is very broad, supported by the marketers' argument of both countries that their competitive advantage is 'diversity'. Thus, Mexico and Colombia are able to offer something for everyone who can afford to go to these countries, as mentioned by Jewgeni Patrouchev from Aviatur Colombia and Sandra Morales. Additionally, a research done by ProExport (2007) has found that the most common travelers to Colombia are lonely men, couples or groups of friends. Almost 70% of the people in the segment "Married couples" that travel to Colombia belong to the age range of over 50 years.

Twelve interviews have been conducted from which the eight most relevant ones have been taken into the analysis of this research. Since this study is aimed at understanding the deviant case of Colombia, the interviewees can be said to be in line with the most potential travelers to Colombia according to the DMOs. In any case, due to the similarity and amplitude of the target group of these two countries, it is assumed that the eight interviewees belong to the target market of both Mexico and Colombia. This is why two interviewees are senior professionals around 50 years old, three interviewees are middle-age professionals and further three are still University students. All the interviews are conducted with Germans or people who have spent most part of their lives in Germany due to the fact that Mexico and especially Colombia are focusing on the German market in their marketing campaigns (Patrouchev, 2009; Toron, 2009). In order to get a multi-facetted picture without gender restrictions the interviews are conducted with at least one male and one female representative within the established categories. In selecting the interviewees we followed the snowball sampling technique (Bryman & Bell, 2007) by contacting friends who in turn contacted potential interview partners with the following characteristics: they

should not know the interviewer, they should have spent most of their life in Germany, and fit into the above mentioned categories of students, young professionals or senior professionals. Furthermore, as suggested by McCracken (1988, p. 37) they "*should not have a special knowledge or ignorance of the topic under study*". This is why people with a certain travel affinity were selected without giving them further insights about the specific research topic.[4]

The Long Interview

The long interview, a term introduced by McCracken (1988) offers the possibility to access the mental world of individuals and see the world from the interviewee's point of view. Moreover, Thompson et al (1994) explain how language not only reflects 'spoken thoughts', but also 'unspoken' cultural traditions that have been built over time and agreed as social reality; "*language conveys an implicit background of meanings, beliefs and metaphors that have coalesced into taken-for-granted cultural viewpoints*" (Thompson et al, 1994, p. 449). Existential-phenomenological interviews in an open interview format, using an interview template to assure that all areas of interest are taken into consideration are conducted. Although the interview template acts as a guideline the interview process is flexible and led by the interviewee in order to get the interviewee's point of view and his / her interpretations and experiences (McCracken, 1988). Especially since these interviews are conducted by different researchers the interview questionnaire is necessary as it assures that all interviewers cover the same areas of interest during the interview. Furthermore, in order to create distance and entail a certain structure prompts like pictures, well-designed questions, etc. are used which have to be planed carefully in advance and positioned in the interview template (McCracken, 1988). We asked our interviewees to prepare five pictures of former travel experiences as a starting point for our conversation about this topic. Although interviews are a very efficient way to gather in-depth empirical data this method often comes along with a certain degree of biased data: interviewees' might answer in the way the interviewer or the social world might expect them to answer. It is the interviewer's task to create a context that makes it easy for the respondents to talk

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[4] The data collection of consumers has been conducted before the outbreak of the Influenza A virus subtype H1N1 in April 2009

about their experiences openly and thoroughly, giving the interviewee the feeling of being the expert in this topic (Thompson et al, 1994). Another important aspect that should not be neglected is that not everything can be captured via interviews, e.g. taken for granted matters or the unspoken. We are aware of this limitation and to overcome this barrier as good as possible we start our interview with a thorough analysis of the respondents' backgrounds. This gives us the possibility to understand the unspoken historical legacy; this means socially shared meanings used to interpret the respondents' experiences (Thompson et al, 1994).

Photo Elicitation

As a complement to the long interview photo elicitation is used as an interview stimuli, an appliance to overcome or prevent misunderstandings, and to access culturally distinct worlds (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Harper, 2002). Pictures of the touristic offers of Mexico and Colombia are selected to be shown to every interviewee. These pictures are taken from the websites of the tourism companies of each country. The interviewees are asked to create a collage composition about how they imagine 'Their traveling experience in Mexico' and another one about 'Their traveling experience in Colombia' with those pictures (not their ideal trip but the real one). Thirty two pictures are shown, but the interviewees are able to select the number of pictures they need to create their composition; being able to leave out pictures that they think do not correspond to their imagery of the countries. The interviewees are also asked about missing pictures in order to be open to unconsidered elements that can be part of the consumers' meanings. The interviewees are not told which country every picture belongs to. Having created the collages, the interviewees are asked to tell the story about their composition as they would tell a friend about the trip to each of these countries. These stories, as stated by Gabriel (2000, p. 135) "*enrich, enhance, and infuse facts with meaning*". Even though there is a risk when implementing storytelling as a research method regarding inconsistencies, inaccuracies, etc. "*the truth of a story lies not in its accuracy but in its meaning*" (Gabriel, 2000, p. 135). It has to be considered that since this storytelling method will be obtained through photo elicitation, stories are not naturally encountered. However, we do not intervene during the elaboration of the collage composition in order not to undermine the spontaneity of the interviewees. As well, this is

the reason for the big number of pictures to choose and the possibility of mentioning missing ones.

2.2   Analysis

The course of investigation is twofold: on the one hand we want to explore if the DMOs are aware of certain difficulties in marketing countries with social problems, what strategies and stories they use to differentiate the destinations and what kind of people they are trying to reach. To do so we first of all analyze the interviews that have been conducted during the ITB Berlin with DMOs and TA / TO. After this we look at the promotional materials gathered during the fair with the purpose of analyzing the meanings and myths that are transmitted through story telling, all in all contributing to the creation of a certain image of the destinations.

In a second step the target customers of Mexico and Colombia are taken into focus in order to investigate through story telling and photo elicitation the consumers' meanings and established myths about certain destinations, contributing as well to the image building process of the destinations.

Story Telling

Czarniawska (2004) stated that stories are emplotted narratives which according to Stern (1995) are shaped by myths. Thus, those myths can be understood by studying the stories' articulations of an experience (ibid). To do this narrative analysis we follow the three steps recommended by Stern (1995): first we identify the myths that appear in the consumers' narratives; second we determine their characteristics; and third we conclude if and how they reflect in the cultural myths portrayed in advertisements and the everyday life. By analyzing the stories in the light of the characteristics of the classical rhetorical figures of speech and plots, explained by White (1973) cited by Czarniawska (2004), a better understanding of the stories told by the consumers is achieved. The rhetorical figures of speech are:

1. Metaphor which associates two terms in order to *"explain a less known term by connecting it to one better known"* e.g. this beach is a paradise.

2. Metonymy in which an object is matched to another one due to the object's nature e.g. the indigene for the jungle.

3. Synecdoche in which a part of something symbolizes the whole part or the whole part symbolizes a part of it e.g. the sand for the beach.

The classical plots are: Comedy, Romance, Tragedy, and Satire. Other authors like Stern (1995) referred to the classification of all myth narratives done in Northrop Frye´s Anatomy of Criticism ([1957] 1973) in which the last category, Satire, can also be Irony. In this work, the four plots are explained and compared to the four nature's seasons and the four processes of human life: Comedy with Spring and Birth, Romance is associated with Summer and Growth, Tragedy with Autumn and Maturity, and Irony/Satire with Winter and Death. In her work Stern (1995) also cites the terminal values associated with every plot defined by Rokeach (1973); stories emplotted in Comic narratives end in joy, and its corresponding values are happiness, pleasure and comfort; Tragic narrative endings are sad with the value of wisdom; Romantic stories end in nostalgia and its values are ideal peace or beauty; and Ironic ones end in surprise with the values of intellectual achievement and excitement. The association of the plots with the seasons suggests that the same as Spring is touched by Winter and Summer, Comedy can be blended into Irony and Romance. Likewise, Romance can be blended into Comedy and Tragedy, Tragedy into Romance and Irony and Irony into Tragedy and Comedy. Thus, when the main value of the story is not the one that is normally attributed, it has been blended into another one. For instance stories that were not so funny at the time of occurrence but in retrospective are an example of a Comic narrative blended into Irony or if a tragic narrative does not end in sadness but in surprise, it means that the story has blended into Irony (ibid).

2.2.1   Destination Marketing Organizations and Travel Agencies / Tour Operators

The analysis of the DMOs' and TA / TO' perspective is twofold: semi-structured interviews as well as promotional material from both countries are interpreted.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The semi-structured qualitative interviews with the DMOs and TA / TO from Colombia and Mexico are analyzed plainly with an informative character. Therefore, the information

within the interviews is condensed in order to get answers for the main categories: difficulties in marketing Latin American countries, basic promotion strategies of the countries, and the target groups and marketing channels used. In order to get a thorough picture the interviews are analyzed in themselves first. Afterwards the promotion strategies of these two countries are compared. Furthermore, the data is used for the theoretical sampling of the in-depth interviews conducted with potential consumers.

Promotional and Advertising Material

During the fair we picked up various brochures, folders, posters, postcards, etc from the Mexican and Colombian encounters. The content of these materials is analyzed following a narrative analysis with the purpose of identifying generic plot elements, chronological events, conflict, characters, and outcome regarding the creation of myths and stereotypes (Czarniawska, 2004). In addition, we want to find out whether the myths found in the literature are used to build promotional messages. Consequently, narrative analysis is applied *"to describe the mythic allusions in topical advertisements"* (Stern, 1995, p. 167). This analysis helps us to understand how DMOs and TA / TO are contributing to the image building process of Mexico and Colombia.

2.2.2   Consumers

The consumers' perspective is analyzed in two ways: the existential-phenomenological interviews are analyzed and validated by the three of us as an interpretive group and the photo elicitation is analyzed in a narrative way.

Existential-Phenomenological Interviews

The interviews were carried out at the respondents' houses and each of them lasted between 80 minutes and 120 minutes. Afterwards, the transcription process of the interviews was distributed among the three of us avoiding transcriptions of own interviews, as recommended by McCracken (1988), with the purpose of staying away from familiarity with the data which would have a negative effect on the analysis. As the aim of existential-phenomenological interviews is to understand lived experiences of the respondents and the emerging meanings, their own words and category systems rather than abstract terms are used in the analysis (Thompson et al, 1989). Furthermore, the described experiences do not

have to be verified externally and only conclusions and inferences that can be drawn from the transcripts are considered. In order to understand the respondents' lived experiences through grasping emerging meanings of the existential-phenomenological interviews, it is necessary to bracket preconceived theoretical concepts. To improve the overall analysis and the process of bracketing we, as being three different individuals, form an interpretive group. This group validates our previous individual interpretations by working through the interview transcripts several times, aiming at an interpretation of the data that is seen as correct by all group members. Furthermore, interpretive groups offer a broader perspective and might see patterns a single researcher would not have seen (ibid).

The analysis of the interviews is conducted by following the five stages presented by McCracken (1988): In the first stage, each statement of the interview is analyzed in its own without considering relationships with other parts of it. Observations of the most outstanding statements are produced. In the second stage, each observation is analyzed firstly by itself, secondly in the light of the rest of the transcript and thirdly in the light of both studied literature and cultural review (the researcher's sense of the topic according to his or her own experience). During the third stage, the interconnections of the observations are analyzed in the light of the literature and cultural review. The purpose of the third stage is to leave the transcript behind and be focused only on the produced observations. During the fourth stage, the previous observations are analyzed in order to determine consistent patterns and contradictions. Finally, in the fifth stage, those patterns are analyzed in order to generate the interview thesis. At this point we are not talking about the world (Mexico and Colombia as destinations) as the respondents see it but as it appears to us from the CCT perspective. These five stages of analysis correspond to the concept of the hermeneutical circle, which means a *"part-to-whole mode of interpretation"* (Thompson et al, 1989, p. 141), and furthermore, with the interview thesis matching the global themes describing common patterns of the experiences.

Transcript	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5
					Interview Thesis
			Observation		
					Interview Thesis
Statement	Observation	Expanded observation	Observation	Pattern	
			Observation		
					Interview Thesis
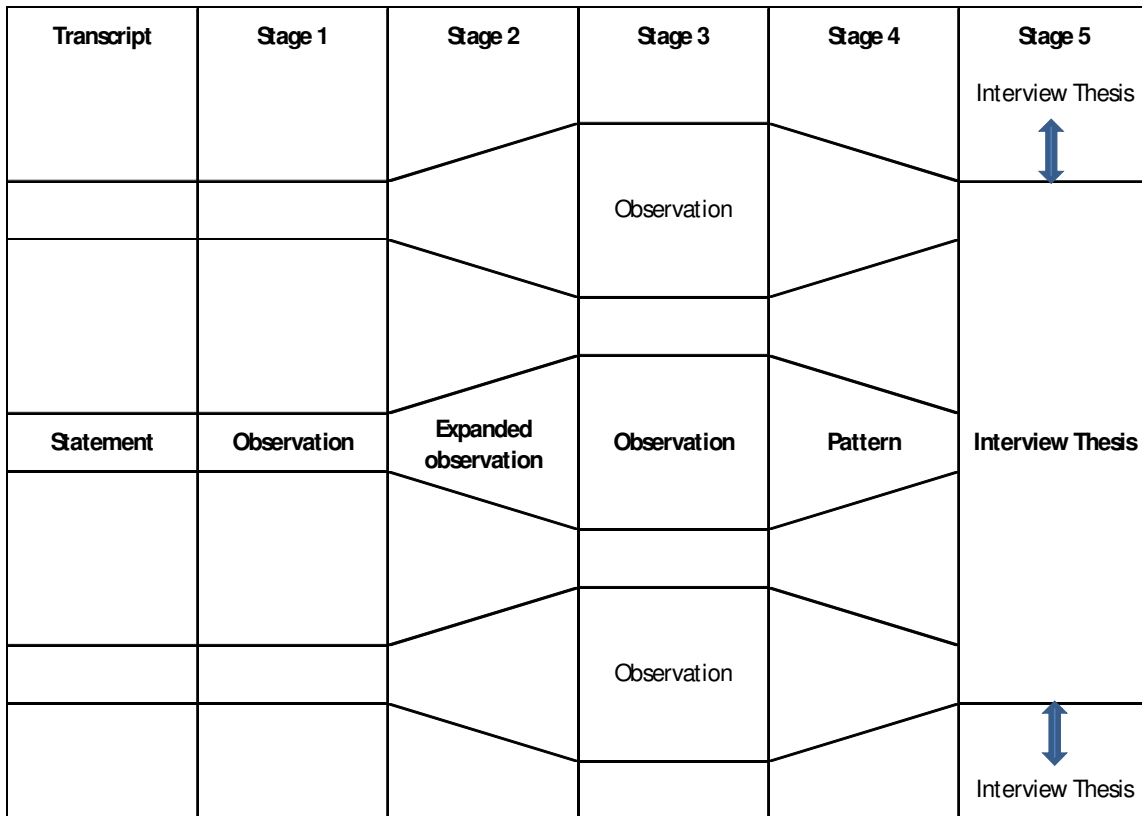
Figure 1: Long Qualitative Interview: Stages of Analysis (adapted from McCracken, 1988, p. 43)

Photo Elicitation

In the analysis of the photo elicitation the focus is on exploring the existing myths and stereotypes that consumers have about the two destinations. This is done by applying a narrative analysis of the stories told by the respondents about their trips to Colombia and Mexico. Furthermore, the stories told by the DMOs are compared to the stories told by the consumers. All in all this method helps to identify if any visual perceptions of image transcend the different interviewees and therefore represent their imagery of Colombia and Mexico and it also reflects if the stories told by the interviewees are in the same line to the stories told by marketers in their advertisements.

3 Limitations

There are several limitations concerning the investigation of this study that need to be acknowledged. As well political issues explained by Easterby-Smith et al (2002) that can influence the study are recognised. First of all the personal background of the researchers has to be considered: as one member of our research team is Colombian we have concerns that this influenced the consumers in their responses. Even though we did not explicitly inform the interviewees about her nationality, her physical appearance can be interpreted as Latin and arouse a certain range of reservation. Additionally, the other two member of our research team have the same German cultural background as our interviewees, which could influence the analysis and methodological procedures such as the selection of the pictures for the photo elicitation where certain taken for granted matters might not be thought of. Secondly, the researchers are personally attached to the general topic of the study: on one hand the Colombian researcher could be emotionally influenced when analyzing the results and on the other hand the researchers with a German cultural background belong to the target group under study which as well can influence the interpretation.

From the interpretivist perspective, according to Easterby-Smith et al (2002) the validity of the study is guaranteed by the selected methods as with them we gain access to the experiences of the participants in this research. As mentioned in the methodology, in order to manage the involvement of the researchers' perceptions and feelings, as well as the bias in answers and behaviours of interviewees because of their awareness of being studied, distance to the consumers was tried to be created following the snowball method and the use of prompts as recommended by McCracken (1988). Furthermore, the use of an interpretive group helped to overcome the bias in the analysis process.

The reliability of the study is guaranteed since all the methodological procedures are thoroughly described in the corresponding chapter. Additionally the transcripts and recordings of the conducted interviews are available.

Since the purpose of this study is to achieve an analytical generalization to theory we consider that the gathered information from our empirical data supports the theoretical arguments that are generated.

Moreover, all interviews, the ones with the DMOs and TA / TO at the ITB Berlin and the ones with potential tourists, have been conducted in English which is not the native language of either the respondents or interviewers. This can lead to problems in understanding the questions addressed at the interviewees and furthermore, the ability to clearly express can be limited. This could furthermore lead to an uncomfortable feeling of our interviewees.

Finally, it is recognized that using the technique of photo elicitation turned out to be somehow strange for some of our consumers as they felt insecure and sometimes embarrassed about their lack of knowledge. Being in this situation some interviewees might have had the priority of just finishing this part without offering all their insights they might have had.

4 Analysis

As Gross, the president of the ARGE Lateinamerika, points out, it is *"impossible to see the market differences between Mexico and Colombia without looking at the history of both countries"*. This is why, before starting our analysis, we travel back for approximately 70 years and provide a brief overview of the happenings in the history of the development of tourism in these two countries which complements and offers useful insights to the understanding of this case study.

4.1 Back to the Roots: History of Tourism in Mexico and Colombia

We start our journey in the 1940s in Mexico where under the president of Avila Camacho (1940 – 1946) the first huge campaign to create awareness around tourists of coming to Mexico, especially to Acapulco, was initiated (Bryan, 1956; Cothran & Cothran, 1998). In the 1960s Miguel Aleman, minister of the Interior, was the central figure, reorganizing the Mexican tourist department and inviting the US press, movie and radio industry as guests of the government to Mexico (Gross, 2009). Additionally, he introduced other promotional tools in the American market to draw the attention to the close-by travel destination that offers beautiful beaches, an enjoyable climate, a passionate nightlife, and the *"opportunity to do a couple of things you would not be allowed to do in the United States"* (ibid); all to low expenses. Furthermore, the government encouraged the construction of highways and airports, the two main means of transportation US citizens used in order to visit Mexico at this time. Hotels and restaurants, offering everything a tourist might desire, were built with the aid of private investors and the government. With these actions the tourism rate in Mexico increased steadily, attracting the high society from Los Angeles and Hollywood who visited Acapulco and other cities that established holiday resorts at that time; Acapulco was hip in the 50s (ibid).

Looking about 3000 km south-east, nothing was hip in Colombia at this time. People were not aware of its secret properties like gold, passionate people and beautiful landscapes. Colombia at that time did not recognize its touristic potential. Tourism was *"always part of individual improvisation and it was victim to a development that not only in the public view but in the reality made travels in Colombia an adventure that nobody was willing to pay*

money for" (Gross, 2009). The situation improved slightly at the end of the 1960s when the 'Instituto Distrital de Cultura y Turismo' (former 'Instituto de Cultura y Turismo de Bogotá') was founded and the airport 'El Dorado de Bogotá' constructed. The first resort hotel was built in 1963 in Santa Marta and by the year 1966 about 65.500 foreign tourists visited Colombia (Valencia, 1992). After taking the first steps in tourism in the 1970s and 1980s, the social and drug scandals in Colombia became very famous within the international press: *"Because, maybe Colombia was not the most important tourist destination, but it was a destination during the 1970's and the 1980's. And then, for 20 years it* (the tourism) *was dead"* (Uribe, 2009). It was the black sheep of Latin America, struggling with violence and political problems. So at some point, after decades of positioning itself as one of the most dangerous countries in the world, the improvements and better socio-economical conditions of Colombia were not recognized by the general society: *"the country realized that something had to be done, because the country was changing but the world did not know about that change"* (Uribe, 2009). This was the turning point for many Colombians as the country began an internal and external image campaign, launching the country brand 'Colombia is passion' in 2005. The development of this campaign started in the beginning of the 21st century with a country internal promotion to stimulate the Colombians' pride of their country.

