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E-branding of rural tourism in Carinthia, Austria

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to create an e-branding model which could also be applied for place branding in small central rural regions of Central Europe based on the innovative methodology of rural tour marketing. It was based and went beyond the European program of transnational cooperation, INTERREG IIIB CADSES. The region of Carinthia, Austria was set as a case study for the application of interrelating scientific theories of marketing, place branding and place identity in relation to and in connection with national identity. The paper succeeds in making a practical and theoretical contribution on the process of the creation of branding, which consists of a holistic approach of the management of every business operating in the region. Virtual reality was promoted since it may provide a direct and international impact via the creation of a virtual community appealing to a broad number of potential visitors. This latter, is the contribution of this paper since it proposes a model of creating e-branding, first applied to the virtual community; as the virtual space /time precedes the real one and is used to implement and succeed in the design of the rural marketing of the European research programme in this region.

Key words: rural tourism marketing; culinary tourism; destination e-branding; Rural Tour e-Brand Carinthia; national identity; place e-branding; Austria

Introduction

The distinct characteristics of a region may combine natural, cultural and gastronomical resources while rural tourism may create the brand destination of a region leading to the emotional projection of the region. Destination is not a single product but incorporates many different elements, including accommodation, tourist attraction, catering, entertainment, cultural and natural aspects (Buhalis in Morgan, Pritchard & Piggott, 2003, pp. 337-338). Speaking of rural areas and the distinct elements these incorporate, they do not often promote culture/ heritage resources not to mention the limited research on the inclusion of culinary experiences with rural tourism resources (McGehee, Lee, Bannon & Perdue, 2010, p. 488; Smith & Xiao, 2008, p. 290). Nevertheless, these resources may consist of the distinct characteristics of a destination and we argue that they may formulate the branding of the area. Branding is a deliberate process usually applied to products or the shaping of a nation's image and reputation on the global stage, in the heightened global competition for ascendancy. Branding

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the nation or a region in the globalised world is a strategy or tool in the competition for attention and wealth, as well as a tool of self-affirmation and the promotion of national identity (Scott, Suwaree, Peivi Ding & Xu, 2011, p. 227; Kavoura, 2007, 2013a). If destination branding uses the internet as a strategic tool for promotion, then e-branding is enhanced especially for rural tourism.

A rural area which is isolated needs tools to be promoted to the rest of the world and internet is a tool for such a procedure. If the consumer/ tourist has not visited the destination, then media's role is important because personal experience is an important criterion to influence selection of a destination's image, without personal experience, images are formed from the different types of media and advertising (Molina & Esteban, 2006, p. 1039; Biel, 1997). Research has found that the website design characteristics which may attract positive feelings of potential customers towards a website include informativeness, organisation and entertainment (Chen & Wells, 1999). We argue that apart from being informative, organised and entertaining as Chen and Wells (1999) argued, a website may provide elements of emotion to the potential consumers and visitors if we speak about tourism. A website may include, promote and advertise experience and emotions and the role of the providers of this information is important in doing so, apart from the role of the customers who interact with the site. The examination of the attribute of emotion in Carinthia's websites may shed more light on the elements that the providers may put emphasis on; this may lead to an e-brand of a destination.

Virtual reality is at the forefront since it may provide a direct and international impact via the creation of a virtual community appealing to a broad number of potential tourists. This latter, is the contribution of this paper since we propose a model of creating e-branding, first applied to the virtual community; the virtual space /time precedes the real one and is used to implement and succeed in the design of the rural marketing European research programme in this region, affirming the view that internet and virtual reality many times shape and change real life. Virtual communities as traditional communities, are used to exchange information and ideas; to share common interests; to entertain people; to offer support; to promote products and services; to create and support relations. The abovementioned emerge, when all participants involved agree to be part of them with the aim to use the products and services on offer with the use of information and communication technologies (Siomkos & Tsiamis, 2004; Stalidis, 2013). Virtual communities allow the support of interrelations among people. They differ from the traditional ones in that they offer multiple ways of communication and in that their members share the sense of belonging to the community (Siomkos & Tsiamis, 2004). Internet allows the communication on one-to-one basis, one-to-all-to-one basis and one-to-all basis (Siomkos & Tsiamis, 2004, p. 206). In addition, this participation, is the result of the social need that the person has to communicate and interact with others. Virtual communities have values and principles they help to build better business procedures and better relations between the supplier and the consumer while the characteristics of interrelation and dialogue is in the center of virtual community (Siomkos & Tsiamis, 2004, p. 206).

Can then a website incorporate experience, appeal to the senses or emotion? How does this take place? Do the elements such as culture or culinary experiences which are associated with rural tourism resources exist in the websites for the creation of an e-brand of a region or a place? Morgan, Pritchard and Piggott (2002, p. 337) argue that destinations have to try to convey a sense of experiencing the place through web cams since consumers make choices under an emotional relationship appeal. Place

identity refers to a symbolic, emotional and affective attachment which involves bonding and experiences (Mlozi, Pesamaa, Haahti & Salunke, 2013). The familiarity or 'centrality' -how central is an activity or experience in the individual's life and the social interactions centred on this activity (Kyle, Bricker, Graefe & Wickham, 2004, pp. 125, 136) provides an emotional bond with the setting that creates an emotional attachment.

Crystal clear waters are combined with cultural elements which inseparably mingle with nature but also culinary suggestions for recipes with local and fresh ingredients; -these are the tangible elements in the process of branding. The result from the tranquillity and the idyllic environment promoted is "the satisfaction of the senses", in other words, the intangible or symbolic aspects of branding- simulating a live experience to the potential tourists, contributing to the destination image of Carinthia, Austria consisting of a typical recourse for destination branding and place branding in Eastern Europe and other isolated regions. This is a contribution of the current research to the existing literature in regard to which are the distinct characteristics of a remote region and how they can lead to destination e-branding.

We anticipate that nature will be promoted as a significant element on the websites for rural areas. In addition, we aim to examine the advertisement of cultural landscape and elements associated with gastronomy taking rural Carinthia as a case study since the literature has suggested more research to take place on whether culinary experiences and/or the cultural landscape may be associated with rural tourism (McGehee *et al.*, 2010, p. 488; Smith & Xiao, 2008, p. 290).

E-branding would assist Carinthia, Austria which is isolated and not well connected with big urban areas so as to create an image. Tourism facts for the destination, illustrate that there is much space for tourism to be increased considering that rather than having an increase in numbers, on the contrary, there is a continuous decrease (Fact Sheet Carinthia and Tourism, 2010). Since it is a mountainous area and not well-known to the rest of the world, the use of internet for promoting e-brand would contribute to illustrate the distinct characteristics of the region.

The approach that is suggested in this present paper is that the network team in charge of the brand strategy of the businesses which participated in the European Rural Tour program should incorporate and identify the place brand of these areas in the abovementioned strategy. Then, this team will operate under the principles of an architecture who will safeguard that the rules of branding which transcend every internal unity, have clear, yet not weak aims and are finally incorporated to the whole brand of the region and every participating country (Dinnie, 2008, pp. 51-54).

