Branding destination through iconic product

Master Thesis

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Abstract

This thesis paper studies the interrelationship between two phenomena: destination brand and iconic product. The aim of this paper is to show the interrelationship between two phenomena and examine how the iconic product can influence the destination brand. The research identifies main concepts of the work: the destination brand and the iconic product, studies the existing theory regarding those concepts and identifies the theoretical gap. To reach the study purposes the qualitative research method was chosen. Through the thesis work along with theory empirical data regarding the Costa Rican coffee and the Moldovan wine is analysed. Based on the theoretical framework and secondary data analysis thesis suggests the conceptual model illustrating the interrelationship between the two phenomena. Research claims that there is the interrelationship between the destination brand and the iconic product, and based on that argues that destination can be branded through iconic product.

Key words: destination brand, iconic product, destination branding, interrelationship, destination image.

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1 Introduction

In recent period destination branding became increasingly popular worldwide not only among the academics but also for practitioners and destination governors. This might be concluded based on a number of recent studies on this topic, a number of brand consulting companies specializing in destination branding and destination promotions that we can see in everyday life worldwide. At the same time, branding through iconic products is also relatively new concept where branding is taken to a new level by establishing the idea of building not just emotion but an entire identity around a brand (Holt, 2004). In this thesis the destination brand and the iconic product will be analyzed along with each other.

The interest in this filed has been grown during the second half of the 20th century, when around 766 major publications by 789 authors were published (Papadopolous, 2002, in Anholt, 2002). The first journal article covering the destination branding topic was published by Dosen, Vransevic and Plebeian's (1998). The article contained the analysis of the appropriateness of Croatia's brand. In the same year, Pritchard and Morgan (1998) have published the case analysis of the brand strategy for Wales in the first destination branding case study journal. Former to this time, research linked to aspects of what is now considered as destination branding had been reported and it includes concepts such as: destination image (for reviews see Gallarza, Saura and Garcia, 2002; Pike, 2002), destination positioning (Chacko, 1997; Reich, 1997; Woodside, 1982), and destination slogans (see Klenosky and Gitelson, 1997; Pritchard, 1982; Richardson and Cohen, 1993). In spite of these publications during that time above mentioned concepts were not explicitly in the context of branding.

Destination branding texts has emerged in the new millennium. Morgan, Pritchard and Pride (2002, 2004) were first scholars who have edited volumes predominantly of case studies and conceptual papers. The next who have followed Morgan, Pritchard, and Pride (2002, 2004) were Donald and Gammack's (2007) research-based analysis of city branding for Sydney, Hong Kong and Shanghai in the context of tourism and film traditions, and Baker's (2007) practitioner perspective on branding for small cities in North America. Destination marketing texts, which contained chapters regarding destination branding, include Pike (2004, 2008).

During the last years, the branding of destination (and especially cities) has gained popularity among city officials (Anholt, 2010). Destination leaders are now thinking beyond the traditional approaches to accept branding techniques that were once used only for commercial products and services (Dinnie, 2011). As a consequence, marketers dedicate a greater amount of focus to creating the destinations as a brand (Braun, 2008) in order to promote their destinations to its existing and potential target groups. Throughout this thesis paper the term destination refers to places, cities, regions and nations.

In the book “How Brands Become Icons: The Principles of Cultural Branding” Douglas Holt (2004) provides the theory of cultural branding where he argues that products that create value on cultural level in popular culture are the ones that attain iconic status. He claims that iconic products compete in “myth markets” and those myths’ are addressed to basic cultural anxieties and contradictions. The product’s goal is to symbolize an idea or a value of the culture. The successful accomplishment of this goal depends upon product’s ability to integrate into popular concerns and channel subconscious desires into consumer activity. An iconic product symbolizes not only a particular brand or an organization, but also the life style.

John et al. (1998) claim that the products that consumers associate mainly with a brand are iconic products. In the context of destinations those are the products (brands, category or type) that people associate mainly with destinations like in the case of Cuba it is cigars. Miller and Henthorne (1997) assume that Cuba is one of the countries, if not the only one in the world, which is so strongly associated with one particular product, cigars.

Through this thesis work, the interrelationship between two phenomena, namely destination brand and iconic product, which is not investigated thoroughly, would be illustrated and analyzed from different perspectives; as this interrelationship might reveal new approach in creating successful destination brand.

1.1 Literature review/theoretical background

In a globally competitive marketplace, where various destinations compete, creating a differentiated destination image has become the starting point in order to survive (Qu et al., 2011). Despite the fact that destination branding is a new concept, some academics and practitioners agree that places can be branded in the same way as consumer goods and services (Morgan and Pritchard, 2000; Olins, 2002; Kotler and Gertner, 2002; Cai, 2002; Anholt, 2002).

Destinations increasingly adopt branding techniques to develop unique positions, identities, and personalities in a competitive environment at the national and international level. In other words, destination branding requires going beyond the creation of catchy advertisements that can influence consumers' awareness. It stands for long-term and holistic destination marketing with exhaustive understanding of the visitor, the destination's distinct identity, and its competitive position (Gnoth et. al, 2007).

De Chernatony and McDonald (2001) described strong and powerful brand as: "an identifiable product, service, person or place, augmented in such a way that the buyer or user perceives relevant unique added values which match their needs more closely". Morgan and Pritchard (2000) argued for the importance of destination branding: "the battle for customers in the tourism industry will be fought not over price but over the hearts and minds – in essence, branding . . . will be the key for success". In addition, Cai (2002) maintains that: "Marketing agencies at all levels, thus, have a vested interest in building strong and positive images for their destinations. However, the extent to which image building benefits their targets can be greater if it takes place in the context of branding".

Gnoth (2002) refers to destination branding as a management process which implies the development of a strategic plan to build brand identity considering destination attributes especially those that are competitive, unique and thoroughly identified. Hall (1999) views the main goal of destination branding as the creation of a consistent communication strategy, based on carefully selected variety of core intangible values in the consumer's mind. On the contrary, Pride (2002) puts together communication and relationship perspectives where tangible attributes are fundamental in creating reasons for the consumer to believe. Kotler and Gertner (2002) also link these perspectives stating that brand personality speaks to the consumer. Morgan, Pritchard and Pride, (2002) argue that increasing product similarity demands destinations to create unique identities in order to differentiate themselves in a highly competitive market.

Nowadays, mainly all destinations have superb five-star resorts, hotels and attractions, every country declares a unique culture and heritage, every place reports being the most friendliest and having outstanding consumer-focused tourist industry and service (Morgan, Pritchard and Pride, 2002) and many destinations promote same attributes such as beautiful scenery, golden beaches and blue seas in their advertisements (Ekinci et al., 2007; Murphy, Benckendorff and Moscardo, 2007). However, these facilities and attributes in destination marketing cannot be differentiators any more (Morgan, Pritchard and Pride, 2002). Positioning destinations, based only on their functional attributes, makes them even more substitutable. Thus, Ekinci and Hosany (2006) state that destination personality can be used as a valuable means for building destination brands, understanding visitors' perceptions of destinations, and creating a unique identity. In a highly competitive environment with increasing substitutability and product parity, branding is the most powerful marketing tool for destination marketers.

The "image" is a crucial aspect in marketing strategy and various authors have studied the usage of image in developing brands for destinations (Chon, 1991; Heath and Wall, 1991). The vital part of destination branding is to create a positive destination image that distinguishes the destination by using proper brand element mix (Cai, 2002). A powerful, unique image is at heart of destination positioning being an effective technique to differentiate destination from competitors to capture the consumers' minds (Botha, Crompton and Kim, 1999; Buhalis, 2000; Calantone, Benedetto, Hakam and Bojanic, 1989; Chon, Weaver and Kim, 1991; Crompton, Fakeye and Lue, 1992; Fan, 2006; Go and Govers, 2000; Mihalic, 2000; Mykletun, Crotts and Mykletun, 2001; Uysal et al., 2000). Qu et al., (2011) proposed that unique image should be interpreted as brand association.

As stated by Echtner and Ritchie (1993) the overall image of destination should be examined by three dimensions of attributes: holistic, functional psychological and unique-common characteristics. Uniqueness is vital as it affects the differentiation among similar destinations (Cai, 2002; Echtner and Ritchie, 1993; Ritchie and Ritchie, 1998). One of the objectives of branding is to differentiate a product from that of competitors (Aaker, 1991). In the same way, destination branding should lay an emphasis on destination's unique image in order to be differentiated from competing destinations by target audiences.

Academics as well as practitioners agree that places can be branded in the same way as products and services. It is known that branding concept has been widely applied to products and services in the generic marketing field (Blain, Levy and Ritchie, 2005), nonetheless brands also can be found in a number of categories of tourism products and penetrate almost all aspects of tourism activities (Cai, 2002; Gnoth, Baloglu, Ekinci and Sirakaya-Turk, 2007). Destination can also be seen as a product or perceived as a brand because it includes a bundle of tangible and intangible attributes (Ekinci and Hosany, 2006; Ekinci, Sirakaya-Turk and Baloglu, 2007; Hosany, Ekinci and Uysal, 2007). However, others (Blichfeldt, 2003; Caldwell and Freirre, 2004; Hankinson, 2004; Morgan and Pritchard, 2004; Pike, 2005) have warned about specific challenges to brand a tourist destination and noted that special conceptual frameworks and models should be developed for destination branding. At the same time a number of scholars (Hankinson, 2007; Kavaratzis, 2009; Parkerson and Saunders, 2005; Trueman et al., 2004) drew parallels between destination branding and corporate branding highlighting that the branding of destinations and corporations share similarities in terms of their complexity and broad range of stakeholders.

As can be noted scholars view destination brands in different ways, destination brand as product brand and destination brand as a corporate brand. We agree with academics who argue that destination brand should be considered as corporate brand as it is multidimensional with various areas of activity with different target audiences. As destination brand refers to different stakeholders like citizens, visitors (tourists / business visitors), investors, government, etc. in presented paper destination brand would be considered as a corporate brand.

Some destinations might have particular features and/or iconic products that can be immediately identified as belonging to and representing certain destination. Iconic products, those whose market power derives from its symbolic dimension, have become notorious and durable cultural symbols. These products comprise collective identities, as illustration of social axes as class, gender, race within and beyond national discourse. People use iconic products' symbolism to establish and perform basic status and connection (Holt, 2004). Despite the fact that none address, develop or even describe the possibility of creating destination brand through products some scholars (e.g. Anholt's Hexagon and Olins' Four Vectors constructs) use terms like "flag products" or "flagship products", which can be considered as iconic products, in the context of destination brand communication and promotion. From the generic point of view destination image is made up of stereotypes that are with time refined to contain characteristics of product categories. Since iconic products obtain its influence through symbolic "work" that they carry out in the society, research on these products has not been thorough (Holt, 2006).

In our thesis paper the concepts of flagship product and iconic product could be used interchangeably as they are employed for identifying destination.

1.2 Problem Discussion

The phenomena of destination brand and iconic product are deeply investigated in the academic world but separately from each other. As far as destination brand comprises the attributes of the commercial product and could be branded as a corporate brand and iconic product denotes symbolic values and meanings we claim that there is an interrelationship between these two phenomena. After reviewing the literature we strongly believe that above mentioned phenomena have interrelationship which has not been explored yet. We think that it is worth to conduct further research on the topic how iconic products could influence destination brands.

Cuba and its Cigar phenomena is the good case to demonstrate how two phenomena, the destination brand and the iconic product, could identify each other. Miller and Henthorne (1997) assume that Cuba is one of the countries, if not only, in the world, which is so strongly associated with one particular product, cigars. In North America cigar manufacturing and consumption has long and interesting history extends back over 500 years (Del Todesco, 1996). LaTour, Henthorne, and Braun-LaTour (2003) analyze current cigar phenomenon from its vast historical context and the meaning of the cigar as a cultural icon. Watts Wacker of the Stanford Research Institute argues that, "Cigars are a wonderfully placed symbol in an age driven by icons" (Hamilton, 1997). This Cuba and its cigar case demonstrates and proves the possibility that particular destination could be associated with specific product.

John et al. (1998) claim that products that consumers associate mainly with the brand are iconic products. In the context of destination those are the products (brand category or type) that people associate mainly with destinations like in case of Cuba, its cigars. In the minds of consumers the images and perceptions of brands and countries are often associated with the place where it is produced. That is Coca-Cola and Microsoft are America, Nokia is Finland and vice versa (Ham, 2008).

Based on the above mentioned examples and literature review, this thesis paper assumes that a destination could be branded through iconic products and in order to argue this interrelationship further secondary data would be analyzed and interrelationship between destination brand and iconic product would be demonstrated.

As criticized and discussed in the scope of this thesis the interrelationship between destination brand and iconic product is not explored in former studies. Researchers have presented definitions of destination brand and iconic products and stated their importance and roles. However, literature fails to show the interrelationship and impact of iconic product phenomenon on destination brand.

Destination branding represents the field of interest not only for academics but also for business world especially for marketers working particularly on destination branding and place/destination/city governors. Thus, this thesis paper might be a basis for new working model how to create and promote destination brands through iconic products, which would be based on theoretical conceptual model developed by researchers. The research analysis of presented paper is done from the managerial point of view.