Traveling back north to Mexico in the 1980s and 1990s, while Colombia was getting its 'beauty sleep', Mexico extensively worked on creating its image as a sunshine, beach, tequila and nightlife travel destination, also starting to focus on the archaeological sites in order to attract culturally interested tourists. At this time international tourism began with flights from Europe, offering the opportunity to explore a magnificent country with all its beauties and cultural sites to European tourists (Gross, 2009).

It seems that the Mexican efforts have paid off when looking at its number of tourists in comparison with tourism in other countries like Colombia. However, looking at the characteristics and attractions the two countries offer, a number of similarities can be found: beautiful beaches, luxury hotels, natural diversity, rich history and traditions, passionate people, vivid nightlife, sports and adventure opportunities, violence problems in the past but places that are *"safe enough"* (Gross, 2009) to visit nowadays, etc. Referring to the research question, the different development of the history of tourism has to be taken

into consideration as it gives insights about the construction of the image of those two destinations over time.

4.2 Destination Marketing Organizations and Travel Agencies / Tour Operators

In this chapter the interviews with the DMOs and TA / TO of Colombia and Mexico are analyzed. The interview with Mr. Gross from the ARGE Lateinamerika will be considered as well since he serves as the unbiased outsider. Furthermore, the notes taken during the Latin America Forum at the ITB Berlin will enrich the findings in order to be able to take a look at this topic from a neutral angle. The analysis will be threefold. After a first look at the development of promoting Colombia and the problems associated with this task, we identify the target group and offerings of the DMOs and TA / TO and finally, the channels used to reach the customers. The analysis of Colombia will always be complemented with aspects from the Mexican DMOs and TA / TO.

Interviewee	Organization	Kind of Organization	Position
Juliana Uribe	ProExport Colombia	DMO	Marketing Director-Tourism Vice Precidency
Luis Gabriel Tobón	Grupo Kajuyalí	TA/TO	Leisure and Adventure Director
Jewgeni Patrouchev	Aviatur	TA/TO	Travel Agent
Enrique Bechara	Contactos	TA/TO	Commercial Director-Receptive Department
Sandra Morales	México	DMO	Deputy Director
Mario Caballero	South Hope	TA/TO	Manager of Tour Plannification
Andreas Gross	Arbeitsgemeinschaft Latein Amerika	Consortium for Latin America	President
DMO= Destination Marketing Organization			
TA/TO= Travel Agency/ Tour Operator			

Table 1: Destination Marketing Organizations and Travel Agencies/Tour Operators

Most of the DMOs we interviewed stressed the importance that historical happenings have on the market situation for Colombian tourism today. At the beginning of the interview with Juliana Uribe she speaks about the importance of understanding the history:

> *Juliana Uribe: I will start by explaining it in chronological order. As you probably know, Colombia has a lot of problems, regarding the politic order. However, it began to get better and better and at one time the country realized that something had to be done, because the country was changing but the world did not know about that change. So we knew*

> *inside that we have now better opportunities for tourists or for investments, but the people outside still have that bad image about Colombia. They think that Colombia is as dangerous as Iraq or Afghanistan or something like that. So they hired one company in order to advise Colombia on how to develop a country brand.*
>
> *Interviewer: When did that happen?*
> *Juliana Uribe: That happened in 2005. So they developed a country brand and they did some interviews and they were looking into what made Colombia different from other countries. … So they launched the country brand "Colombia is Passion" in August 2005 … So in 2005 at the same time, ProExport, that has for 10 years only promoted the non-traditional exports, began to promote international tourists and investments…*

Jewgeni Patrouchev supports the view expressed by Juliana Uribe and summarizes the situation as follows:

> *Jewgeni Patrouchev: Germany needs confidence for Colombia. I guess since three or four years other operators started to get Colombia into the program because of the history and the kidnapping.*

Consequently, the main reason for the difficulties Colombian DMOs face today is routed in the violent past of Colombia. During the past decades, Colombia was surrounded by social problems such as drugs and violence and mass media fueled the creation of the negative image, as Norbert Salcher, Tourism Expert and speaker at the ITB Berlin forum explains. He mentions the lack of positive news about Latin America in the newspapers and on TV. All you ever hear about is drugs, kidnapping and violence which obviously leads to a bad reputation and image in his opinion. There is no advertising of the tourist offerings of Colombia at all. Apart from the negative press, Colombia has to deal with unawareness. Holloway & Hubbard (2001 cited by Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005) highlight the importance of media in the image shaping process of places as consumers interact with destinations indirectly through it. We analyzed "Der Spiegel", one of the most popular internet magazines in Germany (AWA, 2008) and found that there are actually much more articles published about Colombia than about other recognized destinations like Mexico. However, the uni-dimensional images often portrayed in news and mass media (Parameswaran, 2002) about the social problems faced in Colombia have prevented the consumers to inform themselves about the other dimensions and touristic offerings of the country. This argument is supported by Enrique Bechara from the travel agency Contactos and Luis Tobón from the travel agency Kajuyalí who speak of the perceptions of consumers that need to be changed:

Enrique Bechara: Well, at the beginning everybody has two points of view: the first one is that Colombia is dangerous and the other one is that they don't know Colombia at all. So, what we try to do in both cases is to tell what Colombia has to offer, why Colombia should be picked up among other competitors. And maybe to bring a fresh idea in the mind of people... what Colombia has become.

Luis Tobón recognizes the consumers' unawareness as well and elaborates on it as follows.

Luis Tobón: We have a lot of prejudices: many people do not even know where Colombia is. If you tell them about Colombia, they get confused. They do not even know where we are located. Also, the image we have, the drug thing, the cartels, narco traffic, the violence, guerrilla, bombing cars. Those are the prejudices we are facing and fighting against, in order to change our image.

Beate Zwermann from the BZ.COMM GmbH, another speaker during the Latin America Forum, suggests that the country and its associations need to be brought into the German's everyday life, for example offering traditional toys for kids, restaurants with typical food, salsa dancing classes, etc. at the German market in order to overcome this unawareness. As for any branding process, creating authentic brand attachments with core symbols evoked automatically by consumers like the ones suggested by Zwermann is also recommended by Hsu et al (2009) in their five steps for building a destination into a brand icon, based on Holt's approach. By doing this the image creation of the country is supported by everyday experiences (Hsu et al, 2009).

Even though Mexico and Colombia offer the same things to tourists, the group of tourists identified and targeted by Colombian DMOs and TA / TO differs from the one approached by Mexico.

Interviewer: Do you have a special target group? To whom do you communicate?
Juliana Uribe…We are very concerned that the people that go there (Colombia) *spend a lot. Because we do know how the tourists can impact positively in a lot of people's quality life. So we prefer the ones that spend the most.*
Interviewer: Thinking about the German customer, what would be the age group you target?
Juliana Uribe: We do not target families in Germany. It is too hard for them to think about taking their kids on vacation to Colombia. But we do target adventurous young people or old people, because we feel that Colombia is a place to experience adventures. People that have already seen Paris, New York, maybe Thailand, they begin to search for different experiences and places… So it is the same for younger or experienced

> *travelers, no matter the age. So we have more chances with people that have already been to Malaysia, or Peru or Ecuador. They would think about Colombia. It is more difficult if their only trip they do in one year is Colombia. And we target people that care about the nature and environment and that have a high cultural education / awareness. We feel that these are the main two things Colombia can offer to the German market. Or the combination of both.*

> *Jewgeni Patrouchev:*   *…our group for Colombia is best ager, 35 up, because they earn money and they can spend. They don't look at the bill, they want to spend money. Colombia is not cheap if you ask me, Colombia is cheap to live there but to travel, they don't have the low cost airlines like Ryanair or Easy Jet maybe and to travel there by plane is very expensive. If you take a person with 65 years you cannot send him from Bogotá to Santa Marta by bus for 12 hours. They get sick.*

> *Interviewer:* *In general – what is the target group of Colombia and whom is Aviatur targeting?*

> *Jewgeni Patrouchev:*   *We offer things for young people too, e.g. to learn Spanish, exchanges with Universities, etc. We offer them authentic housings where they sleep in hang mats, which is a really cheap option so that every student or backpacker can afford it. But the most expensive thing is the flight.*

> *Luis Tobón:* *The Kajuyali target group is people who like adventures as the main component and that want to experience different things than other countries can offer to them. Everybody knows Galapagos and everybody knows the great Sabana in Venezuela, but in Colombia you can experience something different. You can see that Colombians are very passionate for their country. You can see the love of the people who live there.*

Thus, the target group of Colombian DMOs and TA / TO consists of people with a high education and at least a middle class background in order to be able to afford the trip. Even though during the interviews the DMOs and TA / TO stressed the competitive advantage of diversity, people with interest in nature, contact with natives and adventure are targeted. Especially the fact that they do not target families because it is 'too hard' to take their kids on vacation to Colombia but they target adventurous people because they feel that Colombia is a place to experience adventures, leads to the conclusion that DMOs and TA / TO are well aware about the stereotype of the country as a risky destination which might be unattractive for families with children but an attractive attribute for adventurers. Following the postcolonial theory used by Echtner & Prasad (2003) to understand how Third World destinations are promoted to First World tourists, this characteristic risk of Colombia may evoke colonial expeditions where white First World explorers, hunters,

traders, anthropologist and missionaries heroically managed to go back home to tell all their stories of their adventures.

Mexican DMOs on the other hand target a much broader range of consumers. They try to reach everyone no matter what age or background they might have, as explained during the interviews with Mario Caballero and Sandra Morales.

> Mario Caballero: *Well, our target market is the people who want to get involved with the culture, that want to learn and have a good and different experience.*

> Sandra Morales: *We offer everything. We have beautiful beaches where people can swim during the 365 days of the year due to the water's temperature. This cannot be possible in other countries. We also offer culture, nature, all what a tourist can be looking for. All this has positioned Mexico above other competitors, especially from South or Central America. They of course have their beauties, without doubts, but they are limited to just one or two segments. We offer everything. About nature, we have jungle, desert in the north of the country, mountains…diversity.*

> Sandra Morales: *Well, there is everything anyway. It doesn't mean that every tourist that goes to Mexico is rich and spends a lot. For example, the train is cheap and we also have the local tourists. In general we cannot be a cheap destination because the service that we provide in Mexico is higher than the one that other countries provide... Thus, we cannot be cheap, it is not possible.*

As well in the Latin America Forum Norbert Salcher supported the argument that tourists have to be aware of the average costs of travels to South America (about US$3000). Even though inside the countries there are facilities for every budget the flight prices in South America enact a natural consumer segmentation.

Concerning the strategies and media channels used in order to reach the customers and to inform them about the various offerings, Colombian DMOs follow the same strategies implemented by Mexican marketers. As the negative image is the biggest obstacle to overcome, additionally to road shows and fairs like the ITB Berlin, DMOs invite tour operators from Germany and show them around the country. The idea is to enable the managers of German tour operators to make positive experiences while traveling around the country in order to then include Colombia in their offerings. Likewise, journalists specialized in tourism have been taken to Colombia in order for them to make first hand

experiences and later spread the positive news by word-of-mouth and help to change the image and awareness.

> Juliana Uribe: …*What we did about that is that we first began to take people to Colombia and we invested all our money taking press trips to Colombia from 15 different countries. … We began to invite them and made very good press trips with them. We hired only very good people to accompany them through the whole Colombia experience. We did very exciting activities with only the best hotels. And what happened is that they were always very surprised, it is like the "wow factor of Colombia", they said: we never imagined that Colombia would be like that. In quality, in services, in infrastructure. Because, ok, maybe they thought beautiful beaches, but they did not know that we have a hotel like the 'Santa Clara' in the middle of Cartagena.*

Positive articles about the country have begun to be published in a number of influential international newspapers such as The New York Times and The Guardian. As Hennig (2002) and Holloway & Hubbard (2001 cited by Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005) argue, tourists' expectations about certain places are influenced significantly by journey accounts and other writs since the 18th century, which offers an opportunity for DMOs to characterize the tourist gaze by telling stories and creating something special consumers are searching for on their holidays (Kavaratzis & Ashwort, 2005; Urry, 1992). This is clearly a strategy followed by Colombian DMOs:

> Juliana Uribe: *I think that within two years we took about 1000 people to Colombia. And we always knew that learning from the experiences of other countries that advertising was not the strategy for us at that point, because no one would trust a commercial about Colombia on television. What they would trust is someone that they respect or that they know, would write about Colombia that they could go to Colombia. So that is why we took all our money to take people to Colombia and make them our Ambassadors.*

When comparing the above mentioned strategies with the information obtained by the interviews with the Mexican DMOs and TA / TO, it becomes obvious that their strategy is fairly similar. As Sandra Morales and Mario Caballero point out, they also rely on press trips in order to promote Mexico's offerings and to maintain the strong positive image. Consequently, Mexico was able to build up an image strong enough to resist bad news. Additionally, the bad news about Mexico is *"not shown enough in the press to make it a subject to go or not to go"* (Gross, 2009).

> *Interviewer:*   *Regarding a problem of South American countries… perhaps Europeans still feel that there is a risk when traveling to South America; have you perceived the same situation about Mexico or do you think that this is not a problem?*
>
> *Sandra Morales: Not to be honest. I haven't heard something like "I am scared about what can happen to me if I go there" or "I am scared", no. Of course they ask how safe it is to travel to Mexico, but I think that the tourist is more informed with the internet nowadays, or has travelled more, and somehow has become internationalized… the globalization, I don't know, but this is not a problem.*

Nevertheless, Mexico is also very determined when directly reaching the final consumer; working on worldwide recognized Mexican signifiers and making the stereotypes even stronger:

> *Sandra Morales: …We advertise in magazines, news papers, billboards, advertisements around the cities; on the buses or the subway. Also, in the central square of the cities, people dressed with typical Mexican dresses, with hats; giving out brochures to the final consumer.*

Andreas Gross supports the argument that Colombia is best advised to follow the strategies of Mexico, as the Mexican DMOs have been very successful in attracting tourists in the past years. He says that *"they* (Colombia) *are doing much better when they really try to get enough not-business press… If they bring enough other press, travel press, to Colombia to communicate that this, Bogotá is one of the safest cities in South-America…"*

The biggest efforts however have been associated with the creation of the country brand 'Colombia is passion'.

> *Interviewer:*   *When did that happen?*
>
> *Juliana Uribe:*   *That happened in 2005. So they developed a country brand and they did some interviews and they were looking into what made Colombia different from other countries. What they found was important was the people and the way the people behave when they have problems. It is not that they are happy or energetic when they have problems, but it is something that cannot be translated. No matter what, you are always looking for an answer and for a positive way to handle things. So they translated the word into "passion". So they launched the country brand "Colombia is Passion" in August 2005. The country brand has two different targets. One is for the Colombian market, so that Colombians would feel better about their country, speak positively about their country and help to change the country image. And the other target is the international part.*

Before going international with the brand it was heavily promoted inside the country following the recommendation of Simpson & Siguaw (2008) to encourage word-of-mouth from inhabitants and increase the positive image of the country. Residents must be encouraged to promote their country as "*word-of-mouth recommendations from friends and relatives was the most important source in forming touristic images*" (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999, p. 892 cited by Simpson & Siguaw, 2008, p. 168). This idea is complemented by examples of cities like Vancouver that have developed brands such as "Be a Host" (Simpson & Siguaw, 2008). It seems like the internal promotion of the brand has paid off:

> *Juliana Uribe: Most people go, because they know someone from Colombia and most of the times when you see someone visiting Colombia, you see someone guiding them that is from Colombia. But they also say that if they go by themselves, they make friends in Colombia and that is something that never happens when you travel. I mean, I have been here in Berlin, but I won't know anyone from Berlin. But in Colombia, they stop you on the streets, or you dance with someone or you meet them in a bar and you feel the friendship and you come back to visit the person.*

These word-of-mouth communications have as well been studied by a number of authors cited by Simpson & Siguaw (2008) who explain that consumers' feelings and behavior are affected more by them than by marketer-sourced promotions. As Colombian DMOs are aware of this, they have supported their country brand's international campaign with the testimonies of tourism journalists as mentioned before and as well with foreign people that once went to Colombia, got to know the country and realized its other dimensions.

> *Juliana Uribe: Only the people who have been to Colombia, said that it is possible to work with Colombia as a tourist destination...*
> *Juliana Uribe: ...people from Belgium, from the U.S., from Germany say that when they have been to Colombia, they fell in love with the country and stay there. So it is a very strong message that someone from your country that might be young or that might be old or whatever just loves Colombia stays there and became a tour operator or a business man or invested in a hotel there or fell in love and got married. And those are all true stories. With the internet, we began to search for foreign people that live in Colombia and love the country and we have about 800 people writing to us, that say I want to be there, they show their pictures and they wrote their stories and what is so difficult is to decide which ones to choose. But finally, for different reasons, we have the 9 that we already have (written in their promotional material).*

Even though, those testimonies are part of the promotional material and can therefore be interpreted as marketer-sourced promotions, DMOs use tourists that already have a direct experience in the country in order to make their promotional campaigns more credible.

When deciding upon a catchy slogan for the international campaign, the marketers had to make a difficult choice as explained by Juliana Uribe:

> *Juliana Uribe: ... But we felt that we needed something more powerful, something directly to the public. So we did some research on how to communicate. We had two possibilities. One was communicating the diversity of Colombia, saying you can come here and you have the Amazon... And the other was the total opposite, saying first that the problems were no longer so big that people cannot come to visit Colombia... And we had two proposals, one was "Colombia – magic or reality" and the other "Colombia – the only risk is wanting to stay". We knew that with the latter we had to be very brave, and that people would come and say: are you crazy? How can you talk about risk together with tourism? It is like talking about bombs and things like that. But we were sure that the message we wanted to make was very clear and very direct. We did not want to do something soft. "Colombia – beautiful", we knew this was not going to work for us..*

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Jewgenie Patrouchev is one of the critics of the slogan:

> *Jewgenie Patrouchev: Let's say, if I read it: "Colombia, the only risk is wanting to stay". I like it, but for Europeans – they are really straight – if there is a negation in the phrase it is not good.*

From the explanation of Juliana Uribe, it is understood that they had the option of developing the main slogan for the campaign through a romantic story where a world of beauty would be the main value (Stern, 1995) and would follow the strategies of the DMOs of the competing countries as well as the strategies taught in the traditional branding literature. However, a defiant ironic slogan was chosen. According to Stern (1995) the central points in ironic plots are the hidden truth and the tension between what is apparent and what is actually true. This tension is clear in this slogan where the apparent risk everyone has in mind when thinking about Colombia comes to the surface but transformed into a positive message suggesting that the apparent risk does not exist and instead the truth is something nobody expects, that the offerings of the country will make the tourist want to stay. As also explained by Stern (1995), ironic plots end in surprise with the values of intellectual achievement and excitement. This matches with the intentions of the DMOs of

Colombia of generating a surprising feeling to consumers when reading the slogan and a motivation to get more information about what the country can offer to them.

> *Juliana Uribe: Our strategy is to make people realize that they do not know anything about Colombia and that Colombia might offer what they are looking for.*

This brand has been heavily promoted in mass media channels such as CNN U.S., CNN International, in CNN Spanish and across all the above mentioned channels used to sell Colombia. Additionally, the internet and the website of this brand are translated into several languages and designed with interactive platforms, which is very important for the internationalization of the brand. Likewise, expedia.de, bloggers, Facebook groups with about 25.000 people, and newsgroup channel are used to reach the final consumer.

Juliana Uribe explains the challenge of marketing a destination like Colombia:

> *Juliana Uribe: I try to explain it like this. All countries began their promotion form zero and we began from minus ten... You have to tell them that: First, it is secure to go. Second, it is beautiful and third, you are more sophisticated at different things.*

This is why, by following the first step, the underlying idea of the various strategic tools used in the promotion of Colombia is to create awareness and confidence.

