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Challenges of branding in post-conflict countries: The case of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Abstract

Country branding, by which the authors imply the management of identity and image, that is, strategic communication with the global audience, is an omnipresent phenomenon. Studies have confirmed that a country's positive image is reflected in its international economic and political position. Therefore, various communication strategies, techniques and branding tools have been developed and applied by many countries. However, these strategies and techniques are not necessarily applicable for branding divided and post-conflict countries. For this reason, the paper is deals with the challenges, opportunities and methods of communication and branding Bosnia and Herzegovina, which, even twenty years after the end of the war, is still synonymous with an unstable state and a divided society. It provides an adjusted branding methodology based on an analysis of the elements of identity around which there is a consensus of all three ethnic groups - Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs, and reveals the possibilities upon which the modern brand of an European Bosnia and Herzegovina can be built. The authors pay special attention to the role of Bosnia and Herzegovina's citizens and argue that their perceptions and attitudes towards Bosnia and Herzegovina – as well as their mutual communication – have significant, if not crucial, role in the development of a branding strategy.

Key words: branding; war; country; post-conflict countries; divisions; image; identity; tourism; Bosnia and Herzegovina

Introduction

In today's globalised world every country strives to capture attention and gain respect on an international level. The purpose behind this desire for international acclaim and recognition is essentially economic. No country in the world can be deemed successful and politically and economically sound if it does not endeavour tooth and nail to place its products on foreign markets, to attract foreign investment and if it is not a desirable expat destination. Most countries use a synergy of public relations, public diplomacy and marketing campaigns to create a positive image of themselves in order to stay globally competitive.

Nations are making increasingly conscious efforts to hone their country branding in recognition of the need to fulfil three major objectives: attract tourists, stimulate inward investment and boost export (Dinnie, 2008). Some authors, like Anholt (2006, 2007), believe that the strategic management of identity and image can certainly help undeveloped, transition and less known countries to strengthen their respective economies, create their own brands and find an easier way to reach consumers around the world without mediators.

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Many European transition countries, after the fall of communism, started to search for ways to present their identity, values, tourism and investment opportunities to foreign publics (see: Hall, 2004; Kaneva, 2014; Taylor, 2013). This is succinctly pointed out by Szondy (2011, p. 294): "After the fall of communism, Eastern Europe countries underwent radical economic and political change. The transition involved a systematic identity and image transformation as well and public diplomacy has played a significant role in this process."

It has to be pointed out that the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina was extremely ruthless and many issues that underlined the conflict remain unresolved and the country is still divided along the ethnic lines so that[1] "….not even local authors hesitate to say that Bosnia and Herzegovina is a country under an international protectorate or trusteeship" (Kasapović, 2005, p. 15). Since 1995, billions of dollars of assistance have been allocated to the physical reconstruction of the war-damaged country (Taylor & Kent, 2017). While there has been progress made in rebuilding the infrastructure of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and some success in keeping the three ethnic groups from renewed fighting, the civil society initiatives still show mixed results (Belloni, 2001). The international community has made certain sporadic efforts to impose the spirit of unity and cooperation on the three constituent nations of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but such efforts have yielded no results. Clearly, the negative attitudes about each other, often escalating into hatred and preventing the strengthening of mutual trust cannot simply be "swept under the carpet", as the representatives of various international institutions have tried to do.

One of the obstacles to the branding of Bosnia and Herzegovina is the negative perception of the Balkans, where the country is located, as Hall pointed it out: "Positioned on the western edge of the Islamic world, the Balkans, a term loosely conterminous with South-eastern Europe, is a region that has been subject in recent history to largely pejorative image constructions in the West" (2004, p. 117). Aware of this obstacle, international aid organisations have funded country branding ten years ago. This first attempt was to through tourism. In 2008, it was branded as a travel destination with the support of USAID and Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) using a slogan ''Enjoy life''; all brand toolkits to ensure consistent tourism promotional activities and the unique visual identity were developed, but it was implemented partially (Skoko, 2017, p. 23).

The inability to successfully brand Bosnia and Herzegovina as a tourism destination is not surprising given that the country was not able to reach a consensus on the official flag and national anthem (with no lyrics, in order to avoid different interpretations and associations with one ethnic group or another). Taylor and Kent pointed out to the importance of this top-down approach: "Public relations has played many roles in post-war Bosnia. The one-way communication tactics of media relations, public information, nation branding, and publicity have dominated" (Taylor & Kent, 2017, p. 16). The use of one-way tactics also made sense in the early stages of nation building; Bosnia was at the beginning of the nation building process and it needed foundational communication processes to be created (Taylor, 2000b in: Taylor & Kent, 2017, p. 16).

Kasapović noted over a decade ago that "the Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs still have not reached the minimal consensus on the fundamental values and standards of their coexistence – a necessary basis for establishing and functioning of a democratic political order" (2005: 15-16), is still present today. Therefore, the central issue addressed in this paper is how to brand conflict and post-conflict multi-ethnic countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina which, on the one hand, have the need for such a breakthrough and, on the other, lack basic conditions for successful branding, most of all a common national identity (Smith, 1991).