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze relevant theory and secondary data in order to find the interrelationship between destination brand and iconic product. The analysis would illustrate the importance of enhancing the meaning and value of iconic product belonging to particular destination and would indicate the interrelationship between destination brand and iconic product and, moreover, the influence of iconic product on establishing successful destination brand.

1.3 Research question

Based on the gap that we have identified in literature review the following research questions have been raised:

- What interrelationship exists between destination brand and iconic product and how the phenomenon of iconic product might influence the creation of destination brand?

As this research intends to show how the destination can be branded through the iconic product it is essential to understand how the phenomenon of iconic product influences the destination brand.

According to presented theoretical background a conceptual model would be developed, proving the interrelationship between these two phenomena and illustrating how destination branding could be implemented through iconic products that signify the values and beliefs, which are deeply embedded in culture of that particular destination.

1.4 Limitations

This study aims to analyze the interrelationship between two phenomena: destination brand and iconic product. But there is no intention of this paper to look into the process of creating iconic product as it is long and complicated phenomenon deeply rooted in history and heritage of the nation as a whole.

It is widely known that creation of strong and powerful brand as well as destination brand needs time and effort in order to stay in the minds and hearts of consumers and it demands cooperation between all participants involved into the process, thus it is not a purpose of this thesis to study these general processes in depth.

Based on literature and secondary data analysis it should be noted that if there is interrelationship between the phenomena of destination brand and iconic product it is still not a panacea for absolutely all destinations. When applying the iconic product concept, whilst creating destination brand, it should be remembered that it is to some extent specific and absolutely not universal technique.

2 Methodology

The aim of this research is to study the interrelationship between the destination brand and the iconic product phenomena and how iconic products could influence the destination brand. In order to answer the previously formulated research questions, qualitative research approach was chosen applying analysis of secondary data and based on theoretical concepts that would be outlined in relevant part.

2.1 Deductive, inductive and iterative approach

In order to find out the relationship between theory and research, Bryman and Bell (2007) suggest two major approaches: deductive and inductive. According to researchers, deductive approach is the approach where the researcher gathers knowledge from previous theories and then creates hypothesis based on former theoretical concerns, linked to a certain topic. While using this approach, relevant data is gathered and then applied to prove previously formulated hypothesis. An inductive approach, where empirical data is collected first and then new theories are developed, is often contrasted to deductive approach. Thus, applying an inductive approach is resulted in interesting findings, but with limited contribution to theory. At the same time, Bryman and Bell (2007) suggested the combination of those two approaches, called iterative approach, which states that during this approach researcher "is going back and forth to review the theoretical framework and the empirical material."

We assume that an iterative approach is the most relevant to this study as the research first analyzes existing theories, then represents the empirical data, then goes back to the theory and analyzes the empirical data through the theoretical framework. Further, based on this analysis the research represents new conceptual model. Thus, we can see that we go back and forth from theoretical framework to empirical data and vice versa.

2.2 Qualitative approach

Qualitative research employs a naturalistic approach that aims to understand phenomena in specific settings, such as "real world setting [where] the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest" (Patton, 2002, p. 39). Broadly classified, qualitative research is "any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 17) and alternatively, the kind of research that generates findings brought from real-world settings where the "phenomenon of interest unfold naturally" (Patton, 2002, p. 39). In quantitative studies researchers look for prediction, causal determination, and generalization of results, in qualitative studies, on the contrary, researchers look for understanding, illumination, and extrapolation to similar situations (Hoepfl, 1997).

The overall purpose of qualitative research, regardless of the methodology chosen, is to determine how a particular socio-cultural action or phenomenon operates. That is, to clarify “What's going on” with the behaviour or phenomenon under the investigatory lens. Qualitative research is conducted to understand the procedural affairs of the targeted social phenomenon; the concentration is on how things happen rather than the fact that they happen (Tetnowski and Damico, 2001).

According to Clissett (2008, p. 100) qualitative research covers a varied range of approaches for the investigation of “human experience, perceptions, motivations and behaviours” and is concerned with the collection and analysis of words whether in the form of speech or writing. From this perspective, qualitative analysis means to understand what others do and say or to “get grasp, hear, catch and comprehend” what something means (Grant, 2008, p. 1).

The aim of qualitative research method is not to “test” a hypothesis but to “describe, analyze, and interpret the constructive aspects of the social world” (Mcleod, 2001, p. 133). Given that the qualitative researches are inductive, the evaluation is based on the total deficiency of any sort of theory (Mitchell, 1993) and as a result it is a method that helps a researcher to develop constructive theory within a research (Leedy and Ormrod, 2005; Creswell, 2007). Qualitative research is carried out through deep and long-lasting contact with everyday life situation. In general these situations are typical and reflective of the daily life of individuals, groups, and organisations (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

In order to answer the research questions: what interrelationship exists between destination brand and iconic product; how the phenomenon of iconic product might influence the creation of destination brand we assume that qualitative research is the most relevant research method. The assumption is based on the nature of the research questions (to describe the interrelationship and influence process) and definitions of qualitative research, which were presented above; and according to that theory we assume that it is the best method to describe how the things happen than the fact that they happen.

2.3 Secondary data

There are several points that are important in well-collected data. One main aspect is that qualitative research is concentrated on naturally happening, everyday situations in natural settings and as a consequence there is picture of real life. One more important aspect is that qualitative data is rich and holistic with strong possibility for enlightening complexity. Qualitative data includes loaded descriptions, which represents a real life perspective and has a ring of truth. Moreover, qualitative data is a strong tool for studying any process as the data mainly is collected over a sustained period. As qualitative data stresses on people's "live experience" are primarily well-matched for locating the meanings people place on the events, processes and structures of their lives: their "perceptions, assumptions, prejudgments, presuppositions" (Van Manen, 1977), and for linking these meanings to the social world around them.

Additionally, there are three other aspects advocating the powerfulness of qualitative data. Qualitative data is considered the best approach for investigating new area, discovery and developing hypotheses. Additionally due to the strong potential for testing hypotheses it is possible to see whether specific predictions hold up. In addition qualitative data is helpful when the data gathered from the same setting is needed to validate, supplement, illuminate, explain or reinterpret. Considering the fact that qualitative data represents well-grounded, rich descriptive source one can preserve sequential flow, observe accurately which events led to which consequences, and develop fruitful explanations.

The descriptive and analytic research presented in this thesis paper is based on the material collected from different sources. In particular we rely on documentary data consisting of media, market and government reports, United Nations Development Programme reports; different case studies that has been previously conducted but from the perspective that differs from the scope of this study and internet sources. The material gathered was considered sufficient and proper for the research and was analyzed through method of secondary analysis (Amaratunga, Baldry, Sarshar and Newton, 2002)

2.4 Secondary analysis

Some definitions highlight the practicability of secondary data analysis for investigating new research questions: "the study of specific problems through analysis of existing data which were originally collected for another purpose" (Glaser, 1963, p. 11). Nevertheless, such definitions often neglect the potential of secondary analysis in re-analyzing existing data sets with unique theoretical or statistical approaches in a way that: "secondary analysis is the re-analysis of data for the purpose of answering the original research questions with better statistical techniques, or answering new research questions with old data" (Glass, 1976, p. 3). There is a consensus in finding a definition of secondary analysis which states that it should include the analysis of someone else's data: "a collection of data obtained by another researcher which is available for re-analysis" (Sobal, 1981, p. 149); but this could be argued as: "even re-analysis of one's own data is secondary data analysis if it has a new purpose or is in response to a methodological critique" (Schutt, 2007, p. 4127).

The lack of consensus might lead researchers to use a very general and broad definition of secondary analysis that was offered by Jary and Jary (2000): "any inquiry based on the re-analysis of previously analysed research data" (p. 540) or one which was offered by Hakim:

> "secondary data analysis is any further analysis of an existing dataset which presents interpretations, conclusions or knowledge additional to, or different from, those produced in the first report on the inquiry as a whole and its main results" (Hakim, 1982, p. 1).

Secondary analysis represents the analysis of data by the researchers, who have not taken participation in the collection of those data, thus data was not collected for primary research (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Secondary analysis might include as quantitative data (Dale, Arber and Proctor, 1998) as well qualitative data (Corti, Foster and Thompson, 1995).

Secondary analysis might take into consideration the impact of a particular variable on the relationship between variables of interest, which has not been foreseen by original researchers. Also, as new theories emerging, analyses might propose a reconsideration of the relevance of the data (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Secondary data analysis offers unlimited opportunities for the replication and re-analysis of existing research. It gives the opportunity to carry out longitudinal analyses, to study past events and to test new theories, ideas, models (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008).

According to Thorne (1994) secondary analysis of qualitative data is not acceptable data approach due to concerns regarding its appropriateness of qualitatively generated data for consecutive analysis/reanalysis; but at the same time qualitative data set could become important source of information if the concerns regarding its appropriateness were adequately stated, yet underused and descriptively rich.

There are different approaches of analyzing secondary data, one of which states that all or part of the data set should be reanalyzed by concentrating on a concept that appeared to be present but not exactly focused in the primary analysis. The vital part in this approach is to illustrate the clear link between the primary study and all following secondary analysis, which were based on the same qualitative data set. Otherwise, conclusions drawn from secondary analysis might lead to improper conclusions. One of the challenges of the secondary data analysis is the extent of difference between the study question in the initial investigation and that in the secondary analysis. Research questions on similar phenomena are more often able to bring in data of appropriate depth and valid details. Depending on the details in certain data set, it is decided if new and applicable information can be withdrawn from secondary analysis (Hinds et al., 1997).

2.4.1 The Potential Pitfalls of Secondary Data Analysis

There are many possibilities of secondary data analysis. The technical expertise engaged in developing good surveys and good datasets can bring to highest quality data; it can allow researchers to analyse and replicate data from diverse perspectives; it provides opportunities for finding relationships that are not considered in the primary research; and it can permit researchers to access data on a scale that they could not hope to replicate first sets. But there are also many pitfalls. Two main arguments in usage of secondary data in social research: that it has a lot of errors, and also that because of the socially constructed nature of social data, simply lessening it to a plain numeric form cannot fully cover its difficulty and complexity (Smith, 2008).

2.4.2 The Promises of Secondary Data Analysis

Methodological and Theoretical Benefits

Secondary data analysis presents unlimited opportunities for the re-analysis, replication and re-interpretation of previous research. It gives researchers the opportunity to conduct longitudinal analyses, to investigate and understand past events and to undertake exploratory studies to test new theories, ideas, and models of research design. In addition, secondary analysis can empower triangulation with data from other sources, for example, by comparing sample survey results with Census data or the findings of previous studies with more up to date research. Such an analysis can disclose unexpected relationships in the data (Dale et al., 1988). One exceptional advantage of employing secondary analysis is that it facilitates the researcher to access data that is frequently of the highest quality (Smith, 2008).

Secondary data analysis permits researchers to obtain a second view on the data: "they can ask research questions differently, construct indices differently, analyse the data differently ... or have different theoretical orientations" (Cook, 1974, p. 162), in a way that it has the probability to find out errors in the original analysis. Besides testing the results of previous study, secondary analysis also has the potential to strengthen the findings of the original analysis.

Evidently, replicating another's work does not mean that secondary data analysis is purely descriptive or atheoretical. Apart from the methodological capabilities of secondary data analysis, there is also its contribution to the development of theory, and according to Hakim (1982) it can "allow for greater interaction between theory and empirical data because the transition from theory development to theory testing is more immediate" (p. 170).

Social Benefits

Along with theoretical and methodological opportunities, there are as well social benefits to secondary analysis. Secondary analysis is a modest research method. It has the ethical benefit of not gathering additional data from participants and protecting their privacy by respecting a participant's right to be left alone "free from searching inquiries about oneself and one's activities" (Bulmer, 1979, p. 4). This is valuable for research in sensitive areas and for hard to reach and vulnerable groups (Dale et al., 1988; Rew et al., 2000).

Secondary analysis is considered to be a very democratic research method. High quality data sets and low cost suggest that secondary analysis can "restrain oligarchy" (Hyman, 1972, p. 9) and guarantee that "all researchers have the opportunity for empirical research that has tended to be the privilege of the few" (Hakim, 1982, p. 4). As "it is the costs of data collection that are beyond the scope of the independent researcher, not the costs of data analysis" (Glaser, 1963, p. 12), and it is the accessibility of the data that makes it possible for the researchers to maintain and develop a degree of independence.

2.5 Strengths and weaknesses

Due to the in in-depth nature and analysis of the data, qualitative research mainly relays to a small, selective sample (Cormack, 1991). The weak side of this could be considered the assumption that the investigator could have been influenced by a certain predisposition, affecting the generalization of the small-scale study (Bryman, 1988). Nevertheless, the strong side of this method is that when the sample is well defined, findings can be generalized to a population at large (Hinton, 1987)

Researchers argue that the strength of this method is the fewer threats to external validity as the subjects are studied in their natural setting and come across fewer controlling factors in comparison with quantitative research conditions (Sandelowski, 1986). At the same time the investigators become so absorbed in the framework and subjective states of the research subjects that they are able to give the assurance that the data are representative of the topic being studied.

In order to understand the essence of terms “reliability” and “validity”, it is crucial to introduce different definitions of reliability and validity given by many qualitative researchers from various perspectives (Carr, 1994).