> *Jewgeni Patrouchev: Germany needs confidence for Colombia. What Aviatur needs here for example is to make an office in Germany and to create them an office in Colombia. The German tour operator needs a German person to talk with in German to have a confidence. They need a German travel guide. German people who travel to Colombia … they don't really need luxury they want to discover.*

Moreover, it seems that Colombian DMOs are now aware of the Lévi-Strauss' definition of myth as an idea culturally accepted as reality built over time, since their strategy is to keep on working on the mind of consumers through advertisements and strong country brand campaigns to eventually shape a positive image of Colombia as a touristic destination.

> *Juliana Uribe: So this year, as we have the world crisis, our strategy is to keep building our brand and to keep changing the country image so that when people have the money to travel again, they will have Colombia on their minds. We don't wait until they have the money, we keep on working.*

As concluded during the Latin America Forum at the ITB Berlin, the future for the tourism industry of Colombia and in general of all Latin American countries seems to be promising.

Latin America has been consistently growing in the past years and has a chance to become a winner. First of all, the flight connections between Europe and Latin America are as good as never before. Secondly, Latin American airliners have a good reputation in Germany which is one of the main target markets. Finally, during the last ten years, the tourism infrastructure improved significantly and is in some parts already up to world average which is a major success, considering the short development phase.

4.2.1   Stories and Myths told in Promotional Material

Different destinations are attractive in the eyes of consumers if they believe that their fantasies can be fulfilled (Johns & Gyimóthy, 2002). As pointed out by Johns & Gyimóthy (2002) touristic destinations as part of an experience economy must differentiate themselves not only through functional qualities but as well through image, symbolism and other intangible meanings. Therefore, DMOs work on the creation of positive myths about the destinations with advertising being the most suitable of their used methods (Stern, 1995). Nevertheless, for a myth in order to be credible in the eyes of consumers it has to be built around ideas, metaphors and images pertinent to the background knowledge, beliefs, assumptions and general positive and negative conditions of the particular culture (Slotkin, 1973 cited by Thompson, 2004). From the promotional material of Colombian DMOs and TA / TO, gathered during the ITB Berlin, the following myths are transmitted to the consumers through the articulated stories about the destinations[5]:

The stories that unify both countries, according to the analysed material are the ones about diversity; being in line with what Sandra Morales and Juliana Uribe stated as the competitive advantages of both Mexico and Colombia. Mexico e.g. talks about it supported by metaphors as a *"country with many faces"* – *"white dream beaches, antique high cultures and modern metropolis"*. Colombia is telling the story of "*12 reasons for going to Colombia and, once you are there, a million reasons for wanting to stay*" in a booklet shaped like a book of fairytales. With this Colombia aims at supporting and complementing its ironic slogan suggesting to the consumer that first of all, there are worthy reasons to take

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[5] For examples of the promotional material analyzed please see Appendix III

the risk of going to Colombia and secondly, once you are there the true risk is facing a million beauties and attractions that make you wanting to stay due to Colombia's diversity.

Such diversity introduced by the two countries through the catchy statements above is argued through other stories transmitted in several promotion materials:

> *Everyone has different travelling expectations, and Colombia offers a variety of them. The most beautiful beaches, magic jungles, unreal mountain ranges, large deserts, infinite plains, rivers full of life and colourful lakes. The history contained in each corner is breathtaking. Its colonial cities, strong native communities that have survived the exhausting modern world, brilliant minds, and streets full of memories, are some of the hidden treasures of this country.*

This story possesses significant characteristics that have to be analysed. First of all it is a linguistic construction in which signifiers like magic jungle, unreal mountain ranges and infinite plains are used in order to suggest magical proportions to Colombia and activate the deepest areas of imagination (Johns & Gyimóthy, 2002). Furthermore, the reference to history, colonial cities, strong native communities that have survived in spite of the evolution of the world, memories and hidden treasures of the country, produce a feeling of nostalgia that suggests to the reader that by going to this place it will be possible for him / her to travel in time in order to escape from everyday life (Corrigan, 1997, Johns & Gyimóthy, 2002; MacCannell, 1976). As well, these illustrations are aimed to evoke colonial times of conquest where the tourists are encouraged to discover still hidden treasures in this 'unchanged' destination (Echtner & Prasad, 2003). All in all, this story is emplotted in a romantic narrative where metaphors play a crucial role to portray a world of beauty and nostalgia; in which the tourist focuses on discovery and enjoyment of natural surroundings and exotic people (Czarniawska, 2004; Stern, 1995) which corresponds to the modern myths of nature, the noble savage and paradise (Hennig, 2002).

In the case of Mexico diversity is argued taken the attributes of its big city, Mexico City, where the tourists can find everything; starting with historical buildings, museums, archaeological sites, and ending with a vivid nightlife and a variety of possibilities to shop into consideration. This is combined with the possibilities that the tourists can find in the natural surroundings and other archaeological sites outside the city. The emphasis of most of the advertisings is on creating messages in which the combination of culture and

paradise is transmitted to the consumers, as the following slogans or headlines of travel magazines used by travel agencies like TUI show:

"Mexico – Palm Beach meets Ancient Culture"

"Mexico – Lively Culture and Dream Beaches"

Thus, the myth of joined culture and paradise is constructed through romantic stories as can be seen e.g. in the one about the Riviera Maya where the main value is a world of beauty supported by metaphors and feelings of nostalgia (Czarniawska, 2004; Stern, 1995):

At night the wind whistles through the palms. A hut, a dream. A room, romance. Unforgettable sunsets, dimmed light that never goes away.
Lying in between woods and sea, a thousand year old culture kept in the heart and shown in the hospitality of its inhabitants.

Through this story the consumer is told that through the direct contact that can be achieved with the inhabitants of the country tourists can discover a different time of life (Corrigan, 1997) since the thousand year old culture is still kept in its descendants.

Especially the cultural heritage is emphasized in many advertising texts; working with the tourists' ongoing search for authenticity (MacCannell, 1976) where again the idea of getting in touch with past generations such as Aztecs or Mayas is possible by getting in touch with their descendants and through consumption of the handicrafts made by them since they share the same construction and artistic skills of the creators of such archaeological treasures; all this feeding the modern myth of art (Costa, 1998; Hennig, 2002). The tourists are welcome to a travel experience of discovery and expedition of the cultural heritage still reflected in Mexico and, through the consumption of core symbols like handicrafts authentic place attachments are evoked automatically by consumers (Echtner & Prasad, 2003). The next advertisements illustrate the point:

A perfect example of the amazing heritage that previous generations have left as a legacy to the Oaxacan people is the ability to transform natural materials into amazing forms that reflect the unique characteristics of the different regions of the state.

Currently, our attention is focused on social tourism which allows for a closer contact with local indigenous communities, as well as with urban population thus bringing together their cultures and traditions. From our past, we have countless wonders such as Chichen-Itza, but what the present is offering, along with the diversity of its population, ways of life and traditions, is a wealth of more alive and enriching interactions that are waiting to be discovered. The combination of these two extremes makes Mexico incredibly attractive to all kinds of tourists.

Likewise, the qualities of local food as a result of Mexican's heritage are used to ascribe meanings and associations to the place (Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005). These cultural heritage meanings are transmitted to the consumers through romantic stories written in promotional material. The following story is another example of nostalgia as a common component used in advertisements to position the different destinations (Stern, 1995).

> *Oaxacan Gastronomy is among the most important in Mexico and the world. It is the result of the refinement of generations that knew how to combine chilies, spices, veggies and meats as well as fruits, flours and eggs, which are transformed into colors, aromas and flavors capable of delighting the most demanding palates. Its pre Columbian origin was enriched with the products and spices brought from Spain since colonial times which combined with the products that Mexico contributed to the world, gave birth to the Oaxacan cuisine.*

Even though the main focus of Mexican DMOs is on promoting the myth of joined paradise and culture, advertising talking about nature is a part of the whole picture. Nature, including adventure sports practiced within nature, is promoted in a secondary level in relation to paradise and culture, being important for TA / TO that focus on specialized target groups. The modern myth of nature is transmitted by Mexican DMOs as an opportunity to travel in space and see something you cannot find elsewhere (Corrigan, 1997). They stress the uniqueness of Mexican landscapes while creating a front stage for postmodern tourists who are "*doing what you are supposed to*" while traveling (Goulding, 2000). DMOs prevent the tourists not to miss the important sites by e.g. stopping for ten minutes for the tourists to photograph a unique natural wonder. As well, DMOs offer to the tourists the opportunity of living an 'authentic' natural experience in which they are able to enjoy organized activities such as bonfires.

> *Divisadero Barrancas, known in the entire world as Copper Canyon is the strategic place where you will enjoy of the majestic of the Canyon collection. Proudly it is the first natural Mexico wonder... As a part of the tour in the famous CHEPE, this is the point where the train stops for ten minutes approximately. Here you will be able to enjoy excellent landscapes, as well as regional tasty food... Venture out to walk or ride to Copper Canyon bottom, and live the experience of sleeping under the light of the sky lit up by the stars, next to a warm bonfire. Do not forget your tent and your camping equipment.*

Colombian DMOs on the other hand work mainly with the myth of nature and noble savage, portraying a paradise that can be found far away from the modern everyday life. Hennig, (2002) has pointed out how tourism advertising is working with the experience of

untouched nature, inviting the tourists to explore virgin flora and undiscovered fauna. In the stories transmitted by Colombian DMOs this is illustrated:

> *Aquatic and terrestrial mammals and birds, corals, abundance of great size fish, plants, trees, insects and reptiles make out of this place a paradise for naturists, Ornithologists, divers, walkers, artists and people wishing to be far away from the city stress.*

Several stories show untouched places where the old traditions and Indian names have been kept, suggesting to the reader that the time at those places was stopped and its culture has been frozen (Hennig, 2002). This is in line with the myth of the Unchanged as defined by Echtner & Prasad (2003).

> *…The mountains seem to plunge into the Caribbean while giving shape to bays and coves of indescribable beauty. The bays of Chengue, Gayraca, and Neguange. They are known by their Indian names; not so the bay of Concha, although equally beautiful. Beaches, mangrove swamps. Coral reefs, forests and a varied of fauna share this marvelous place with the archeological ruins at Pueblito, one of the many urban centers of the pre-columbian Tayrona civilization.*

Targeting adventurous people the Colombian DMOs create romantic stories where extreme sports can be practiced surrounded by unique natural places while thoroughly informing the reader about all the offerings they propose. As explained by Hennig (2002) the modern myth of nature is fed when describing the body in contact with nature, e.g. when practicing sportive activities such as hiking, mountain climbing and so on, since the feeling of being part of nature is produced. This is furthermore supported by Urry (1992) who states that the most mundane activities become special when performed in a special environment. The following story exemplifies how these vacation activities are described in a way that shows how inconceivable it is in most people's daily life (Hennig, 2002).

> *Colombia is a privileged country with myriad attractions for visitors to take pleasure in their passion for adventure… The peaks of the Andes and its steep slopes are ideal for rock climbing, mountain climbing, long hikes, and mountain biking. Winds and heights favor the practice of hang gliding all year round. The warm waters of the Caribbean Sea hide unsuspected beauty, while the depths of the Pacific Ocean abound with underwater species that invite fishing enthusiasts…the steep slopes of the Andes generate torrents and cascades that are ideal for engaging in rafting, hydro speeding, and kayaking, among others.*

DMOs also promote Colombian beaches, differentiating them according to what every tourist is looking for. The beaches located at the Pacific Ocean are portrayed as the perfect paradise for non-ironic tourists who are not interested in touristic sites and mass attractions

but an authentic place where untouched nature and the noble savage are found away from the civilization. In contrast, the beaches at the Caribbean Sea offer the paradise myth as portrayed by spectacle and pop media and expected by postmodern tourists (Goulding, 2000). In this paradise the tourist is invited to visit the touristic places of significant importance due to the history that they have. In the same way stunning hotels and special places for tourists are offered such as the tour that provides the original narratives of the past civilization and significant personalities in the history of Colombia.

> *Colombia's Pacific Coast is a marvelous place located on the West side of the country. It's surrounded by a wide variety of natural resources, and the warmth of its people makes the place a privileged spot. Its biodiversity and climate makes this place one of those with the most natural richness in the world. The calmness and charms of this area makes the region an ideal place for those who desire close contact with nature, adventure mountain and ocean sports. There, two ecosystems are combined: the deep blue of the Pacific Ocean and its beautiful beaches contrast the clear streams and intense green of the mountains.*

> *In contrast, the Caribbean Coast, with its modern tourist sectors, wide beaches, large hotel complexes, shops, and restaurants, is an invitation to family relaxation, although without ignoring the activities of city life. The Caribbean invites us to tour history through the walls and pirate tales of Cartagena de Indias, the narratives of Tayrona Indians, the memorabilia of Liberator Simón Bolívar, and the island culture of San Andrés and Providencia.*

Generally, the stories describing the traveling experience in Colombia are emplotted in romance and nostalgia and supported by the classical rhetorical figures of speech of metaphors, metonymy and synecdoche explained by White (1973) cited by Czarniawska (2004).

> *The voices will blend with the sound of domino tiles, and in the background, the voices of the people who encourage one horse or another to win the traditional seaside races.*

Addressing the tourists' wish of discovering long kept secrets and unexplored nature, the following story is told in a romantic way, full of metaphors where magical places seem to have been taken from a fairy tale and ready to be discovered by the postcolonial First World tourist (Echtner & Prasad, 2003).

> *The Amazon Jungle is the biggest rainforest in the World, and it takes up territory in all of the northern countries of Latin America, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Brazil. This jungle has very well kept secrets, like plants, birds, fish and mammals which are still a mystery to the majority of mankind; people can see and feel things that are only possible in this incredibly special environment. Additionally, this territory is occupied mostly by native people who work daily for the regions great conservation and who*

also add a touch of mysticism and magic to the jungle. The lung of the world, as the Amazon is frequently called, is a place that every human being should visit.

Colombian DMOs work on myths and legends to portray a feeling of nostalgia and an image of an authentic experience where the typical narratives can be experienced while being surrounded by natives and their culture.

Nights will be filled with the stories of Anancy, a famous spider. Legends will tell you about the hidden treasure of pirate Henry Morgan. Many more tales will draw a vivid picture of the customs passed down in pirates. And all of the above, enlivened by native music.

The cultural heritage of Colombia is transmitted in the same way as the one of Mexico as well as the modern myth of art (Hennig, 2002) is tried to be build, based on the tourists' ongoing search for authenticity (MacCannell, 1976), portraying the image of an experience of expedition and evoking colonial times of conquest (Echtner & Prasad, 2003). Moreover, DMOs use convincing arguments for the tourist gaze to consider the place as worth visiting by supporting their narratives with the statement of certifications given by world organizations (Urry 1990).

This is one of the most beautiful cities in 'America, declared a World Heritage Site by Unesco. Visitors to Cartagena go back in time when they stroll the narrow streets, framed by seigneurial colonial houses, cloisters, and churches and when they visit the ramparts, forts, and castles that revive past struggles in which pirates and buccaneers ambushed the treasures of the Spanish Empire.

Furthermore, they work with the modern myth of the noble savage, inviting the tourists to live the real experience in the created back stage with a promise of an untouched culture waiting for the tourists to experience their ancient traditions (Hennig, 2002).

The native population, proud of its traditions and determined to maintain them, offers plans for individuals and families interested in becoming acquainted with the people. There are over forty native inns, where visitors can share everyday life with the islanders.

Furthermore, Colombian people are a key component of the advertising. In the same way as the main slogan of the international campaign uses irony to transmit its message based on what is the apparent reality of Colombia and what is the hidden truth, these stories about Colombian people have ironic plots in which the inhabitants of a country known for its social conflicts are portrayed as one of the happiest in the world. The irony blends into romance where Colombians are portrayed as heroes who have had to use their creativity

and tenaciousness to keep on going despite of difficult circumstances and eventually reach a land of peace and prosperity (Stern, 1995).

> *Passion is our guiding and driving force, as well as the source for our extraordinary intensiveness, creativity, resourcefulness, and tenaciousness under difficult circumstances… We are one of the happiest countries on earth thanks to the passion we feel for life, work, family, peace… Passion for creating and serving, and above all, for making Colombia a land of peace and prosperity.*

The capital Bogota and other cities like Medellín and Santa Marta are positioned as destinations for city tours, stressing on the infrastructure and cultural sites that can be found, such as public spaces, open air art galleries, museums, shopping malls where national and foreign brand name products can be purchased, a number of street carnivals and a night life enriched with typical drinks and dances. It can be seen how DMOs communicate to the consumers that Colombian cities are more sophisticated than they are thought of around the world, and again DMOs inform the consumers about the certifications given by world organizations in order to convince them that they are worth to gaze at (Urry 1990).

> *Bogota is one of the best options on the continent for tourism and business. Situated in the Eastern Cordillera of the Andes, it is an entry point into South America. It is a cosmopolitan city that is full of contrasts, and has won not only the Swiss Tourism Award as one of the "Destinations Worth Discovering, 2007-2008", but also a number of other awards, such as UNESCO World Book Capital 2007 for its network of public libraries, and the Golden Lion "Best City" award for its outstanding social, cultural and economic transformation. Bogota is a city that boasts attractive squares, avenues and parks, a mass transport system – Transmilenio – that has become a model for Latin America, shopping centers, exquisite cuisine, a wide range of accommodation options, and a surprising cultural and night life.*

The marketers are aware of the yet established stereotypes and take e.g. the Colombian coffee to promote the country. The representative brand of Juan Valdez is used to communicate to the German consumer that every farmer of Colombia is the same as the image they already have in their mind.

> *In the fertile mountain soils of the central mountain range, farmers in the image of Juan Valdez produce the mildest coffee in the world.*

As mentioned before, Colombia is using testimonies of tourists from all over the world that have discovered the boundaries of the country in its advertisings to show that Colombia is a place for everyone due to its diversity and as a way of creating trust. Furthermore, they feed

the myth that is tried to be created by the slogan "*Colombia – the only risk is wanting to stay*" since they show European tourists who once went to Colombia and never returned to their home countries, having found all what they were looking for and even more in their own dream paradise in Colombia. They as well use pictures in which they show that Colombia is the perfect place for foreigners where they can get in touch with nature, happy natives and paradise. The following are examples of the testimonies used in the advertising:

'Johan Ilsen, Belgian in love with Colombia', tells his experience in a romantic narrative where he portrays Colombia as a world of beauty with the help of rhetorical figures and generates a feeling of nostalgia by referring to the history that is kept in the place.

> *One December day I arrived in Santa Marta, a marvelous place on the Colombian Caribbean coast. Since then, I cannot conceive of living anywhere else. How can you not stay to live in a place that combines magic and history in one of the most beautiful cities in the world?*

'Daniel Fioro, Italian in love with Colombia', helps to change the image of Colombia by telling the world that the entire negative stereotypes where unconfirmed when he lived his experience in Colombia. It is clear how the irony of the slogan ends in surprise (Stern, 1995): the apparent risk of Colombia he thought he was going to find, turned into positive feelings after discovering some of the 'million reasons to stay' that are mentioned in the promotional booklet.

> *This country is completely different from the one I had in my head. When I got to know it, I thought, "Why didn't I come before?" You have to be here to know that this is a country full of natural treasures that challenge anyone's imagination. How can you not stay to live in a country where an immersion is enough to enjoy one of the most beautiful underwater scenes in the world? Its extensive coral platform, its exotic fauna and flora will remain in your memory forever.*

From the analysis of the stories above, full of rhetorical figures, it can be seen how Colombian and Mexican DMOs try to suggest to the consumers that their fantasies can be fulfilled in these countries. They try to differentiate themselves not only by communicating their competitive advantages and uniqueness as destinations but as well by the creation of myths through linguistic constructions and place attachments with symbolism. From the interviews with Mexican DMOs their awareness about the positive image of Mexico around the world is inferred; its well recognized signifiers such as the spicy food, its folklore and its cultural heritage. This is why, although both countries try to position themselves with

the help of several stories that transmit their characteristic diversity, Mexico makes an emphasis on attracting the tourists with the myth of joined culture and paradise. This means, Mexico makes its myths credible since they are built around the general conditions and beliefs that consumers have about the country. Contrary, as explained by Juliana Uribe in her interview, while other countries start to promote themselves from 'zero', only communicating their qualities and uniqueness, Colombia has to start from 'minus ten'. Colombian DMOs try to build their myths contradicting the background beliefs and general negative conditions of Colombia. Thus, in order to reinforce the credibility of the myths, they are trying to build them by using testimonies of tourists who demystified Colombia as a risky destination; helping to create positive myths instead. Additionally, Colombian DMOs use the beliefs and images that consumers have about South American countries in order to build the myths of nature and noble savage as well as paradise when communicating the beauty of its beaches and natural spaces. The myth of art is trying to be created with the help of the Unchanged myth by informing the consumers about the still unknown cultural heritage that is kept in the country from colonial times, inviting them to discover it by themselves in an exploration journey. Likewise, the sophistication of the cities and touristic places is communicated through advertising since DMOs are aware that due to the surrounding social problems of Colombia, the development of the touristic infrastructure is hard to believe.