The brand may become the experience via stimuli associated with emotions and affection in order to create loyalty; thus, affection and commitment are different from brand loyalty and it is argued in the literature that affection encompasses psychological and economic attachments (Iglesias, Singh, & Batista-Foguet, 2011, pp. 571, 574).

Destination and place branding in rural areas: Their connection with related theories of marketing and national-local identity

The initial concept of the idea of place branding comes from dealing with regions as destinations which should have an image in order to consist of poles of tourism attractions. Later, the concept of

destination was specialised in order to include many forms of geographical unities such as a nation, a region, a city, even an event or / and a tourist resort. It could be argued that the relation which develops among the terms that refer to place branding and destination branding is the following: the first two terms, relate with each other based on a general to specific perspective, the first being a conceptual term and the latter, putting emphasis on the tourism sector. Further, the term destination branding, may be analysed in more specific forms of branding, based on the geographical unity section which every time consists of the subject under management, one of which is nation branding (Hanna & Rowley, 2008, pp. 61-64).

In the creation of a brand, certain key elements connect and this includes the product and its abilities, the brand and its name, the brand symbolism and imagery and the consumer (Meenaghham, 1995, p. 25). Definitions related to brand give emphasis on the differentiation element, the existence of physical attributes but also the intangible values existing in the imagination of the customer (Hall, 1999, p. 230; Kim, 1990, p. 60; Kotler, 1988, p. 463). Brands have personalities and these personalities are the sum of the emotional added values which the product carries created by advertising and encompassing lifestyle characteristics (Meenaghham, 1995, p. 27; Biel, 1997). Destination branding is a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that both identifies and differentiates the place; it also conveys the promise of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the place; further, it serves to consolidate and reinforce the pleasurable memories of the place experience (Ritchie & Ritchie in Saraniemi, 2009; Saraniemi, 2011, p. 247). Destination branding has "a tremendous scope to grow" (Balakrishnan, Nekhili & Lewis, 2011, p. 4). Saraniemi (2009) examined the theoretically emerging phenomenon of tourism destination branding taking Finland as a case study and noted that empirical research is limited in destination branding (in Saraniemi, 2011, p. 248); another example is the promotion of Croatia where encompassing dimensions such as entertainment and relaxation make a place to become 'the other place', the perfect tourist destination (Bertoša, Muhvić-Dimanovski & Skelin-Horvat, 2010). Thus, there is space to examine how destination branding may take place and its application to rural tourism.

The development and promotion of a tourism destination consists of a multidimensional phenomenon, which requires special emphasis not only to the businesses of the region, but also to bigger geographical regions or peripheries such as is the case in the present study. "Stemming from the literature on product to service branding, destination branding is one of the newest research areas" (Konečnik, 2004, p. 307; Balakrishnan et al., 2011). While branding as a business strategy is well established and well researched, place branding lacks both extensive theorisation and broad-scale application (Rausch, 2008). Yet, in reality, businessmen express themselves collectively through their representatives and a number of stakeholders, who have direct or indirect influence and interest in regard to the decision making procedure associated with the destination (Konečnik, 2004). Conflicts of interest and priorities among the people involved creates problems to the initiation of strategic policies and as a result to the design of an identity branding of a destination, not to mention the issues created when agents in most cases are consisted of heterogenous powers. According to Prideaux and Cooper (2002) destination branding consists of the tangible and positive result of unity and cooperation of agents involved in a tourism destination. The creation of the idea of the identity of the destination, Marzano and Scott (2009) argue -as a cooperative procedure- may be the central theme in the literature as the interrelation between agents involved in the procedure of the identity of a tourism destination.

The image of a destination is the total cognitive and emotional impression created to the visitor (Konečnik, 2004; Anholt, 2005, 2010). Cognitive evaluation is associated with beliefs and knowledge in relation to a destination, while sentimental evaluation is associated with feelings and the destination. Most approaches in relation to the identity of a destination take into consideration cognitive rather than sentimental factors; this is the case for brands as well (Iglesias *et al.*, 2011, p. 572). The use of both cognitive and emotional elements leads to the creation of a concise and holistic identity destination which will then lead to the branding of the destination.

The strategy of branding initially deriving from marketing is closely associated with the related theory and uses its terminology. First of all, the concept of brand has four different dimensions, the development of which will be broadly attempted to be related with the concept under consideration of place brand and then we try to connect it with e- place brand. In particular, the first one is brand identity and is related to identity, the core, which in the case of consumer goods is what is seen in the consumers' eyes, that is, the slogan, the framework, the wrapping (Anholt, 2007, pp. 5-6). The concept of brand identity has as a further aim, that is, the differentiation of one product and its placement in a competitive environment (Hankinson, 2004, p. 110). In the case of regions, this is the regional (local) brand identity and in the case of states, it is called the national brand identity.

Nonetheless, in order for the identity of a place to be transformed to a commercial, brand identity, we need to accept beforehand that the latter will be only formed on the basis of a limited number of constitutive elements of the first. These elements need to be carefully chosen beforehand based on the criterion of satisfying the strategy of place marketing and place branding (Anholt, 2007) both from the tangible and intangible elements. Following, the second dimension is brand image and is associated with the belief that exists for a brand in the mind of the consumers; it is associated with the image that a product has and at times, it may be associated with the identity of a product, based on the fact that this latter -the identity of the product-, is constructed and as such is under the business's control, while the image depends on consumers' perceptions (Anholt, 2007, pp. 5-6).

Its third dimension refers to the brand purpose and consists of the equivalent of the internal image of a business. It is based on the idea that every effort made from the company's point of view will not bring the anticipated results if it is not supported from the human resources and the other stakeholders of the business and that the combination of a powerful internal culture with a dynamic external feature, may create a very powerful brand. Such view of the concept of brand may be effectively used in the case of regions and countries with special significance (Anholt, 2007, pp. 5-6).

Last but not least, brand equity refers to the value that positive image has for a business, which may be stronger than its material elements. Such a view may be also adopted to the case of regions and countries. Its presence may bring economic benefits for a periphery or a place or a country (Anholt, 2007, pp. 5-6). Apart from this definitional approach, there is also the approach which departs from the consumer's perspective approach and refers to the ability of the consumer to recognise the brand, to make judgements regarding quality, uniqueness, fame and other elements. Of determining significance for the concept of brand equity, under the consumer's perspective, is also the concept of brand loyalty, which, refers to the devotion to the brand. In regard to the content of this concept in the business sector, this is associated with the fact that when there is devotion, this leads to a high degree of sentimental consumer connection with a brand. The realisation of such an aim is considered for a business more

preferable to the repeated simple purchase of a product (Anholt, 2007, pp. 5-6). The abovementioned, adopted in place branding may mean that: for the brand equity concept, regions located within countries but also countries themselves, with abundance of symbols and imaginative correlations, have the uniqueness under search and a distinct iconography, as a result of their local/ national identity, which reinforces the development of the brand of a country; national identity can be related with branding if the perceived distinct elements of a nation are promoted and are embedded with special emphasis and symbolism (Kavoura, 2013a, p. 72). These elements and symbolism though, need to be directly related to those distinct elements of local identity -in the specific research, the Austrian environment, the Alps, the mountains, common elements for both the local and national identity.