Literature review and theoretical framework

Until recently, the image of a country and its influence on its political and economic position in contemporary international relations remained a rather neglected area of scholarly research. However, recent years have witnessed the publication of a significant number of research papers dealing with these issues, showing that the power of image delivered through communication channels becomes increasingly important in the globalized society and has a direct impact on the success of a country and achievement of its national goals. In this process, the role of public relations is becoming increasingly important, not only in the nation branding processes, but also in the strengthening of national unity and creation of identity as a prerequisite for branding. This is particularly manifested in post-conflict societies such as Bosnia and Herzegovina (Somerville, Hargie, Taylor & Toledano, 2017). Public relations, argue Taylor and Kent (2017, p. 12) offers a valuable lens through which to view the nation building process, and they believe that the type of choice of public relations applied in nation building is dependent on the level and type of existing relationships in the nation.

The explosion of nation branding practices since the mid-1990s has coincided with an explosion of publications by academics and branding practitioners alike which attempt to theorize, codify, and legitimize these practices. The majority of scholarly work on nation branding to date has been produced within the field of marketing and tends to focus on instrumentalist concerns, related to advancing branding applications. Nation branding has also attracted the attention of public relations scholars (Dinnie, 2008) and it is further discussed in reference to international relations (Gilboa, 2008; van Ham, 2008) and public diplomacy (Szondy, 2008; Wang, 2006, 2008; Kaneva, 2014, p. 4).

In addition to studying national identity as the basis of a nation brand, modern nation branding relies on several theoretical concepts. One of the most researched areas related to the power of image is the so-called 'country of origin' concept. The literature in this area shows that consumers develop stereotypical images of countries and/or their products, which consequently influence their purchase decisions (e.g. Nagashima, 1970; Papadopoulos & Heslop, 1993; Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2006; Papadopulos & Heslop, 2000).

In international relations, image plays a significant role. This fact is clearly reflected in a given country's political position in the international arena. That position then translates into the ability of a country to realize its economic and social potential. This is confirmed by numerous authors, such as Dinnie (2008), Anholt (2007), Jaffe and Nebenzahl (2006), Kunczik (1997), Martin and Eroglu (1993), Papadopoulos and Heslop (1993) and others. The same and other authors directly link investment to the image with an increase in income from tourism and investment (Anholt, 2004, 2007; Dinnie, 2008). "A positive place brand encourages inward investment, and tourism is a magnet for talent (both new immigrants and returning members of the diaspora), and if properly managed can create a renewed sense of purpose and identity for the inhabitants of the country, region or city" (Anholt, 2004, p. 28).

Forming a national image is a multifaceted process and influenced by numerous factors. The type of information predominantly available to audiences abroad and the type of information in question that facilitates or hinders the process of creating a positive image is one of the most important factors in this process. At the other end of the spectrum, there are factors involving the mentality of the population, especially in the context of different ethnic or religious groups. Stereotypes may play an important role in creating a national image, since these tend to linger for decades and even centuries (Anholt, 2007). Changing the image of a country is a much more demanding and complex project than changing the image of a product or a corporation. Stereotypes about countries are mostly long-lasting and can be

hardly changed, but on the other hand they are remembered easily. "Most country images are stereotypes, extreme simplifications of the reality that are not necessarily accurate" (Kotler & Gertner, 2004).

The concept of brand management or country branding has its origins in the management of commercial brands and corporate branding, which have functioned in the market for over a century. "Nation branding can be provisionally defined as the result of the interpretation of commercial and public sector interests to communicate national priorities among domestic and international populations for a variety of interrelated purposes" (Aronczyk, 2013, 16). Destination branding can be also considered a part of the nation branding. It is a vital management function, but researches have mostly been focused on the formation of destination images. Although countries very often have tourism branding as their primary goal, a growing number of countries have in the past years carried out overall branding of countries as tourism, economic, cultural etc. brands,[2] which requires strategic communication, surveys and two-way communication with target audiences. Kotler, Haider and Rein (1993, p. 142) argue that strategic image management is a continued process of surveying a country's image among its audience, disintegration and targeting of its specific image and its demographic audience, positioning its advantages in such way that they support the existing image or create a new image, and communicating these advantages to the target audience.

Public relations is an important part of nation branding because PR can be compared to public diplomacy. Signitzer and Coombs (1992) discuss that objectives for both PR and public diplomacy are similar which leads to natural convergence of these two fields (1992, in Wang, 2006, p. 93). Volumes of literature and research on transition-country branding attempts have been published over the last few years (eg. Kaneva, 2014; Szondy, 2006, 2009; Aronczyk, 2007; Skoko, 2017). For example, Kaneva (2014) deals with the phenomenon of marketizing national identities in Central and Eastern European countries. Dwyer, Tomljenović and Čorak (2017) are analysing Croatia as a new European tourist brand. Somerville et al. (2017) analyse the role of public relations in post-conflict societies. In the chapter on former Yugoslavia they particularly address the nation branding phenomenon, focusing on Bosnia and Herzegovina. They analyse the experiments by the international community to improve the country's stability and strengthen its unity by using public relations campaigns.

Communication is a central part of nation building because mediated communication channels act as relationship building tools that bring citizens together and, in times of crisis or threats, can help to unify them (Taylor & Kent, 2017, p. 15). Such is the case with Bosnia and Herzegovina, a former Yugoslav republic and now an independent state. After a bloody and devastating war (1992 - 1995) and instability caused by a political crisis over the last twenty years, it is still unstable and divided multi-ethnic society. At the same time, Bosnia and Herzegovina is trying to solve these challenges to become a stable democracy and a brand among the countries of the modern world (Skoko, 2017, p. 21).