2.5.1 Reliability

Joppe (2000) determines reliability as:
…The extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study is referred to as reliability and if the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered to be reliable (p. 1).

Even though the term “reliability” is an idea used for evaluating or testing quantitative research, the notion is often used in all types of research. When the aim of testing is the elicitation of information then quality of the study is the most valuable test of any qualitative research. A fine qualitative research can help us “understand a situation that would otherwise be enigmatic or confusing” (Eisner, 1991, p. 58). This relates to the concept of a fine quality research when reliability is a concept to evaluate quality in quantitative study with a “purpose of explaining” whereas quality concept in qualitative study has the purpose of “generating understanding” (Stenbacka, 2001, p. 551). The difference in motives of evaluating the quality of studies in qualitative and quantitative research is one of the arguments that the concept of reliability is inappropriate in qualitative research. As stated by Stenbacka (2001) “the concept of reliability is even misleading in qualitative research. If a qualitative study is discussed with reliability as a criterion, the consequence is rather that the study is no good” (p. 552).

Alternatively, Patton (2002) reports that whilst designing a study, evaluating the quality of a study and analyzing findings, reliability and validity are two aspects which any qualitative researcher should take notice of. It is similar to the question “How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to?" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290).

To guarantee reliability in qualitative research, the issue of trustworthiness is vital. While building quality through validity and reliability in qualitative research, Seale (1999) declares that the “trustworthiness of a research report lies at the heart of issues conventionally discussed as validity and reliability” (p. 266). Once testing qualitative work, Strauss and Corbin (1990) propose that the "usual canons of “good science”…require redefinition in order to fit the realities of qualitative research" (p. 250).

To extend the range of conceptualization of reliability and manifesting the congruence of reliability and validity in qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) note that: "Since there can be no validity without reliability, a demonstration of the former [validity] is sufficient to establish the latter [reliability;]" (p. 316). In addition, Patton (2002) says that reliability is a result of the validity in a study.

2.5.2 Validity

In order to evaluate how good does researcher provided an answer the concept validity is often used. It determines that a model, theory, concept or category illustrate reality with good fitting. (Then, 1996).

The concept of validity is presented by a variety of terms in qualitative studies. It is not a single or universal concept, but “rather a contingent construct, inescapably grounded in the processes and intentions of particular research methodologies and projects” (Winter, 2000, p.1). Even though some qualitative researchers have claimed that the term validity is not relevant in qualitative research, but still, they have acknowledged the necessity for some tool of qualifying check for their research. Creswell & Miller (2000) advocated that the validity is influenced by the researcher’s perception of validity in a study and the selection of paradigm assumption. Therefore, numerous researchers have established their own concepts of validity and have often accepted what they believe to be more suitable terms, such as, rigor, quality and trustworthiness (Davies & Dodd, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Seale, 1999; Stenbacka, 2001).

Stenbacka (2001) claims that the notion of validity should be redefined for qualitative researches. Stenbacka (2001) explains the idea of reliability as one of the quality conceptions in qualitative research which "to be solved in order to claim a study as part of proper research" (p. 551).

2.5.3 Testing Validity and Reliability

When the validity or trustworthiness could be tested or proved then more “credible and defensible result” (Johnson, 1997, p. 283) might lead to generalizability which is one of the concepts proposed by Stenbacka (2001) as the system for conducting as well as documenting high quality qualitative research. Consequently, the quality of research is linked to generalizability of findings and thus to the checking and enhancing the validity or trustworthiness of the research.

Triangulation is usually an approach for enhancing the validity and reliability of research or assessment of results. Mathison (1988) goes further and asserts that: “[T]riangulation has raised an important methodological issue in naturalistic and qualitative approaches to evaluation [in order to] control bias and establishing valid propositions because traditional scientific techniques are incompatible with this alternate epistemology.” (p. 13)

Patton (2002) encourages the use of triangulation by saying that “triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods. This can mean using several kinds of methods or data, including using both quantitative and qualitative approaches” (p. 247). Though, Barbour (1998) has questioned the combination of methods. She explains that although mixing paradigms might be possible but mixing methods within one paradigm, for example qualitative research, is ambiguous because each method within the qualitative paradigm has its own supposition in “terms of theoretical frameworks we bring to bear on our research” (p. 353). Although triangulation is used in quantitative framework for verification and generalization of a research, Barbour (1998) does not diminish the significance of triangulation in qualitative research and she argues the necessity to designate triangulation from a qualitative research’s point of view in each paradigm.

The aim in qualitative research is to "engage in research that probes for deeper understanding rather than examining surface features” (Johnson, 1995, p. 4) and constructivism helps to reach this goal. As a result, to obtain reliable and valid diverse authenticity, numerous methods of collecting data are in order. Even though triangulation embraces multiple methods of data gathering and analysis, it does not propose a certain method for all researches. Method selected in triangulation to examine the validity and reliability of a research depends on the purpose of the study (Golafshani, 2003).

In qualitative research reliability and validity can be viewed as trustworthiness, rigor and quality. In addition it is also perceived through the association that the way to accomplish validity and reliability of a study might get influenced by the qualitative researchers' views which are aimed to reduce bias and enlarge the researcher's truthfulness of an assumption about some social aspects (Denzin, 1978) employing triangulation. Triangulation is classified as "a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 126).

2.5.4 Generalizability

Generalizability is an act of argumentation that includes deriving broad conclusions from particular samples – in other words, making an assumption about the unobserved based on the observed. In quantitative research, generalizability is believed to be a vital criterion for evaluating the quality of a study (Kerlinger and Lee, 2000; Polit and Beck, 2008). Considering the classic validity framework of Cook and Campbell (e.g., Shadish et al., 2002), external validity—the degree to which assumptions from a study could be generalized—has been a respected standard for decades. However, generalizability is a difficult, thorny, and illusory issue even in high-quality studies (Kerlinger and Lee, 2000; Shadish et al., 2002).

In qualitative studies, the matter of generalization is more controversial and complicated. Qualitative researchers rare worry clearly about the issue of generalizability. The goal of qualitative studies is to present a rich, contextualized understanding of human practices through the thorough study of specific cases. However, not all qualitative researchers agree about the significance or attainability of generalizability. Some confront the possibility of generalizability in both types of research, either qualitative or quantitative. From this view, generalization requests extrapolation that can never be fully verified because findings are always nested in a context. In line with this proposition, knowledge is idiographic, to be found in the particulars (Guba, 1978; Erlandson et al., 1993). On the contrary, some qualitative researchers suppose that in-depth qualitative research is especially appropriate in disclosing higher-level concepts and theories that are not unique to a certain participant or situation (Glaser, 2002; Misco, 2007). In this point of view, the rich, extremely detailed, and potentially insightful essence of qualitative findings make them more sufficient for extrapolation (Polit and Beck, 2010).

Transferability is frequently considered to be a collaborative enterprise. The researcher's job is to supply readers with comprehensive and detailed descriptions that allow them to make assumptions about extrapolating the findings to other settings. But readers and users of research do the main work of transferability. Their task is to evaluate to what extent the findings suit to new settings. Readers and consumers of research "transfer" the results (Polit and Beck, 2010).

In order to justify transferability, most authors discuss the need for thick description (Geertz, 1973; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Thick description means rich, thorough descriptive information about the participants, research setting, and observed operations and processes. Readers can make good conclusions about the proximal likeness of study contexts and their own environments only if researchers supply with high-quality descriptive information. To permit transferability, description needs to be adequately detailed. Lincoln and Guba (1986) recognized that "it is by no means clear how 'thick' a thick description needs to be" (p. 77).

Decisions about degree of "thickness" are based on the specifics of the research, but a common recommendation is for researchers to intentionally consider the consequences of their "thickness" decision for the suitability of their evidence. Qualitative and quantitative researchers need to do a better job at presenting basic information about contexts, timeframes, and participants. Users of research should know when data were collected, who the participants were and what type of community was involved, in terms of their gender, age, race, and any social characteristics that could affect an evaluation of proximal likeness (Polit and Beck, 2010).

Guba (1978) wrote that "in the spirit of naturalistic inquiry [the researcher] should regard each possible generalization only as a working hypothesis, to be tested again in the next encounter and again in the encounter after that" (p. 70). Kerlinger and Lee (2000) put forward a similar position treating generalizability as something that exists on a continuum. While discussing the classic model of generalizability, they indicated that the typical question of whether the findings of a study can be generalized to other settings or people might probably be changed for a question of relativity: "*How much* can we generalize the results of the study?" (p. 474, emphasis in original). Lincoln and Guba (1985) noticed, "The trouble with generalizations is that they don't apply to particulars" (p. 110). Donmoyer (1990) also warned against straight generalizing from research results to particular individuals in particular circumstances.

2.6 Selecting cases

In order to answer the research questions it is essential that the phenomena of iconic product and destination brand are present in selected examples.

Products chosen for branding purposes should be cautiously selected, considering various requirements. On the whole, category should be important for consumers, comprising high functional, experiential and symbolic values for them. The product should represent culture and tradition. Moreover, it should be based on the country's experience, capability and specialization in the specific field, having quality reputation (Florek and Conejo, 2007).

Another important part while selecting the iconic product for branding purposes is the level of involvement of this product (low/high involvement). Involvement is an enthusiasm, interest and excitement that consumers manifest towards product category (Bloch (1986) and Goldsmith et al. (1998) cited in Lockshin and Hall (2003)). Wine might be considered as a very simple product if only tangible attributes are analyzed. On the contrary, it is rather complex, offering unique benefits to wide range of consumers (Edwards and Mort, 1991; quoted in Keown and Casey, 1995). Consumers can not assess the product objectively, which is part of this complexity. Because of this, consumers make their choice decision depending on intrinsic as well as extrinsic cues (Lockshin and Hall, 2003).

For further analysis Costa Rican coffee and Moldovan wine examples were chosen. Wine and coffee might be recognized as rather high involvement products. Fundamentally, they can go beyond the functional attributes and be permeated with symbolism and associations. Thus, they suit for branding, having the potential to evoke emotions and maybe even a relationship. Moreover, wine and coffee might act as a transmitter of culture enhancing or even building a country brand (Florek and Conejo, 2007).

3 Theory

This chapter covers the ground of the study and required theory that is necessary to answer the research questions and achieve the objective of this thesis.

The theoretical background presented below intends to cover the major concepts used in our research. First, a brand concept is identified in order to understand the destination brand concept itself. To determine a working definition for our thesis, in the next part we discuss the following concepts - city branding, place marketing, place branding, destination branding; their roles, goals, differences and/or similarities between them. As in the field of destination branding there is no consensus among researchers on one common name they are usually giving same definitions and characteristics for all of them. Then, it is essential to understand the similarities and differences between destination brand and product brand and destination brand and corporate brand. Based on this discussion we define how the destination brand is viewed in this thesis. Further, the section about creating the destination brand is presented. As this thesis aims to give knowledge how destination could be branded through iconic product it is important to be aware of the whole destination creation process. As this thesis focuses on the interrelationship between destination brand and iconic product, at the next phase, another major concept, iconic product, is identified and discussed. This part explains main features and characteristics, prerequisites for the product to become iconic, the role they hold in the society. In the last part of the theoretical background the interrelationship between the destination brand and the iconic product is discussed, which is the basis for our further analysis of empirical data.

3.1 Destination brand phenomenon

3.1.1 Brand Definition

According to the American Marketing Association (AMA), a brand is a "name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition" (Kotler, 2003).

A brand is more than a product. Besides physical attributes, quality, and functional benefits, it also contains characteristics such as emotional benefits, self-expressive benefits, symbols, brand personality, customer relationships, trust, user imagery, and country of origin connotations (Aaker, 1996, p. 74; Keller, 1998). Brands are valuable assets and tools of differentiation in marketing consumer goods and services as they enhance loyalty and positive word of mouth among different target audiences. They ensure both economic and symbolic value to the consumer not only by reducing costs and risks, but also by delivering quality, values, promises, and lifestyle (O'Cass and Grace, 2003).

A brand signifies a set of product characteristics and added values, both functional and non-functional, constructing special meaning, which reflects and depicts it, awareness of which could be either conscious or intuitive (Macrae, Parkison and Sheerman, 1995). Brand managers distinguish their products by emphasizing attributes that will match their target group needs closer that other brands and they develop product image coherent with the perceived self-image of target audience (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2000). When it comes to brand choice, including destinations, consumers are making life-style statements because they are purchasing not only image but also emotional relationship (Sheth, Mittal and Newman, 1999; Urde, 1999).

Definition of branding introduced by Aaker (1991) is one of the most widely accepted. He claims that the primary role of a brand is

> "to identify the goods or services of either one seller or a group of sellers, and to differentiate those goods or services from those of competitors". (p. 7)

Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) suggest that the value of a brand is gained through four main factors: brand awareness, perceived quality of the brand, brand associations and brand loyalty. Also branding offers some additional functions for both buyers and sellers. Since brands perform as "symbol(s) around which relationships are built" (p. 54) (Berthon, Hulbert and Pitt 1999), it implies that logo design can be regarded as key component of branding. When the brand symbol contains a distinguishing name, logo, trademark, or package design, logos often become a central brand image representation of products, services, or destinations.

