

THE AMBIGUOUS IMAGE OF LINZ: LINZ09 – EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE

Elitza IORDANOVA-KRASTEVA
Buckinghamshire New University, U.K.
Elitza.Iordanova@bucks.ac.uk

Eugenia WICKENS
Buckinghamshire New University, U.K.
Eugenia.wickens@bucks.ac.uk

Ali BAKIR
Buckinghamshire New University, U.K.
Ali.Bakir@bucks.ac.uk

ABSTRACT

The importance of destination image is widely recognised for its significant effect on the behavioural intentions of visitors. As such, efforts to build and/or improve destination images are critical to the success of destination tourism development. An important prerequisite for the successful long-term destination image improvement and promotion is the knowledge of tourists' perceptions of the attributes of the destination's image. This paper seeks to obtain this particular knowledge and to provoke discussions by contrasting the projected image of Linz as a tourist destination promoted by its policy makers with the perceived image held by Linz's potential tourists in the context of the European initiative, "Cultural Capital of Europe" 2009.

This paper juxtaposes the results of Linz's 2008 image monitoring survey conducted by its policy makers (consisting of closed questions completed by a sample of domestic visitors) with an exploratory online survey conducted by the authors of this paper. This latter survey was designed to capture the image components of Linz using open ended questions and a convenient sample of domestic and foreign potential tourists to Linz.

KEYWORDS

Destination Image; Linz; European Capital of Culture.

INTRODUCTION

The significance of tourist destination image has been broadly acknowledged as it correlates with people's perceptions of a place and can affect the destination selection process (Gartner, 1993), tourists' behaviour in terms of revisit and recommendation (Echtner and Ritchie, 2003; Bigne, Sanchez and Sanchez, 2001), and the levels of experienced satisfaction (Hose and Wickens, 2002; Chon, 1990, 1992). It has also been established that destination image influences the earliest stage in the decision making process by encouraging individuals to form expectations and assumptions about the destination prior to their actual experience of it (Fakeye and Crompton, 1991). Baloglu and Mangaloglu (2001) argue that destinations mainly compete on the basis of their perceived image relative to those of their competitors. Hence, identifying the destination image held by its tourists is an essential prerequisite to discover its strong and weak attributes (Chen and Uysal, 2002).

Bramwell and Rawding (1996) discuss the current projected and received place images in the place marketing literature (Kotler, Haider and Irving, 1993) by using the destination image formation model proposed by Gunn (1972). This model consists of 'organic', 'induced' and 'modified induced' images. The organic image is based primarily on information assimilated from non-touristic, non-commercial sources and the opinions of family and friends. The altered, induced, image is formed through accessing additional, more commercial sources of information; whereas the modified induced image is based on first hand information and destination experience.

Bramwell and Rawding (1996) describe projected place images as the ideas and impressions of a place that are available

for people's consideration. They may be created deliberately as the result of marketing efforts (induced image) or they may emerge without premeditated planning and from information sources not directly associated with the destination (organic images). The interaction between these projected images and the tourist's own needs, motivations, prior knowledge/experience, preferences, and other personal characteristics, form the received place images.

Baloglu and Brimberg (1997) have analyzed destination image in terms of an individual's mental representation of knowledge, beliefs, feelings, and global impressions about the destination. The cognitive component of destination image is related to the tourist destination's attributes – the beliefs and knowledge one holds regarding a destination (White, 2004). The affective component expresses the emotions (e.g. pleasure, excitement) that a tourist destination is able to evoke in individuals (Martin and Bosque, 2008; Baloglu and Brinberg, 1997) or an individual's feelings about a destination (White, 2004). Baloglu and Brinberg (1997) also suggest that the sum of both perceptual (cognitive) and affective components create a destination's overall image.

Echtner and Ritchie (1993) propose a model of destination image that consists of attribute-based and holistic components that are made up of functional (the more tangible aspects of the destination) and psychological (the more intangible aspects) characteristics. These researchers also argue that destination images can be arranged on a continuum ranging from traits which can be commonly used to compare all destinations to those which are shared by very few destinations, and could include unique features, events or 'auras/atmospheres' (e.g., the aura of the Vatican, the mystique of Nepal).