Challenges of post-conflict country branding

There are various concepts of country branding, but they all start with a definition of a country's identity. In his *Conceptual model of nation-brand identity and image*, Dinnie (2008, p. 49) sees the following components as crucial for the nation-brand identity: history, language, territory, political regime, architecture, sport, literature, art, religion, education system, icons, landscape, music, food & drink and folklore. Communicators of nation-brand identity are: branded exports, sporting achievements, the diaspora, marketing communications, brand ambassadors, cultural artefacts, government foreign policy, tourism experience, prominent personalities… Audiences in nation-brand image creation are:

domestic consumers, external consumers, domestic firms, external firms, inward investors, governments, media (Dinne, 2008, p. 49).

National identity plays a key role in nation branding. Communication campaigns create national identities that allow a nation's people to think together and act together. The rhetorical construction of a national identity is a foundational step in the nation building process (Taylor & Kent, 2017, p. 15). An awareness and understanding of the core features of national identity are prerequisites for developing nation-branding campaigns, as the essence of any nation-brand derives not only from the country's companies and brands but also from its culture in the widest sense – language, literature, music, sport, architecture and so on all embody the soul of the nation (Dinnie, 2008, p. 111). Anholt also stresses the importance of national identity. In his opinion, "national identity and nation brand are virtually the same thing: nation brand is national identity made tangible, robust, communicable, and above all useful" (2007, p. 75). The hexagon of Competitive identity by Anholt (2007, p. 26) is made up of tourism, brands, policy, investments, culture and people.

There is no universal template for nation-branding strategy, as nations have only relatively recently engaged in nation branding and are exploring different strategies for achieving their nation-brand goals (Dinnie, 2008, p. 219). However, Dinnie (2008, p. 220) does mention some of the principles of the strategy, such as: strategic analysis (internal and external) – *Where are we now?*, strategic planning – *Where do we want to go?,* and strategic implementation – *How do we get there?* As crucial branding tools he mentions: nation-brand advertising, customer and citizen relationship management, nation-brand ambassadors, diaspora mobilization, nation days, the naming of nation-brands and nation-brand tracking studies. The branding strategy of Kotler and Gertner (2004) has five steps: The country needs to carry out a SWOT analysis to determine its chief strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. It then chooses industries, personalities, natural landmarks and historical events that could provide a basis for strong branding and storytelling. Then, an umbrella concept that would cover and be consistent with all of its separate branding activities is developed. Among possible concepts could be a country of pleasure, quality, security, honesty or progress, or other concepts. The country then allocates sufficient national funds to each branding activity deemed to have a potentially large impact. Finally, the country creates export controls to make sure that every exported product is reliable and delivers the promised level of performance.

Clearly, there is a rather strong agreement about the steps comprising the country branding process. Different branding strategies mostly contain the following strategic starting points: formulating the identity of country, defining the image of a country, defining the architecture of the brand, identifying the most important moments of truth of a brand and creating the communication strategy for the new brand. However, it is perfectly clear that the branding process, regardless of the specific steps and techniques that it uses, also implies certain conditions such as a consensus on national identity, citizens' similar views on the past and present, common values, distinctive export products and similar. Bosnia and Herzegovina and many other post-conflict countries lack a number of these preconditions, which makes the process of their branding seemingly impossible.

Unfortunately, research and studies on the phenomenon of the branding of post-conflict countries are scarce while, at the same time, the branding of such countries has become a pressing need. Balkans is especially interesting in that context. "Whether the newly independent countries of the Balkans will effectively move beyond their histories of violence and succeed in establishing successful, sustainable tourism industries, depends greatly on the degree to which all participants are fully and collaboratively engaged in the branding process – an option that remains problematic for economies and political

systems still in transition from socialism and the terrorism of war to tourism" (Ringer, 2004). Since the classic branding models fail when it comes to post-conflict countries, the question arises: Is it possible to brand a country in a situation like that (torn apart by social and territorial divisions)? There can be, in spite of all challenges, an attempt to do so, but with much more sensibility for the views, opinions and feelings of individual nations or groups formerly in conflict in order to probe if there are common elements of identity on which the country's future brand could be built. What seems to be important in such cases is the "view from the outside" – the neutral opinion of tourists, investors, or diplomats regarding their perceptions of what the country's assets are. Those perceptions are the good starting point for building the country's image. Since people all over the world tend to remember countries by the latest major event they have heard of (Anholt, 2007), it is essential for the branding of post-conflict countries to offer to the world a new, different image of themselves – an image that would redirect the attention from war and conflict to the country's specific advantages and special qualities. Therefore it is challenging to change the image of Bosnia and Herzegovina considering that the war in this country happened recently. "The image of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the world is still under-mined by the recent war, while its multicultural spirit, natural beauties, film, sports and its historical heritage are not utilized enough" (Pulic, 2015, p. 313). In addition, there should not be hesitation to use commercialization of war memory: "Even war memories are encouraged to be repackaged and sold as tourist practices to strengthen the local economy which is viewed as intrinsically tied to social betterment" (Volcic, Erjavec & Peak, 2014, p. 739). But it is certainly much more important to reco-gnize the elements of the country's potential, especially those that are perceived in a positive light by, both, national and international audiences and present them in a way that caters to those perceptions.