According to Ambler's (1992) definition, brand is:

> "the promise of the bundles of attributes that someone buys and provide satisfaction … The attributes that make up a brand may be real or illusory, rational or emotional, tangible or invisible".

Brands propose different satisfaction mixes. Any of three dimensions of the product may be stressed and highlighted but it is the experiential and most of all the symbolic levels that form brand distinction and uniqueness. However, basic attributes, such as functionality, need to be established before the symbolic attributes (Gnoth, 2002). Kapferer (1992) maintains this notion by notifying that product quality, features and performance need to be established before experiential and symbolic elements are added. Moreover, consumers will refuse products even with experiential and symbolic values if primary functional characteristics are not met.

In our thesis paper we would operate with the definition of a brand that was presented by Ambler (1992) as it denotes not only physical features but also attributes could be tangible or intangible, real or illusory, rational or emotional. Thus, the connection between the destination brand and iconic product might be illustrated more clearly on the basis of the attributes of the phenomena.

3.1.2 City Branding

Globalization has increased overall shifts of resources, people and capital, and has increased the competition among cities for influence, markets, attention, visitors, investments, businesses, talents and significant events. City branding, which is considered as a strategic tool to depiction a city's competitive advantages, becomes a common practice to market the city's history, quality of place, lifestyle, and culture for opportunity, prestige or power in capital accumulation in a competitive environment (Langer, 2001; Morgan, Pritchard and Pride, 2002; Berci et al., 2002; Evans, 2003).

In order to brand a city successfully the right strategies should be adopted. Successful city branding depends significantly on the identification of unique and defining characteristics possessed by the city in question. Characteristics of a city might be both functional and non-functional, which include, among others, city appearance, cultural attractions, history, economics, demographics and governance, people's experience of the city, and people's perception of the city. Consensus between the city authorities and the general public regarding the city's identity and core values is one of the key factors in achieving the success of city branding.

City branding concept originated from product branding and marketing. The brand of a product symbolizes a set of physical and socio-psychological attributes as well as beliefs that are associated with the product (Simoes and Dibb, 2001). Branding represents a deliberate strategy to choose several attributes of a product as core values in order to facilitate the process by which consumers confidently recognize and appreciate those attributes (De Chernatony and Dall'Olmo Riley, 1998). From the selected core values, the product's identity can be formed. Though several authors (e.g. Peterson, 1981) oppose that cities are not products that are involved in direct transactions in markets, proponents of city branding (e.g. Morgan, Pritchard and Pride, 2002; Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2006; Anholt, 2007) argue that the concept of product branding can indeed be shifted to city branding. They suggest that a city can be viewed as an "entity", to which an "identity" is attributed with a set of stable values fostered from the long course of urban development (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2006). A city like a product that possesses utility values, can generate utility functions that "customers" (investors, visitors and the resident population) can directly experience during daily business transactions and related activities. Cities can be seen as spatially extended products and cities can compete with each other in a way that is common between products. Consequently, to be marketed, cities should be treated as "products" employing branding activities (Zhang and Zhao, 2009).

3.1.3 Place Marketing

Place marketing is often incorrectly understood as place selling (see for a further discussion: Berglund and Olsson (2010) and Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2006)), focused solely on the promotional aspects of marketing whereas disregarding the true aims of place marketing and branding. The initial aim of place marketing is to understand and satisfy the consumer's needs and wants (demand orientation). Place selling, on the other hand, gives description of a process that tries to find the right consumers for an existing product (supply orientation). Despite the fact that the two may work in conjunction, they cannot be used interchangeably.

Generally, place marketing could be understood as "the coordinated use of marketing tools supported by a shared customer-oriented philosophy, for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging urban offerings that have value for the city's customers and the city's community at large" (Braun, 2008, p. 43). Also, place marketing can be considered as a form of relation between local authorities and local or broader audiences. "… (I)t may be as much about communication between citizens as clients and public authorities as service providers as about attracting exogenous investment, employment or customers. A place is sending messages to itself. The purpose is the fostering of a civic consciousness and self-confidence. This is both an end in itself and a necessary precondition for external marketing" (Ashworth, 2001).

The goal of place marketing is "to maximize the efficient social and economic functioning of the area concerned, in accordance with whatever wider goals have been established" (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990, p. 41). These definitions underline two very critical points: first, despite the fact that place marketing features an economic intention, the increasing of social functions – like place identification or satisfaction – it also forms a major goal. Second, place marketing is a customer-orientated approach that should integrate all of a city's existing and potential "customers". To conclude, place marketing attempts to increase the social function for all residents rather than favour any particular group (Zenker, 2011).

3.1.4 Place Branding

Over the past years, the discussions about place marketing were replaced by the discussions about place branding (Kavaratzis, 2008). Apparently, places are eager to acquire positive associations in the consumers' mind in order to develop and promote their brand.

Researchers Moilanen and Rainisto (2009) give definition of place branding which states:

> "place branding is the management of place image through strategic innovation and coordinated economic, commercial, social, cultural, and government policy".

While characterizing the place brand, Zenker and Braun (2010, p.3) have adapted the definition of corporate brand that is assumed as the visual, verbal and behavioural expression of an organization's unique business model, which radiates through the company's mission, core values, culture and overall design (Kavaratzis, 2009; Knox and Bickerton, 2003) and considering brand as a network of associations in consumers' minds (Keller, 1993; Keller and Lehmann, 2006). The researchers define a place brand as

> "a network of associations in the consumers' mind based on the visual, verbal, and behavioural expression of a place, which is embodied through the aims, communication, values, and the general culture of the place's stakeholders and the overall place design".

The definition basically states that a brand is not the communicated expression or "place physics", but the perception of those expressions in the mind of the target group(s). In branding literature, the "real" characteristics namely the visual, verbal and behavioural expression of a company – are acknowledged as the brand identity (Nandan, 2005). Based on this theory, a place identity in the presented model could be understood as the visual, verbal and behavioural expressions of a place that are embodied in the aims, communication, values and general culture of the place's stakeholders and the overall place design (Zenker, 2011).

Place branding is more than just slogans and advertising campaigns; it engages more than positioning a territory on the map as a tourist destination. It is more effective to think of a place brand as intellectual property, that is, "the totality of the thoughts, feelings, associations and expectations that come to mind when a prospect or consumer is exposed to an entity's name, logo, products, services, events, or any design or symbol representing them" (Lindsay, 2000).

Place branding is essential as it makes the country's image affect its citizens and its economy. Nowadays, many places have the same products to offer - people, territory, infrastructure, systems of governance – and they face the competition in terms of tourism, investment and political power on global level. Globalization and harmonizing effects of European integration demand states to build, manage and enhance their brand equity. Place branding has become a vital means to distinguish itself and seize a considerable market share and mind share (Ham, 2008).

"Contemporary brands succeed by getting close to the dreams of their audiences. They promise a better world, and they strive to deliver one. Since nation-states today need to reengage popular support and understanding, they should use the power of branding to deliver a message about their value and values to the widest possible audience" (Wolff Olins n.d.). Through commercial branding consumers analyze, judge and make choices considering that the brand guaranties some quality, standards and services and thus reduces the risk of buying failure. While facing information overload and complexity consumers and citizens are using brands as their guides. The idea that in competitive market brands are crucial for customer loyalty and organizations growth for long-term survival became widely accepted. Assumptions like that are now inspiring countries while developing their place brands. Due to place brand complexity, researchers suggest and advise to perceive it as a corporate brand (alike Unilever or Nestlé, who have wide range of products in the market simultaneously) and not like one simple product. While identifying the place's identity it is crucial not to lose and oversimplify its complexity. Place branding encompasses various stakeholders and frequently with conflicting interests; contrary to product branding, place branding is rarely controlled by one central stakeholder (Ham, 2008).

3.1.5 Destination Branding

Destination branding has become extremely important in recent years. Destination branding is a subject of significant interest not only for academics but also for policy makers. Governments at all levels, national, regional and city, are employing the concept in order to face global competition successfully (Kotler and Gertner, 2002). As a consequence, marketers focus significantly on establishing the destination as a brand (Braun, 2008) in order to promote the destination to its existing and potential target groups.

Destinations compete globally not only to attract visitors and tourists but also to achieve many other objectives like inward investment, job creation and settlement (Fan,2006), the concepts of brand strategy are more frequently adopted from the commercial world and applied in pursuit of urban development, regeneration and quality of life.

It is known that branding concept has been widely applied to products and services in the general marketing field (Blain, Levy and Ritchie, 2005), nonetheless, brands also can be found in a number of categories of tourism products and penetrate almost all aspects of tourism activities (Cai, 2002; Gnoth, Balogu, Ekinci and Sirakaya-Turk, 2007). Destination can also be seen as a product or perceived as a brand because it includes a bundle of tangible and intangible attributes (Ekinci and Hosany, 2006; Ekinci, Sirakaya-Turk and Baloglu, 2007; Hosany, Ekinci and Uysal, 2007).

As status and style indicators, destinations can present the same consumer benefits as more highly branded lifestyle accessories such as watches, perfumes, clothes and cars, all of which are used to communicate, display and emphasize associations, statements and belonging to a certain group in the same way (Clarke, 2000, p. 330).

Though the idea of branding destinations is rather new (Blain et al., 2005; Cai, 2002; Gnoth, 1998), many destinations in the world have been trying to implement branding strategies similar to those used by Coca Cola, Nike, and Sony, in order to differentiate their identities and to emphasize the uniqueness of their products (Morgan, Pritchard and Pride, 2004). On the other hand some studies argue that the geographically based marketing (or selling) of places is not a new concept (Papadopoulos, 2004; Kavaratzis and Ashworth 2006; Kavaratzis, 2004). It is, nevertheless, the explicit use of branding and city scripting techniques, in order to differentiate cities from their competitors and to (re) align themselves with where they would ideally like to be positioned (Ward, 2000), that is directing the practices of place branding in a new light.

In the time of fierce competition, product similarity, substitutability in markets, destination branding has been recognized as a strategic marketing activity and powerful marketing tool; the research in this field has extensively increased (Ward, 1998).

The most thorough definition of destination branding has been proposed by Blain et al. (2005, p. 337), which includes the functions of a brand from both the buyer and seller perspectives:

> "destination branding is the set of marketing activities that (1) support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that readily identifies and differentiates a destination; that (2) consistently convey the expectation of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; that (3) serve to consolidate and reinforce the emotional connection between the visitor and the destination; and that (4) reduce consumer search costs and perceived risk. Collectively, these activities serve to create a destination image that positively influences consumer destination choice".

Together with branding goods and services, a destination name by itself is not enough for differentiation. Mostly, a destination name does not provide clear association with position of destination brand in the travel markets. For a number of destinations, slogan is a needed communication of the destination's brand positioning. Places are becoming more substitutable and hard to differentiate, and a slogan presents a link between brand identity and the actual brand image in the market (Pike, 2005). To succeed in destination branding, marketers should deliver strong and effective experiences, and not just compose superficial slogans and brand logos on the paper (Moilanen and Rainisto, 2009). Also Gold and Ward (1994) criticized the significance of slogans as they are doubtfully to meaningfully differentiate the destinations over time.

Within the tourism context, destination logos can simplify many destination marketing organisation's (DMO) marketing activities to create brand image and identity, particularly before the actual visitor experience. As there are thousands of destinations to visit, logos can effectively increase awareness and communicate desired attributes of internationally recognized brands (van Riel and van den Ban, 2001) to visitors, thus reducing search costs and influencing visitor choice behaviour. Simultaneously, visitors can also expect to pay a premium for this assurance of quality and reduction of perceived risk. L. Berry (2000) notes that "a brand reduces customers' perceived monetary, social, or safety risk in buying services, which are difficult to evaluate prior to purchase" (p. 128).

For destination branding the concept of the visitor *experience* (identified as a critical tourism concept by Ryan (2002)) needs to be included in the process of branding (L. Berry, 2000; Pine and Gilmore, 1999).

Through the promise the visitor receives enlarged degree of comfort and experience of destination brand. As can be seen in service organizations, when the promise is not fulfilled, the customer is dissatisfied. In the light of destination branding, the term *promise* is even more complex as DMOs cannot always guarantee its proper delivery for a dense entity every time, given that the nature of destinations products and its elements are not under the control of the DMOs (Morgan, Pritchard and Piggott, 2002).

The concept of *destination image* eventually influences the destination choice. The international image of a destination is built upon widely accepted stereotypes. These are created and strengthen by industries such as entertainment and media and sometimes by destination itself (Gertner and Kotler, 2004).

Referring to Echtner and Ritchie (1991), destination image is described as “not only the perceptions of individual destination attributes but also the holistic impression made by the destination” (p. 8). It is argued that destination image is a significant factor in determining visitor’s choice (Lee, O’Leary and Hong, 2002). In highly competitive industry as tourism, it is necessary to employ the concepts of destination image and competitiveness.

Woodside (1982) states that the brand should be seen from the buyer’s perspective, in particular, successful destination branding offers assurance of quality experiences, reduces visitor search costs and provides unique selling proposition for destination.