4.3   Consumers

In this chapter we analyze the consumers we interviewed basing our arguments mainly on the stories they told in the photo elicitation[6] and important points that have been made in the existential-phenomenological interviews. We start with a description of our interviewees' personalities and their general interests in tourism in order to have a helpful background. Next, the images that the consumers have about our two cases, Mexico and Colombia and the images they are reproducing through story telling are inferred by exploring the myths that came to the surface in their stories. We elaborate on already existing myths but as well add the myths that our consumers have created on their own due

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[6] For the pictures of the Consumers' collages created during the Photo Elicitation please see Appendix V

to the dynamic characteristic of myths as described by Johns & Clark (2001) and Johns & Gyimóthy (2002). The headlines attached to our consumers portray these new myths.

4.3.1 Barbara – 'Mexico: a Country with many Faces' and 'Latin America: the Wheel of Poverty without End'

Our female senior professional Barbara, 47, is a settled down person who was born in a small village. When she was very little she moved from her hometown to the town she is still living in today. Considering her age she is a very dynamic person who likes traveling and is not afraid of taking risks by driving *"very fast cars, or motorbikes"*. Barbara considers her family as important and spends most of her free time with her boyfriend, her son, and friends. She describes herself as a social person with a special interest in people. On holidays she is either searching for big cities to observe the people or for beautiful and clean places to relax, have time for herself, her family and friends, get in touch with nature and especially people. During the whole interview she made clear that people can make the difference in her traveling experiences:

> Barbara: *We spend one week in Hong Kong. Not so good. It was the second try. I don't like it.*
> Interviewer: *How come that you don't like it?*
> Barbara: *It is so dirty and the Asian people are not my friends. I don't like them.*
>
> Interviewer: *What do you like about London?*
> Barbara: *The people, the various people.*
> Interviewer: *So you always try to get in contact whit locals when you travel? People, who are living there?*
> Barbara: *I like traveling because I like the people.*

She is always in chase of special experiences and something different from her daily life as can be seen in her stories about sleeping in a windmill, visiting a submarine, or a night zoo. This corresponds to the ideas presented by Urry (1992), portraying the lived experience as something outstanding and of great importance, as according to him the quest for difference is the main source of tourism. Likewise Barbara says that by traveling to Australia she made one of her big dreams come true. Hennig (2002) states that tourism is partly taking place in the tourists' fantasies, which are connected to the world of dreams. With this argumentation Hennig (2002) explains the establishment of the expression 'dream holidays'.

Barbara likes to create her trips independently, deciding on where to go by reading a book or a newspaper, a story or a report or by getting recommendations from relatives and friends, being more influenced by personal recommendations than other kinds of marketing communications (Simpson & Siguaw, 2008). While traveling she wants to discover the places on her own, anchoring what is said about the different destinations through direct physical experience as explained by Hennig (2002). Tourism has the special function of enacting modern myths physically and in this way either confirming or disproving them (ibid).

> Barbara: *Then we went to Canberra. Canberra is awful and we wanted to know, why Australian people do not go to Canberra. Now we know it. Awful, only Concrete.*

The stories about her traveling experiences in Australia are emplotted in a comic narrative where the dominant values are happiness and comfortable holidays in touch with animals and nature (Stern, 1995):

> Barbara: *This is the home from my uncle. Behind the house. There is a little channel. When you sit outside at night we make a little fire. You can hear (noise)… it is like a little raccoon. A little bit smaller. It came over the roof with his babies from the back of the house. They climb up with the wires of electricity. Very funny. Or you can hear the flying foxes at midnight.*

For Barbara there are three kinds of tourists going to Latin America: First, rich and regular tourists who go to hotels. From her ideas it is clear that she is classifying them in the front stage. The second kind of tourists are the ones who want to explore the countries, positioning them with these ideas within the back stage, and people who want to help e.g. with participating in social programs. Emphasizing people who engage themselves in aid projects is explained by Barbara's strong meanings of Latin American countries with very poor people and sickness, ideas that she got from her past trips to the Dominican Republic and Venezuela. Her traveling stories turned to a satiric narrative that blends into tragedy when referring to Latin America. They have a sad ending and its value is wisdom about the social problems faced in these countries and the hidden truth or orchestration of the tourism industry (Stern 1995). The central plot is the corrupt society. She makes emphasis on the disaster and "*expresses anger at the injustice of the power structure*" (ibid, p. 177).

> *Barbara:*   *We went to Latin America when my son was 10 years old. We went to Dominican Republic and Venezuela.*
> *Interviewer:*   *How was the experience?*
> *Barbara:*   *For tourists and rich people, very nice places. But if you want to see poorness and sickness then you have to go by foot to small towns and you think about the money you have got… And with that money, we make the people poorer. They have to work for us and their situation does not become better. They are as poor as before we came. Or more poor. Because they want to have the same things as tourist. But they can't because they are like slaves. It makes me angry. I don't like to go there.*

For her there are no differences between the countries of Latin America, all of them possess the two characteristics of poverty and sickness, apparent in her stories that are strongly marked within a tragic plot, which usually emphasizes disaster. Stern (1995, p. 177) explains that tragic stories are characterized by the fatalism of the consumers who *"do not anticipate that things will be any different in the future, because there is no vision of a reformed or utopian society about to emerge"*. This becomes clear when listening to Barbara:

> *Barbara:*   *...It only gets better if you earn a little money and you can buy a car and the children can go to school. But their knowledge is too small. The government allows not too much knowledge to the people.*
> *Interviewer:*   *So what do you suggest for the governments of these countries to do in order to improve the situation? If the tourism is no solution, what do you think is a solution?*
> *Barbara:*   *Hmm… who is going to change the whole situation there? It's like a wheel without end…*

We perceive Barbara as a non-ironic tourist, always searching for the real experience and the back stage, not the things constructed for tourists. She is aware of the tourist gaze and applies her knowledge about it to suggest how a real trip in Latin America would possibly look like:

> *Barbara:*   *If you make a trip with the guide you will see the nice places of these countries but not the real living there.*

Her trips to Latin America will always be in the search of what she considers as authentic experiences and real life; getting to see the poverty and sickness of these countries and the abuse of the government with the local people. Even though she considers that *"outside the resorts of tourists"* it can be risky if you take expensive possessions with you, the violence ideas generally associated with Latin American countries do not affect her decision of going there. In part because she is a risk taking person who likes the feeling of driving fast

cars and motorbikes, furthermore due to her strategy of going native and being in the places with local people without possessions. She thinks that they might try to rob because they want to get those possessions but cannot afford them.

> *Interviewer:* *So for you it is not more risky to travel to Latin America than traveling to Australia, e.g.?*
> *Barbara:* *In another way perhaps... I mean, yes, it is more risky to meet people... They want to have the same things like you, like the Europeans, for having a change... and the people who want to rob you they only want to have the same as we have and don't even consider that with violence they can't really achieve this.*

Barbara's imagination of Mexico is marked by the diversity that can be found there. However, according to her personality and the kind of tourist she is, she differentiates the experiences that can be obtained in Mexico, stressing the tourist gaze in her satiric story about the tourist who travels with a *"fixed package"*. The story is emplotted in a satiric narrative where specific activities organized in the front stage are identified: diving, golfing, whale watching, rafting, luxurious hotels, going to cultural sites by bus, visiting a museum with the possibility to buy a souvenir for the wife and the shopping mall. From her social background she applies that those fixed packages are mainly booked by rich people who do not care about getting to know the country. Those tourists only want to enjoy their time as usual, just changing the scenery in order to make the activities more special. This corresponds to Urry's (1992) idea of putting importance to something through a visual change. MacCannell (2002) discusses the construction of the *'tourist bubble'* as something hateful for those tourists who do not put their ego in front but care about others and set out to experience the destinations with its sophisticated pleasures. Barbara appeals to this as seen in her satiric narrative about the two kind of trips that are possible in Mexico where she parodies the postmodern tourists moving in the front stage, traveling with fixed packages, contrasting them with the tourist that, like her, find the authentic experience. Even though ironic and satiric plots show the incongruity between appearance and reality, the difference between Ironic and Satiric stories is that the later plays with parodies seeking to show someone or something as ridiculous, "*it shows the absurdity of all that occurs*" (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 20).

> *Barbara:* *I think it depends what you do in the country if you are a tourist traveling individually or with a fixed package. If you go for a fixed package and if you are rich you go there for golfing, and you go on the ocean for diving*

and if you are there you as well go for whale watching, and you go there for a drink, you stay in this luxurious hotel… that's important as well, and there we go by bus and there is for sure a little goldsmith workshop where "I can buy a ring for my wife"…

Barbara: *When I come there, I am coming by plane. I start in a big city. I like small hotels in places like that. I think it is my place. If I wake up in the morning, the place is very busy. After a good breakfast I have a walk and I find a place where I can take a very nice sit and I am watching the people that are around me. And I talk with the people, I laugh with them, I am learning about them. In the evening, the people are very fun. If it is possible, I rent a car. Then I watch the country. The place, where my lovely coffee comes from. I am sitting on the beach listening to the nature. Perhaps this people have a place for me in their boat and I am going to the jungle with them, meeting some funny animals. And in the evening, perhaps they have a place for me to sleep.*

Barbara's experience corresponds to the second story where she avoids the front stage and where the nature and noble savage myths are the main drivers of her overall trip, painting her own paradise as supported by Hennig (2002) who defines the paradise myth as a combination of the nature and noble savage myths. Her story portrays an ideal world of beauty and peace and rhetoric figures such as *"I am sitting on the beach listening to the nature"* are employed to feed the romance (Czarniawska, 2004). For Barbara, her experience is an authentic one, but in order to be able to achieve it, it is necessary to have certain knowledge and to be aware of the tourist gaze.

Barbara: *I think everybody finds what he is able to see.*

Barbara thinks that in Mexico she can find everything what is shown on the pictures during the photo elicitation, including the poverty that characterizes all Latin American countries according to her:

Interviewer: *Are there any missing pictures? Do you think we left something out for Mexico?*
Barbara: *Yes, I think my kind of trip is that I see the mountains of waste and the people are living in slums. These places here* (pictures of photo elicitation) *are the ones I am looking for, but I am sure that I would see ugly places too.*

Barbara is an example of a tourist with a strong unawareness of Colombia. She even does not know where the country is geographically located. For her, the ideas of Colombia correspond to the generalization of her image of Latin America as poor countries with an unequal distribution of wealth.

> *Interviewer:*   *And Colombia?*
> *Barbara:*   *Are tourists going there? I don't know anything about Colombia.*
>
> *Barbara:*   *I don't know anything about Colombia. I have no idea. I think in Latin America you can find the same problems everywhere. Some people have all the things and some people have nothing.*

Through the stories Barbara tells she is working on the myth of Mexico as 'a Country with many Faces' where what can be found there depends on the kind of tourists. In her own traveling to Mexico she would not only follow the nature and noble savage myth but as well the poverty and sickness that she has found in past trips to Latin American countries. This background experience has led to the creation of the myth of 'the Wheel of Poverty without End' that is attributed to all Latin American countries as well as to Colombia since her unawareness about this country is so strong that she does not have particular imaginations about it.

4.3.2   Sabrina – 'Mexico: a Country with Many Faces', 'Colombia: too risky to step out of the Bubble' and 'the Wheel of Poverty without End'

Sabrina, 27, is a young professional, working in the human resources department of a German company. During her studies she went for a semester abroad to Australia and has taken the opportunity to go to places in Asia like Thailand and Malaysia. She is a sportive person, loves nature, spending time with friends and family. It becomes apparent that she is very passionate about traveling, choosing it over her career. This is in line with MacCannell's (2002) argument that especially young people are taking a critical perspective on the *'superegoic injunctions'* of getting rich quickly and enjoying a good life, leading to tourism as a way of escaping from corporate environments.

> *Interviewer:*   *A big step to quit the job. So you say traveling is worth quitting your job in this case?*
> *Sabrina:*   *Yes, because I had my job for 2 ½ years now, and I know it is not good for my career, that does not really look good in my CV. But I decided not to have a good CV but a good life.*

For her there exist two kinds of holidays: when she is traveling with her boyfriend she prefers club holidays; when she travels alone she likes backpacking trips, e.g. Australia and Thailand. TV, movies, and advice from friends influence her decisions of where to go.

When listening to Sabrina, it becomes clear how, through media representations, consumers interact and fill their imagination about the different destinations (Parameswaran, 2002).

> *Sabrina:*   *Thailand, the first time when I was backpacking there, I decided to go, because I watched a movie "The Beach" that was coming out at that time. And I thought I am in Australia backpacking that should be next. One more adventure before I start studying and start with a serious life. So I saved up all my money and went to Thailand.*

Sabrina does not actively search for advertisement about destinations, but she is aware of its subconscious influence and the induced image produced by it (Gunn, 1997 cited by Li et al, 2009):

> *Interviewer:*   *So you don't really react to travel advertising at all?*
> *Sabrina:*   *I think unconscious you do. I would not say, ok, I have seen that advertisement, I want to do that. But afterwards, when I think about my next trip, it comes up to my mind. That's what marketing is about.*

By going to Australia she fulfilled a dream holiday that she had since she was a child and went there for her first time with her parents. During the whole time in school she was living with this fantasy which finally became true through her trip, representing another example of Hennig's (2002) explanation for the word 'dream holiday'. Her story reflects a romantic narrative focused on her and her potentialities that made it possible, after a prolonged search, to achieve the glory of making her dream come true. The main characteristic of romantic stories is the hero who after several adventures manages to achieve a desired goal (Czarniawska, 2004).

> *Sabrina:*   *That was already when I was little, because then I went with my parents. And the whole time at school, I like it so much in Australia that I said, after I finish school, I want to go back. So the last three years in school, I have always been working and saving up money. That was really like a dream for me.*

In Australia she had the opportunity to confirm her imaginations of Whitsunday Island by herself, stressing that the experience was like she had imagined it and that the name of the 'White Heaven Beach' is chosen correctly. With this trip Sabrina could confirm her myth of paradise at this special place and as she experienced it on her own she will always remember it very clearly, clearer than before when she heard about this destination from other sources as explained by Hennig (2002).

When traveling she is looking for what is different from home, representing her quest for otherness (Costa, 1998), typical cultural sights and famous spots, corresponding to Urry's (1990) definition of the tourist gaze. In general, Sabrina is moving in the front stage, often stating that she goes for the typical sites 'you have to see', being classified as postmodern tourist according to MacCannell (1973). Furthermore, she trusts the guidebook "Lonely Planet", referring to it as the best thing you can buy when backpacking. Although she is aware of the influence that advertising has on her, she does not consider these guidebooks as induced images with marketing purposes but as sources of true and valuable information.

For Sabrina the people who go to Latin America are mostly males and maybe groups. As she is mainly traveling alone she always came to the conclusion that it is too dangerous for her to travel to Latin America, and especially to Colombia. This dominating imagination prevented her from informing herself in more detail about the countries. Even after listening and seeing interesting pictures of a friend of her who traveled in Latin America, the characteristic of danger has been accepted as reality by her. This is explained by Li et al (2009) by pointing out that external information is often not enough to change the affective image of destinations which is mainly based on the cognitive image established over time.

> Sabrina: *I have not been thinking about…, well, I had a friend that was really traveling all around the world and I always followed his travel blog in the internet, and he has been to Venezuela, Bogotá, all around South America. So I did not really pick a country and said, ok, to that country I would really like to go. There are a lot of interesting countries, but I did not really inform myself enough to say ok, I want to go there. I always thought it is too dangerous.*

Nevertheless, in her imagined trip to Mexico she would spend a lot of time in the jungle and the woods, she would go for trekking, canoeing or rafting tours, and as well visit the famous places in the cities. Through this story the myth of nature came to the surface as defined by Hennig (2002); physical activities in natural surrounding enhance this myth. By visiting the touristic and well known places Sabrina shows that she is comfortable with the front stage and the concept of the tourist gaze. Additionally she would spend some time lying on the beach to relax and enjoy the sun, not considering a certain risk she could face, referring to Mexico as *"a really nice place to travel"* with *"a variety of things"* to do. Following her arguments, we perceive that for Sabrina Mexico is somehow outstanding and

different from Latin America, not being as dangerous as other countries. Talking about Colombia her story is a different one:

> *Sabrina:*   *I think in Colombia I would stay more in the hotels or around the tourist sites, because I would be too afraid to go anywhere on my own. Maybe, if I would be more informed about what is safe, I would do more, but at my knowledge standard I have right now, I would stay at the safe places.*
>
> *Interviewer:* *And what places would that be?*
> *Sabrina:*   *Good hotels, like here, you have golf around. That's all things were you feel safe, because that is guarded. Or some touristic places with a lot of people.*
>
> *Interviewer:* *Can you tell me about your trip to Colombia?*
> *Sabrina:*   *It would be a nice holiday, not traveling around the country, but staying at the touristic places, enjoying the sun. And not so much seeing of the country.*

Her imagination of Colombia as a very dangerous country prevents her from following her usual travel habit of backpacking when traveling alone. These imaginations are supported by organic images she got from the media: about criminality, the risk of traveling alone and the necessity to be back home at night. Nevertheless, her described traveling experience in Colombia corresponds to her motives of seeing the typical sites, feeling safe at those popular tourist places, being in line with her tendency of moving in the front stage. This furthermore supports the argumentation of Judd & Fainstein (1999 cited by MacCannell, 2002) that the tourist bubble has to be created as a safe and protected space for tourism. In addition to consider Colombia as a risky destination, even though she imagines that Colombia possesses good touristic infrastructure, Sabrina's imagination of Colombia is one of a country facing poverty, confirmed by her answer when she was asked for missing pictures during the photo elicitation of Colombia:

> *Sabrina:*   *It looks very peaceful. I am missing the poverty. No poor people, all the poor suburbs with the street kids. That's what I am missing.*

Sabrina's case can be portrayed as a vicious circle: on the one hand Sabrina's strong reliance on her imaginations about Colombia especially as a very dangerous country can partly be explained by her unawareness of Colombia. On the other hand those strong imaginations will always prevent her from overcoming this unawareness, not even considering informing herself more about Colombia and Latin America in general. As she states plainly she only saw movies and documentations that showed Colombia in a negative

way. This exemplifies the uni-dimensional representations of mainstream media and Hollywood movies explained by Lutz & Collins (1993) and Cecil et al (1994) cited by Parameswaran (2002) which basically ignore the urban countries' vibrant, cosmopolitan culture focusing on recycled images and stories about exotic customs, natural disasters, poverty and oppression.

> *Interviewer:*   *Colombia?*
> *Sabrina:*   *Oh, sounds even worse. Colombia sounds like it is even more criminal.*
> *Interviewer:*   *Why do you have this idea?*
> *Sabrina:*   *Out of movies, because I did not get in touch with anything about Colombia.*
> *Interviewer:*   *What kind of movies?*
> *Sabrina:*   *Bad movies.*
> *Interviewer:*   *What were they about?*
> *Sabrina:*   *Always when it is about Colombia you always think about drug dealers. I have seen some journals about street kids. That is really hard.*

It can be inferred that through the stories Sabrina tells she works on the myth of 'Latin America as a risky Destination'; being 'Colombia too risky to step out of the Bubble' and obligating the tourist to stay away from getting to know the country. Furthermore, the significant poverty of the country perceived by Sabrina contributes to the myth of 'the Wheel of Poverty without End'. Additionally, the drugs are a signifier of Colombia in Sabrina's mind. Mexico in contrast is portrayed somehow different from Latin America, where she finds a variety of things to do, working on the myth of 'Mexico: a Country with many Faces'. Especially the myths about nature and culture are fed through her stories.