Since Bosnia and Herzegovina lacks the unique national identity (Kasapović, 2005; Skoko, 2010; Kaneva, 2014; Duraković, 2009; Taylor & Kent, 2017), the aim of the study reported here was to identify some common ground between the identities of its three divided and, until recently, clashing peoples. This "common" identity is a starting point for the branding attempt. Furthermore, as the mutual trust among its citizens has been shaken, as well as their trust in the state, it is a situation where public relations can have a crucial role – primarily in establishing two-way communication between the institutions and citizens and between the country's three constituent nations (at all levels – from their institutions and media to non-governmental organizations and interest groups). This is a strong starting point to initiate dialogue, reach understanding for the expectations and needs of the others and establish a cooperation – a prerequisite for joint efforts in the branding. The third level would be a "view from the outside" – an independent "filter" of and judgment by the representatives of foreign target audiences that are familiar with this country and can identify the most attractive aspects of its identity and its offerings. After these initial steps, one of the usual branding strategies – slightly modi-fied – could be applied.

Methodology

Since a consensus of Bosnia and Herzegovina's three nations is required at the beginning of the brand-ing process, we focused on the separate views of the country's three constituent nations and tried to identify their common ground– how they perceive their country and its future. In this regard, we defined the starting points for branding Bosnia and Herzegovina:

1. What are the elements of the country's identity on which there is a consensus between all three constituent nations?

2. What are the elements of identity that each nation feels to be their own (close to them) and that they are proud of?

3. What are the integrative factors and communication channels intended for strengthening of unity and cooperation on the creation of the new brand?

4. What are the items bringing about substantial divisions and disagreement between the three constituent nations (*taboo subjects*)?

5. Is there consensus regarding the desirable future image of Bosnia and Herzegovina?

6. Testing the relevance of particular elements of identity as regards target audiences, competition, developmental strategies and the desired future image.

The sample

In order to fulfil objective of the study, a research design was developed combing qualitative and quantitative approach - a population survey (or first level research) with focus groups (second and third level). Using random sample, stratified by nationality, information from 1,200 respondents aged 15 and above (citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina – Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats) was gathered. Data was collected via telephone in November 2013. The close-ended questionnaire consisted of four sections collecting information on their mutual relationships, their views of the country and the key elements of their identity and the desired image. Their perception was analysed through four key dimensions: 1. Perception of one's own country – the key determinant of identity, 2. The best integrating factors for bringing together and cooperation of the Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs for the benefit of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 3. The best factors for restoring the lost trust between the Croats, Bosniaks and Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 4. Bosnia and Herzegovina's major assets for creating a new brand in terms of its identity potential. A complete survey report was previously published in Skoko (2013).

On the second and third levels, focus groups were conducted with experts. The second level research was conducted with experts in tourism, marketing, economy, culture, public relations and media from different parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The experts were actively engaged in projects that represent and promote Bosnia and Herzegovina. The focus group was organized in Banja Luka in February 2016. The aim of this focus group was to list all elements – as extensively as possible – by which Bosnia and Herzegovina should become recognizable internationally and to define what best symbolizes the identity of the country and its three nations that could at the same time attract foreign audiences. The third level research (focus groups) included eleven foreign experts – tourist agents, investors, journalists and officials who have experienced Bosnia and Herzegovina, to determine which parts of the country's identity are attractive to foreign audiences. The focus group was organized in Sarajevo in May 2016.

Given the complexity and differences in the identities of the three constituent nations and the complex identity of Bosnia and Herzegovina (denied by many due to deep divisions in the society and the fact that elements of the identity have been imposed by the international community), we are creating the "Identity Triangle of Bosnia and Herzegovina" for easier understanding of situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It shows that the fact that the country consists of the three separate identities of Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs is the country's asset; in the areas where the identities touch, overlap or are identical, we find the basis for the future brand of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Figure 1
Identity triangle of Bosnia and Herzegovina
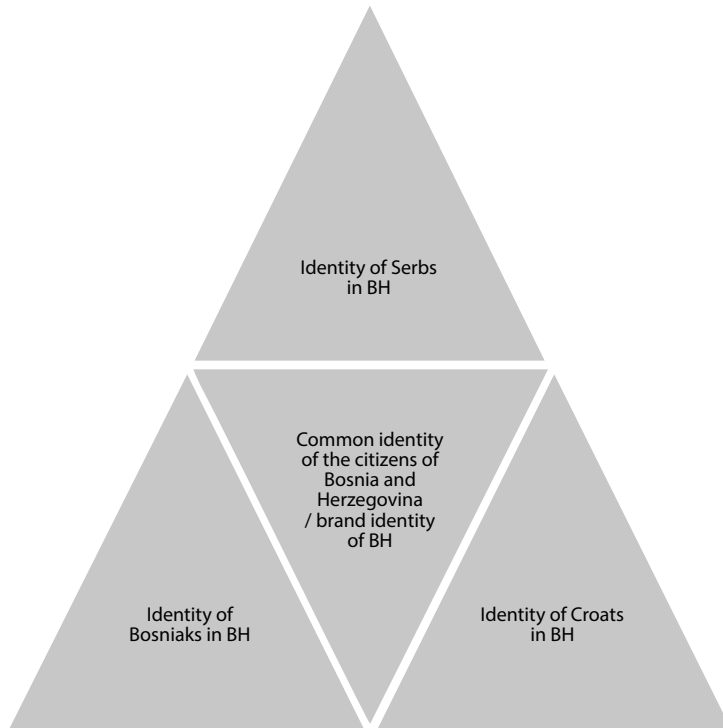
Source: Author's figure

We then discussed the overlapping, adjacent and shared elements of identity with domestic experts, who present and "sell" Bosnia and Herzegovina as part of their daily work. This was done in order to determine the most useful and attractive elements of that identity. Then we discussed the mentioned elements with foreign experts who are well acquainted with Bosnia and Herzegovina (some of them work there, some do business with its corporations, some got to know it as journalists or diplomats etc.). We used their insights as the final test for choosing an image of the country that would attract the greatest attention of foreign audiences. The transcripts of the discussions of both focus groups underwent a qualitative analysis and the most represented subjects were identified.