Since it is generally recognized that tourists use both cognitive and affective dimensions in the process of destination image formation (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999), marketing

campaigns may have to stress both the physical attributes of a place, and the amalgam of emotions and feelings that it is able to evoke in the tourist's mind (Martin and Bosque, 2008). Furthermore, current studies (Pike, 2002; White, 2004) suggest that destination image research may also benefit from exploring both the cognitive and affective dimensions. Pike's (2002) review of 142 destination image papers from 1973 to 2000 shows that only six studies took into consideration both the cognitive and the affective image components. Similarly, White (2004) finds that past studies have concentrated on items that represented respondents' perceptions of the more physical characteristics of a destination rather than exploring both cognitive and affective dimensions (see for example, Baloglu and Mangalolu, 2001; Baloglu and McCleary 1999; MacKay and Fesenmaier, 2000). Martin and Bosque (2008) thus posit that a tourist destination image should be recognized as a multi-dimensional phenomenon that includes not only beliefs or knowledge about the place's attributes, but also the individual's feelings toward the destination. Emotions, White (2004) declares, are better predictors of destination visitation and customer purchase intentions than the more commonly used cognitive component.

In addition, Martin and Bosque (2008) urge destination image researchers to pay attention to the role of cultural values, as individuals' perceptions could be filtered by the preconceptions engendered by the culture of their country of origin. Cognitive and affective destination image components may also be distorted by sociocultural stereotypes caused by cultural and physical distance (Baloglu and McCleary 1999; Tasci, Gartner and Cavusgil, 2007). A study conducted by Martin and Bosque (2008) partially supports the proposition that the shorter the cultural distance between destination and tourist, the more favourable the cognitive/affective image of the tourist destination. Hunt (1975) and Scott, et. al., (1978) also find that destination image formation is determined partly by

geographical distance from the destination; people are more likely to have visited the places near their homes or gathered information about particular destinations through the mass media or from friends and family.

Significant in destination image research is the fact that the number of studies using structured methods (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999) outweighs the number of studies utilizing unstructured ones (Reilly, 1990; Perdue, 2000; Jutla, 2000). Pike (2002) reports that the majority of the 142 papers he examined used structured techniques. In a structured method a variety of general image attributes are specified and integrated into a standardized instrument, whereas in an unstructured method, the participants are allowed to more freely describe their impressions about a destination. Both approaches have advantages and disadvantages that have to be considered when designing a particular research project. For instance, structured methods are easy to administer, simple to code and the results can be analysed using sophisticated statistical techniques (Marks, 1976 in Echtner and Ritchie, 1993). However, as structured methods focus their attention on destination image attributes, where respondents are asked to evaluate a list of previously selected attributes, they fail to capture the holistic and unique components of a particular destination. This disadvantage is neutralized by the unstructured method which allows the holistic components of a destination image to be captured. Nevertheless, capturing the image's holistic components still depends on the participants' verbal and writing skills, and their willingness to share their opinions and knowledge about a particular destination. It can, therefore, be argued that in order to explore all the components of a destination image, both structured and unstructured methods need to be employed (Echtner and Ritchie, 2003; Iordanova-Krasteva and Wickens, 2008).

LINZ: A CASE STUDY

The European Capital of Culture (ECC) Initiative

The ECC initiative was launched in 1985 by Melina Mercouri. Its main aim is to bring the member states closer together through the “expression of a culture which, in its historical emergence and contemporary development, is characterized by having both common elements and a richness born of diversity” (European Commission, 1985). The ECC has earned itself a reputation as a platform for sharing the diverse cultural wealth in Europe, attracting enormous attention and public interest. The competition for recognition as a capital of culture is so severe that it compares to that for the Olympic Games nomination (Richards, 2000)

The majority of hosting cities exploit the ECC to: improve the international profile of the city and its region, attract visitors, enhance pride and self-confidence, promote themselves and their countries as cultural centres, and take a solid place on the cultural map of Europe (Palmer/Rae Associates, 2004). However, Bologna (2000), Bruges (2002), and Genoa (2004) used the ECC to transform their images; for example, to move from superficial tourism towards contemporary cultural tourism and to renew or regenerate their image.