If businesses which operate in an area or a region perceive the significance of branding the region as a whole in a similar way, this can be an effective tool and an engine for the success of their businesses; at the same time, the culture of the region is promoted in a consistent way (Sang Ryu & Swinney, 2011, p. 81). Urban and rural activities are becoming increasingly intermingled and rural urban boundaries are disappearing allowing for a significant role to rural agricultural regions (Horlings, 2012). "These areas have become network societies, where local and international production and consumption are connected in a complex system, whereas governance implementation is still organised along sectoral lines" (Horlings, 2012, p. 295). The views of local key people such as stakeholders and business people, who create, the local narratives of place, may lead to the promotion of local particularity of such region as research has shown for the island of Santorini and its rapid transformation into a tourism destination (Lichrou, O'Malley & Patterson, 2010). Thus, the local opinion is significant. Local cultural commodities provide the ideal product in place branding (Rausch, 2008).

In the broad meaning of the term culture, it consists of a significant element of value for the country brand. In the contemporary period of global economy, economic crisis and recession, the emphasis on the holistic perception of countries, states, nations' identity and their regions, -especially for the newly established ones and those with no economic resources, such as those of Eastern Europe-, could consist of a more attractive and feasible way of building their value than a costly advertising campaign.

At the same time, the country's profile, is formed through a popular culture (Dinnie, 2008, pp. 67-72). In regard to the concept of brand loyalty, the associations made with the rich cultural resources, including the environmental resources but also the intangible cultural resources -values, traditions, customs, way of life- that these nations have and the meanings which create, bring powerful sentimental qualities which lead to the sentimental devotion and attachment that derives from the concept of brand loyalty (Dinnie, 2008, pp. 62-64).

Finally, it was abovementioned that the further aim of brand associated with a powerful identity is its position in competitive environments (Anholt, 2007). Positioning is another element that is associated with the theory of marketing related to the space that this product has on a market segment and needs to be characterised from qualities that are of central significance such as those of continuity, consequences, competitiveness and reliability. Critical to the positioning of a product, is the creation and establishment of its differentiating elements.

"The physical and material aspects of a destination which differentiate it, called tangibles, include fortified structures, urban developments, monuments and memorials, religious buildings including churches and especially monasteries, buildings associated with production or manufacture, government or civic

buildings, villages, cultural landscapes and manufactured objects in their context. The intangible qualities of a destination include such things as practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills, legends, language, tradition, religion, folklore, music and dance, handicrafts, etc..." (Mitsche, Vogt, Knox, Cooper, Lombardi & Ciaffi, 2013, p. 69). These sites and intangible qualities may be connected with the identity of a population and create a sense of place (Mitsche *et al.*, 2013, pp. 68-69).

This sense of place is enhanced if the tourists have a cultural familiarity with the destination while local communities can identify and relate to (Mitsche *et al.*, 2013, p. 69).

In regard to the regions that are included in RURAL TOUR project, the positioning procedure, is mainly expressed via the development of the rural/ holistic tourism which inherently incorporates elements of uniqueness, adopting the element of bond and cohesion rather than consistency. Such technique (modularity technique) is inspired by innovation and product development; it is based on the idea that the smaller parts of a complex product may be autonomously designed but also they operate/function as a whole. Such adoption of the abovementioned idea in the area of regions' branding and businesses leads to the theorising of the brand of a region as a total product which is consisted of separate diverse unities.

Slovenia is such an example which has promoted an environmental friendly framework, where the integration of food/drink and tourism has been pursued, reinforcing a rural-cultural emphasis -the sunny side of the Alps or a nature based region (Hall, 1999, pp. 232-233). As far as the spatial framework is concerned, landscape is defined from the field of human senses and relations. Therefore, it always changes since the way of life changes; the urban landscape changes as a result of the movement of people, their activities, their cultural interests (Hackett, 1980, pp. 241-260; Katsoni, 2011).

There lies the danger that the rural area may lose its unique differential point if there is combination of heritage attractions and rural/ natural activities (Clarke, 2005, p. 93). Nevertheless, offering consumers options and a range of activities and resources may be a positive option for tourists without necessarily meaning that rural tourism will lose any of its distinct characteristics and promote a strong place identity; the case of Canso, Nova Scotia provides such an example (George, Mair & Reid, 2009, p. 94) or Spain (Polo & Frias, 2010).

Marketing, e-branding and the use of internet

Entertainment, relaxation, pleasurable memories are associated with emotion. Symbolic or intangible components extrinsic in nature to the product are associated with emotional values and feelings as the other key brand attribute (Aaker in Balakrishnan *et al.*, 2011). Destinations have a tangible reference point -history, heritage and culture associated with buildings and architectural environment- while the intangible component can be the symbolic aspects like interactions between customer and stakeholders (Balakrishnan *et al.*, 2011; Crompton & Ekinci, 2003, p. 21). Thus, the element of emotion may be considered to be part of the intangible aspect of a brand.

Little research, though, has taken place on advertising and branding on destinations that is why, the application of the concept of branding to rural tourism is relatively novel. Research on branding is mainly on products and the use of emotions to build brand equity and loyal customers is well known for traditional media. Research demonstrated that emotion can increase the value of physical products

such as houses and cars; emotion can also influence a user's memories of products and their purchasing decision processes (Kim, Lee & Choi, 2002). The use of emotion as part of the advertising strategy goes hand in hand with the provision of information including the informational and transformational dichotomy associated with emotional appeals (Hwang, McMillan & Lee, 2003; Dens & Pelsmacker, 2010); a) the first sends, transmits or gives information to consumers providing factual product information about a brand; b) the second constructs and maintains an ordered, meaningful cultural world where consumers live, decisions are emotionally and personally important to consumers, recalling and reliving social experiences through product consumption and products provide consumers with a moment of pleasure based on any of the five senses (Hwang *et al.*, 2003). Emotions contribute to the selection of service providers, determination of purchase behaviours, development of brand loyalty (Westbrook & Oliver in Lee, Back & Kim, 2009). Destination branding has been considered a potent marketing tool defined as selecting a consistent element mix to identify and distinguish (a destination) through positive image-building containing unique identity; the goal is to build a desirable image that can attract tourists and to differentiate one's destination from competitors (Park & Petrick, 2008, p. 262) while developing an emotional link with tourists is important and such studies regarding image formation processes are rare in the literature (Saraniemi, 2009). How are the suppliers of a region going to be in touch with tourists and bring this interaction? The role of the website then becomes important for e-branding especially for remoted areas that are difficult to reach.