Results and discussion

The surveys conducted among the citizens have indicated rather dramatic relationships between the three nations and a negative perception of their own country. These can be summarized in the following points: lack of consensus on the past, present and future of Bosnia and Herzegovina; dissatisfaction with the functioning of the country as it is; lack of a common goal and vision; a high level of mutual distrust; mutual perception encumbered with stereotypes from the past and the recent war. For example, when it comes to defining their country, two pictures are predominant (Table 1): a state of three constituent nations (38% of Bosniaks, 32% of Croats and 36% of Serbs) and a divided state with no future (24% of Bosniaks, 37% of Croats and 31% of Serbs). Bosniaks mostly consider it a multiethnic European state (27%) and Serbs see it as a state under the care of the international community (20%).

Table 1
Perception of one's own country – the key determinant of identity (%)

Variable	Nationality		
	Bosniaks	**Croats**	**Serbs**
A multiethnic European country	27	14	12
A state of three constituent nations	38	32	36
A divided country with no future	24	37	31
An Islamic state in the heart of Europe	6	2	5
A state under supervision of the international community	12	16	20
Other	1	1	3
I don't know	1	7	5
N	400	400	400

However, despite all the obstacles, the surveys indicate there is a will among the respondents from all three nations to overcome the divisions and start cooperating with one another in a viable manner. For example, the survey has shown (Table 2) that the best integrating factors for bringing Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs together are: trade and doing business together (41% of Bosniaks, 37% of Croats and 40% of Serbs) and joint cooperation at work and making friends (45% of Bosniaks, 37% of Croats and 40% of Serbs).

Table 2
The best integrating factors for bringing together the Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs for the benefit of Bosnia and Herzegovina (%)

Variables	Nationality		
	Bosniaks	**Croats**	**Serbs**
Trade and doing business together	41	42	48
Culture and cultural cooperation	22	25	21
Tourism and travel	11	11	10
Politics	16	10	10
Sports	19	13	10
Joint cooperation at work and making friends	45	37	40
Other	5	5	5
N	400	400	400

The two determining factors considered by all respondents as the best factors for restoring the lost trust between the three nations (Table 3): better politicians on all sides and Bosnia and Herzegovina's admission to the European Union. There is no consensus as regards other factors. For example, while Bosniaks think their country would have a better future if the entities were abolished and if more power were given to the central government, Serbs and Croats believe that the solution to the country's problems lies in federalization and creation of three separate entities with distinctive ethnic majorities.

Table 3
The best factors for restoring the lost trust between the Croats, Bosniaks and Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina (%)

Variable	Nationality		
	Bosniaks	**Croats**	**Serbs**
Efforts of ordinary people	13	16	12
Better legislature and a more equitable constitutional system	20	17	15
Better politicians on all sides	37	41	34
Abolishment of entities and giving more power to the central government	29	4	14
Creation of Croat, Bosniak and Serb entities	1	11	12

Table 3 **Continued**

Variable	Nationality		
	Bosniaks	**Croats**	**Serbs**
Bosnia and Herzegovina's accession to the European Union	29	23	35
Other	1	2	5
I don't know	2	4	5
N	400	400	400

However, despite all the differences, we have established, through the focus groups, that there are elements of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian identity on which there is a consensus which all three nations consider their own and are proud of and which could, at the same time, be attractive to foreign audiences:

• Natural attractions and natural diversity,

• Rich cultural and historical heritage,

• Local mentality and way of life, straightforwardness and hospitality,

• Local cuisine,

• Shared historical figures,

• Multicultural society (where the three religions and cultures meet),

• Common cause against the Axis powers and Axis sponsored regimes during WWII (*some of the most important battles that anti-Axis guerilla groups fought in WWII took place in Bosnia and Herzegovina*).

The following assets were recognised as the country's trump cards in terms of creating a new brand in the context of focusing on the possibilities stemming from how the citizens of the country perceive their own shared identity: hospitability and friendliness of the country's people (24% of Bosniaks, 29% of Croats and 21% of Serbs), natural beauty and geographic diversity (19% of Bosniaks, 21% of Croats and 25% of Serbs). Most people agree that the multicultural character of the country (Bosnia and Herzegovina is a point of contact between Christianity and Islam, and between Catholicism and Orthodoxy) is an asset rather than a liability. Also, most people agree that the potential inherent in the country's rich cultural and historical heritage (from the medieval Kingdom of Bosnia through the era of the Ottoman Empire to modern day achievements) has been ignored.