4.3.3   Andreas – 'Mexico: a Country with many Faces' and 'Colombia: a Virgin Place'

Andreas, 23, is our male student who does an exchange semester in Sweden at the moment. He made the decision of going to Sweden quite spontaneously considering mainly the short distance to Germany and the English speaking exchange program. Andreas is an active and sportive person who likes to party. In his free time he plays the guitar, goes to concerts, spends time with friends and likes to travel to places that are far away to see something completely new. Depending on who he is going on holidays with he either spends a lot of time doing sports and going out with his friend, or if he is traveling with his girlfriend he is usually going for city trips and club holidays. Nevertheless, he is usually searching for good weather, beaches, different cultures, different people and the touristic and historical

sites that have been taught and accumulated over the time forming his cognitive image (Li et al, 2009).

> *Andreas:* *Yes, this is a photo in front of the Eiffel tower. I have been in Paris with a very good friend of mine. First of all, it was a trip in France. First of all, we visited a friend in Dijon and then on the way back, we stayed three days in Paris. It was one of the best cities I have ever visited. Cause of all the tourist. All the things you learn about in school for example, you hear about, you know a lot of sights. It was the first time for me in Paris and it was far more impressive than I imagined. It was really impressive.*

> *Andreas:* *It was after, when I finished my high-school. I went to Ibiza with a very good friend of mine. It was a special offer, like 600 Euros for two weeks, so you don't really think about it and we just booked it. And yes, it was our best holiday. We spend a lot of time at the beach, at the pool, outside. We had beautiful weather; Ibiza is a very nice island. We drove around the island and saw very famous, in brackets, places and famous beaches.*
> *Interviewer:* *What do you mean, famous in brackets?*
> *Andreas:* *Well, it is not famous like here you have the pyramids of Egypt, or the Eiffel tower. But for parties it is very famous.*

For Andreas holidays mean forgetting everything that is happening back home and experiencing his imaginations about different countries in real life which is in line with Hennig's (2002) statement of enacting myths physically through traveling. Andreas explains that the ideas he gets about the different destinations come from induced and organic images, listing movies and TV, news, internet and even though he is not consciously searching for advertising about destinations he refers to that when thinking about the sources of his imagination. This is reflected when he talks about his 'dream holiday' (Hennig, 2002) in the US, basically portraying a totally different world than the one in Europe, which suggests that a main purpose of his dream holidays is finding otherness (Costa, 1998). This otherness is especially portrayed in an absence of obligations and rules. According to Hennig (2002) this emotional stage, where people lose the 'burden of existence', is usually reached while being on holidays. The freedom myth surrounding the US is in line with the individual freedom and self realization myth discussed by Hennig (2002) where on holidays you can find a world full of your own preferences. Andreas' narrative reveals the American dream, emplotted in a romantic way, and that the affective image he has about the US is based on his cognitive one (Li et al, 2009).

> *Interviewer:* *And where in America would you like to go?*

Andreas: *I would like to visit the big cities, like New York, but also like Florida. I think Florida is really good. The best would be to make a really long trip and travel all around. Take a car, and route 66 for example.*

Interviewer: *Since you have not been to America, when you think about it, what kind of ideas come to your mind?*

Andreas: *The famous saying, it is the land with endless possibilities. It is a country where you can…, it is very, very different to Europe I think. The mentality of the people, and the law, and the rules. Everything is very different. This is one reason. For example, when you want to build a shop, or something like this, in America you don't have any rules about it. You can just do it. If you want to build a house in Germany, they tell you how high the house has to be, which color the roof has to have. In America, you don't have these rules. This is the thing that really impresses me about America. You have a lot more of possibilities.*

When talking about his imagined trip to Mexico, Andreas' story has as well a romantic plot reflecting diversity and ideal beauty.

Andreas: *I had a really beautiful trip with beautiful weather. As you can see, the beaches are very wonderful, white sand, completely crystal clear water, palms. Very nice hotels, 5 star all-inclusive, directly at the beach. We went diving, saw a lot of fishes and coral reefs. And we made a trip to Mexico City, very, very big and busy city. We went out to a club, and everybody was very well in dancing. We heard a lot of the typical music. Ah… yes, that was my trip to Mexico. This is carnival. I think in Mexico grows coffee. This is coffee.*

Interviewer: *Do you think there are some pictures missing?*

Andreas: *Yes, tequila and sombreros.*

Andreas' personality and personal interests when traveling are reflected in his story. The paradise myth where he can enjoy beautiful weather, white sandy beaches, a clear sea, good dancers and luxury are always within his expectations of what he refers to as an ideal holiday. His imagination of Mexico is very similar to the holiday he defined as one of the best he ever had; his experience in Egypt:

Andreas: *This picture is in Egypt. The trip was with my girlfriend. It was also one of my best… hmm… no, no ranking. It was a very, very nice holiday... Egypt, with my girlfriend... We have been there for one week. In spring and we had perfect weather, 35 degrees, sun all day. We visited some really nice places in Egypt and also had some time in the ocean and on the beach.*

It is important to recognize the influence that a story that a friend told Andreas about Mexico has on Andrea's own image of the country, showing the importance of Word of Mouth in the image creation process of destinations:

> *Andreas:*   *Ah, yes, I have one friend who went to Mexico. But it was a lot of years ago. He told me that it was really, really beautiful, the ocean was really clear. The quality of the beaches very nice.*

We recognize Andreas as a postmodern tourist, as categorized by MacCannell (1973), who is always in search of tourist signs and signifiers like the popular Mexican tequila and sombrero, constructing the tourist gaze. His trip without getting in contact with these two important representations of the Mexican experience would probably not be conceivable. Likewise, in his imagination about Mexico we can as well see some other general signifiers. For instance, when he refers to his experience in the night club he revealed the stereotype he has in mind of Latin Americans as good dancers.

Furthermore, the general image that Andreas has about Mexico corresponds to a well developed touristic country capable to create the tourist bubble (MacCannell, 2002) and to offer well organized club holidays with good infrastructure and with different activities for the tourists; from city tours in interesting and busy places like Mexico City to idyllic beaches.

Andreas' image of Colombia is that of a country that is by far less developed than Mexico, where he cannot find the same infrastructure e.g. to play golf or dive. He says that these things "*look more like Europe*" or categorizes rafting as a "*European sport*". However, in his collage about Mexico 'the things of this sort' (Johns & Gyimóthy, 2002; Martin et al, 2007), with a European style are included, signifying Mexico as a developed country with a Western influence, at least regarding tourism. In contrast, his imagined trip in Colombia has the touch of an authentic experience of a virgin place, free from the presence of a big tourism industry with the native inhabitants being farmers and living in peace with nature, portraying the modern myth of paradise according to Hennig (2002). Nevertheless, from Andreas' stories it can be inferred that for him the 'real' paradise is the one he would experience in Mexico, the one that is portrayed in the postmodern consumer society of the spectacle and media (Goulding, 2000). As he is not explicitly searching for nature and natives in his trips but rather for sun, beaches and nice hotels he does not refer to untouched nature and the noble savage as something paradisiacal. Due to the myth of the Uncivilized that he has about Colombia, he is attributing the degrading characteristic of savage and

uncivilized to its general community (Ashcroft et al, 1998 cited by Echtner & Prasad, 2003).

> *Andreas:*   *We ate a lot of tropical fruits. Made a trip to the rainforest with a ship on the river. We saw some apes. This is how I imagine the inhabitants, farmers.*
> *Interviewer:* *And this picture?*
> *Andreas:*   *I think in Colombia, you can also find coffee.*

Following his imaginations about Colombia, Andreas misses pictures showing drugs and crime in his collage of Colombia suggesting that all the pictures shown are positive. From this we can see his expectations of facing the social problems of Colombia that have been reflected in the mass media. However, he thinks that in Colombia he can *as well* find coffee while in Mexico *for sure* he can. This disregarding of the stereotype of the *Colombian coffee* reflects that the negative stereotypes of Colombia are stronger, or at least clearer in his mind.

Additionally, when touching the point of danger in Colombia, he stated that he is not confident with the knowledge he has about the situation there. He argues that before traveling he would search for information to have a more neutral image, not only the stereotypes he has. Engel et al (1995) and Petrick et al (2007) cited by Li et al (2009) explain that when consumers cannot find enough information internally within their existing cognitive image about the destinations, they will actively search for information to reduce risk and uncertainty.

> *Andreas:*   *When I would think about going there, I would inform myself first, read about it, what is going on. Right now, it is just the prejudices.*

It can be inferred that Andreas is as well contributing to the myth of 'Mexico: a Country with many Faces' where he can find all the things he is looking for. According to his personal interests, in his traveling experience in Mexico he would follow the myth of paradise as portrayed by pop culture. In this case, we saw again that Mexico is signified as being different from regular Latin American countries where even things with a European style can be found. Regarding Colombia, Andreas infers that due to the social problems of the country, a lack of tourism has prevented the destination from developing touristic infrastructure. Even though drugs and crime are strong signifiers of the country, Andreas is

mainly building the myth of 'Colombia: a Virgin Place' where untouched nature and the noble savage are found.

4.3.4 Stephanie – 'Mexico: a Country with many Faces' and 'Colombia: a Virgin Place'

Stephanie, 23, is a student from Germany, doing her Master studies in Sweden at the moment. She gained international experience before by doing an internship in Australia where she was traveling around, trying to discover as much as possible of the country. Stephanie is a sportive person, who likes spending time with friends and favors a mixture of active and relaxing time. Being born and having studied in a small village she is now searching for bigger places to stay, which was also a main criterion of her decision of where to study her Master. In her free time she likes visiting her friends all over Europe, going on city tours, or typical holiday packages with sun and beach holidays. In Australia she also went backpacking and camping in the outback. She is referring to it within a romantic narrative, recreating her past traveling experience as a world of beauty where even uncommon holiday activities for her (camping) are remembered with nostalgia as ideal ones (Stern, 1995).

> Stephanie: *We went around with like a little bus, but it was not really a bus, it was more like a jeep and then we camped always outside and slept under the open sky. So we always cooked our meals ourselves, so the tour guide had food and then we all had to prepare the food and cook something. And then we drove again somewhere with the jeep and then we did like big walks and explored the nature. It was kind of terrific… normally I don't like camping but in this case it was really nice.*
> Interviewer: *Have you done camping before?*
> Stephanie: *No… I mean I went camping but that was never holiday for me… it was more like a youth camp but I wouldn't say it is holiday. It is more like a nice weekend or whatever but not holiday. So normally I would prefer to stay in a hotel. It doesn't need to be any fancy but just to have my bed and my shower, but that one was actually really great.*

On holidays Stephanie is searching for new places and things she has not seen before. She is participating in guided tours and visits the typical tourist attractions described in guidebooks or by travel agencies, functioning to create the tourist gaze (Urry, 1990). Although she is aware of the difficulty of getting to know the locals she is trying to do so and feels satisfied to get at least an impression of their life. From this it can be seen that

Stephanie is aware of the tourist gaze and comfortable with walking in the front stage, but if she sees a chance to get to the back stage she is taking the opportunity:

> Stephanie: *Just to see something that is different from home, like the landscape, but also the houses and the buildings, how the people live, like their habits, e.g. I mean in Spain they have always the siesta and the shops are not open until 5 and then all the night life and just to see something new what I don't know and also get to know the people and how they live. I mean it is hard when you are just a tourist you don't really get to know how the people live, but just to get an impression.*

Before a trip Stephanie is usually searching for information on the internet and follows the recommendations given there, basing her decisions mainly on the shown pictures. Peter & Olsen (2002 cited by Li et al, 2009) explain that the elicitation of affective responses is effectively obtained through online sources. She likes the huge amount of information you can find about travel destinations on the internet, creating induced images. Nevertheless, she gets disappointed if the advertisings are promising more than you can find. This may lead to a disproving of an imagination and to the creation of a negative myth through the stories she tells about her disappointment:

> Stephanie: *On the one hand I think it is quite good because you find a lot on the internet and they are really giving you different aspects. When you want to do sightseeing you can do that. If you want to do some culture they show you offers, or they recommend you some tours you can do. So I like that, but on the other hand they sometimes make look things better than they are. Like you always think it looks so great and then you go there and you are like hm, okay I expected more from the advertisement…*

Stephanie's picture of Mexico is marked by diversity. In the photo elicitation she chose all of the pictures to express her imaginations of what can be found in Mexico, stating that one can basically do everything in Mexico as it offers a huge diversity. Even though this includes natural offerings she emphasizes Mexico's advanced level of tourism.

> Stephanie: *Basically I could match all of them. I don't know, I think with Mexico it's so on the one hand they have like also all this nature thing like Colombia but they are more developed with tourism. So that's why they also have these mass hotels and the golfers and these fancy things and the rafting… Basically I would say I would put all these pictures for Mexico. Because it has like so many differences you can find in Mexico. You can do everything in Mexico kind of. Because it is so developed in tourism and lots of people go there and… but you still find the little villages or where you find the people and get to know them as soon as you go away from these tourist centers.*

Her trip in Mexico would consist of a mixture of sightseeing and relaxation, confirming the paradise and nature myth of beautiful beaches, good weather and having nice diving experiences there. The nature myth is especially portrayed through activities performed in untouched natural settings since the direct contact with nature intensifies the experience (Hennig, 2002). Since she sees Mexico as a developed tourist place she would as well include shopping in a modern shopping mall in her trip. By reflecting about the nightlife she points out that she would prefer to go out with Mexicans rather than with tourists, in order to get the authentic experience of the Mexican nightlife, entering the back stage of the country.

Stephanie's focus of the traveling experience in Colombia is on discovering the untouched nature and experiencing its purifying power, a connection described by Hennig (2002). Another important point for her is to get to know the people who live in Colombia, participating in their everyday life by going to the same restaurants and pubs and therefore experiencing the authentic noble savage, entering the back stage. This variation of her usual traveling habits where she is comfortable with moving in the front stage can be interrelated with her perception of the virginity of Colombia. Away from the civilization and the mass tourism it is easier to find the real back stage impression by getting in contact with locals. This reflects her myth of Colombia as the Uncivilized (Echtner & Prasad, 2003). The combination of nature and the noble savage is expressed by Hennig (2002) as the tourist's modern paradise, where the natives live in harmony with the nature portraying a contrasting picture of what we usually know from our modern society, portrayed in Stephanie's emphasis on experiencing the local places of a different culture.

> Stephanie: *In Colombia I did lots of travel in the nature, like exploring the rainforest, I saw a lot of animals and just discovered the rivers and really getting to know the nature. But I also had a look on how the life of the people is, like I went to markets, I saw the little villages and just had a look around about how the people are going there. And I did some sightseeing but I also adventured the night life and went to local restaurants and pubs where the locals are. Not these tourist places, more the secret hidden good places. Yeah that's I guess what I did in Colombia. Doing a lot of nature but also trying to get to know the people and also like the markets.*

Stephanie explicitly distinguishes the two countries, attributing nature and natives living in small villages to Colombia and historical and city sites, touristic resorts, and sophisticated golfing experiences to Mexico:

> *Stephanie:*   *For me Colombia is more about nature and less about city sites…*
> *Interviewer:* *Can you imagine some pictures that are missing…*
> *Stephanie:*   *Actually Colombia was kind of good because of the rainforest and the rivers. That was something I would expect there. Also like the people, to see some little villages and towns. I think that was representative kind of good I think.*
> *Interviewer:* *What about Mexico?*
> *Stephanie:*   *I would have expected more of those … like the Incas and Mayas... like more historical sites... like where you can see something about the history of the culture of the country…*
> *Stephanie:*   *…Yeah also like this golfing... this is like more for me sophisticated and higher how do you say... they have like tourism when it is really developed and lots of hotels and I don't think that's in Colombia…*

It can be inferred that Colombian DMOs have reached Stephanie to some extent, considering that her picture of Colombia having a lot of rainforest and nature has been shaped by an advertising movie of Colombia that she got from a friend. The influence of the DMOs gets even more apparent in the case of Mexico where the diversity picture of Mexico is clear for Stephanie, stating that she got these ideas out of travel magazines shown on TV. Additional to this induced image she got organic images about Mexico's cultural heritage of the Incas and Mayas from school. Stephanie does not perceive Latin America in general as a dangerous place, being aware that there are always some areas she should not visit alone as a woman during the night. She would consider going there if she had the money for it which demonstrates an awareness of the higher costs that occur when traveling to an overseas destination.

> *Stephanie:*   *I wouldn't say that it's… Like the security issue wouldn't be a problem for me… I mean, sure I am aware that there might be areas like Mexico City where I shouldn't go alone as a woman in the night, but I mean it is still kind of safe to go there. I mean sure you always need to be careful, especially as a women when you go there alone and whatever, but for me it wouldn't be the first thing I would think about. There would be other countries like in the Middle East where this is more an issue, at least for me.*

Stephanie's stories about Colombia transmit the modern paradise myth of the noble savage living in untouched nature, explained by her myth of Colombia as an uncivilized country. Thus, it is inferred that Stephanie is working on the myth of 'Colombia: a Virgin Place'.

Regarding Mexico, her awareness about diversity is so strong that she is working on the myth 'Mexico: a Country with many Faces', where both the front stage and the back stage are possible, depending on the tourists' interests. Likewise, she reproduces the modern myth of art since she emphasizes the archaeological sites that should be visited in Mexico.

4.3.5   Martina – 'Mexico: a Country with many Faces' and 'Colombia: the Wheel of Poverty without End'

Martina, 23, our second female student is doing her semester abroad in Sweden since she kept good memories of the first time she was there three years ago. She is a very sportive and active person, spending most of her free time doing outside activities and traveling with her friends or family. She usually enjoys active sport trips, city tours or family holidays. For her there is a big difference when she travels with her family due to the fact that they are not as flexible as she is:

> Interviewer: *So the places that you go with your parents and places you go with your friends are different?*
>
> Martina: *Yes I think so, I can't do the same things with my parents as I can do with my friends. They want to stay in a nice place in the evening, not just camping. They want to have their shower; I don't need it, not every day.*

Martina possesses a spontaneous character and since she does not have a strong personal motivation for traveling, her past trips have been consequences of others' invitations or convenient decisions. Nevertheless, Martina enjoys visiting museums and guided tours, following special activities of the countries like the one in Kiruna being proud of her typical Swedish experience: *"It was the Northest place I ever was"*. From this it can be inferred that Martina is influenced by the tourist gaze and comfortable with moving in the front stage.

Organized trips are very convenient for her. For instance, when she traveled to Kiruna she liked that "*it was all organized. I didn't have to do anything, just pay*". However, she is aware of the constructed tourist bubbles which she does not like (MacCannell, 2002). She prefers exploring things on her own and getting to know other cultures, being the reason for not paying attention to advertisement of destinations.

> Interviewer: *I am wondering if you have seen some advertising and your opinion about how the vacations are sold today. What do you think about it? Or you haven't paid attention at all?*

> *Martina:*   *Not really, because the advertising normally doesn't fit to my expectations of a good holiday. I mean always when you watch television then it is sometimes advertising about traveling and then it is always luxurious hotels, or just some exclusive places you can visit but it's not individual holidays, it's all organized and I don't like this very much. I want to choose on my own at which time I can go where to. Perhaps when I am older I want to have it like this but not at the moment.*

As well, she especially enjoys holidays involving nature and the descriptions of pictures of her bike trips focus on this, in line with Corrigan (1997), to find something different and travel in space. Likewise, Hennig (2002) explains that consumers feel that they are drained over time through their routines and working lives and they expect to be redeemed by contact with nature.