Tourists acquire knowledge from their own experiences, those of others and visual and sensory stimuli, all of which educate them about destination image; destination image is formed from communication inputs throughout one's lifetime and tourists retain messages that are relevant to them (Molina & Esteban, 2006, p. 1039). Research in many countries such as New Zealand or eight different Spanish cities showed that an aesthetically pleasing design and interest-generating qualities were needed to get consumers to pick up and read a destination-specific brochure because the use of media can make the visitor participate and establish an image of the destination as a viable alternative with the use of emotion (Hall & McArthur, 1993; Chen & Wells, 1999; Molina & Esteban, 2006, p. 1042).

The development of models and research on corporate web sites suggests that users evaluate a website along the three dimensions of how entertaining (creating positive impressions for the brand), how informative (interacting with the public for the provision of information) and how organised (the ability of the web page to show the information or function from which the visitor chooses) it is (Chen & Wells, 1999; Hwang *et al.*, 2003). Researchers argue that among the factors of success for marketing on the website are information quality, ease of use, responsiveness, security/privacy, visual appearance, trust, interactivity, personalization and fulfillment (Chen & Wells, 1999, p. 28; Chen & Rodgers, 2006). Stern, Zinkhan and Holbrook (2002) also argue for the role of entertainment, information -in the form of education- but also of sensory inputs in their Netvertising Image Communication Model where a netvertising image is "a cyberspace media representation in which the message incorporates multiple sensory inputs as vivid stimuli that fuse entertainment and education to inspire consumer creation of mental pictures that lead to marketplace behavioral responses" (Stern *et al.*, 2002, p. 23). Thus, dimensions of a website can be generally categorised under entertainment, informativeness and organization based on Chen and Wells' (1999) model on attitude towards the website. Much more limited is the research on destination marketing on the website (Parker, Sears & Rachel, 2012) and this paper examines whether these dimensions exist for destination e-branding of Carinthia.

The level of familiarity with a destination influences the characteristics of perceived images as understood by consumers (Baloglu in Saraniemi, 2009). There are of course other researchers who argue for a balance between novelty and familiarity existing between the place destination image and the experiences that the tourist has as the case for Portugal and tourists' perceptions has shown where the high level of familiarity with the destination did not necessarily influence the positive images of the consumers (Kastenholz, 2010). Destination image studies have been associated with the perceived image (the consumer's tourist's side) (Crompton cf Ekinci, 2003, p. 21; Baloglu & McCleary in Saraniemi, 2009) and the projected image (the producer's image) since the role of those involved in the whole process of promotion of a destination brand is significant (Bramwell & Rawding in Saraniemi, 2009; Saraniemi, 2011). Empirical knowledge is still limited in destination branding (Saraniemi, 2011, p. 247). The co-creation view of brands and branding is a neglected area in destination-branding literature. Destination-branding research, in particular, lacks grounded models that profoundly describe branding activities (Saraniemi, 2011; Parker *et al.*, 2012) to develop a unified regional brand identity for a destination. The specific research will shed light on the way the creation of rural tour e-brand contributes to a projected image for the region of Carinthia, Austria.

No matter if we speak for print promotional material or electronic material, the design and the organisation of the promotional material is an important factor influencing the potential customer to pay attention to a destination with the use of information and communication technologies (Molina & Esteban, 2006, p. 1042; Borges-Tiago, Couto, dos Santos Natário & Braga, 2007; Katsoni, 2011; Stalidis, 2013). The abovementioned processes can be well applied when promoting an area, a place or a city.

Research in the use of internet and e-commerce found that it is a strategic tool for many leisure farms to supplement rural tourism development in Taiwan (Huang, 2006, p. 243), to attract international tourists reinforcing the identity and uniqueness of a place in New Zealand (Campelo, Aitken & Gnoth, 2011, p. 11), to promote the area as in Maestrazgo, district of Teruel, Aragon (Evans & Parravicini, 2005, p. 112). In other words, tourists may not gather to sea resorts but rural regions may offer an alternative to tourists in regard to the promotion of rural tourism.

We take Carinthia as a case study close to many big urban centres while it is remote at the same time reinforcing the region and Eastern Europe which has not been well represented in academic papers. E-brand is important especially for remote areas. The most common criterion for information source is its accessibility to a greater percentage of consumers which influences destination image (Molina & Esteban, 2006, p. 1039).

Study settings: Trends and facts of rural tourism development in the Eastern European region-description of Carinthia and methodology of the research

Carinthia is the southernmost Austrian state situated within the Eastern Alps and is chiefly noted for its mountains and lakes. The two core-competences of Carinthian Tourism are "sport, active and outdoor" and "sun and lakes" (Fact Sheet Carinthia and Tourism, 2010, p. 14). The size of Carinthia is 9.540km². The arrivals were in 1990/1991 2.509.618, in 2000/2001 2.402.673 while in 2008/2009

there were 2.679.918 arrivals (Fact Sheet Carinthia and Tourism, 2010, p. 6), a fact that shows that within a 20year period, arrivals are stable, there is not an increase which illustrates the limited promotion that has taken place, neither visitors (incoming and potential) have realised the unique elements of Carinthia on offer. The overnight stays and average lengths of stay in days were 17.952.732 with an average stay of 7.2 days in 1990/1991, 12.996.194 and an average of 5.6 days in 2000/2001 and 12.762.410 and an average of 4.8 days in 2008/2009 (Fact Sheet Carinthia and Tourism, 2010, p. 6).

Thus, activities are necessary to be projected so as to illustrate the alternative tourism that the Carinthian Tourism Board (Kärnten Werburg GmbH) aims to promote, "an appealing image for Carinthia as a holiday destination, as well as to implement Carinthia's identity in authentic and attractive holiday offers" (Fact Sheet Carinthia and Tourism, 2010, p. 11).

The general trend according to the Carinthian Tourism Board is to get away from "a lifestyle of fun" to a lifestyle of deeper meaning and enjoyment of nature while the target groups are all age and income groups with high affinity to technology and intense relationship to nature; nature is considered aesthetic and it can be consumed. Nature for them is a source of deceleration and inspiration and they want to experience the beauty of the original, the authenticity and unique of the region (Fact Sheet Carinthia and Tourism, 2010, p. 26).

Many powers have been taken away from Carinthia by the Federal Constitution of Austria to such an extent that only relatively few matters remain (most importantly, planning and zoning codes, nature protection, hunting, fishing, farming, youth protection, certain issues of public health and welfare and the right to levy certain taxes) (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/States_of_Austria last access 19/10/2011). It is not the purpose of this research, though, to decipher meaning about the presence or not of tension between the Federal State of Carinthia, Austria and Austria which may be worthwhile another research to investigate and thus, correlate it with the promotion of rural tour e-branding.

Taking into consideration that other cases in Eastern Europe have connected tourism destination branding and national image projection (see Croatia and Slovenia in Hall, 1999) and the fact that issues such as agritourism, farming and nature protection are among the powers remaining with Carinthia, in relation to Austria (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/States_of_Austria last access 19/10/2011), we argue that e-brand can be a way to promote its resources, idyllic environment, its return to nature.