Table 4
Bosnia and Herzegovina's major assets for creating a new brand in terms of its identity potential (%)

Variables	Nationality		
	Bosniaks	**Croats**	**Serbs**
Mentality, hospitality and friendliness	24	29	21
Natural attractions and geographical diversity	19	21	25
Multicultural society – a place where different religions and cultures meet	18	10	12
Geographical position	5	7	6
Rich and underexploited cultural heritage	12	8	9
Tourism potentials and attractions	6	7	7
Friendly neighboring countries – Serbia, Croatia...	16	18	19
N	400	400	400

The correlation analysis indicated a high positive correlation of the respondents' (Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs) perceptions, with a 1% significance level. The high correlation coefficients confirm that the research has identified the key elements of the consensus between three nations, based on which Bosnia

and Herzegovina can be branded. The analysis of the answers (N=41) entered into the questionnaire by the respondents (N=1,200) shows that – as far as ethnic background is concerned – the opinions of Croats and Serbs correspond the most (0.955), while Bosniaks' correlation with the other two nations is negligibly lower (Croats - 0.919; Serbs - 0.890). The departure of the Bosniaks' perception from that of other nations can perhaps be explained with the assumption that Bosnia and Herzegovina is the only homeland for Bosniaks, while Croats and Serbs have their "real" or "spare" homelands – Croatia and Serbia, respectively (Kasapović, 2005), and thus have a slightly different perception of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The results of the correlational research show a high positive correlation with a 1% significance level as regards the age of the respondents, too. The respondents' age did not substantially influence their perception of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The highest correlation coefficient can be found between the group of respondents from 31 to 44 years of age and the group of those from 45 to 59 years of age (0.965). As for the lowest correlation coefficient, it can be found between the group of respondents from 31 to 44 years of age and the group of those above 60 years of age (0.843). It may indicate that the "older ones" and the "younger ones" – due to their different perspectives – may have different visions of Bosnia and Herzegovina's future.

By analysing the transcripts from the session of the focus group of local experts, we isolated twelve areas within which the participants had specified the elements of the country's desired identity and the notions that should make it distinctive in the world. Some of the presented arguments referred to the obstacles to branding. We have grouped them into thirteen categories. There is a number in brackets for each area, specifying on how many individual attributes or great assets within each category a consensus was reached – some kind of consensus was reached in the discussion:

- Cultural destinations (locations, museums, galleries, religious buildings, institutions etc.) important for the identity and, potentially, for the promotion of Bosnia and Herzegovina (42).
- The greatest figures of Bosnian history who could serve as a basis for the country's distinctiveness in the world (41).
- Individuals or groups (regardless of their field) who could best represent modern Bosnia and Herzegovina and promote it to a global audience (35).
- Major natural attractions of Bosnia and Herzegovina that should be better promoted and that should make the country distinctive in the world (31).
- Events regularly taking place in Bosnia and Herzegovina *(cultural, entertainment, religious, traditional etc.)* which could potentially grow into regional and global events (31).
- The main symbols of Bosnia and Herzegovina that could be a long-term distinctive feature of the country and its people as perceived by the rest of the world (30).
- The most specific qualities (comparative advantages) of Bosnia and Herzegovina in comparison with other European countries (27).
- Historical sites in Bosnia and Herzegovina that should be additionally protected and promoted as they could contribute to the country's global distinctiveness (26).
- Bosnian products that could become competitive in the global market and thus contribute to the promotion of Bosnia and Herzegovina (26).
- The adjectives that best describe Bosnia and Herzegovina (21).[3]
- The most important elements of Bosnia and Herzegovina's identity that can be perceived as common for all three nations (17).

- Bosnian cities boasting high-quality tourism offerings or having a potential for its improvement (11).
- The main obstacles for the branding of Bosnia and Herzegovina and for improvement of its image in the world (61).

The first focus group helped us gain insight into the specific identity-related "supply" of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its greatest assets for branding. Interestingly, cultural destinations account for the largest number of notions; they are followed by great historical figures, famous people and natural attractions. Although the participants were experts – and they took part in the discussion regardless of their ethnic or regional background – we should assume that even their *bona fide* approach was rather subjective. This is why the second focus group consisted of foreign experts was conducted; the idea was to additionally "filter" the above mentioned potentials and advantages. In the discussion, we selected from the notions obtained through the first focus group the most significant elements of identity and symbols (around which there is a consensus among Bosnian citizens and between domestic and foreign audiences)[4]. Then we grouped all the obtained arguments about Bosnia and Herzegovina as a potential brand and defined six crucial theses put forward by the participants. The numbers in brackets indicate how many times a particular thesis was repeated in that or similar form. Next to each thesis some interesting quotes that illustrate it are given.

- Bosnia and Herzegovina is an undiscovered and unknown European country (31); "*The war, and the legacy of war, diminishes the country's potential and advantages. Many Europeans perceive Bosnia and Herzegovina through negative stereotypes but they don't know anything about the country. This country has more potential than, I dare to say, any other country in Europe. Some European politicians think they can learn pertinent facts about the country by reading books penned by Ivo Andrić, who was awarded the Nobel prize for literature in 1961. When some of my British friends from London visited the country I took them on a road trip through Herzegovina and they were astounded by the beauty of the region. Unfortunately, people in the West still associate Bosnia and Herzegovina with war. People somehow seem to think the war still hasn't ended despite the fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina draws ever more tourists every year. It is a shame Bruxelles is not aware of how rich this country, in terms of potential, it really is…*"

- The diversity of religions, cultures and identities, abused for new divisions and conflicts during the war, should be turned into Bosnia and Herzegovina's key asset (27); "*Bosnia and Herzegovina is unique in the sense that it is the meeting point of three great religions. It has been for centuries. People here need to be thought that multiculturalism is cool! This country was in the grips of a vicious civil war only two decades ago. Now, people belonging to different ethnic groups and subscribing to different religious beliefs are cooperating again. Bosnia and Herzegovina is a kaleidoscope of different religions and cultures.*"