> *Martina:*   *That was on our bike trip through Sweden and there we camped somewhere in the wilderness and that was the view when we wake up in the morning. And I really like the picture because it is just nature and you are there and nobody else.*

Her travel in Venezuela was a completely different experience for her. It was far away from home, it was a different culture, different people and different landscapes like the rainforest. She enjoyed the staged authentic experience of sleeping in a camp with hang mats, giving her the feeling of experiencing the life like it is in Venezuela. Even though she was also involved in social demonstrations her memories are emplotted in comic narratives that end happily despite of unsuccessful results (Stern, 1995):

> *Interviewer:*   *Just recall one of the most memorable traveling experiences you had.*
> *Martina:*   *Okay… one of the funniest things I remember, I went after my high school degree, I went with some relatives, one uncle, two ants and one cousin to Venezuela. And we went there in the rainforest and to the highest water fall in the world, the Salto Angel and in front of that we stayed in a camp, with hang mats, things were you can lay in, it is just fixed on the trees. It was a camp full of these things where we slept one night. And my cousin and I we met a Spanish boy and also Indians, a native person from there, and we tried to teach them German riddles, it's some special kind of talking, it's a few words you put together and it is really hard to say them, we tried to teach this to them, the Spanish boy and the native Indian. We didn't really succeed, but it was so much fun. It was really nice there.*

Her short story about teaching German riddles to the Venezuelan native and a Spanish boy corresponds to postcolonial theory (Echtner & Prasad, 2003) where the Western world is seen as superior to people from different cultures. With telling this story Martina revives,

intentionally or not, the power relationship where the Western people 'civilize' the non-Western cultures (ibid).

New Zealand is a country she would like to visit in the future because of the landscape that is shown in the movie Lord of the Rings. Likewise, from the conversation with Martina we realized a significant influence of TV, the internet and friends' opinions on her perception of different destinations. This shows that her affective image of destinations is based on the cognitive images she gains over time, fed by organic as well as induced images (Li et al, 2009).

Martina attributes diversity to Mexico, including the rainforest, rural market places with locals, historical sites, and carnivals on the one hand and days on the beach, modern holiday resorts, diving trips, shopping centers, and big cities on the other hand. She is aware of the contrast of those two categories of traveling experiences; authentic experience vs. the tourist bubble. When talking about Mexico in general she thinks about the signifiers of Mexico such as spicy food and the sombreros, representing the tourist gaze. In general Martina perceives Latin American countries as poor. She considers the tourists who go there as open minded people who are open for new experiences, different from the European ones. Thus, her imagination of what can be found in Latin America is something different from what can be found in Europe. For Martina the main meaning in this case is poverty, especially expressed in her description of her traveling experience in Colombia, taking her experience in Venezuela as a reference point to generalize it to Colombia. Due to her image of Colombia as a very poor country, her story reveals her perception of an unchanged or timeless country representing the Unchanged and Uncivilized myth where natives do not need modern infrastructure like shopping centers (Echtner & Prasad, 2003).

> *Martina:* *Compared to Mexico I think Colombia is a poorer country so I didn't select so many pictures of places where the rich people go. Here again the rain forest, some traditional or older buildings that are still there, pictures from the market, the same as in Mexico. Hm, these have to be people living in the mountains. In a way they look really traditional like the original people from Colombia. I think Colombia is still a Christian country so here the cross fits to it. Yeah, anything else is the same like in Mexico. Also a lot of streets and party and disco… don't know what else to say.*
>
> *Interviewer:* *Are there missing pictures?*
> *Martina:* *I don't know if this picture is not completely wrong but I think in Colombia the people are really poor and so I think the picture of a ghetto*

> *or something like that is missing where they have only these houses build of… how do you call it? It's grey and it's suppose to fall apart… do you know what I mean? It's made of not steel, but something like this and it has these.*
>
> *Interviewer: Like with the not very proper materials to build houses?*
>
> *Martina: Yes exactly, just build together out of different pieces. Because I have seen such houses in Venezuela when you go a bit away from the normal tourist places you see some really poor people who just have these houses and I am sure in Colombia there you can find the same things.*

During the photo elicitation she is elaborating even more on this idea, seeing Mexico as far more developed than Colombia, due to its North American influence:

> *Martina: I think more tourists come to Mexico than to Colombia so there won't be any big hotels like this in Colombia. It is also, I don't think that in Colombia there are such big cities and that looks really modern… it's another thing with Mexico because Mexico is so close to the USA and I think America has a big influence on Mexico but Colombia is more south... as I said I still have the picture of Colombia being a poor country and I can't imagine that you can find some exclusive shopping malls like this and also nobody goes on holidays to Colombia, yeah that's why they don't need such expensive places…*
>
> *Martina: … This must be in the rainforest, wide away from the civilization, so I can't imagine that this is in Mexico…*

It can be seen that Martina's image about Mexico is based on the myth of 'Mexico: a Country with many Faces' due to her imagination of the diversity and development of touristic places that can be found there. In contrast, Colombia is strongly connected to poverty. The reason for this might be that one of her cousins has been in Colombia, working on a social aid project. The stories told and pictures shown from someone who already enacted the myth might have fortified Martina's imagination of the people who live in poverty in Colombia, representing the reproduction of the myth of 'the Wheel of Poverty without End' through a consumer story. Furthermore, Martina is quite unaware of the country, only considering the images of poverty seen on TV, that have been acknowledge through her cousin's experience.

4.3.6   Richard – 'Mexico and Colombia: Countries with many Faces' and 'Latin America: too risky to step out of the Bubble'

Richard, 56, is our male senior professional. During his professional career he always faced challenging positions in which he had contact with countries from all over the world. He is

now retired but still very active, working as a consultant and tennis coach, and involved in different political and social projects. His aim is to help other people, portraying his actions in romantic stories and constructing a heroic image (Czarniawska, 2004):

> Richard: *…You can compare it: I don't give the people a fish to eat, I give them an angle* (fishing rod) *so that they can fish themselves and help themselves…*

He is a family man, always traveling with his wife and in the past with his children. The traveling decisions are either made by his wife or following invitations from friends. He enjoys trips that involve nature, people, some culture, sport activities and typical food. During the whole interview we recognized Richard as a postmodern tourist (MacCannell, 1973) as it was apparent that Richard is comfortable with moving in the front stage, searching for famous places and using the guidebooks as a manual for his traveling experiences, following the ways others have suggested to see the sacred worldly sites (Corrigan, 1997).

> Richard: *And every day we went five, six hours in Paris and we learnt Paris in such kind. We often buy a book, a guide, and then we make the program of how it is in the book. That's the way we try to learn cities.*

Most of his traveling experiences are told in a romantic narrative with a nostalgic touch regarding his family trips in which past memories are frozen in time (Stern, 1995).

> Richard: *For five or six times we were at the Wörther See with our children. And they often had the opportunity to go with a banana and they always say now as they are over 20 years that they have good memories of the Wörther See. It was always fun also for me.*

During his travel experiences he has also visited countries with social problems, e.g. Nepal, but in contrast to Helga his stories about these trips were following rather an ironic narrative than a tragic one regarding differences in ways of living. Irony aims to make clear the incongruity between appearance and reality (Stern, 1995; Czarniawska, 2004). In his story, ironic tension exists between poverty and happiness / satisfaction, and wealth and sadness / dissatisfaction:

> Richard: *I often think about the people, they have not much, their shoes are sandals where we have mountain shoes, but it works and the people are happy. In our country many people try to get more and more, higher, better. It's another living.*

Even though he is aware of the potential risks he can face in such countries he thinks that by going native and dressing and behaving like locals he can avoid bad experiences.

> *Interviewer:* *How did you feel there? Did you ever experience something bad during one of your travels?*
> *Richard:* *No, no… because we are also at the same level with the people where we go. We had a backpack and we have normal clothes. We had no bad feelings; we had no problems in this country...*

Richard perceives Mexico and Colombia sharing more comparable characteristics and similar offerings for his travel experience. While talking about his imagined trips to Mexico and Colombia he stated in both cases that he would be interested in getting to know the people, visiting the marketplaces to find original products, doing some sports, getting to know the famous sites including the big cities Mexico City and Bogota and as well going for relaxing holidays. Sports play an important part in Richard's everyday life which is why he as well lists them during his holiday trips. This corresponds to McCabe's (2002) argumentation that tourist experiences reproduce parts of the everyday life and to Urry's (1992) claim that even the most mundane activities become special when practiced in front of another visual perception. Since Richard at first did not see the picture representing the resorts he pointed this out as missing, meaning that he could not imagine his trip without visiting one of the typical Mexican resorts; an induced image created by DMOs. He furthermore points out that he is always looking for typical products, a way of searching for otherness (Costa, 1998) and living up to the expectations of our society that while on holidays you have to experience something outstanding, often represented by the existing myths and signifiers of the destination (McCabe, 2002; Johns & Gyimóthy, 2002). This behavior of trying to live up to the expectations of society by searching for typical things is a characteristic of postmodern tourists as explained by Johns & Clarke (2001).

> *Interviewer:* *So how was your trip in Mexico?*
> *Richard:* *I am interested in the people who live in this country. In the originals, how they live, the older people, what they do in the market. This is a market place, and I want to know what are the original products and original people. This is how they live and what they eat and what they usually do during the day. What's the life outside the big city. A little bit of sports, an example is golf, this could also be tennis, this is not that important for me. To know the people, to know the culture, the great interesting sites, also churches, how they are inside, famous places, the old cultures, the natives, how they live in the wood, the geographic areas*

like here but also Mexico City, one of the biggest cities in the world, and
some typical products. We are looking in every place for what is typical.

Interviewer: *Are there some pictures missing you would add and could not find in the*
pictures I gave you?

Richard: *…but there is no picture of what is typical for a little town and I don't*
see the holiday areas in Mexico like Acapulco. That is missing. Oh no,
here it is, the holiday area. The culture, the people, nature… the areas
outside the cities and the land.

Interviewer: *Now we maybe go to Colombia…*

Richard: *So… here you can see typical people and a market with typical products*
you can buy. A little bit of sports, but this is only an example, this could
also be water ski. This is Bogotá, the great city. We also make a few days
holiday. Here you see the land and culture and our sightseeing of famous
buildings, culture and natives.

Although Richard attributes diversity to both countries he has a more positive image about Mexico than about Colombia as can be seen in the order of his listings of things that come into his mind when asking for Mexico and Colombia. Cocaine is mentioned quite late in his list of Mexico, while it is the first thing that comes into his mind when talking about Colombia. Furthermore, it can be seen that he connects fewer things with Colombia than with Mexico, showing a certain degree of unawareness about this country:

Richard: *Mexico, Acapulco, sunny, great capital with many people, thousands of*
cars and thousands of peoples, interesting, football, cocaine.

Interviewer: *And Colombia?*

Richard: *Cocaine. Bogotá, wood, … not more*

Richard tells tragic stories about Latin America, e.g. about his colleagues who never left the hotels during business trips. Although he does not exactly know where in Latin America those stories took place he generalizes them and concludes that whole Latin America is dangerous.

Richard: *Mexico… Mexico, it is a country you have to go, it is very interesting.*
Mexico city is one of the largest cities. But I know South America also
from my colleagues from Siemens Hoffmann Straße. They were
responsible for some South American countries and they always told me
that they never left the hotel. They never left the hotel. They only went to
the airport and the hotel and they took the next way to Siemens, but they
never walked alone in the cities. They said that it is too dangerous to get
robbed and have other problems. That's what I heard from South
America.

Furthermore, he states that people from Mexico are all very nice but then he comes up with another tragic story of a friend of him who got killed in some country of Latin America. So

he ends his story with the recommendation of traveling to Latin America in groups, comparing it to New Zealand where you can easily travel alone:

> *Richard:*   *Mexico… I know that the people are all very nice… But also where I life in Lorch, there is a friend of mine who lived there in Lorch, he lived also in South America, he was killed there. This is my experience, that it is always dangerous in such countries. I don't know exactly what he had done, he was a security man, but he was killed there. I think in a little country, but I don't know exactly where. And also a famous Austrian singer who was singing Mozart died there. In my eyes, I think it is a country where you can go with many people, with a group of people but not alone. New Zealand is another country, you can go there alone. Many students go there alone with their backpacks. Go backpacking in New Zealand. That's my mind.*

The stories Richard tells about Mexico and Colombia are a mixture of diversity working on the myth of 'Countries with Many Faces'. Nevertheless, by reproducing the stories he has heard about danger in Latin America where his colleagues even did not dare leaving the hotel, he is contributing to the myth of 'too risky to step out of the Bubble'. Risk is a signifier of both countries, even though he imagines Colombia as slightly more risky than Mexico. This is the same with drugs as a signifier of both countries but primarily of Colombia.

4.3.7   Christian – 'Mexico and Colombia: Countries with many Faces' and 'Colombia: a risky Adventure'

Our second young professional is Christian, 27. He has a significant international experience, working in India and New Zealand and studying in Japan. Christian is an active and sportive person who likes being outside and going on short trips with his girlfriend or friends. If he has longer periods of free time he always travels to far places, mainly with his girlfriend. On his trips he is searching for something different from what he used to know, concerning nature, cities and people. Tourism has the specific ability to transform myths into physical activities and therefore offers the possibility to experience imaginations in real life (Hennig, 2002), something that is a must for Christian when visiting the USA:

> *Christian:*   *When we go to the USA I want to drive one of those big cars, you know V8 engine… but I don't have to travel through the whole USA with that car, just enough for 100 kilometers, just to make that experience.*

On the one hand Christian is really passionate about traveling to places in order to confirm his imaginations about certain destinations, represented by commonly known and famous sites. This corresponds to Urry's (1990) observation that many tourists are searching for photogenic sites, where the gathering of pictures is the main motive of traveling. Taking this into consideration, the impression that Christian follows the tourist gaze and moves in the front stage is created.

> Christian: *Ok...This picture shows me and a friend in India at the Taj Mahal. He was one of my study mates I would say. So we also spend a lot of time and we went from Nagpur which is almost in the middle of India, between Bombay and Kolkata, so we took a train with an 18-hour-ride to Taj Mahal, to Agra and Delhi, we have been there only for one day and we were very impressed, I mean I always wanted to be there, to have one of those pictures. This was fantastic.*

On the other hand by e.g. living with a Japanese guest family and getting in touch with natives and asking them for places to visit he is searching for authentic experiences outside the tourist gaze that can be found in the back stage. His stories about India and Japan are following a romantic plot with values of ideal peace or beauty (Stern, 1995), with the exception of a tragic story when he was fooled by an Indian travel agency. Even though he knew the Indian malice, the story has a sad ending because he did not follow the precautions he should. In tragic stories, rules or instructions prevent unhappy endings, when they are not followed the sad endings are interpreted as a "*punishment for defying reality*" and as an own mistake (Stern, 1995).

> Christian: *I went to the agency when I was in India, I made a ten-eleven-days trip to the southern part of India and I had to book everything in advance, so I went to the agency and told them "ok, I have to go to that place, I want to spend there how much time", so just book everything around that. So after that I found that they fooled me quite strong, I mean, I paid mainly the double price…*
> Interviewer: *Did it influence your future decisions of booking with travel agencies?*
> Christian: *I knew, I think it was a very "Indian thing", you know… when you go to India, you know, many of them just see the dollar sign in the eyes, so when they see a white guy who wants to travel somewhere; he knows nothing about the prices, about the costs, about the distances, so you can tell him everything and get every amount…*

Although Christian made this bad experience in India it did not influence his overall positive impression of this trip as it was a confirmation of the 'Indian thing' myth or even common sense. The tragic plot in this story is shown by the punishment Christian got for

the defiance of the social laws that should have been followed, according to his knowledge of the Indian culture. When considering Christian's definition of a bad traveling experience where people play a central role it can be inferred that he does not blame the Indian travel agent for fooling him because he connects this imagination with the Indian culture. If this had happened in a culture where he did not expect it, where he e.g. thought of the people as representing the noble savage myth, this would have harmed his overall travel experience:

> Christian: *I must be disappointed by the people, more than the landscape or the cities. When you go to a different place and you have in your mind that the people are like this or like that and if you think you can trust someone and he is fooling you, this makes something bad but before you go to an other country I inform myself about that so a kind of living standard, what will face me. But if I go to a place and they would rob me or steal my wallet or this thing that would make it a bad experience. I mean, this could happen to me also in Germany but if it happens in another place, in another country you always, whenever you think about that country you have that in your mind.*

Christian is aware of the influence movies have on him, taking a Jackie Chan movie as his main motivation for going to New Zealand. He does not trust movies but anyways thinks that movies shape the imaginations of destinations. Christian is aware of the induced images that he constructs through promotional advertising. He constantly evaluates such induced images against the information he gets through documentaries or books.

> Christian: *Movies, movies, yes, first of all movies and then documentations…I mean you cannot trust movies very much but it gives you an impression and you will keep this impression. As long as you read books or read or watch documentaries. Or at least you have been there, I mean then you have the real impression.*

Additionally, he is happy if he can find the imaginations that have been created through these movies in real life, representing his quest for confirming myths on his own:

> Christian: *…we found that hotel, it was very very … I would say the cliché for an Italian hotel. So, think about the wooden things at the bed and all you see in mafia movies, all the mafia movies, how you imagine, how it should be and that is exactly how it was; so with small steal bars, and it was a very old, little village with tiny roads and little cars…that was very nice.*

Christian as well refers to movies when he is asked about the things that influence his picture of Colombia and Mexico. He explains further: "*American movies about some guys*

smuggling drugs and the drug bearings", mentioning "Blow"[7] as one example that has shaped his imagination about Colombia. Furthermore he mentions "El Cartel"[8] where he confuses the setting of the movie, putting the story in a Colombian context and not in the proper Mexican one. From this it can be inferred that according to his imaginations for him drugs are a signifier of Colombia and not of Mexico.

> *Interviewer:*   *And where did you get these ideas of these countries from?*
> *Christian:*   *From media, from TV, from movies, mainly movies, and some from the Internet.*
> *Interviewer:*   *Can you give me an example of a movie that forms your image of one of these countries for example?*
> *Christian:*   *…I just remember "Blow" because this is a movie shown today… I think "Las Vegas", somehow I remember I don't know why and… I like "mafia movies"… they show the times in the 70s and 80s.*
> *Interviewer:*   *So these are "mafia movies" about Latin America?*
> *Christian:*   *No, there are "mafia movies" about the US and "El Cartel" was a movie about the US in Colombia.*

Additionally, the FARC is another signifier of Colombia. Christian mentions the FARC and the story of Ingrid Betancourt who was released sometime ago. He says that he does not know about the current situation in Colombia and if *"there are still some rebels looking for tourists"*, reflecting his imagination of the FARC being especially focused on tourists:

> *Christian:*   *… FARC, I think that it's from Colombia? …I know that they captured a French woman for a couple of years, that's what I heard. I don't know very much the situation now in Colombia, how dangerous it is and if there are still some rebels looking for tourists or it changed a lot… I don't know…*

Christian compares backpacking in Latin America with backpacking in Vietnam or Indochina, not with New Zealand because of the good accommodation infrastructure you can find in New Zealand. He as well points out to the likelihood to be robbed in Latin America as some of his friends have told him stories about such occasions, e.g. one of his friends was robbed in Peru. However, he concludes that the robbery in Peru was his friend's fault as he did not listen to the warnings he got before being robbed. This tragic story as well refers to the punishment for '*defying reality*' (Stern, 1995). Christian perceives robberies in Mexico as something usual as in all Latin American countries and

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[7] For a brief description of the movie please see Appendix VI

[8] For a brief description of the movie please see Appendix VI

that it is the individual's task to prevent oneself from it. He expresses that if you behave in the right way you can avoid being robbed. However, he perceives the danger in Colombia as more special, connecting it with e.g. the FARC.

> Christian: *I think traveling in Latin America or South America via backpacking is very similar to New Zealand… no I would say less to New Zealand because in New Zealand you can find everywhere hotels or hostels but more like Vietnam or Indochina. The difference could be that… this is my meaning…that you are likely to be robbed, more in Latin or South America than in Indochina. A friend has been there a couple of times and he was robbed and also others told me about that… I haven't heard that much about Indochina….*
>
> Interviewer: *So do you usually go backpacking?*
> Christian: *Hm… I went backpacking in New Zealand and I will go backpacking in Indochina and when I would go to Latin or South America I would also go for backpacking.*
> Interviewer: *Although you say that there is a risk? A certain risk of being robbed?*
> Christian: *Yes, yes, I definitely think that. A company mate told me that when he was…I am not sure…in Peru, he was in Peru and… I don't know exactly…he went to a place there and other guys told him don't go there alone on your own but he did it and then on the way back three guys were waiting for him and took his bag, so after that he thought ok I shouldn't have done that but it was too late. So, of course you never know what happens…and there are some ways to travel securely or you have to follow some rules by traveling… where to put your wallet, how much money you should have and where… you shouldn't have all your money in your back pack, you should wear it somewhere at your body, you should have maybe two wallets, one wallet you can give to the robber and the other one with the money I would say like these things… then you should follow the ways.*

For Christian his trip to Colombia would mainly be the same as his trip to Mexico, including experiences in the nature, going backpacking, seeing wild animals and visiting places with a cultural heritage, representing the modern myths of nature and art (Hennig, 2002). Although at the beginning of the conversation he was not aware of Colombia being surrounded by the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, he took this information and included the possibility of having beach holidays in his overall picture of Colombia. Furthermore, he thinks that he could also find resorts and shopping malls in Colombia, but anyways he would not include it in his trip to either Mexico or Colombia, since he is not attracted by these activities.