The research is based and went beyond a project called the RURALTOUR project, financed within the European program of transnational cooperation, INTERREG IIIB CADSES. It began in June 2006 with the intention of promoting a model for the development, (in sustainable and innovative ways), of an integrated rural tourism in Central Eastern Europe (area CADSES). The RURALTOUR project, financed within the European program of transnational cooperation, INTERREG IIIB CADSES, began in June 2006 with the intention of promoting a model for the development, (in sustainable and innovative ways), of an integrated rural tourism in Central Eastern Europe (area CADSES) (Bitsani & Kavoura, 2010).

The main methodological elements that were employed in this paper are encoded: a) classical thematic analysis (statistical quantitative analysis). According to Roberts (2000), quantitative text analysis methods have a framework where texts are interpreted either instrumentally (according to the researcher's conceptual framework) or representationally (according to the texts' sources' perspectives), as well as

in which variables are thematic (counts of word/phrase occurrences, semantic (themes within a semantic grammar), or network-related (theme- or relation-positions within a conceptual network). The method techniques employed were: element categorisation according to their meaning, classification, enumeration, analysis.

The researchers categorised and classified the web pages according to the themes that were analysed (natural, cultural, gastronomic resources). Lexical analysis was also employed where the centre of gravity of the research is put on the structural unity that defines the word. Methods of technique were the statistical enumeration of the words, categorisation according to the frequency that the words appear, thus, the concepts that the sender wishes to transmit are put in hierarchy, research of breadth of lexical wealth, research of combination of words (Halliday, 1994), for example, how the distinct characteristics of the region (natural, cultural, gastronomic resources) stand out as important and are combined and structural organisation was examined (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Syntactical analysis is also employed to define the core of the data analysis to the level of phrases and sentences which have horizontal organisation and hierarchical function. In addition, semiotics were employed in the use of a combination of codes such as pictures and words. Structural analysis through the examination of the way a text is structured as a whole took place. In this project the phrase and the sentence in the web pages under study is the ultimate unit of analysis and has a linear configuration (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 215).

The general themes that we searched in the data of all the websites of rural Carinthia were associated with the tangible elements in the creation of a brand; we have defined that the tangible elements can be associated with natural, cultural, gastronomic resources. The presence of intangible elements was also examined. Tangible elements can be associated with pleasurable experiences and the appeal to the senses. The presence or not of these attributes and the promotion of emotion may lead us to argue for an e-brand of a rural region.

The Rural Tour software online form includes components such as the brief description of the resource (60-70 words), with a possible reference to one photo. The resource is described in detail, with reference to one or more photos which have to be available online. Online references (link to Web Pages, photos, videos, etc.) and reference to other nearby resources takes place. Sources and bibliographic references, websites and other URL which are connected to the resource in reference need to be mentioned and listed. Association with google earth map is made for every web page of the rural tour project to help the visitors find the location. If there are other resources nearby (30-45 minutes from the resource in reference), the relevant resource codes should be entered (for example, the resource XYZ010 is close to resources XYZ022 and ABC030). Every web page has suggested routes that one may take (<http://www.ruraltour.org/kaernten>). Each tourism resource has been characterised by a series of varying attributes that are rated based on surveys carried out in the area or on the relevant literature pertaining thereto. For instance, a resource listed in "Leisure Time" and/or "Culture," is attributed with a "Name," (for example, the "Uffizi Museum"), and is attributed a "Brief Description," which is rated accordingly (for example, "One of the most famous museums in the world...etc..") (Bitsani & Kavoura, 2010).

In this paper, we argue that the creation of an e-brand presented in an organised, informative, yet entertaining form and its application for the e-branding of a region can promote the region of Carinthia, Austria or every rural region aiming to attract visitors and promote the destination image. We argue that the distinct characteristics of a region may combine natural, cultural and gastronomic resources

with rural tourism to create the brand destination of a region leading to the emotional projection of the region. If destination branding uses the internet as a strategic tool for promotion, then e-branding of rural tourism is enhanced.

Carinthia's e-branding: The dimensions of the identity/ Tourism resources-results

The central webpage is <http://www.ruraltour.org/kaernten>. There are topics such as "experience tours", "nature" and "accommodation" which share the same information interconnecting one with the other. Under the topic "accommodation", 22 farmers promote their accommodation farm holiday providing a picture of their accommodation farm, the prices and the resources that the region of Carinthia has to offer which are natural, cultural and gastronomical in the related 44 web pages which are the corporate websites analysed with different linked suggested experience tours, all incorporating a relevant picture.

Based on the rural tour project each of these linked web pages has the same structure: a typical picture of the tour, a title, contact information, a short text describing the area, a description of the experience tour and a googlemap locating the farm and the tour. There is also the callback-service where potential tourists may ask for additional information. The formation of the web sites included a picture with the distinct characteristics of the area, written text describing the area and suggestions about the routes one can follow as well as information about the accommodation and prices. The distinct characteristics of the region of Eastern Europe include crystal clear waters, scenic landscape. The tranquillity of the remote region and the idyllic environment are the distinct characteristics of the region.

The creation of all the sites in the same way and format is in line with the theoretical perspectives on the significance of the organisation of the site to attract customers, in our case, the potential tourists (Chen & Wells, 1999; Chen & Rodgers, 2006; Parker *et al.*, 2012; Stern *et al.*, 2002). We continue to analyse the messages given in these websites in order to examine whether informativeness and entertainment exist as the other dimensions described in the theoretical model of Chen and Wells (1999) but also to examine whether tangible and symbolic elements exist on the presentation of the region in an attempt to argue for the creation of the regional e-brand.

Results: Natural resources

The attractions within the destination are further discussed. Carinthia is the land of thousand lakes, situated between Tauren Ridge, the Carnian Alps and the Karawanken. The area under study is rural at its biggest part. The province of Carinthia is located in the Southern part of Austria to the West of Styria, bordering Italy.

Specifically for the spring and autumn seasons, 22 farms in the most diverse regions of Carinthia have put together a selection of individual offerings in close vicinity of their farms where the whole family can wind down and recharge their batteries—surrounded by beautiful natural countryside. Yet, slowing down does not mean being motionless, let alone uncreative.

The natural area of Carinthia includes the promotion of special forests, rural villages with flower paradises, Stenberg mountain is a star mountain, the untouched countryside, the unique natural landscape,

the purity of nature, magnificent mountain scenery, the highest free-falling waterfall in Europe, amazing fairytale alpine landscape, gorgeously tended gardens, Lake Weissensee and fjord like bays with international awards for its drinking-water quality, Lesachtal valley which is the most natural Alpine valley. Based on these results, the farms use adjectives and phrases that express goodness. In addition, they repeatedly use the names of the natural spots so as to create the e-brand.