- Bosnia and Herzegovina is a beautiful country, with exceptional natural attractions and diversity. (26); "*Tremendous geographic diversity! Surprisingly beautiful country. This country is tailor made for adventure tourism. I was astonished by the country's beauty. The rivers and canyons are more beautiful than anywhere else in the world. Not many people in Europe are aware that Bosnia features great climatic diversity; there are snow capped mountains, lush valleys and the Adriatic sea …*"

- Bosnian people, their mentality and their way of life are the country's special quality and asset (23); "*I was actually afraid to relocate to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Now, wild horses couldn't tear me away from these wonderful people. People here lead a stress-free lifestyle. They are extremely hospitable, in all parts of the country. Nobody is in a hurry here, everyone has time for relaxation over a cup of coffee. People in this country know how to enjoy life. Most folks are by no stretch of the imagination well off but everyone is eager to share the little wealth they have, even with complete strangers. They live in harmony with nature. Their sense of humor is disarming…*"

- Bosnian politicians, the way the country is organized and the wrong moves of the international community are the major hindrance for its potential branding (22). "*For years now all three constituent nations have been discontent and restive. Bosnia and Herzegovina is led by incompetent and irresponsible politicians concerned only with their own venal gains! The politicians in power are not even aware how important a country's image is in today's world. The country's diplomats are morons. The ministry of foreign affairs is a sham. The efforts of representatives of various international organizations have made a bad situation catastrophic. They behave like the East India Company's representatives in the British Raj. They now bugger all about the country. Political patronage is ubiquitous in this country and professionals and competent people are a dying breed. The public sector is a mess and the governing structure of the country is geared towards repelling foreign investment, especially in relation to those projects promoting ecologically safe and sustainable development…*"

- Underdeveloped infrastructure and tourist supply and the citizens' low awareness of environmental protection and protection of cultural heritage are thwarting the efforts to increase the distinctiveness of Bosnia and Herzegovina (18); "*The roads are terrible, despite the fact that many projects to rectify the situation are, officially at least, in progress. The population is oblivious of ecological issues and everybody is in the habit of dumping their garbage into the country's beautiful rivers. Most people in this country don't realize that there is a thing called cultural historical heritage, let alone that Bosnia and Herzegovina's historical and cultural heritage is uniquely rich. They are hooked on diminishing their own values, traditions and potential and on glorifying what they think is the western way of life. The three constitutive nations have to learn to live together and work together and forgo jealousy and factionalism. The hospitality industry does not exist in this country. Bosnians and Herzegovinians are not aware of what they have and consequently they can't realize the country's potential. Some of the most beautiful cultural monuments are piles of rubble now and nobody seems to care.*"

In general, while not having reached a consensus on the political present and future of their country, the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina have shown they are not only familiar with the country's assets and possibilities, but also objective when it comes to perceiving its competitive advantages. Another positive finding is the fact that the participants belonging to three different nations showed a willingness to communicate and cooperate with members of the other three nations. The research has also helped us identify the areas that have the potential to bring the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina together, regardless of their ethnic background. These areas should have a special role in the branding process. Owing to the citizens' willingness to consider the positive elements of the identity of other peoples, we have created an ample base of possibilities that Bosnia and Herzegovina could use in building its recognizability. The focus groups carried out among national and foreign experts additionally "filtered" the elements with the highest potential for creating a new common identity, or brand, of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The foreign experts in question approached this matter critically, and for that reason not only were we able to perceive or define what this post-conflict country has to offer in terms of its assets and natural and other attractions, but we were also able to define the obstacles in the branding process. Some of their considerations indicate that the governing structures (the representatives of the international community included) are neither capable of initiating and implementing the branding process nor do they have the credibility required for it. It would therefore be wise if an initiative for it came from the business sector. Interestingly, however, we managed to facilitate a consensus in terms of public opinion at home and abroad on the key elements of the country's identity, which clearly indicates the potential and attractiveness of the elements in question. And since the citizens manifested a minimum of unity, good will and readiness for cooperation – necessary for the beginning of a successful branding process and more active cooperation on turning Bosnia and Herzegovina into

a tourism brand – clearly the ball is now in the court of political institutions, business sector and non-governmental organizations. If no concrete progress in terms of necessary political reforms and economic recovery takes place in the country, there is a possibility that the above mentioned potential will melt away, leaving the citizens on the brink of new conflicts.

Conclusion

As stated at the outset, very little research has been conducted about the possibilities of branding post-conflict countries – the ones that until recently have only been mentioned in the international media in the context of wars, ethnic strife and the like. Even after a conflict, most of these countries are still plagued by divisions in their societies, non-functioning state institutions and, often, deep wounds resulting from ethnic or political conflicts. Bosnia and Herzegovina is an example of a post-conflict country. Deep divisions between its three constituent nations and impotent government and political institutions are still present, even twenty years after the Bosnian War. At the same time, the need for branding is growing on a daily basis because private entrepreneurs are trying to sell their products in international markets, tourism organizations want to attract new tourists and the government wants to attract investments etc. Moreover, in such post-conflict countries, the branding process could boost an optimistic trend of rethinking and defining a new identity, focusing on crucial advantages and possibilities etc. and thus contribute to the creation of new ties among the citizens and strengthening of the state.