It is acknowledged that image is a vital aspect of a marketing strategy for destinations and a number of researchers have examined the benefits of image in destination brand development (Chon, 1991; Heath and Wall, 1991). It is explored that even though one umbrella brand has a variety of products and services, the creation of brand identity can be accomplished to give the destination marketing purpose and directions. For example, the brand Australia campaign to get partnership between all state tourism bodies within Australia; Queensland’s “Destination Queensland: Beautiful One Day, Perfect the Next!” campaign and the brand Ireland campaign to foster Eire and Northern Ireland as a single tourism destination (Palmer, 2002, in Morgan, Pritchard and Pride, 2002).

The main objective of a destination branding process is to establish among potential visitors name recognition and an associated identity for the destination. This ability to create a brand identity is influenced by what the destination has to offer and potential visitor preferences. In spite of this, it is also influenced by external environmental circumstances. A branding model has been developed in order to explain a destination' s success in developing a brand identity built on what it has to offer and external circumstances (Kolb, 2006).

After defining and revising concepts: city branding, place marketing, place branding and destination branding we can see that despite the different names researchers are generally giving same definitions and characteristics for all of them. In all those models we see that their goal is to promote and create specific destination (place, city, and region) brand while having different stakeholders simultaneously. Considering the above mentioned, we assume that those concepts could be used interchangeably. In our thesis paper the destination branding concept is taken as the working one, as it is broader and includes all those terms: places, regions, countries and cities.

3.1.6 Destination brands: as product brand or as corporate brand

Product brands

Destination marketers have very little control over the vast range of products, services, interactions, agencies either public or private, and involved in marketing and management of destinations (Gnoth et al., 2007). Some researchers have argued that destinations can be branded in much the same way as consumer goods and services while others have warned about specific challenges to brand a destination and noted that special conceptual frameworks and models should be developed for destination branding (Blichfeldt, 2003; Caldwell and Freirre, 2004; Hankinson, 2004; Morgan and Pritchard, 2004; Pike, 2005). For destination marketing organisations (DMO), branding destinations is more complex than consumer goods and services because destinations have diverse products, different funding models, and groups of stakeholders and local politics to operate with; they also have various levels of community and resident support and thus theoretical challenges for measuring brand equity (Morgan and Pritchard, 2004; Pike, 2005).

There are differences between a destination brand and a commercial product brand. Products can be discontinued, modified, withdrawn from the market, relaunched and repositioned or replaced by improved products. Places do not possess most of these options (Frost, 2004). Comparing to consumer products, destination brands are more complex and therefore cause a significant challenge for the destination marketer (Morgan, Pritchard and Pride, 2002); some of them are listed below.

First, destinations exist both as holistic entities and as collections of individual (contributory) elements of services and facilities. For example, a city can be known as an old industrial city, when individual elements, like museums, sports facilities or shopping centres, can have their own reputations for absolutely independent reasons. Here, the main task of the destination marketers is to identify and present a portfolio from these individual elements to form the core of a destination product.

Second, the destination brand is experienced uniquely by each visitor from his/her experiences of a selected set of individual contributory elements (Ashworth and Voogt, 1990). Consequently, the destination marketer may not fully control the product experience.

Third, destinations are multi-dimensional and multi-functional than consumer goods and other types of services. In order to reach minds of consumers there should be a concise message reflecting one or a few brand associations. It is even more challenging task in creating a slogan that embraces destination's diverse and extensive range of natural resources, built attractions, culture, activities and accommodation (Pike, 2005). The essence behind the destination brand promise could be fully expressed through slogans such as "Kenya – creation's most beautiful destinations, all in one country" and "Ohio – so much to discover". In other cases it is hard to reveal the destination brand core in slogans such as "Greece – beyond words". Destinations can seldom accomplish focused slogans as "Arizona – Grand Canyon state" or "Snowy Mountains – Australia's high country" (Pike, 2005). The same destination can offer historical buildings, shopping and sports facilities and entertainment sites. All these are consumed by residents as well as by visitors who has different interests (Ashworth and Voogt, 1990). As a result, the same destination's product can be consumed simultaneously by different consumers' segments.

Fourth, the market interests of a broad group of active stakeholders are heterogeneous. DMOs try to aim a multiplicity of geographic markets to attract various segments for their products; hence, the brand message can be not meaningful to all market segments. It is unlikely that slogans such as “Idaho – great potatoes, tasty destinations” and “Slovenia – the grown place of Europe” would be expressive for all market segments (Pike, 2005).

Fifth, there should be a consensus between community and brand theory, as top down method in implementing the destination brand might be unsuccessful. DMOs do not have complete control over the actual delivery of the brand promise by local communities. The strategy will fail when there is no buy-in from local tourism community. This is what happened in the case of “Oregon – things look different here” (see Curtis, 2001), when a brand strategy developed by state tourism organization was introduced, the regional tourism organizations refused it. Moreover, as host population also interacts with visitors they should believe that the destination brand reflects their experiences about the place as well (Pike, 2005).

Corporate brand

Parallels between destination branding and corporate branding have been emphasized by various scholars, who have highlighted that the branding of destinations and corporations share similarities in terms of their complexity and broad range of stakeholders (Hankinson, 2007; Kavaratzis, 2009; Parkerson and Saunders, 2005; Trueman et al., 2004).

Part of the complexity of destination brands originates from their obligation to address the needs of a spectrum of fundamentally different target groups. A destination brand may target different audiences like tourists (Bickford-Smith, 2009), fashion consumers (Martinez, 2007), sports fans (Chalip and Costa, 2005) and current and potential future residents (Greenberg, 2000; Zenker, 2009). The techniques of marketing and branding might as well be used in order to combat existing negative perceptions of a destination (Paddison, 1993).

Researchers Dooley and Bowie (2005) and Dinnie (2011) have applied the concept of brand architecture to the branding of places by examining the ways in which a destination brand can organize its many “sub-brand” in a similar way to that in which corporations manage their portfolio of product or service brands. The main challenge for destination brand revolves around the subject of how to develop a strong “umbrella” brand that is coherent across a range of diverse areas of activity with different target audiences, whilst at the same time enabling sector-specific brand communications to be created.

Hankinson (2007) stated the similarities between managing brands at a corporate level and managing destination brands. To be successful, both types of brand need to reflect and be reflected by sub brands and consumer experiences. This, in its turn, requires high level of management in the organization. Then, both types of brand are dependent on proper organizational culture with high interdepartmental coordination and strong relationships within the network. Finally, both types of brand have to communicate and deal with a variety of stakeholders. Hankinson (2007) proposed conceptual framework for managing destination brands guided by five principles: “(1) strong, visionary leadership; (2) a brand-oriented organizational culture; (3) departmental co-ordination and process alignment; (4) consistent communications across a wide range of stakeholders; (5) strong, compatible partnerships”.

Although there are evident differences in the character and in the management between these two categories of brand, it is noted that there is a number of similarities to consider. As presented framework is aimed to show a holistic model of the destination management process, there are no universal approaches to destination branding. It is also agreed that political realities of the destination can influence the development and implementation of branding process (Hankinson, 2007).

In particular, one of the principles suggests that destination brand management needs strong, visionary leadership and commitment towards a set of brand values which comprise the destination’s brand promise. This process starts with the top management of the DMO and a strategic vision which can shape the base for a brand-oriented culture and departmental coordination. Then, through dialogue and discussion, a brand strategy must be improved by the organisations that will later communicate and deliver the destination brand experience. The role of the DMO throughout this process is to guarantee consistent communications with all stakeholders: partners, visitors and residents (Hankinson, 2007).

As we can see, generally there are two directions how the destination brand is perceived by researchers in the theory. Scholars argue that destination could be seen and thus branded either as a product brand or as corporate brand. As we have indicated, the theory argues that destination brand itself is complex concept, has different stakeholders, missions and operate on different levels simultaneously. Due to its complexity, we assume that it is more relevant to consider the destination brand as a corporate rather than as a product brand. Thus, in our thesis paper the destination brand would be viewed as corporate brand.

3.1.7 Creating the destination brand

In order to see and understand the interrelationship between destination brand and iconic product it is important to be aware how destination brand is created. Over the years, a number of studies have been conducted to understand destination branding. While a considerable progress has been made in determining the attributes which are fundamental for destination branding such as brand personality (Ekinci and Hosany, 2006), image (Cai, 2002), and elements (Blain et al., 2005), there is still a confusion between the definitions of each attribute and a lack of agreement regarding how they work together to form a true destination brand among academic experts and industry leaders (Tasci and Kozak, 2006). However, academics do agree on the development process for destination branding. Multistage methods, that are strategic and involve visionary leadership, have four distinct stages: a need to assess the destination's current situation, develop a brand identity and promise, communicate the promise, and finally measure the brand's effectiveness (Hudson and Ritchie, 2009).

Recently, it has been widely accepted that a successful destination brand needs to impart the expectations, or promise, of an outstanding travel experience which is uniquely connected to that destination (Ritchie and Crouch, 2003; Blain et al., 2005; Knapp and Sherwin, 2005). This "experience branding" helps to unite and enhance the emotional connection between the visitor and the destination, to reduce consumer search costs and perceived risks (Blain et al., 2005).

Four stages as follows:

1. *Assessing the destination brand's current situation*

The first stage in creating a destination brand is to establish the core values of the destination and its brand. During this stage marketers should evaluate to what extent the brand is contemporary or relevant to today's visitors and residents and its competitiveness with other rivals. To conduct an independent situation analysis of the marketplace a viewpoint of existing and potential visitors, residents, destination marketing organizations (DMO) members, tour operators must be taken into account (Knapp and Sherwin, 2005).

2. *Developing a brand identity and brand promise*

After market analysis is completed, the next stage is to develop the brand identity. It is essential to any destination brand how the destination's brand personality interacts with target audiences. As Morgan et al. (2003) stated a brand's personality has both a head and a heart: its "head" refers to its logical attributes, where its "heart" refers to its emotional values and associations. Brand communications and propositions might be based on either one; however there is an increasing attention on the latter. Functional and emotional attributes constitute the concept of brand promise, by which destinations communicate to current and potential visitors the benefits and experiences that they might receive upon arrival (Knapp and Sherwin, 2005). The significant distinction motivates travellers' purchase decisions and acts as critical component of the brand.

Destination marketers have acknowledged that the brand promise needs much more to communicate than just to define the physical aspects of the destination, and build an experience once the visitor reaches the destination. Some examples are stated below: the Las Vegas promise is "an exciting, sexy and safely dangerous experience"; the promise of visiting Ireland is "the intriguing and engaging people, and the rich, colourful, unspoiled, natural and cultural environment"; Australian brand promise proposes "a welcome that will be warm, distinctive and authentically Australian"; New Zealand promises to its visitors "personal discovery, and more authentic, genuine experiences than they are familiar with at home, all with the backdrop of stunning landscapes"; India promises "a unique opportunity for physical invigoration, mental rejuvenation, cultural enrichment and spiritual elevation" (Hudson and Ritchie, 2009).

3. *Communicating the brand promise*

Communication of the brand promise, the third step, entails that the brand's essence is communicated via a range of promotional campaigns, advertisements and messages such as brand's logo, tagline, name and story. Overall presence in media influences the brand presence. As mentioned above, there is a great focus on the visitor experience, and messages based upon experiences will influence more the travel decisions in future (Williams, 2006).

A variety of means should be employed to better communicate the destination brand. Nowadays the Internet is widely used to launch a destination brand: in 2002 online campaign "Incredible India" was launched which communication message was "to project India as a unique opportunity for physical invigoration, mental rejuvenation, cultural enrichment and spiritual elevation". Internet is also used to place advertisements - the "Where The Bloody Hell Are You" advertisements from Australia were broadcasted online even before its official television release and were viewed in almost every country in the world. New trend influencing brand advertising is the development of the integrated marketing communication approach that combines all marketing communication tools to project consistent, coherent, persuasive message promoting the brand (Hudson and Ritchie, 2009).

4. *Measuring effectiveness*

The last stage in building the destination brand is to evaluate the brand's performance in the market. Measuring the effectiveness of the destination brand is crucial in the brand development process (Ritchie and Ritchie, 1998; Blain et al., 2005). Measurement will guarantee that the brand personality is constantly developed and enhanced in order to reinforce its appeal and to extend the market (Morgan et al., 2003). Permanent monitoring and evaluation of the communications is vital tool for sustaining successful destination brand as today's marketers tend to change their messages more often than in the past which is, in its turn, harmful for the brand. Any changes must be held with the overall consistency of the brand. The main task here is to continually advance and improve the original brand personality, based on initial strengths to reinforce their appeal and to extend the market (Hudson and Ritchie, 2009).

It is worth mentioning that the best way of measuring the destination brand's performance is to track the performance of the brand than the performance of individual campaigns as it reveals the quality of the consumer's brand relationship (Wells et al., 2006).

Destinations like conventional brands have functional and representational dimensions that are used in order to express visitor's individual uniqueness and status. Representational dimension drives the destination to become fashionable (Caldwell and Freire, 2004). Additional benefits along with the product functional and experiential levels (elements like traditions and culture, which are linked to specific product) might be hence extended to generic level, which in this case represents the destination as whole and thus could create the symbolic significance of destination brand.

For our thesis paper, the first two stages are relevant and important as during those two stages main attributes of the destination is analyzed and formulated.