It is found that since landscape is a vitally important asset, there is a general re-orientation in landscape perception from "spectacularisation" towards "multi-sensing" in a similar way with landscapes in Norway and the research conducted by Daugstad (2008). This is how landscape is experienced in the region of Carinthia. The senses are awake, they participate in order to fully enjoy the distinctiveness of the area. The satisfaction of the alternative tourist is mainly focused on the simplicity and authenticity of tradition, the local character of the agricultural businesses and the area as a whole (Lawson & Manning, 2002). What is on offer is not something that is extraordinary but something missing from everyday life of tourists, the return to the roots, the simplicity. In that way, we would agree with Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier, (2009) who analysed the mediation of tourist experiences for places that have virtually visited them and found that potential tourists preferred to move away from the different to the presentation of a simple everyday life to them.

As was expected from our core research questions, nature is promoted as a significant element on the websites for rural areas. These natural resources provide a tangible reference point for the destination, physical attributes and information about the brand (Balakrishnan *et al.*, 2011; Hall, 1999, p. 230; Kim, 1990, p. 60; Kotler, 1988, p. 463; Dens & Pelsmacker, 2010). Results also showed the significant presentation of culture as a rural tourism resource of the region and is presented next.

Results: Cultural and heritage attractions

The combination of nature with culture is a motif present in the web pages analysed in search for the way e-branding takes place for these areas. The cultural resources of Carinthia include the promotion of a chapel that was built in the 1920s, a Romanesque parish church built in 1258, Gasthof Pertl Carinthia's highest parish church, the Church of Saint Leonhard built in 1288, Saint Maria's Basilica monastery, Carinthian legends for birthplace of gods, fairyland gates, mysterious houses, mythical creatures, Saint Christophorus church. Based on the results, the farms mainly present the religious element of the region and the value of mystery when they promote soft values (<http://www.ruraltour.org/kaernten>). The farmers also promote the names of the spots in an effort to create the brand.

The promotion of culture is then another issue that is highly promoted for the region of Carinthia. The phrase "cultural heritage" is typical while another finding was the emphasis put on the promotion of sites with religious significance in the region such as churches and chapels or the use of "legends" and "myths" associated with religion. The region of Carinthia promotes its competitive advantage which incorporates elements of culture together with nature being in accord with literature review that argues how heritage resources may contribute to the destination image of a rural area (Dallen, 2005; Clarke, 2005).

These findings shed more light to the theoretical framework related to which tourism resources can be combined with rural resources since the literature has suggested more research to take place on whether the cultural landscape may be associated with rural tourism (McGehee *et al.*, 2010, p. 488).

Results: Local gastronomical resources

They also promote the herbs of the regions that tourists can use in a variety of ways: prepared as a salad or vegetable, as a seasoning, as tea, as juice, as herbal bath, as a cream. The farmers help the tourists to decide on their dishes or help them make their dishes and nourishment is a value that describes how farmers promote the local gastronomical resources. They describe the typical food of the region with their local names so as to create the e-brand.

Farms in Carinthia interconnect with each other with multiple results and a holistic brand model is created which creates another brand. Some farms put emphasis on the natural resources, while others put emphasis on the cultural or local gastronomical resources of the area under study. Whether natural, cultural or gastronomical resources are promoted, the names of the resources in the local dialect, as mentioned above, is emphatically stated. Literature highlights the fact that in order to create the brand, an element required is a name (Meenaghham, 1995). Table 1 presents the distribution of combined resources from the analysis of all the web pages that promote the guided experience tours in Carinthia.

Table 1
Distribution of combined resources presented at Carinthia's web sites

Combined resources	Number of farms	Percentage of farms (%)
Natural, cultural, local gastronomical	6	66,7
Natural, cultural	3	33,3
Natural, gastronomical	0	-
Cultural, gastronomical	0	-
Total	9	100,0

If we consider that imagining the landscape in order to create a powerful brand involves a synthesis of natural and cultural elements at a first level and then of human relations and economic activities (Sauer, 1984; Jackson, 1984; Clarke, 2005), the combination of resources presented promote a powerful brand. The promotion of gastronomical resources when promoting rural Carinthia, reinforces the issue that culinary experiences may be associated with rural tourism (Smith & Xiao, 2008, p. 290). Natural, cultural and gastronomical resources provide a tangible reference point for the destination, physical attributes and information about the brand (Balakrishnan *et al.*, 2011; Hall, 1999, p. 230; Kim, 1990, p. 60; Kotler, 1988, p. 463; Dens & Pelsmacker, 2010; Hwang *et al.*, 2003).

Results: Informative elements for e-branding/ Satisfaction of basic needs

The satisfaction of basic needs is offered with the information provided about a) prices and details about accommodation and b) booking can take place contributing to the tourist's satisfaction showing all the possible options he/she may have and their cost. All web pages provide the Callback-Service where the potential customer inserts the name, the email and the question he/ she has (<http://www.ruraltour.org/kaernten/section409>).

Accommodation is included in the basic needs promoted and means of transport as well as directions are provided. There are options for the tourist which are promoted in order to create the branding

of the area with the contribution of Rural Tour. When accommodation is described, the theme that prevails is the relaxation presented by business accommodation for body and for soul. Tables 2 and 3 summarize information for the accommodation prices from the participating farmhouses in the Rural Tour Project in the region of Carinthia where the letters symbolize the businesses with the order they appear on the web pages.

Table 2
Accommodation prices (lowest and higher) from participating businesses in the Rural Tour Project in Carinthia (in Euros)

Lowest price	Highest price	Lowest Price	Highest Price
a) 20	56	k) 29	80
b) 20	75	l) 29	143
c) 20	89	m) 30	75
d) 22	44	n) 30	100
e) 22	70	o) 40	125
f) 22	53	p) 44	110
g) 25	40	q) 43	70
h) 27	75	r) 45	140
i) 27	48	s) 48,80	48,80
j) 28	114	t) 52	65
		u) 52	60

Note: The letters before the numbers symbolize the participating businesses and their range in prices regarding accommodation prices.

Prices range depending on the room capacity and the time of the year one travels in the area and there is an obvious price variation that exists. The mean for the lowest and the highest price is 30 Euros and 81.5 Euros respectively.

Table 3
Mean for lowest and highest accommodation prices for participating businesses in the Rural Tour Project in Carinthia (in Euros)

Mean for lowest price	Mean for highest price
30	81,5

Considering Chen and Wells' model on attitude towards the web site that needs to be informative and organised (1999), emphasis put upon these dimensions. The provision of information about prices can be an information specific element allowing the brand to develop (Biel, 1997).

Results: Invitation for the participation of the tourists' senses and the emphasis on emotion

E-branding of Carinthia incorporates the invitation for the participation of the tourists' senses. Emphasis is put upon the uniqueness of the region and the soothing and calming role they may have on mind and soul.

Expressions related to the senses such as "see, smell, hear, feel, taste", the phrase "a wealth of sensations", "your senses will be especially addressed", "awaken your senses", "let nature cast its spell on you", exist in many of the web pages under study promoting the rural area of Carinthia (http://www.ruraltour/kaernten/detail/a_delightful_hike_in_lesachtal_valley_to_awaken_your_senses and http://www.ruraltour/kaernten/detail/strength_lies_in_calmness). They are used to inculcate feelings in people's minds. This is part of a process used to embellish the presentation of an area. They are used so as to make connections related to the emotional needs of the tourists.