However, due to tense interrelations and the citizens' sensitivity about their own and other identities, this process should be approached with much more caution than usual. This is why, in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it was important to find common ground between three nations, as well as such elements of identity that they all share and on which a new brand could be created. This led us to a model we named "Identity Triangle of Bosnia and Herzegovina". It explains not only the complex nature of identity in this country, but also the possibilities. Although seemingly non-existent, exceptional possibilities for creating a new Bosnia-Herzegovina brand were discovered in the second and third phases of the research. They primarily rest on the local mentality and way of life, friendliness and hospitality of the local people, natural attractions and the cultural and historical heritage that reflects the country's multicultural nature (Bosnia and Herzegovina as a place where Christianity meets Islam). It was also important to "isolate" the subjects on which there was no consensus between the three nations, so that they could be avoided when creating a new brand (e.g. the responsibility for the war and its consequences), thus not hindering the efforts.

It was also necessary to establish the preconditions and possibilities for the strengthening of mutual communication and cooperation, since therein lies the very basis for the strengthening of political, cultural, economic and all other relationships between the citizens, nations and entities. Based on the research conducted, we came up with proposals for identity development possibilities and key footholds for the creation of a new brand of Bosnia and Herzegovina, attractive enough to neutralize the effects of the war on the country's image and present it in a whole new light.

The conducted research can be considered a kind of pilot-research for a concrete attempt at (re)branding Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as a kind of model that can be applied in other post-conflict countries. In the paper, we tried to demonstrate that there is a need to change the image of this country, that is, to brand and create added value for its economy, culture, tourism and other efforts… Furthermore, we attempted to demonstrate the existence of possibilities and conditions for such a project to be realised in spite of the war legacy and the presence of political divisions. However, the realisation of such a

project in large part depends on the will of the political actors, who in recent years have rarely shown their preparedness to achieve a consensus on the progress of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Notes

[1] "The signing of the Dayton Accord in 1995 ended the war, but the country was irrationally divided in two territorial entities – Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (where Bosniaks and Croats live) and Republic of Srpska (ethnically cleansed during the war and populated mostly by Serbs). In reality, the two entities – plus Brčko District – function separately, with very little consent about the common interests of the country. At the same time, Croats in the Federation – as the smallest constituent nation – are not in a position to control their own destiny because their political, social and economic aspirations are, as a matter of course, overruled by the Bosniak majority." (Skoko, 2010: 37).

[2] British "GREAT" campaign is a good example of such an approach. See more at: https://www.gov.uk/britain-isgreat.

[3] resilient, poor, devastated, solidary, relaxed, unknown, innovative, beautiful, natural, spontaneous, straightforward, hospitable, sociable, entertaining, laid-back, quarreling, undeveloped, Balkan, multiethnic, slowed-down and coarse.

[4] These are the fifty most attractive brands of Bosnia and Herzegovina, obtained through a discussion: traditional Bosnian dishes – ćevapi (from Banja Luka, Sarajevo and Travnik) and burek; medieval gravestones (stećci); the Old Bridge and historical core of Mostar; Baščaršija in Sarajevo; Blessed Virgin Mary's sanctuary in Međugorje; Olympic Games in Sarajevo 1984 and the mountains where the Olympic events took place (Bjelašnica, Jahorina, Igman); old fort Kastel in Banja Luka; sevdalinke (traditional love songs); Sarajevo Town Hall; Turkish bridge in Višegrad (described in Nobel laureate Ivo Andrić's novel The Bridge over the Drina); Gazi-Husrev Beg Mosque in Sarajevo; Franciscan monasteries throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina; "Pyramids" in Visoko; Tuzla salt mines; special types of cheese (Livno and Travnik cheeses and the one made by Trappist monks in Banja Luka); Bosnian humor; Sarajevo music scene; film industry of Bosnia and Herzegovina; blend of cultures – mosques, Catholic and Orthodox churches and synagogues (Sarajevo dubbed as "European Jerusalem"); Partisan battles and German offensives from World War II – memorial sites surrounded with beautiful nature (Neretva, Sutjeska, Drvar, Igman and Kozara); Sarajevo Film Festival; traditional jumps from Old Bridge in Mostar; World Youth Festival in Međugorje; Jajce – former royal city and the birthplace of Socialist Yugoslavia in 1943, with a unique waterfall; Travnik – the old Ottoman town; Perućica Forest – the largest preserved virgin forest in Europe; the canyons of Rivers Neretva, Vrbas and Tara; Lake Rama; writers Ivo Andrić, Branko Ćopić, Meša Selimović, Antun Branko Šimić, Mak Dizdar, Aleksa Šantić and Petar Kočić; painter Gabrijel Jurkić; Herzegovinian wines produced from indigenous varieties žilavka and blatina; Kupres Field and nearby ski runs; Hutovo Blato Nature Park – the last remaining Mediterranean swamp; medieval castle in Blagaj; source of River Buna and the Dervish monastery; medieval Bobovac Castle near Vareš – the capital of Bosnian kings; Roman settlement Mogorjelo near Čapljina – the most beautiful ancient site in Bosnia and Herzegovina; stone town of Počitelj; Bosnian mountain horses and wild horses of Livno; Troy in Gabela (alleged site of Homer's Troy – according to Mexican archaeologist Roberto Salinas Price); Vlašić Mountain; Kravice Waterfall near Ljubuški; Bosnian rugs; century-old mining tradition.

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