3.2 Iconic product phenomenon

In order to answer the research question and find the interrelationship between two phenomena: the destination brand and the iconic product, it is necessary to identify and select the working definitions of both concepts for this work. In the previous part the working definition of destination branding was identified. The next part will discuss iconic product concept in the context of destination branding.

Chandler (2007) names three key meanings of the term "icon" and "iconic" in general practice. One of these states that to become "iconic" "typically means that something or someone would be expected to be instantly recognized as famous by any fully fledged member of a particular culture or subculture"' (Chandler, 2007, p. 40). Nevertheless, in the field of semiotics terms are used in a technical sense. Hence, "iconic", together with "symbolic" and "indexical", are classified as various "modes of relationship" between sign vehicles and what is represented (Chandler, 2007). The iconic mode of performance is one "in which the signifier is perceived as *resembling* or imitating the signified" (Chandler 2007, p. 36; original emphasis). In the context of this thesis work, iconic products would be generally identified and associated with a particular destination.

Symbolic values and meanings are essential for customers as they help them to retain a sense of the past and also assist consumers to identify their belongingness in society and even communicate cultural meanings such as social status, age, gender, group identity and traditions (Belk, 1988). Symbolic values and meanings are consequential from social context and they tend to be shared. Due to virtue of their ability to exert a significant influence within the media, brands can become influential carriers of symbolic values and meanings for the consumers. If the symbolisms are used effectively, they might convert brands into successful and profitable icons (Tan and Ming, 2003).

Iconic products, products whose market power is based on symbolic dimension, have become conspicuous and persistent cultural symbols. Such products work to unify collective identities, as expressions of the major social axes such as class, gender, and race within national discourse and beyond. People use iconic product symbolism to establish their identities and perform the basic status processes which are primary functions of all symbols (Holt, 2004).

Products and brands become iconic when they are blended in the most influential ideological currents in society. The power of Jack Daniel's symbolism originated from its articulation to the gunfighter myth. Similarly, as can be seen in studies of Harley-Davidson, Volkswagen, Budweiser, Snapple, Mountain Dew, Coke, and ESPN (Holt, 2004) – it is obvious that, these brands are concealed in the ideological struggle for influence through culture. Iconic brands are soldiers, following ideological demands wherever the action is. Hence, iconic brands are expressed in a variety of ideological states: from the frontier myth of Harley and Jack Daniel's to the Hobbesian sporting worlds of Nike and ESPN, to the aesthetic self-actualization of Apple and Volkswagen to the sustainable development myths of Patagonia and Ben&Jerry's. Brands become potent cultural symbols when they enter the emerging myth market accompanied by more powerful cultural forms (books, films, sports and so forth). Holt (2006) claims that iconic brands enact as complementary because commodities reveal myths in different manner, allowing people to communicate and experience these rather remote myths in everyday life. Iconic brands provide less-involved methods and more accessible forms of experiencing the myth via consumption.

According to Florek and Conejo (2007) using iconic products make destination positioning less general and more tangible for average people. At the same time iconic products create the opportunity for a destination to be identified for something explicit and unforgettable. As a result while using the iconic continually in marketing communications, the destination brand might be reinforced and enhanced.

Skaggs et al. (1996) support the idea, which states that consumers have stereotyped images of destination's food products. Janda and Rao (1997) go further than product categories and also comprise characteristics of products (particular domain of a destination), and specific brands in their hierarchy. As a result brands originating from a specific destination generate intangible liabilities and/or assets, which are shared by brands originating from the same destination. Consequently strategic profitable products might work as a basis for creating, building or enhancing a destination brand.

The scholars (Florek and Conejo, 2007) advocate focusing on an iconic product, which has not only commercial potential, but also truthfully characterize the destination. Further than instant profit-making benefits, iconic products' positive associations might be identified with the place and might be used as a starting point for creating and developing a destination brand. Based on above-mentioned not only destination brand will be enhanced, but also the positive associations will be transmitted towards further destination branding activities and as a consequence the overall improvement would be achieved.

3.3 Interrelationship between destination brand and iconic product phenomena

As formulated earlier this thesis work argues that there is an interrelationship between destination brand and iconic product phenomena, which is based on the theoretical part and secondary data analysis of Moldovan wine and Costa Rican coffee, which would be further presented.

Florek and Conejo (2007) develop the idea how commercial goods (flagship products) might be a ground for development of the country brand. Researchers argue that flagship products are the products that truthfully characterize the destination. And flagship products' positive associations might be identified with the place and could be used as a starting point of creating and developing destination brand. Export flagships enhance the national brand and symbolize the country and its people. An export flagship does not need to be major and modern export of the country. It is essentially that it is functionally standard, presently relevant, culturally / historically embedded, supported by its people, has high-level profile and has external demand.

Based on above presented theories and considering the goal of iconic product which is to symbolize an idea or a value of the culture (Holt, 2004) we assume that in our further analysis the concepts of flagship product and iconic product could be used interchangeably as they are employed for identifying destination.

Country's growth strategy is directly linked to its brand extensions, especially products that country selects to launch in order to complement iconic products. As an example, Beverland (2000 cited in Lockshin and Hall, 2003) advocates the idea that brand loyalty could be built on wine tourism. The researchers (Florek and Conejo, 2007) agree with this theory considering the fact that wine includes not only experiential but also symbolic components of product. From one side visitors will have possibility to see, feel, hear and experience the product origin; and on the other side discovering about where the product comes from, who produces it and what it stands for will lead to the shift of the brand's symbolic meaning to an entire other level. The above-mentioned points will cause brand differentiation; this idea is even more developed by Lockshin and Hall (2003) stating that it might even cause a long time period emotional connection with the brand/country. Besides the instant product perceptions Gnoth (2002) assumes that tourism represents a good basis for promoting and branding other country products.

The researchers (Florek and Conejo, 2007) advocate the use of iconic products as they make destination positioning less general and more tangible for average people. At the same time iconic products create an opportunity for a destination to be identified for something explicit and unforgettable. As a result, while using the iconic products continually in marketing communications, the destination brand might be reinforced and enhanced.

But one of the challenges using iconic product is cooperation among local iconic product producers. Papadopoulos (2004) argues that consistency and clarity of brand promise and product delivery is the basis for successful branding. Conversely, Gnoth (2002) stands for the idea that manufacturers tend to be a heterogeneous group with different, frequently with conflicting interests. He argues that due to mismanagement and absence of manufacturer interest, involvement and even defection are possible and that both product and marketing communications are likely to be unpredictable, and as a result diluting the brand.

In order to reinforce and enhance the destination brand the following should be taken into consideration. First, as the product's features should strengthen the image of the country, products must be chosen very carefully in accordance with uniqueness, competitiveness and desired identity (Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2002). At the same time, in order to captivate consumer's emotions and become relevant to individual there should be a good story behind the chosen product (Anholt, 2005).

Based on the presented theories we have conceptualized both phenomena for further analysis (Figure 1).

The destination brand is considered in three levels: functional, experiential and symbolic. Functional level comprises attributes such as facilities, infrastructure, etc. On the experiential level the brand promise is experienced. Symbolic level includes such attributes as image, cultural values, symbols, history. As we have stated, in this thesis the destination brand is viewed as corporate brand: destination brand has a broad range of stakeholders (citizens, tourists, government, investors, and business visitors) and destination brand should satisfy needs of different target audiences.

The iconic product attributes were grouped in two dimensions. Symbolic dimension consists of such attributes as cultural values, history, symbols. Functional dimension includes basic product features such as quality, taste, etc.

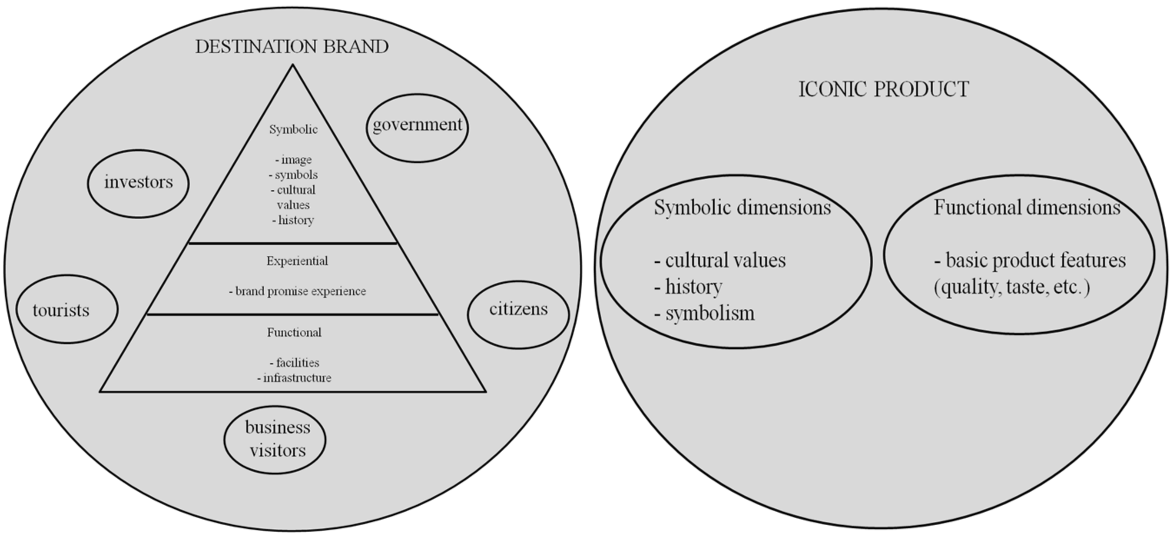

Figure 1: The concepts of the destination brand and the iconic product phenomena

4 Empirical Data

4.1 The case of Costa Rica

4.1.1 History and overview

Costa Rica is a small country in Central America bordered by Nicaragua and Panama. It was discovered by Columbus in 1502. Costa Rica, which means "Rich Coast", received its name as a result of supposed mineral wealth. Not satisfying Spanish expectations, and not having proper work force, it became an isolated colony relying on subsistence farming. Costa Rica gained independence from Spain in 1821 and has been a republic from then (http://www.state.gov, 2011).

In that region most of the countries faced dictatorship, civil wars and revolutions for decades, but Costa Rica adhered to democratic tradition and invested in education, public health and infrastructure. Thus, one of the highest standards of living in Latin America holds Costa Rica (Biesanz et al., 1999). In the Human Development Index, Costa Rica has been ranked among the top Latin American countries, occupying 62nd position in the world (UNDP, 2010).

In 2010 World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index Costa Rica was ranked 121st out of 183 countries. This was constraint for the flow of FDI, which were needed to repair and rebuild the countries' public infrastructure, which has weakened due to the lack of maintenance and new investment. Country's biggest part more than 30,000 kilometres, is accessible through an extensive road system, though much of the system has fallen into damaged. Pollution of beaches, rivers and aquifers is a problematic issue. Though in the past decade Costa Rica has made important progress in growing the access to water suppliers and sanitation and only 3.5 per cent of the country's sewage is managed in sewage treatment facilities, and based on the Water and Sewage Institute (AyA) estimations 50 per cent of septic systems function (http://www.state.gov, 2011).

Table 1 represents some characteristics of Costa Rica.

Table 1: Costa Rica at a glance

Costa Rica	
Area	51,100 km^2
Population	4.576m
Language	Spanish
Adult literacy	94.9%
Life expectancy	77.72 years
Human development	High: #62
Unemployment Rate	7.3%
GDP	$51.55bn
GDP per capita	$11,400

Source: CIA (2011a).

4.1.2 Country brand

Costa Rica country brand is established on its tourism idea. The country positions itself as "natural" destination, which is underlined in its tagline: "No artificial ingredients" (Figure 2) (ICT, 2011). The basis for this tagline and communication is Costa Rica's wealthy nature. Due to country's geographical location and rich ecosystems, Costa Rica is the country with highest biodiversity in the world, meanwhile possessing about 4 per cent of our planet's animals and plants. At the same time Costa Rica is also well known for its preservation achievements and as result having 25 per cent of the country's area protected (ICT, 2011; INBIO, 2011). However, the slogan's "no artificial ingredients" communication concept goes further than country's instant associations with nature. It is directed to its people, culture and lifestyle characterizing them as 'pure', 'unspoiled' and 'genuine'. At the same time it is also aimed to link other Costa Rican associations such as 'democracy', 'freedom' and 'peace' (Florek and Conejo, 2007).

Costa Rica provides a variety of tourist destinations within the country that include areas in different variations of landscape and climate. Costa Rica is divided into 7 territorial provinces and in each of the provinces visitors can find extensive rainforests, rivers running through the mountains, coral reefs, beaches, splendid volcanoes, national parks, forest reserves, coffee plantations. Throughout the territory one can experience natural richness of the country (http://www.visitcostarica.com/, 2011)

Nowadays, Costa Rica is already applying product-related tourism. Costa Rica offers to its visitors several “Coffee Tours”, which include educational part (telling to visitors about coffee history), visit plantations and processing facilities. For example, in Heredia province, guided tours to coffee plantations are held and visitors can observe the process of harvesting, drying, and roasting of coffee beans. Through the tours coffee-related product such as coffee liquor, chocolate-covered coffee beans and even oxcarts are introduced to visitors (Britt, 2011).