The farms promote the resources they have in the area embellishing them with subjective emotional feelings. Thus, when the farmers – who play a significant role in the whole process of promotion of a destination brand as literature has suggested (Bramwell & Rawding in Saraniemi, 2009; Saraniemi, 2011; Parker *et al.*, 2012) – promote the natural, cultural or gastronomical resources, they argue that "all the senses participate", "the place conveys tranquility and equilibrium", "the region is a feast of senses and soothing to the soul", "one can find strength and calm", "it is a place for the re-energisation of self" (<http://www.ruraltour.org/kaernten>). This is the way the farms promote subjective emotions for the region and trust about the region. The consumer is the potential tourist in this project and he participates with his/ her senses and emotions. The use of the personal pronoun "you" is extensively used to connect the tourist with the area (<http://www.ruraltour.org/kaernten>).

Of the 44 experience tours promoted, all of them use the word "senses" either as a phrase "every one of your senses is being stimulated" or "this is a feast for your senses" to invite the tourist to participate, contrary to the findings of the literature which argue that informational strategies dominate Web sites (Strauss & Frost 2011). Table 4 indicatively presents the phrases promoting rural Carinthia in an emotional way in order to symbolically promote the region.

Table 4

Phrases promoting rural Carinthia in an emotional way (use of the word 'senses')

"Every one of your senses is being stimulated"

"Your senses will be especially addressed"

"A wealth of sensations"

"Awaken your senses"

"This is a feast for your senses"

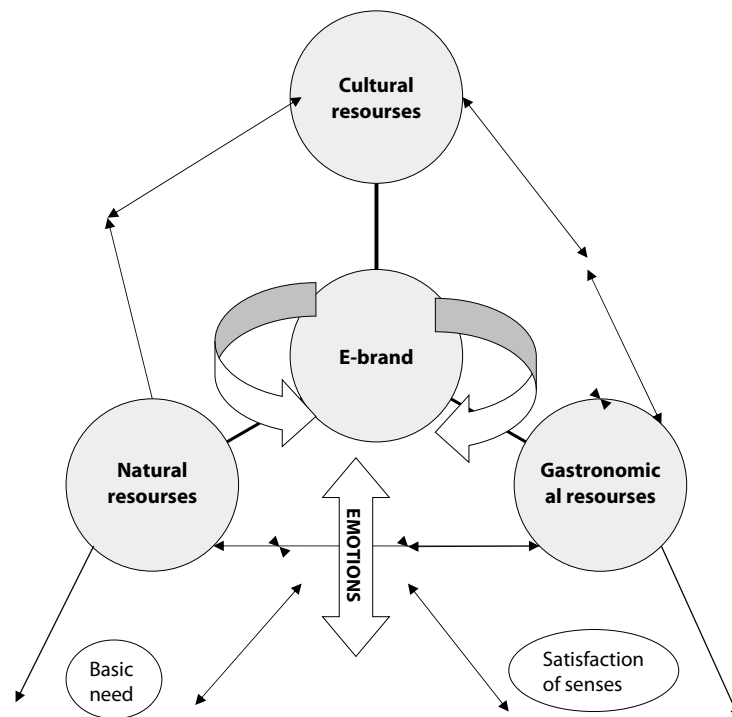
There is combination of cultural and natural elements of the local identity for rural areas which are promoted by stakeholders in a unified way. E-branding of Carinthia incorporates the promotion of its natural resources, cultural and heritage attractions, the invitation for the participation of the tourists' senses. The promotion of the experiences tourists will have when visiting the area is highly promoted.

There is promotion of basic and emotional needs that may be satisfied when visiting the rural region with the cultivation of feelings familiar to potential visitors so as to interpret the unknown. The third issue which emerges is the way web sites are structured so as the potential tourist are able to know the experiences he/she will have beforehand, valorising the local gastronomical products, incorporating a complete booking/ reservation facility to on-line users in order to be able to arrange their destination excursions, saving money and time.

Farmers provide the names for the resources their region has to offer in order to create the e-brand, which is of natural, cultural and/or gastronomical value. The e-brand that they aim to promote includes natural, cultural, gastronomical resources for the region of Carinthia that are name specific, are tangible while incorporate the element of emotion according to the netscape image communication model (Stern, Zinkhan & Holbrook, 2002); the tourist will enjoy, make a wish, test or train his/ her senses, elements which are intangible and subjective.

We conclude that the emphasis that is put upon the web site, apart from its organisational structure – all web sites have a similar description (Chen & Wells, 1999). That is the information provided – promotion of cultural natural and gastronomical resources, the entertaining side of the web site is also promoted via the promotion of emotion. Relaxation, projection of pleasurable memories then, may provide of an intangible reference point for the creation of the brand and the destination brand (Balakrishnan *et al.*, 2011; Hall, 1999, p. 230; Kim, 1990, p. 60; Kotler, 1988, p. 463; Dens & Pelsmacker, 2010; Saraniemi, 2011).

Figure 1
The Rural Tour e-Brand

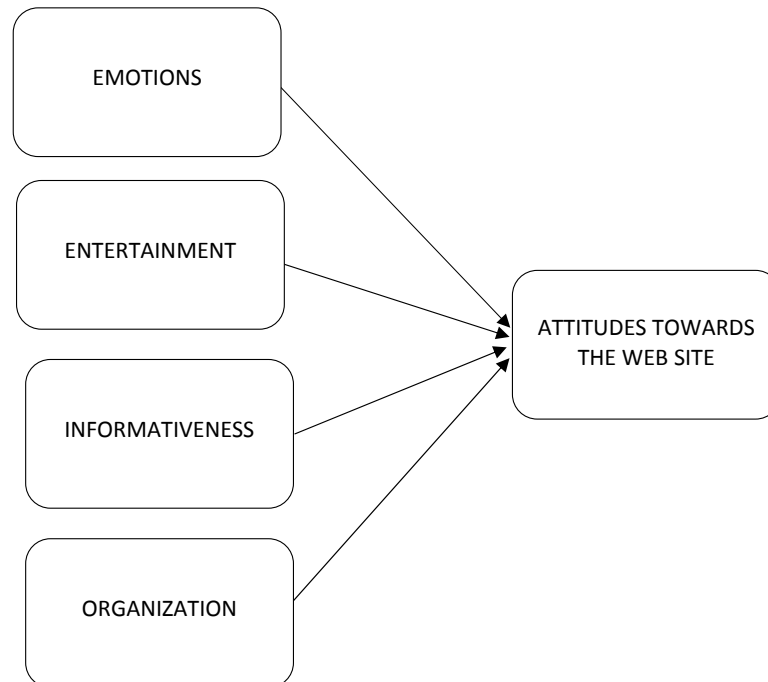


Emotion is the element that adds to the promotion of e-branding of rural tourism. In addition, Rural Tour Methodology introduces that element of the same structure that corporate web sites follow for the same region where co-ordination of farmers' activities create synergies. The model proposed in Figure 1 which presents the Rural Tour e-brand, is flexible so that each farmer promotes different aspects of the brand of the region and all farmers contribute to the creation of a coherent brand for the whole region.