Linz’s Bid

Linz is Austria’s third largest city with a population of 190,000. The intention to develop Linz from an industrial city to a future-oriented cultural and technological city was underpinned by a Cultural Development Plan in 2000. The consequent establishment of technology and new media

businesses, open spaces, the ‘Independent Art Scene’¹, “culture for all”, along with the lively, well developed cultural infrastructure provided an exceptional starting point for the city’s desire to host the ECC. Three big hallmark events are considered as the cultural trademarks of Linz and dot its cultural calendar: the International Street Artist Festival, the Ars Electronica Festival, and the Linz Cloud of Sound (Linz Culture, 2009).

The nomination of Linz (the capital of the province Upper Austria) for the title of European Capital of Culture ((Linz09), was submitted in 2004. The main focus of its presentation was on its attempts since 1985 to change itself from an industrial to a high-tech cultural city. Linz’s representatives, therefore, presented the Austrian town as a creative, cultural and dynamic one, having worldwide significance (The Selection Panel for the European Capital of Culture 2009). Linz’s authorities think of the ECC as a project that:

“is endowing its [Linz’s] image with interesting new contours ...offers a big chance – already during the lead-in to the big year but especially during the time thereafter ... for an ambitious cultural program and for tourism marketing. Linz09 has the potential to significantly increase international awareness for this city....” (www.linz09.at).

Developing this line of thought, Martin Heller (2008), the artistic director of Linz09, argues that:

“...Linz will be the most interesting city in Austria in 2015. That may sound utopian to many, yet it is also imaginable within the logic of contemporary reality. For Linz is already an interesting city today. A city with a brisk pace, a city that enables, an unconcernedly solution-oriented city, a social

¹ Independent Art Scene consists of alternative cultural initiatives (initiatives that are not integrated in public institutions) as well as small, independently working artistic teams

model city, a rural city, a wealthy city, a globally open-minded city. And a city where culture, industry and nature can enter into a symbiosis like hardly anywhere else...”

This ambitious mission statement is provoked by Linz’s image problems not only because of its association with Hitler, being the place where he grew up, but also because Linz, despite its diverse cultural life, has always stood in the shadow of Vienna and Salzburg. The objectives, however, required to realise this ambitious vision are two-fold: firstly, to give international audiences an idea of what Linz is all about and secondly, to change the clichéd stereotype of Linz as a blue-collar town of chimney stacks (Linz Europa Tour 2007 – 2009).

Linz’s Nazi Past

The panel evaluating Linz’s bid to host the ECC Event recommended that a display of material relating to the city’s history in the context of the Third Reich would be a real benefit and should be included as part of the programme (The Selection Panel for the European Capital of Culture, 2009).

Adolf Hitler was born in the outlying village of Braunau and only grew up in Linz. Linz is ‘Hitler’s town’ in the same way that Salzburg is Mozart’s. During the Nazi period Linz was transformed from a small town into an industrial city with a potential to become a cultural metropolis on the Danube as Hitler had planned. After 1945 the main concern of the Linz’s authority was to distance the city from Nazi culture and Hitler, highlighting traditionally humanist cultural values (Cultural Development Plan 2000). Traces of the Nazi’s past, however, are still part of everyday life in Linz – in the appearance of the so-called ‘Hitlerbauten’² and in the materials used for buildings - Mauthausen granite was paid for with the lives of concentration camp prisoners (Mission Statement, 2009).

² Cheap homes that Hitler built for industrial workers

Linz's policy makers have decided to accept the challenge to exploit, rather than to ignore, the most disgraceful associations of the town. For many people Adolf Hitler is one of the last names that would be expected to be incorporated into a destination promotion campaign. Visitors to Linz can explore Nazi remnants in the town, for example, by watching footage of survivors being led through a residential area or by visiting a former underground aircraft factory that was part of the Mauthausen/Gusen concentration camp complex. Ulrich Fuchs, the deputy manager of Linz09, says with regard to the Hitler issue, that:

".....whenever you come to Linz in the coming year, you will find something related to this topic. We are not sweeping Hitler under the carpet."

The point of view of Martin Heller, the artistic director of Linz 2009, is similar to that of Fuchs. He stated that:

"...the only way of dealing with Hitler is to be completely honest..."