> Interviewer: *Ok, can you now tell me about your traveling experience in Mexico?*
> Christian: *Ok, in Mexico we went to the Maya… I think it was the "Maya place" I think it could be the Maya place with the gold statutes… we started here,*

> *then, from here we went to the rainforest, with the monkeys and wild animals and… we were traveling on a lake, and on rivers, on small wooden boats, through this backwaters you call it… it's called in India backwater, so sweet water rivers and lakes, we stayed there in those wooden buildings inside the rainforest I think this is on top of the trees… ok and… from here we went into the country to the building which looks likes a church, a church on a bridge and we went for rafting on a wild river… and we were traveling with a car, with a jeep through the rural areas and along those islands to the sea where we watched whales and after that we went to a beach, to Cancun maybe, and yes, we were just lazy…laying there around…*

Interviewer: *Can you describe me your trip to Colombia?*
Christian: *Ok. We went to Colombia, mainly I think that the Aztecs have been there, so we went to the Aztec places, we travelled to the rainforest, to the backwaters, and met some wild animals; snakes and monkeys, and wild pigs, we saw some coffee plantations, ok and… we visited rural areas, we went there by car and stayed in old buildings where we slept. We went through the markets, where they sell the goods they produce and animals. Most of the time we spent traveling and backpacking in the forests and near the Aztecs' places.*
Christian: *Ok. I think always there is dance in Colombia as everywhere in Latin and South America… more or less. I think they have mountains; they have rivers, so you can raft… there is a sea, so of course… it is a catholic country, is it? So, you can find churches… they will have also have resorts and shopping malls as well… yes. That's it.*

At the end of the conversation Christian states that he "*would more likely go to Colombia than to Mexico*" because he perceives it as being more adventurous and authentic. Echtner & Prasad (2003) categorize tourists like Christian as adventure seekers who are targeted through the Uncivilized myth about the wilderness that can be found in Third World destinations. Even though Christian connects Colombia with a certain danger of robbery and with the FARC, this would not prevent him from going there as he perceives Colombia's offerings (e.g. the rainforest) as valuable reasons to take this risk. Furthermore, Shields (1990 cited by Urry, 1992) states that in the special setting of tourism safety and risk assessments are unsettled. Especially the non-ironic tourist often wants to avoid the tourist settings in his search for authenticity and is more attracted by untouched nature and trips that have a character of exploration (Echtner & Prasad, 2003; MacCannell, 1973) as it is the case for Christian:

Interviewer: *Ok, perfect. Something you want to add to the conversation?*
Christian: *I think I would more likely go to Colombia than to Mexico.*
Interviewer: *Why?*
Christian: *I think it would be more adventurous.*
Interviewer: *How?*

> *Christian:* *I don't know... I mean, Mexico from my point of view is more this sandy thing, beaches and resorts and maybe playing golf but less adventurous, I would say so. They surely have forest and rainforest but I would go more likely to Colombia and from there I would like to visit other countries in South America and see the Aztecs' places. Yes.*

To sum up, even though Christian has a certain unawareness of Colombia; he creates the image of 'Mexico and Colombia: Countries with many Faces'. Being a non-ironic tourist in the search of authentic experiences he is more attracted by Colombia than Mexico since due to his imagination of Mexico as a more developed country he infers that it is more difficult to get to know the back stage there. From Hollywood movies and other information media, drugs and the FARC are clear signifiers of Colombia. Even though this contributes to the construction of an image of danger, due to his chase for adventure and the myth of Colombia as an uncivilized destination, Colombia would be an exciting destination for Christian. From all the above it is inferred that Christian is furthermore building the myth of 'Colombia: a risky Adventure'.

4.3.8   Tobias – 'Mexico and Colombia: Countries with many Faces'

Our third young professional, Tobias, 32, comes from a small village in Germany where he also spent most of his time as a student. He studied Architecture and then decided to study Business Administration as a second career in which he was obligated to do a semester abroad. Following his motivation of having different experiences to the ones he had in his little village, he decided to go to Argentina. There were two main considerations involved in this decision:

> *Tobias:* *… if I have to leave, then I want to go far away. This was the first criterion and the second criterion was the place has to have sun. Which was more important than if the University was very famous or stuff like that.*

The first option that came to his mind was Mexico due to all the movies about Mexico he has seen before and that have shaped his imaginations about Mexico. He mentioned "From Dusk till Dawn", "El Mariachi" and "Desperado"[9] as examples of such movies:

> *Tobias:* *… but then I thought but you wanted to go far away so I don't know but what came to my mind was Mexico, you know, from TV, stuff like…*

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[9] For a brief description of the movies see Appendix VI

> *"From dusk till dawn" or like, Antonio Banderas playing guitar… that*
> *was my imagination of Mexico.*

Nevertheless, his strong motivation of going to the southern hemisphere made him change his mind. His thoughts about South America were emplotted in a comic narrative in which the main value is the pursuit of happiness (Stern, 1995).

> *Interviewer:*   *Why did you choose Argentina?*
> *Tobias:*   *I recognized that Mexico actually wasn't at the southern hemisphere and*
> *all this ideas of going far away go to the southern hemisphere where the*
> *sun at 12 o'clock in the noon is not in the south but in the north, to*
> *choose something very different, "where the water turns the other way*
> *around when it leaves the shower" yes, a big difference…(laugh).*

There, he met his Argentinean girlfriend who recently moved to Germany to live with him. Tobias does not have specific hobbies and he is rather a lazy guy who dedicates most of his free time to his loved girlfriend. In contrast, she is quite an active person who is in charge of the leisure activities they do together. For instance, she likes to do city tours and visit friends abroad during long weekends.

> *Tobias:*   *…actually my girlfriend likes to do some vacation, some long weekend*
> *vacation and I am happy that she obligates me to do this and she makes*
> *me to do this but on my own, I wouldn't move, I am the one who tries to*
> *avoid any kind of stress.*

They make the decision of where to go in a very spontaneous way without planning in advance or searching information about destinations. He states "*part of strategy of my life is to let things happen*".

Generally he likes relaxing holidays where he can chill out; enjoy the sun and warm temperatures. Since he is usually very occupied during the week, he wants to relax on weekends without pressure and schedules, representing the myth of self-realization and the emotional state of being without burdens that is usually reached through holidays (Hennig, 2002). He is not interested in cultural holidays and his journeys are different depending on if he is with his girlfriend or with his friends who prefer camping tours.

His past traveling experiences are told in a romantic narrative where nostalgia about early traveling experiences determines the kind of holidays he prefers nowadays. This is in line with Johns & Gyimóthy (2002) who refer to a feeling of nostalgia when traveling to similar places as the once visited in the past.

> *Tobias:*   *… when I finished school with the age of 19, I rented a car I went to the coast so maybe that is why this idea of going with the car, camping, I don't know… and one and a half week we spent in New York, two and a half maybe. Other especial vacation, once we made a boat trip at the East of Germany at the Mecklenburgische Seenplatte mostly chilling on the boats. When I was a kid, with my parents we made a lot of walking or climbing vacations in the Alps, Austrian Alps and I don't know, I still like it, once every two years I go to a trip for two or three days, something like that.*

We perceived Tobias as a non-ironic tourist (MacCannell, 1973) as he affirms several times during the interview that he does not like "*tourist stuff*".

> *Tobias:*   *I have seen the documental, far away there are some trips on the river with old tubes… this bullshit (laugh).*

However, in some of his traveling experiences he refers to his search for typical and famous things e.g. signifiers such as the Argentinean beer and the bicycles in Amsterdam. He sees these things as authentic representations of those countries. It can be inferred that he wants to confirm his imaginations about destinations with physical experience through tourism (Hennig, 2002).

Tobias recognizes that the image he had about South America as well as the ones he has about the different destinations come from TV and the movies he watches. TV programs and movies are generally considered as sources for organic images (Li et al, 2009). The characteristic uni-dimension of mass media identified by Parameswaran (2002) is clearly shaping the expectations of Tobias about destinations. After his trip to Argentina he questions himself about it since the image he had about Argentina did not correspond to his pre-trip expectations.

> *Tobias:*   *This idea of South America of poorness and indios and jungle and stuff… this exists in Argentina but only in the North, the rest it… it's South America but in a very European way I would say… And Mexico, what pops up in my mind I would say as I have a lack of experience, I honestly can talk about Argentina, the rest… some rumors I heard in Argentina about the other states and a lot of European prejudices.*

As he could not confirm if the north of Argentina is how he really meant South America to be he wants to confirm the stereotypes he still has:

> *Tobias*   *…I used the time in Argentina to make vacations over there, to get to know the country, I only got to know some part of Patagonia which is very impressive but I also would like to get to know the northern part*

> *which is more, has more indigenes background, the people who live there is more… in South America, how you imagine this. The South of Argentina is very impressive but is not the image I had of South America, it's cold and high mountains, alps, an impressively large country…*

He recognizes that Mexico is probably one of the most stereotyped countries in Latin America and that is why he is afraid of sharing his opinion about Mexico and other countries where he has not had a personal experience. When he thinks about Mexico he mentions signifiers like tequila, cactus and sombreros, things he saw in movies like "El Mariachi" or "From Dusk till Dawn". However, as he found a big European influence in Argentina due to the many immigrants inhabiting this country, he is wondering about the possibility of a Mexican experience without the North American influence.

> *Tobias:*   *I don't have any idea if it's more like the United States influence, I could imagine the big influence of this North American stuff, I don't know if now you can find this typical Mexican with tequila y sombrero y cactus y qué se yo (I don't know)… if this still exists or it's only an image.*

> *Tobias:*   *The idea of Mexico I have from these Antonio Banderas films… The film "El Mariachi", there are three parts of it. "El Mariachi", "Desperado" … I don't know, these are my Mexican ideas so, I don't know any idea about how really… this is how it I would like to be, this is how I would like to be Mexico.*

On the other hand, we can see an image of diversity in Tobias' collage composition about Mexico. However, he wonders if such diversity can really be found there due to some strong association he has with Mexico like cactus and deserts.

> *Tobias:*   *I don't know… this is maybe a bit more than what Mexico can offer… I don't know if you can find this vegetation in Mexico, I don't know, I imagine Mexico… I don't know.*

His ideas about Mexico are positive as we can see in his explanation of the Zapatistas, the guerrilla group that was active in Mexico in the past. The group is described rather with a heroic image than a conflictive one, maybe referring to the image by the story told by an online news paper.

> *Interviewer:*   *What is Chiapas?*
> *Tobias:*   *One of the places where the indigenes people, the people, I know that is the group of revolutionary who want to establish some kind of self-government … se llama "Zapatista", like the great Mexican revolutionary which also I read in this online news paper, of the beginning of the 20th century, who tried to help this small farmers to get the land back…*

Although Tobias is aware of his stereotypes, his ideas about Colombia are marked by them and influenced by mass media and others' opinions:

> *Tobias*   *…if you think of cocaine; you think of Colombia.*

> *Tobias:*   *…I have an image of nice beaches but… Shakira! Shakira, Shakira… the people told me that Colombian girls are pretty…*

Likewise, when he was asked about the things that come to his mind when thinking about Colombia the first thing he mentioned was the "*Sir of the drugs*"; Pablo Escobar and instead of referring to Bogota, the capital city, he remembered Medellin, the city where Pablo Escobar and important drug organizations were established.

Since for him drugs are a signifier of Colombia he infers that Colombia cannot be a touristic destination for North Americans; adopting then the conclusion that for North Americans Colombia can be comparable with Cuba.

Furthermore, although he knows some people who traveled to Colombia and had a good experience there, he thinks that it is dangerous to travel alone because of 'rumors' that he confesses he does not know if are true. Those 'rumors' probably come from the referred movies and all the organic images he has built from mass media (Li et al, 2009).

> *Tobias:*   *…I don't know the truth but I heard the population is armed, I don't know…*

Quite early, Tobias stated that he would include Colombia in his backpacking round trip in South America since for him this country is a must. However, he would not travel to South America only to visit Colombia. The reason is that he has a lack of knowledge of the offerings of Colombia and he would not know what to do during three or four weeks there, something that does not happen with other countries.

> *Interviewer: And Germans? Would Germans travel there? Would you consider traveling to Colombia?*
> *Tobias:*   *I would consider during this backpacking trip, to go to Colombia but let's say… what I can imagine is…. If I go to South America I would go for at least three or four weeks, the minimum. And, for example I could imagine staying four weeks in Brazil but in Colombia… I have a lack of idea what to do for four weeks. So if I go to this great South America trip, I think it's a must to go to Colombia, but it is not that I would say I will only go to Colombia, because of the lack of goals or cities to visit. I don't know. In Brazil I would know what to do for three or four weeks*

but in Colombia not. It's a lack of information maybe. People over there apart of this drug stuff, I don't know about Colombia. Almost nothing. Maybe I would say, all the South American states it is the one I know the fewest about.

Nevertheless, the above statement is contradicting when at the end of the photo elicitation Tobias came up with the conclusion that the trips to Colombia and Mexico could be comparable. Somehow he reflected along the interview and came from an unawareness of Colombia to the idea of Colombia as a country where diverse touristic activities can be found and where safety issues can be questioned (based on what he experienced in Argentina), managed by the tourist, and found not only in Colombia but also in German cities such as Frankfurt, Hamburg or Munich.

Interviewer: *…during the research that we did for our master thesis we frequently came across people that said I wouldn't travel to Colombia because it's too dangerous and not a safe place to be. How do you feel about this?*

Tobias: *I think it's dangerous but all the people told me that Argentina is dangerous too, I never had a problem in Argentina, and I think like all the places in the world, if you behave, you can avoid for a high percentage getting in trouble.*

Tobias: *I would say, I came to the conclusion, what I would like to visit in Colombia is the same as what I would like to visit in Mexico, so it's like the first picture you took. And what I think is Colombia, I think all the photos are from Colombia, I am pretty sure, yes. Maybe I don't know, this is Mexico and Colombia I don't know but I think this stuff could be the same. I think that you can more or less find everything like that in Colombia.*

It can be seen that Tobias' way of thinking suggests that he perceives the stereotypes of these countries as cultural myths that he has to enact by himself (Hennig, 2002):

Tobias: *"I think if you are there for three days then you have an idea how dangerous it is or not, or whatever…"*

Although Tobias has some imaginations about Colombia and Mexico he is not comfortable with telling them through stories as he learnt from his experience in Argentina, where his pre-trip imaginations did not really become true. He would still search for the myths he already has in order to confirm them, but he does not totally expect to find them, showing his awareness of stereotypes that often are not true.

It is inferred that through his story telling Tobias is building the image of 'Mexico and Colombia: Countries with many Faces', mainly because he is aware of the geographical

location of these countries and the natural resources that can be found there. He knows about the fact that his image building is based on cultural myths and stereotypes. Even though he signifies Colombia through drugs and violence due to the news and movies that shape his cognitive image of Colombia, we consider that Tobias is not reproducing these negative myths due to his reluctance to talk about destinations he has not experienced by himself. The same happens with Mexico where he refers to the signifiers of tequila, cactus and hats but questions if he could really find them there due to the American influence.

5 The dialectical Image Building Process of Destinations with Social Problems - Mexico and Colombia

From the analysis of the interviews and stories told by the DMOs of Colombia and Mexico it is concluded that they try to position these two countries as destinations with diversity as competitive advantage. They promote the countries' attributes and uniqueness as destinations by building myths using linguistic constructions and place attachments with symbolism. Since the image building process of destinations is a dialectical process, the images of consumers about these countries should reflect this, at least to some extent.

From the analysis of our consumers we conclude that some of them identified Mexico and Colombia as somewhat comparable destinations, sharing the diversity as the touristic attraction of these two countries. Through their stories, Christian, Richard and Tobias build the myth of 'Mexico and Colombia: Countries with many Faces' based on the modern myths of nature, art, noble savage, self-realization and paradise. Even though the tourists perceive certain similarities in the countries, the image of Colombia always has a more negative touch than the one of Mexico. During the interviews with these three consumers, strong signifiers of Colombia such as cocaine, drugs, the Sir of the Drugs (Pablo Escobar), and the FARC came to the surface. It became apparent that those signifiers have been established through organic images fed mainly by Hollywood movies as well as news that portray the negative uni-dimension of Colombia. For instance, Christian attributed the movie "El Cartel" to Colombia although the movie actually tells the story about the Mexican drug problem. Therefore, Christian is building the myth of 'Colombia: a risky Adventure' based on the existing myths of an Uncivilized destination where the wilderness of the inhabitants of those destinations is attractive for tourists that, like Christian, search for adventure. Additionally, he explains that the special attribute of Colombia's rainforest is a sufficient motivation to take a certain risk. As well the Mexican signifiers like tequila, mariachi, hats, and cactus were explained by the Hollywood movies.

The other consumers are characterized as having a more contrasting image about Mexico and Colombia where the diversity is not a shared attribute of these two countries. Several times, especially Sabrina and Andreas, Mexico was signified as being different from Latin America where its developed touristic infrastructure is compared with Western

destinations. Whereas all of them build the myth of 'Mexico: a Country with many Faces' based as well on the modern myths explained by Hennig (2002), their myths about Colombia are built around other meanings. Sabrina creates the myth of 'Colombia: too risky to step out of the Bubble' due to the strong signifiers of crime and drugs that she has in her mind. Even though those signifiers apply as well for Latin America she categorizes Colombia as one of the most risky countries. The myth created by Sabrina is the result of a vicious circle where the strong signifiers of crime and drugs prevent her from informing herself more about Colombia, cutting off the connection point to the Colombian DMOs. Therefore, her unawareness about the other dimensions of the country is difficult to overcome. Martina creates the myth of 'Colombia: the Wheel of Poverty without End' with signifiers like ghettos shaping it. This myth is constructed based on other myths found in the literature, such as the Unchanged and the Uncivilized myths, portraying characteristics of Third World countries. Stephanie and Andreas construct the myth of 'Colombia: a Virgin Place' based on the modern myths of nature and the noble savage that are associated with Colombia. They furthermore work on the myth of Colombia as an Unchanged and Uncivilized destination where touristic infrastructure is not developed and therefore offers the exploration of untouched nature to the tourists. In the same way Andreas perceives the general community of Colombia as savage and uncivilized.

In addition to the drugs, crime and poverty signifiers of Colombia few signifiers with positive meanings were found, e.g. Shakira, coffee and the rainforest. Andreas and Barbara attributed coffee to Mexico instead of Colombia, which leads to the conclusion of the general lack of positive associations to Colombia.

In general we perceived a certain unawareness about Colombia in a higher or lower extend depending on the consumer, e.g. Barbara is an example of total unawareness about Colombia lacking even geographical knowledge of the country and attributing the general ideas she has about Latin America to it. From her past trips to Latin America she constructs the myth of 'Latin America: the Wheel of Poverty without End'. As the social problem is an unchangeable issue in those countries, non-ironic tourists like her will always find these issues through their search for authenticity. Sabrina contributes to the creation of this general myth of Latin America as a result of the vicious circle regarding her unawareness of the other dimensions of Latin American countries and her reluctance to inform herself.

Another example of the generalization of social problems in Latin America is Richard who creates the myth of 'Latin America: too risky to step out of the Bubble' which is constructed through the reproduction of stories about others' experiences in Latin America.