We argue for the creation of a model about the destination branding, the provision of amusement for the destination place, the provision of guidelines or routes that can be followed through the webpages but also the format of the web sites which will lead the customer to the purchase behaviour are important for the creation of a positive image.

Then, Chen and Wells' model related to the attitude towards the web site (1999) from the point of view of the customer/ tourist could incorporate the element of "the appeal to the senses", "the satisfaction of the senses", in other words, emotion which can be included in the model or can explain entertainment more fully in relation to branding of a destination. Emotions and the sense of belonging to a community may allow the creation of strong bonds between people and activities and are further discussed in regard to place branding by Kavoura (2013b). The empirical analysis of the data for the creation of rural tour web sites and the promotion of e-brand of Carinthia, Austria led to allow for the element of emotion apart from entertainment, organisation, informativeness that Chen and Wells suggested (1999), as is presented next in Figure 2 which needs to be empirically tested and verified. Providers of the image of a region may co-produce experiences with consumers for the co-creation view of brands -a neglected area in destination branding literature (Saraniemi, 2011, p. 247).

Figure 2
Modified model of Chen and Wells (1999)



These functional attributes of place branding together with tangible attributes, create the brand image for places in combination with intangible and symbolic attributes and incorporates values (Campelo *et al.*, 2011, p. 4).

Results: The dimensions of the identity

The promotion of Carinthia was also found to include aspects of culture in combination with the natural capital, adding to the limited research that has taken place regarding this field (McGehee *et al.*, 2010, p. 488). In addition, this research sheds more light to the way rural tourism resources may provide information on the promotion of culinary tourism related to the natural environment of an area since little research has taken place to analyse how culinary tourism products can market and promote local regions (Smith & Xiao, 2008, p. 289-291). These consist of the tangible elements of a brand. Research has also reached conclusions regarding the promotion of the enjoyment of tranquillity, the search for peace and solitude, pure and simple lifestyle (Cawley & Gillmor, 2008, p. 317; Huang, 2006, p. 243). We argue that these are the intangible elements of a brand that are based on the tangible and interact with each other as a reference point for the creation of the brand and in the specific case the destination brand (Balakrishnan *et al.*, 2011; Hall, 1999, p. 230; Kim, 1990, p. 60; Kotler, 1988, p. 463; Dens & Pelsmacker, 2010; Saraniemi, 2011). These rural tourism resources, when combined, can bring forth the e-brand of the region. This latter, will be associated with the share of common interests and experiences, the development of new relations, the pursuit of fantasies, the exchange and transaction conduct (Siomkos & Tsiamis, 2004, p. 212).

The research proposes the rural tour e-brand for remote regions that takes place via the internet, has an organised structure when promoting the distinct characteristics of the brand of Carinthia (natural, cultural and gastronomical resources) and lead to the satisfaction of the senses in an informative and entertaining way (learn to collect herbs, prepare food, relax and get emotional and return back to nature and simple life).

Concluding remarks: RURAL TOUR e-BRAND a new model

The creation of a Rural Tour e-Brand favours the identification of the areas and also favours an effective strategy of communication and promotion at the international level. The common denominator that was found for the promotion of the region of Carinthia is the participation of the senses, the satisfaction that one can get from the simplicity of everyday life living behind the spectacular and the extraordinary which is the result of the promotion the distinct characteristics of the region, which include natural, cultural and gastronomical resources as part of the e-brand of the region.

In that way, the theoretical contribution of the paper is the specification of the variables that form knowledge structures familiar to the people thus, making it easier for them to become acquainted with the rural areas they have never met, offering yet, another way for the conceptualisation of e-branding with all the senses to participate forming knowledge structures that the tourist is familiar with for the promotion of subjective emotional values.

The aim of this paper was to examine how new systems of promotion are implemented to promote an isolated area like Carinthia in the framework of a holistic sustainable development. Within this framework we examined theoretically but also empirically the adoption of a theory through the RURAL TOUR program, the concepts and their relation, place branding- place marketing- local development, e-branding- destination e-branding and their relation with the concepts of nation and local identity and nation branding as well.

The techniques of competitive identification and marketing techniques may be very useful when a product or a service is sold (this is the reason why tourist advertising campaigns may in fact be effective), yet, places and countries "are not for sale". According to Anholt (2010) there are some reasons for that:

- a) there is not a unique agent which exerts so much control in a place (city, region or country) as is in a business;
- b) even the smallest village is more complicated from a big company;
- c) places do not have a unique and unified aim, owing to the fact that social institutions of a place mainly have to do with the rights and not with obligations.

That is why we need to abandon the idea that the competitive identification with a place is a form of marketing, on the contrary, it is a new approach related to the management of places in the economic development and the international relations.

This new approach though, allows us to use the most modern techniques of marketing in order to promote and sell the tourist product which emerges from the specific place and its people and is the result of the combination of all the material and immaterial resources, human related and non-human related. Then, such a combination is applied on the internet and e-branding and e-marketing are being transformed to the best ambassadors and advertisers of the region and its identity, of the state and the national identity which includes and incorporates these regions and actions as a whole.

On the other hand, it has been proven that tourism, apart from its own contribution in development, should be seen as a necessary vehicle for the promotion of local quality products not only within a country but internationally in the global environment. Thus, local identity and the branding of this region consists of a powerful element for its consolidation and its reputation all over, yet, at the same time, for the maintenance of its local identity and the method of its sustainable development; these characteristics contribute to have fame and brand name and demand will exist for them. In that way, a competitive advantage will be constructed in relation to other regions, but also simultaneously reinforces the unique elements of its identity. This is exactly the unique identity that we need to seek for a sustainable development of local and national economy.

We also found that a website may include experience and emotions and the role of the providers of this information is important in doing so. Apart from being informative, organised and entertaining (Chen & Wells, 1999), a website may provide elements of emotion and the model can be applied to rural tourist destinations. More research can take place for other tourist destinations. Elements associated with rural tourism such as the emphasis put on nature and natural resources (Cawley & Gillmor, 2008, p. 317; Huang, 2006, p. 243) have been found to be significant aspects promoted in the web sites of Carinthia.

Without transforming the unique characteristics of Carinthia, we integrate them in contemporary reality and with information and communication technology as a tool and e-branding, we preserve tradition as a whole and we communicate it to the rest of the world. In that way, the use of technology does not come into contrast with the past and its maintenance but is transformed to one of its supporting mechanisms. Proliferous local economies develop based on quality and professionalism and the participation of their people.

This long term financial sustainability can be realised if, subsequent to an initial investment, the tourist initiatives are capable of generating a positive flow of funds to ensure an enduring success of the initiative itself because research has shown that such actions are no longer active beyond the funding period (Evans & Parravicini, 2005).

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Submitted: 03/23/2013

Accepted: 08/27/2013