Figure 2**:** Costa Rica’s country brand logo and tagline “No artificial ingredients”

4.1.3 Image of Costa Rica

Central America is the region known for human rights violations, dictatorships, revolutions and civil wars. Nowadays things have changed considerably, but the region still holds that image (Gertner and Kotler, 2004). Comparing to its neighbours, Costa Rica holds better image – introduced as a “Latin America’s most stable democracy” (Kotler et al., 1993), and as a “Central American success story” (CIA, 2011a). Considering the fact that tourism has been the country’s most important industry for years (Biesanz et al., 1999) and in 2009 it hosted over 1,9 million of tourists from all over the world (BCCR, 2011), it illustrates that Costa Rica’s image is rather well accepted worldwide. Costa Rica still belongs to Latin American countries with its stereotypes and associations even though it does not match regional stereotypes.

4.1.4 Costa Rican coffee

Coffee was presented in Costa Rica in the 1790s, being not more than a botanical curiosity. In 1821 independent state of Costa Rica bet on coffee to stimulate economy and development (Biesanz et al., 1999). The government significantly promoted the activity and fostered coffee production by giving land, seeds and tax breaks. The country's mountainous landscape, moderate tropical climate and rich volcanic soils were ideal for the crop (ICAFE, 2011).

By the 1830s Costa Rica began to export coffee to England. However, making its way around South America, it was repackaged in Chile and sold under the Valparaiso (Chilean) brand. But the country was not getting any credit or most of the money for its coffee. After some efforts the government started direct export of its coffee in 1843. By branding its coffee as its own, Costa Rica soon built positive country image in Europe and began branding the country worldwide. For the next 50 years coffee was its exclusive export product. Exports and thus national income significantly grew taking the country towards prosperity and development. The country's universities, railroads and its architectonic treasure, the National Theatre, may all be tracked back to coffee (ICAFE, 2011; Biesanz et al., 1999).

By the mid 1980s the significance of coffee had been lessen to 35 per cent of total exports and in 2005 coffee made up only 3 per cent (BCCR, 2006). This decrease was due to the diversification of the economy and growth of 'non-traditional' exports. Nowadays, Costa Rica is one of the smallest coffee manufacturers in the world. Costa Rican coffee export reaches up to 90 per cent of its production but provides around 3 per cent of the world's coffee. Costa Rica concentrates mainly on quality, aiming for international gourmet markets. Moreover, it is also suggested by industry standards and by national laws: Costa Rica is the only country in the world where by law coffee manufacturers must cultivate Arabica species. By cultivating lower quality Robusta species would damage the national reputation (ICAFE, 2011). Although coffee export has dropped comparing to other export products (BCCR, 2006), Costa Rica is internationally acknowledged for its superior coffee. It is characterized as perfectly balanced as it has sharp acidity and medium body (NCAUSA, 2011).

Costa Rica's coffee industry is very fragmented. High concentration of land is possessed by few manufacturers, thus disadvantaging small farmers. The majority of landowners (92 per cent) produce with less than 5 hectares, accounting for 44 per cent of the national crop. While only 2 per cent of coffee growers own more than 20 hectares, which amounts to 35 per cent of the total coffee production (http://www.globalexchange.org, 2011).

4.2 The case of Moldova

4.2.1 History and overview

Moldova is a small country located on the eastern part of Europe between Romania and the Ukraine. In the Middle Ages the country together with some lands of present Romania were part of Principality of Moldova. In 1812 Moldova was occupied by the Russians and became part of Russian Empire. The country returned its independence in 1918, after the First World War and reunified with Romania. Nevertheless, in 1940 Soviet Union has re-annexed Moldova and southern parts of the country including gate to the Black Sea were occupied and given to the Ukrainian SSR. The rest part has been transformed and became the Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldavia. In 1991 after breakdown of the Iron Curtain, Moldova regained its independence. Nowadays, Moldova is in transformation process moving towards a market economy and as a consequence has made important progress towards macroeconomic stabilization. Due to structural reforms, which have been successfully conducted, private and liberalized economy has been created and foreign direct investments were attracted. As a consequence of above-mentioned reforms country economy has experienced strong growth starting from 2000 (MMCT, 2011a). However, Moldova is still under the influence of 50 years Soviet governance, which is seen not only in its economy, which remains exposed to local and regional political pressures, but also in international prices, specifically fuel. Despite the fact that country has big progress, Moldova is still listed in poorest counties of Europe, ranked at 99th position (UNDP, 2010).

Moldova has two main modes of transport: road and railway. Since 1995, 100 per cent of the road freight transport sphere has been privatized and 80 per cent of the road passenger transport belongs to private sector. The country's road network is significantly damaged and reconstruction is needed. Around 88 per cent of local roads and 78 per cent national roads are amortized and technically outdated. Nowadays, the Ministry of Transport and Communications is responsible for the administration, maintenance, and design of the public road network. In 2002 Parliament submitted road fund legislation a “second generation”, but has not yet been acted on (http://transinfo.50megs.com/)

Table 2 represents some characteristics of Moldova.

Table 1: Moldova at a glance

Moldova	
Area	33,851 km^2
Population	4.314m
Language	Moldovan
Adult literacy	99.1%
Life expectancy	71.37 years
Human development	Medium: #99
Unemployment Rate	6.5%
GDP	$11.01bn
GDP per capita	$2,500

Source: CIA (2011b).

4.2.2 Country brand

Moldova’s previous brand positioning was built on ‘comfort’ and ‘wholesomeness’ and thus the idea was reflected in the slogan: “Moldova, feel at home in the heart of nature” (Figure 3). The brand concept did not actually addressed to Moldova’s different sides like people, culture or history in a holistic way combining everything under general concept. Moreover, through this concept Moldova was not much differentiated especially from its neighbours (MMCT, 2005). Moldovan new brand concept was presented in June 2006, at the First International Promoting Moldavian Conference with aim to reposition country’s old brand concept. The new concept is based on all that Moldova has to offer to the rest of the world and thus World is being invited to ‘discover’ country’s nature, history, people, and wine, amongst others (Figure 4) (Florek and Conejo, 2007). The visitors are invited to discover The Country of Heritage, the Harbour of Legends, the Land of Dreams - located between the Prut and Nistru rivers. Country opens the doors to a wide range of visitors to experience a land of warm generosity and welcoming hospitality. Moldova represents land of charming variety. Its nature (plains, forests) and climate combination make paramount characteristic of Moldova (MMCT, 2011a).

Figure 3: Moldova's country brand logo and tagline "Feel at home in the heart of nature"

Figure 4: Moldova's country brand logo and tagline "Discover us"

Nowadays, Moldova is applying product-related tourism. It offers some "wine routes" taking visitors to different regions in order to experience wineries and other interesting places. The tours are also used for promotion of other wine-related products like "Divine" wine-based liquor (MMCT, 2011b).

4.2.3 Image of Moldova

Mort et al. (1996, p. 32) state that 'consumers outside Eastern Europe are likely to know little about these countries and even less about their products'. During the Cold War there was not detailed and thorough public information about former communistic countries and as a result they are stereotyped as ‘a uniform mass’ (Beracs and Papadopoulos, 1990). Ettenson (1993) adds that Eastern European and Former Soviet Republics are perceived as homogeneous economic units by Western countries due to the lack of experience or information. Main reasons for such views are Socialist ideology, collectivist economies and Cold War’s mindset ‘us versus them’. Western media has described Eastern Bloc nations as depressed and fighting their ‘post-Communist plight’. Moldova fits the Eastern European stereotype, therefore is unknown and suffering from serious awareness problem. The moment it becomes known, its image is contaminated by post Soviet associations (Florek and Conejo, 2007).

4.2.4 Moldovan wine

Moldovan grapes date back to ancient times, having grown there for millions of years (MMCT, 2011b). The country has moderate climate, hilly relief and wealthy soils, like those of the best wine regions of France, which are perfect for cultivating grapes (MMCT, 2011b).

Moldova has a long tradition of winemaking. About 5,000 years ago, Moldova’s ancient inhabitants, the Dacians, began producing wine. Due to its quality, it was traded and became the source of wealth and pride of the region. Throughout the first millennium BC, the Greeks founded colonies in Dacia. They continued with winemaking and exported considerable amount back to Greek cities (MMCT, 2011b). During the first century AD, the Romans also founded colonies in Dacia. Their settlers introduced new grape species, added to the technical know-how and raised the region’s wine output (MMCT, 2011b).

In the Middle Ages, wine manufacturing was widely spread in the Principality of Moldova. Monasteries, which used their wine for the Eucharist, were among main producers. During the 1800s, Tsar Alexander the First ordered to send French wine makers to Moldova. They introduced western European grape species and launched industrial wine manufacturing (MMCT, 2011b). By the end of the 19th century, Moldova had grown into one of the major wine exporters in the region (MMCT, 2011b).

In the second half of the 20th century, Moldovan wine production reached its peak. By the 1960s entire production had escalated to 220,000 hectares (MMCT, 2011b). Moldovan wines were exported principally to the former Soviet Union, where they were considered the finest (US Library of Congress, 2011). Today, Moldova is one of the top 10 wine-making countries in the world having about 142,000 hectares of vineyards and 180 processing plants. 85 per cent of its total production is exported (MMCT, 2011b) making about $256m a year, or 26 per cent of the countries revenues (http://www.moldova.md/en). In 2005, total Moldovan wine export was 85 per cent from which 90 per cent was exported to Russia (Aden, 2010). Moldovan wines are also presented in traditional western European wine making countries and all around the world. It is due to its quality grapes, modern production capacities and good quality wine (MMCT, 2011b).

It should be highlighted that there are over 250 Moldavian wine producers that signifies how fragmented the country's wine industry. Additionally, it was illustrated during the conference "Promoting Moldavian" where from country's top 50 wine producers only seven assisted the conference despite having been invited all 50 (Florek and Conejo, 2007).

Internationally, Moldova is not well known, however, it has earned a reputation of fine wines producer. The government of Moldova subsidizes wine industry in order to improve the quality of wine and the modernization of wineries (http://www.vinmoldova.md). Internally, it is the country's most significant export product (http://www.moldova.md/en) and one of the biggest spheres of employment (MMCT, 2011b). Externally, wine is industry with high profile with constantly increasing demand worldwide (Keown and Casey, 1995).

Moreover, wine is authentic Moldovan product with long history and deep-seated roots within the country's culture. It is common tradition of home wine making in country villages. The Moldovan government has established a National Wine Holiday, which represents an old autumn tradition honouring the grape harvest. There is a legend of white storks that saved the besieged Soroca fortress. Also, white storks are believed to bring good luck. Given these associations, Moldovan wine producers use white storks as a symbol for promoting their wines internationally (MMCT, 2011b).

5 Analysis

The analysis of empirical data would be based on two phenomena which were conceptualized in theory.

5.1 Costa Rica

Costa Rica is the country with long history. As we could see from the empirical data, the coffee as a product exists in the country's history from the early ages, dating from 1790. Time after time, the coffee became the part of the everyday life and later the source for economic development of the country. Branding the coffee as its own and starting the export of the product in 1843 was the basis for building the Costa Rica's positive country image worldwide. Costa Rica concentrates on the quality of coffee, cultivating only Arabica species and Costa Rican coffee is considered to be one of the finnest coffee in the world.

From this analysis we assume that those two phenomena have interrelationship on the historic level, as, on the one hand, the product is the part of the country's history and on the other hand, the product itself represents the history of the country.

The analysis also illustrates how the quality of the product, which in this thesis is indicated as one of attributes of the functional dimension, influenced the formation of the country's positive image in the middle of 19th century. Despite the fact that in 1843 Costa Rica did not aim to use coffee for its branding purposes from this perspective in 21st century while having concepts like destination branding and iconic product we can assume that product functional features play key role in formation of the destination positive image.

After gaining independence, the country was moving towards the democratic tradition, maintaining peace, investing in education and public health. Analyzing the country from ancient period up to date, we can identify several values, which are evident and present till nowadays. Country's values are democracy, peace, freedom, and natural resource sustainability. Empirical data shows the country's passion toward the democracy, peace and freedom based on the international rankings, stable political situation and economic growth, which differentiates the country within the region. The fact that Costa Rica is also well known for its preservation achievements and as result having 25 per cent of the country's area protected, illustrates how the natural resource sustainability is embedded in everyday life and culture. Today, the country has one of the highest standards of living, outstanding academic level which could be a great potential to attract investment and for establishment of big multinational companies. All the above-mentioned country's values are integrated in country's brand slogan: "no artificial ingredients", which, on the one hand, highlights the main treasure of the country – its natural resources and, on the other hand, goes beyond it and describes its culture, people and lifestyle. Thus, creating and sustaining the favorable and attractive environment for different stakeholders, Costa Rica establishes its brand promise.

Costa Ricans are proud of its national symbol, coffee, which is frequently proclaimed as the pillar of the national identity. The history of Costa Rican coffee is directly connected to its strong middle class, democracy and land ownership. Costa Rica has also experienced its brand where coffee is instilled in the national psyche and is considered to be a vital part of everyday culture. Coffee is deeply rooted not only historically but culturally – it can be seen in living traditions of consuming coffee, also construction of universities, railroads, architectural sites and theaters is directly related to sales of coffee.