Some of our consumers attribute poverty and underdevelopment of the touristic sector to Colombia. As explained by Echtner & Prasad (2003) by constructing the Unchanged, the Uncivilized and the Unrestrained myths around Third World destinations, signs of development and modernity are kept away from those destinations. Therefore, our consumers do not think that they could find modern buildings or environments there, imagining Colombia as a place where they can experience authenticity. Urry (1992) states that for consumers authenticity is shown in a relationship between an object and a given historical period that has passed until its construction, expecting that the object has remained in its ancient status. This corresponds to the understanding of authenticity that our consumers have, e.g. when they refer to specific organized touristic activities such as diving, whale watching and 'things of this sort' as 'touristic stuff' they are not interested in. The resorts of e.g. Cancun in Mexico portray the picture of modern environments that have been constructed recently and do not appear authentic to our consumers but correspond to the wishes and expectations of front stage tourists who want to apply the tourist gaze. They perceive Colombia as a place for discovery and exploration where adventure tourists like Christian can find authentic experiences through untouched nature and unknown flora and fauna. For him, more developed destinations like Mexico are perceived as 'the sandy thing'.

According to the studied literature organic images are considered uncontrollable by the DMOs while induced images are controllable (Li et al, 2009). However, in postmodern society of pop culture the border between these two images is very blurred in the minds of consumers (ibid). Therefore, the cognitive image that consumers have about destinations, which is formed by these organic and induced images and constructed over time, becomes an abstract meaning that e.g. in the case of our consumers is defined as 'rumors' or ideas they are 'not sure if are true' but they 'have always heard'. In spite of this abstraction, these are the images transmitted through storytelling. Considering the history of tourism in these two countries as well as the DMOs' interviews and consumers' stories, it is clear that Mexico possesses a strong positive image that prevents this destination from being affected

by bad news or associations with its social problems. Mexican DMOs have worked as myth creators for more than six decades. Following Lévi-Strauss's definition of myth as an idea transmitted generation by generation and being culturally accepted as reality, it is understood how these six decades have been used by Mexican DMOs to establish the positive myths and signifiers that consumers have in their minds. As seen in our overview of the tourism history in both countries, Mexico started to work on the creation of positive myths four decades before the era of drugs and social scandals started in the two countries. Therefore, when these scandals started, Mexico already had the basis for tourism with established positive myths that had already been accepted as reality by the consumers. In contrast, Colombia did not have this basis and started to be internationally recognized through negative news which over three decades built negative myths about this country. From the analysis of the magazine "Der Spiegel" it was found that the amount of news about Colombia since the 1980s, when these social and drug scandals started, is significantly higher than the amount of Mexican articles. Most of the articles about Colombia are portraying only its social problems whereas the news about Mexico is portraying many aspects of the country, not only focusing on the social problems. The same applies when analyzing the Hollywood movies about these countries, which were referred by the interviewed consumers several times. From this it can be concluded that Mexican DMOs have a better control over the uncontrollable sources of information than the Colombian DMOs, resulting in more positive news and signifiers of Mexico. This is supported by Andreas Gross who furthermore states that the bad news about Mexico is not shown that often in the press and recommends Colombia to take non-business press to e.g. communicate that Bogota is the safest city of Latin America.

Since Mexico possesses this positive image, the myths that DMOs try to create, such as the 'Mexico: the Country with many Faces' and the joined culture and paradise myth, are credible. They are built around the general conditions and beliefs that consumers have about the country. This is reflected in our research where we found that DMOs have successfully transmitted these messages as all our consumers attributed diversity to Mexico and contribute to the creation of their myths, such as 'Mexico: a Country with many Faces'.

Contrary, Colombian DMOs have to contradict the background knowledge, beliefs, assumptions and general negative conditions of Colombia when communicating the

uniqueness and offerings of the country. This is why general ideas about South American countries and the modern myths of noble savage, nature, art, self-realization, and paradise as well as the myths of the Uncivilized, Unchanged and Unrestrained are told through advertising, using international tourists that have experienced the country on their own and therefore act as testimonials, trying to reinforce the credibility of these myths. Along the history, DMOs targeting First World tourists have internationally worked on the creation of certain 'Third World myths' through advertisement (Echtner & Prasad, 2003). Those myths have been attributed to Colombia by being a Third World destination. This is why Colombian DMOs now additionally try to transmit the message of the sophistication of the cities and touristic places since this touristic infrastructure has been hidden from the consumer when working on those myths. However, Colombian marketers work as well on the 'Third World myths' in order to emphasize the untouched nature and noble savage that can be found in this country.

The above explains the radical and polarizing slogan used in the international campaign of Colombia: *"Colombia- the only risk is wanting to stay"*. Contradicting the marketing patterns that DMOs use to promote their destinations, this ironic slogan aims at creating a surprising feeling through the tension between all the abstract meanings consumers have in their minds defining Colombia as a risky destination, and what the DMOs want to communicate as the truth of the country; something that nobody expects, that the offerings of the country will make the tourist want to stay. Colombian DMOs expect that due to the tension between what is suggested as apparent and what is suggested as truth, consumers will feel the motivation to get informed about the other dimensions of this destination.

Having understood the purposes of Colombian DMOs behind their defiant campaign and the myths they are trying to create through stories in their promotional material it is possible to infer that Colombia is now well aware of the dialectical image building process of destinations. They know about the power of cultural myths created by the consumers' interpretations of what is shown in the media, marketing material, word-of-mouth and past experiences. This is why they decided to work on the cultural myth of Colombia as a risky destination instead of creating only positive myths without credibility since Colombia's image as the black sheep within the tourism market has been constructed over a long time.

By working on the stereotype of the country as a risky destination DMOs are especially trying to reach adventure consumers like Christian that can be targeted by evoking colonial expeditions in wild and exotic places.

As concluded during the Latin America Forum at the ITB Berlin, the future for the tourism industry of Colombia and in general of all Latin American countries seems to be promising. Therefore, Colombian DMOs' overall strategy is to keep on working on the mind of consumers through advertisements and strong country brand campaigns to eventually shape a positive image of Colombia as a touristic destination. During the observations at the ITB Berlin it was realized that the DMOs are working on the enhancement of positive signifiers by e.g. showing videos of Shakira and offering samples of Colombian coffee.

Even though, Colombian DMOs now seem to be aware of the Lévi-Strauss' definition of myth as an idea culturally accepted as reality built over time, and try to manage the 'abstract images' of consumers by constantly working with non-business press, reaching mass media channels and word-of-mouth communications to support the creation of positive myths, it is clear that destinations like Mexico have a great time-advantage over Colombia.

6 Conclusion, Managerial Contributions and Further Research

By using a dialectical approach to study DMOs as myth makers to promote countries with social problems and Consumers as myth makers when assessing those countries, we contribute to the research tradition of CCT as well as to the marketing domain of Destination Marketing by offering a thick understanding of this image creation process of destinations with social problems. This study shows that even though DMOs work on myths that portray the countries as desiring destinations, usually hiding surrounding social problems within their marketing campaigns, not only positive images constitute the overall image of the countries. Consumers, as individual human beings with different associations and interpretations, interpret what is shown in the media and other sources of organic images, marketing material, word-of-mouth communications and past experiences. Through consumers' interpretations, despite of the hidden social problems, the negative cultural myths created around the destinations might overcome DMOs' efforts as myth makers if their myths are not based on a dialectical process where myths have to be built in line with the background knowledge and beliefs about the destinations. Through the case study of this research, it is shown that in the dialectical destination image building process of Colombia, DMOs have not reached potential tourists. This is why Consumers have built the image of Colombia based on the uni-dimensional images portrayed by mass media and the cultural negative myths that have been created over time. After the turning point for Colombia in 2005 with the country brand campaign *"Colombia- is passion"* and the following international campaign *"Colombia-the only risk is wanting to stay"*, the DMOs of Colombia are determined to take their position in the dialectical image building process of Colombia as a touristic destination where the image of diversity should be the overall image of the country. As being aware of the dialectical image building process, Colombian DMOs work on the cultural myth of Colombia as a risky destination instead of creating only positive myths without credibility, since the abstract image about Colombia as a black sheep within the touristic market has been constructed a long time ago. It is clear that Mexico has worked on building a strong positive image for more than six decades. Its positive image prevents this destination from being affected by bad news or associations with its social problems, being signified by consumers as something even different from Latin America. This is why the positive myths that DMOs try to create are credible. They

are built around the general conditions and beliefs that consumers have about the country. This is reflected in our research where all our consumers attributed diversity to Mexico and contributed to the enhancement of the positive myths.

By understanding this dialectical image creation process of destinations with social problems, where both DMOs and Consumers work as myth makers, DMOs can be more successful in their marketing campaigns in which through promotional material and storytelling myths are trying to be built. Social problems can never be hidden due to the power of media, word-of-mouth communications and consumers' own interpretation of cultural myths. DMOs as myth makers to promote destinations with social problems must consider this dialectical process in order to be reliable in their campaigns.

As explained before, consumers create the image of the destinations according to their imagination as well as past experiences. This study only took consumers working on imagination of the countries into consideration since none of them has had direct travelling experience in those destinations. Thus, taking consumers who have confirmed and unconfirmed myths through direct experiences into focus is suggested for future research about the destination image building process of destinations with social problems. Moreover, the significant role of mass media, influencing both DMOs and Consumers in the dialectical image building process of destinations, is remarkable. In the case of countries like Colombia where DMOs have not reached the consumers, mass media and the film industry were referred as the strongest sources of myths and imagination of the consumers. Furthermore, in the current society of pop culture, where the border between non-commercial and commercial information is blurred, mass media and films analysis is considerably relevant. This is why it is suggested for further research.

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Appendix

I "Latin America Forum: Chances in the Crisis - Specialization and Quality: Key issues for tourism in Mexico and Latin America?"

During the ITB Berlin the Latin America Forum was presented, including the following topics and speakers:

1. The tourism development in Latin America in 2008 - Andreas M. Gross, Chairman, ARGE Latin America

2. Analysis of the economical conditions in Latin America and the German outbound market - Norbert Salcher, Tourism Expert

3. Facing the global crisis: Mexico as an example for the chances of Latin America – Sandra Morales, Associate Director, National Tourist Office of Mexico

4. Specialisation and Quality in Tourism: Key issues for success in Latin America? - Roland Junker, Senior Product Manager the Caribbean and Latin America, Neckermann Fernreisen GmbH

5. Panel discussion

II Semi-Structured Qualitative Interviews with Representatives from Destination Marketing Organizations and Travel Agencies / Tour Operators

The following questions represent the interview template used in the semi-structured qualitative interviews with Mexican and Colombian DMOs and TA / TO.

1. When did you start promoting Colombia (Mexico)?

2. What are your strategies to present and promote Colombia (Mexico)?

3. Do you use qualities of local products to attribute associations to Colombia (Mexico)?

4. How successful are these promotions?

5. How many tourists are going to Colombia (Mexico) compared to other Latin American countries?

6. What are tourists looking for when traveling to Colombia (Mexico)?

7. Which activities characterize the image of Colombia (Mexico)?

8. What are the competitive advantages and uniqueness of Colombia (Mexico)?

9. What are the difficulties in promoting Colombia (Mexico)?

10. Do you apply special strategies to overcome those difficulties/prejudices?

11. What is the profile of customers going to Colombia (Mexico)? Whom are you targeting?
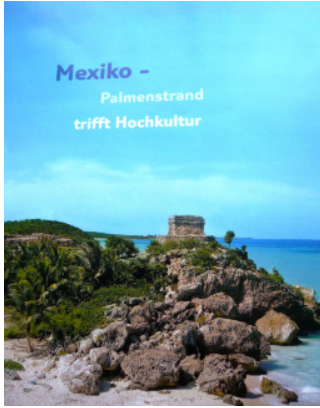
III Examples of Promotional Material

Mexico

Figure 2: Mexico – Palm Beach meets Ancient Culture
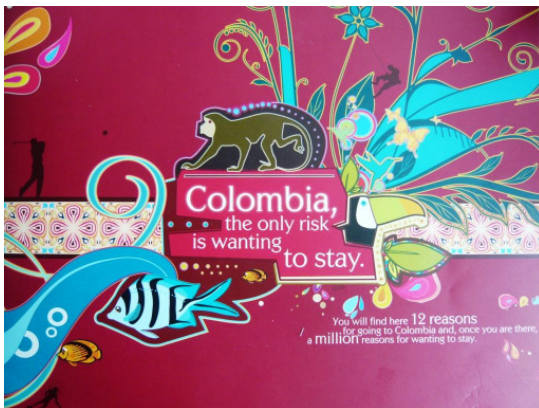

Figure 3: Oaxaca, Mexico

Colombia

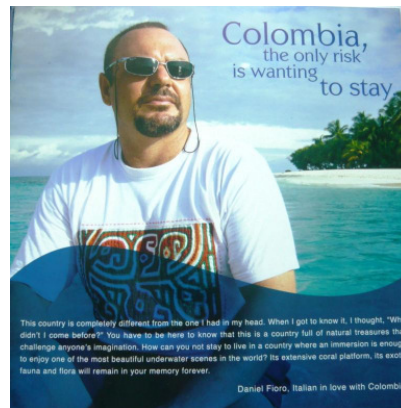**Figure 4: Colombia - 12 Reasons for going to Colombia**

Figure 5: Italian in Love with Colombia

Figure 6: Happy Natives
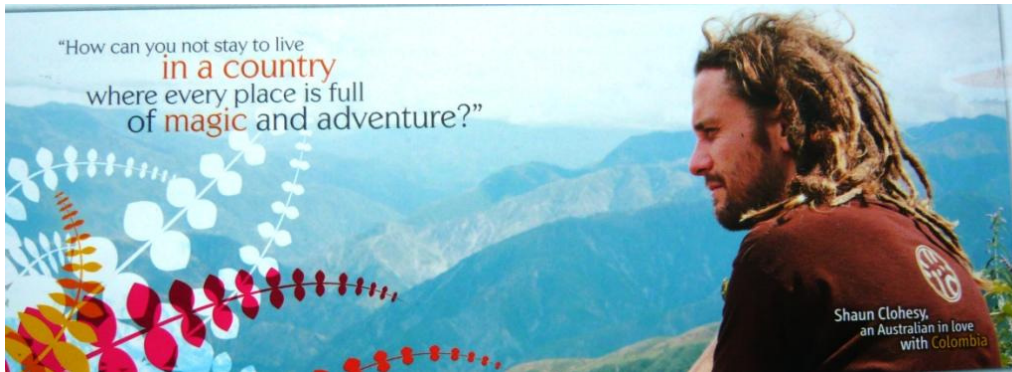

Figure 7: Tourists with Natives

Figure 8: Australian in Love with Colombia

IV Overview of Existential-Phenomenological Interviewees

Name	Sex	Age	Nationality	Place of Residence	Profession
Andreas	M	23	Germany	Linköping (SWE)	Student
Barbara	F	47	Germany	Heroldsberg (GER)	Archivist
Christian	M	27	Germany	Stuttgart (GER)	Constructing Engineer
Martina	F	23	Germany	Linköping (SWE)	Student
Richard	M	56	Austria	Lorch (GER)	Retired / Consultant
Sabrina	F	27	Germany	Stuttgart (GER)	Consultant Relations Manager
Stephanie	F	23	Germany	Linköping (SWE)	Student
Tobias	M	32	Germany	Düsseldorf (GER)	Real Estate Project Developer

Table 2: Existential-Phenomenological Interviewees

V Pictures of the Interviewees' Collages created during the Photo Elicitation

Barbara

Figure 9: Barbara's Traveling Experience in Mexico

Figure 10: Barbara's typical Tourist Package Trip to Mexico

Sabrina

Figure 11: Sabrina's Traveling Experience in Mexico

Figure 12: Sabrina's Traveling Experience in Colombia

Andreas

Figure 13: Andrea's Traveling Experience in Mexico

Figure 14: Andrea's Traveling Experience in Colombia

Stephanie

Figure 15: Stephanie's Traveling Experience in Mexico

Figure 16: Stephanie's Traveling Experience in Colombia

Martina

Figure 17: Martina's Traveling Experience in Mexico

Figure 18: Martina's Traveling Experience in Colombia

Richard

Figure 19: Richard's Traveling Experience in Mexico

Figure 20: Richard's Traveling Experience in Colombia

Christian

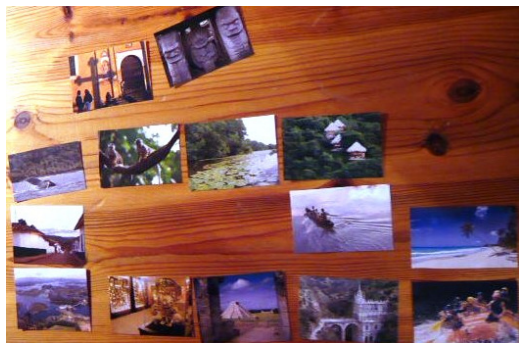Figure 21: Christian's Traveling Experience in Mexico

Figure 22: Christian's Traveling Experience in Colombia

Tobias

Figure 23: Tobias' Traveling Experience in Mexico

Figure 24: Tobias' Traveling Experience in Colombia

VI Description of Movies mentioned by the Interviewees

In the existential-phenomenological interviews we conducted with our consumers they mentioned some movies that shaped their images about the two destinations Mexico and Colombia. In order to understand the influence these movies have on the consumers' perceptions of the two countries a short description of the mentioned movies will be given here.

Blow

The drama / biopic film "Blow" (2001) is staged in the 1970s and 1980s shows the story of the American cocaine smuggler George Jung. It is based on the real life stories of George Jung, Pablo Escobar, Carlos Lehder, and the Medellín Cartel. The film's title comes from a slang term for cocaine. The following quote from George Jung portrays the "good image" Colombia has in the drug world:

> This is 100% pure Columbian cocaine, ladies and gentlemen. Disco shit. Pure as the driven snow.

The story tells the up rise of a young drug dealer named George Jung who later ends up as one of the most important cocaine smugglers within the famous Medellín Cartel. The underlying plot is a mixture of tragedy, irony and heroism, portraying Colombia and the drug business in a naive way. The dangers and negative sides of the business and the effects on the portrayed countries and its inhabitants are not neglected, however it is fair to say that to some extend a careless image is created, where the drug smuggling is portrayed in a heroic way as the following quote shows:

> So in the end, was it worth it? Jesus Christ. How irreparably changed my life has become. It's always the last days of summer and I've been left out in the cold with no door to get back in. I'll grant you I've had more than my share of poignant moments. Life passes most people by when they're busy making grand plans for it. Throughout my lifetime I've left pieces of my heart here and there. And now, there's almost barely enough to stay alive. But I force a smile, knowing that my ambition far exceeded my talent. There are no more white horses or pretty ladies at my door. (George Jung)

From Dusk till Dawn

The 1996 action / horror film "From Dusk till Dawn" tells the story about the fugitive bank robbers and brothers Seth and Richie Gecko who are fleeing from the F.B.I. and Texas

police, is mentioned. The movie follows a science fiction plot dealing with vampires and strong / outlaw characters. A great part of the story takes place at a remote Bar and Strip-Club called "Titty Twister", located in the desert. The "desert, cactus, sun and tequila image" mentioned by the interviewees in connection with Mexico can be found often throughout the movie. At the very end, a connection to the ancient culture of Mexico is drawn as the final camera shot reveals that the "Titty Twister" was actually the top of a buried ancient Aztec temple.

El Mariachi

The Spanish language film was shot in the northern Mexican border town of Ciudad Acuña with a mainly amateur cast. Due to the success of the debut film, two further entries were created, namely: Desperado (1995) and Once Upon a Time in Mexico (2003). The three movies are known today as the Mexico Trilogy. The plot is tragic in nature and tells the story of an out of work musician, El Mariachi, traveling through Mexico. He dreams of being a big-time Mariachi like his forefathers before him. However, things turn out a lot different. Again, this movie shows the desert landscape typical for parts of Mexico, and follows the image of sex, drugs and Rock'n'Roll to some extend.

El Cartel

A brand new supplement to the Mexican image based on drugs and crime stories is the movie "El Cartel" (2009). The story deals with a naive journalist named Jules Land who approaches Mexico's most notorious drug cartel in order to kick-start his struggling career. The official movie press release refers to the movie as a *"rare look into the values and practices of the world's most intriguing and enigmatic industry - the multi-billion dollar business of drug trafficking"* especially relevant due to Mexico's current criminal climate.