As could be seen from the empirical data, coffee export was the reason for significantly increased national income, taking the country towards prosperity and development. Thus, the coffee represents not only the part of the history but also symbolizes prosperity and development of the country. Thus, we can see another interrelationship on the symbolic level. As the product symbolizes the prosperity and development of the country and, at the same time, product itself is symbolized with country's prosperity and development by its people, we can assume that those two phenomena reflect each other while sharing the similar symbolical meanings.

As we could see from the presented empirical data, one of the attributes of functional level, infrastructure, is weak and requires improvement and solid investment.

Figure 5 illustrates the interrelationship between the destination brand, Costa Rica, and the iconic product, coffee.

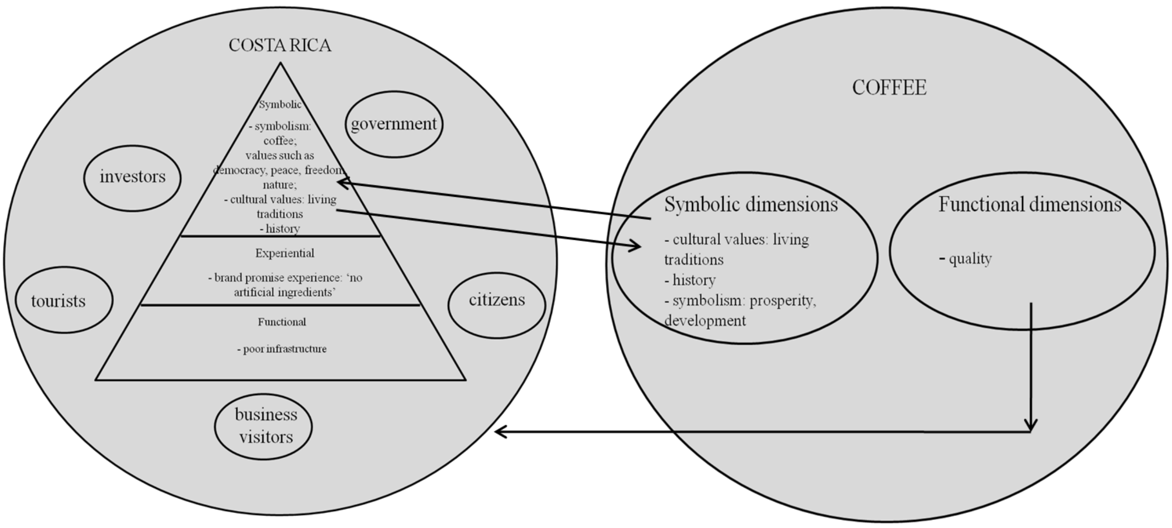

Figure 5: Costa Rica - interrelationship between the destination brand and the iconic product.

5.2 Moldova

As can be noted from empirical data, the history of Moldova goes back to the ancient times. At some stages of its development it was under the rule of Russian Empire, then reunified with Romania, then it was a part of Soviet Union until it became independent. Nevertheless, all this did not affect the wine-making industry but on the contrary each period had influenced it positively. The tradition of winemaking in Moldova is deeply rooted in its history. During different times Greek, Roman, French winemakers introduced new grape species, technical know-how, launched industrial manufacturing. The wine making was developing along with country’s development.

From this analysis we assume that those two phenomena have interrelationship on the historic level, as, on the one hand, the product is the part of the country’s history and, on the other hand, the product itself represents the history of the country.

As it was stated in the empirical data the Moldova is not well known generally and it is trying to increase its brand awareness, attract visitors and investors through branding of the destination. The country’s new brand concept and communication message formulated in the slogan “Discover us” is trying to cover all the aspects that the country has to offer to its visitors. Country brand makes the promise that this is the Country of Heritage, the Harbour of Legends, the Land of Dreams. To fulfill the brand promise visitors are offered to experience a land of warm generosity and welcoming hospitality. Country especially focuses on wine as a part of the national culture while having variety of wine tours, claiming that through those routes the whole culture (hospitality, nature, history) of the country could be experienced.

By analyzing the empirical data, we can note that the country's moderate climate, hilly relief, wealthy soils, quality grapes, modern production capacities and long wine making tradition made the country famous in the region for quality wine producer since 19th century. The government of Moldova understands the importance of functional attributes of the product and subsidizes wine industry in order to improve the quality of wine and the modernization of wineries.

Wine is widely and deeply introduced in the national culture of Moldova as authentic Moldovan product – at first it was mainly produced and consumed in monasteries; also home wine making is very popular in the villages; moreover, national wine holiday is established. We assume that home making wine is a tradition that signifies the hospitality and generosity of its people, their openness to the world and the will to be 'discovered'. The symbol of white stork is deeply embedded in culture – first of all because of the legend telling that white storks saved the fortress, second of all they are believed to bring good luck. As can be seen in the empirical data wine manufacturers use this symbol for labeling the wine.

From this analysis we can assume that the product, wine, supported the country to create the country brand recognition starting from 19th century till up to date, being one of the top ten wine makers in the world. As the product's functional features played key role in destination brand image formation, we argue that the iconic product phenomenon (functional dimensions) influences the destination brand phenomenon. Based on the above-mentioned we can conclude that wine symbolizes the country's values and reflects its culture. According to the analysis, we argue that there is a direct linkage between iconic product's symbolic dimension and destination brand's symbolic level.

Figure 6 illustrates the interrelationship between the destination brand, Moldova, and the iconic product, wine.

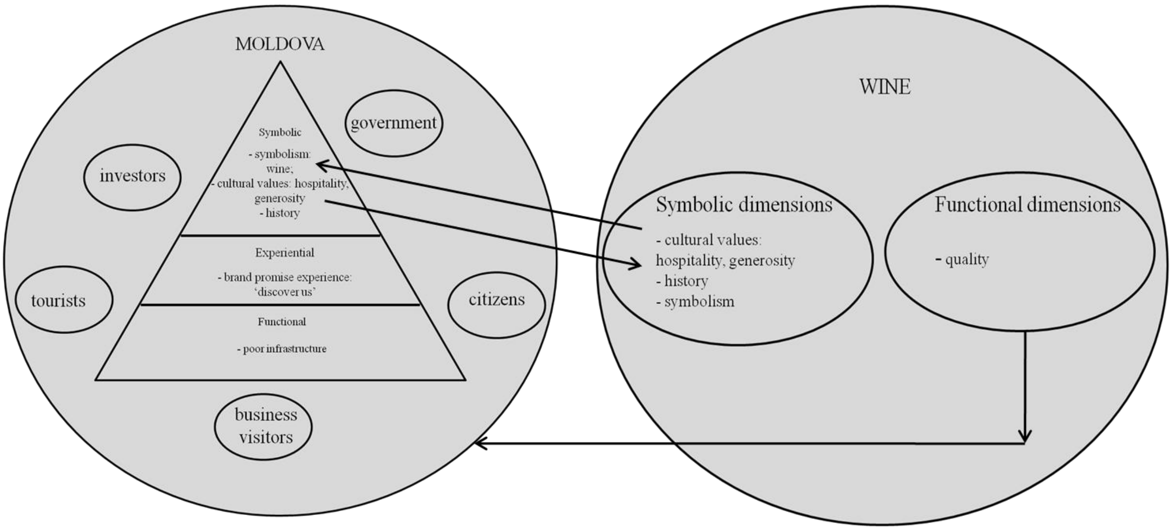

***Figure 6*:** Moldova - interrelationship between the destination brand and the iconic product.

Kotler and Gertner (2002) have highlighted that a destination brand should be based on its reality. As iconic product characterizes the destination and is deeply embedded in culture reflecting values and beliefs of its people we argue that iconic product is a basis for that reality.

Mort et al. (1996) argue that despite the fact that consumers are not fully aware of Eastern European products, they are inclined to buy them. Mort et al. (1996) claim that due to the fact that Eastern European countries are nascent and evolving, their image formulation will be the result of consumer's direct product experience. Therefore, the very first product experience is essential to be positive, and thus being perfectly superior to what consumers would have experienced in case of having traditional brands. Thus, in case of negative experience there is a big probability that it will influence negative product and country image formation.

Moldova and Costa Rica should attempt to become world-class wine and coffee producers, if they plan to build their destination brands on those products. Very frequently consumer and importers make their decisions based on rankings and awards (Florek and Conejo, 2007). Therefore, both countries should strive to target world's most authoritative rankings and awards and consistently figure amongst top manufacturers in terms of quality.

The theoretical framework, the empirical data presented in this thesis paper and the analysis of it leads us to conclude that the destination brand and the iconic product phenomena have interrelationship on the symbolic level as they share common values and reflect each other; the functional attributes of the iconic product phenomenon influence the destination brand.

Based on above arguments the general conceptual model was developed.

5.3 Conceptual model

In order to answer the research questions we suggest and present the conceptual model (see Figure 7) which is based on the theoretical framework and empirical data analysis, which illustrates the interrelationship between two phenomena, the destination brand and the iconic product and how the iconic product influence the destination brand.

In the beginning an appropriate iconic product, which would characterize the destination brand while symbolizing the culture should be selected. Papadopoulos and Heslop (2002) stated that in order to strengthen the image of the destination, products must be chosen very carefully in accordance with uniqueness, competitiveness and desired identity. As product is iconic for the destination it should convey the destination's associations to consumers. The lines 1 and 2 demonstrate that iconic product and destination brand share common values and reflect each other and thus the model illustrates the interrelationship between two phenomena. The third line demonstrates that iconic product's functional dimensions influence the destination brand phenomenon. It is supported by Mort et al. (1996) who claim that first product experience is essential to be positive, as in case of negative experience there is a big probability that it will influence negative product and country image formation.

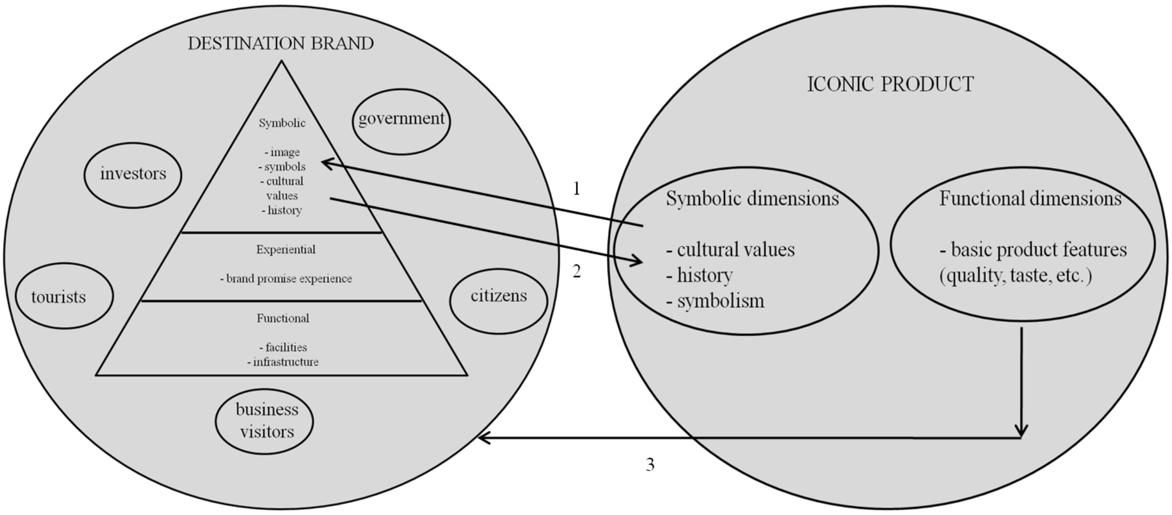

Figure 7**:** Destination brand and iconic product interrelationship

6 Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to study the interrelationship between the destination brand and the iconic product. To reach this purpose, the following research questions were raised:

- What interrelationship exists between destination brand and iconic product and how the phenomenon of iconic product might influence the creation of destination brand?

Analysing theoretical framework and empirical data we have developed the conceptual model which illustrates the interrelationship between two phenomena and answers the research questions.

In regard of the first research question we can draw conclusion that destination brand and iconic product have interrelationship on the symbolic level. As while talking about iconic products, its main attributes and features are transported to destination brand and vice versa. Moreover, consumer can understand a destination better and symbolize it based on iconic products.

For the second research question it can be said that functional dimensions of iconic product could influence the destination brand. The iconic product experience is essential to be positive, as it would positively influence formation of the destination image and vice versa.

7 Contribution

7.1 Theoretical contribution

As outlined in the literature overview, we could summarize that those two phenomena, the destination brand and the iconic product, are thoroughly investigated in the literature. But it should be noted that these two phenomena have been studied separately from each other. The scholars have identified the main features and attributes; have studied the goals of both phenomena and their roles in marketing field. However, the literature fails to show the interrelationship between the destination brand and the iconic product and impact of the iconic product phenomenon on the destination brand.

The introduction and the development of the conceptual model, applying empirical study contribute to the existing literature. The findings will supply the academic world with further knowledge regarding the interrelationship between these two phenomena, which could be basis for further researches.

7.2 Practical contribution

As destination branding represents the field of interest not only for academics but also for business world especially for marketers working particularly on destination branding and place/destination/city governors, this paper might be especially useful for the practitioners as the research was conducted from the managerial point of view. Thus, this thesis paper might be a basis for new working model how to create destination brand through iconic product, which would be based on conceptual model suggested by this study.

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