The director of the Upper Austrian State Museums, Peter Assmann, recognized that an exhibition about Linz's Hitler past might be seen as going too far, because Hitler's legacy is still a very difficult and sensitive topic, but he says that:

"I don't see any glorification of Hitler in the exhibition. Hitler is fact, so we just face this fact and we face it with many arguments..." (Pierce, 2009).

Linz's Projected Image

The organizers of Linz09 conducted Linz's image monitoring survey and presented the results approximately six months before the official start of Linz09. This survey had several objectives: to identify the position of Linz amongst its direct competitors – Graz, Innsbruck and Klagenfurt; to

uncover the image held by the respondents, and to find out how strongly Austrians support Linz hosting the ECC.

The sample consisted of three groups – 500 non-local Austrians, 500 people living in the Province of Upper Austria, and 513 citizens of Linz. For the purposes of this paper, however, only the responses to those questions related to the image of Linz are considered.

One question sought to elicit respondent's spontaneous associations with Linz and the answers among the three groups of respondents were very similar. They all firstly associated Linz with its tourist sights (most frequently, Poestlingberg, the main square, the old town), and secondly with its cultural life (most frequently, the Brucknerhaus /Anton Bruckner/Bruckner Festival, the Ars Electronica Centre, the Cloud of Sounds, the Lentos Museum, the Pflasterspektakel and even the ECC). Thirdly Linz was associated with its shopping facilities.

Another question was designed to find the attributes of Linz, and was phrased thus:

“I will read out several attributes and your task is to say which attributes fit which city - Linz, Innsbruck, Graz or Klagenfurt. One attribute can be applied to one, several or none of the cities”

Linz was described as an industrial city (89 respondents), modern (65), with attractive cultural range (61), friendly city (60), high tech oriented city (59), famous for digital art in Europe (56), dynamic (56) and an interesting city (53).

Being closed in structure, the preselected sets of answers to these two questions predisposed an individual's answers. The resulting responses therefore represent “vox auctoritas” rather than “vox populi”. The survey missed the opportunity to reveal a more comprehensive and nuanced account of the image of Linz which might have been held by these respondents.

More worrying is the fact that, even though Linz's authorities are aware that "*Linz09 has the potential to significantly increase international awareness for this city....*" (www.linz09.at) and aim to make Linz "*...the most interesting city in Austria in 2015*" (Martin Heller, 2008), international tourists were not included in this image monitoring survey. Nor did the survey design allow respondents to express their opinions, feelings, and perceptions of Linz. It is also of note that the predetermined responses did not allow respondents to express a view about Linz's recent historical past, despite the recommendation of the ECC evaluation panel and the Linz authorities' response to that recommendation.

Methodology

As the first stage of a broader study, the authors of this paper conducted an online survey (January to March 09) consisting of three open-ended questions. The main aim of this survey was to acquire an exploratory knowledge of Linz's cognitive and affective image components, and gain a better understanding of the multidimensionality of its image. A link to the online survey was posted on the homepage of Linz09 and on several online platforms for travellers.

Open-ended questions were used, allowing respondents to share their feelings and perceptions of Linz. This approach also eliminates the likelihood of a particular type of research bias that can arise with predefined sets of answers (Jenkins, 1999). The online survey was aimed at both repeat and first-time domestic and international tourists.

The rationale for this preliminary study was to gain qualitative data that will inform the design of a structured questionnaire to be administered in the field as part of the second stage of this study.

Analysis

The total number of responses was 88, of which 74 were completely filled in and analyzed. Because of the small number of respondents, this study is only exploratory. The majority of the respondents (55 individuals) were international potential tourists of Linz from: Great Britain, Germany, Switzerland, Portugal, Italy, Cyprus, France, Poland, Bulgaria and the USA. 51 % of respondents were female and 49 % male, and there was a reasonable age distribution.

The first question focused on respondents' spontaneous associations with Linz, aiming to capture the overall image of Linz as a tourist destination. This question was answered by the majority (59) of the respondents. Only two Austrians (11%) left the question unanswered. For 13 international respondents (23%), however, Linz did not evoke any particular association, neither knowledge or beliefs nor feelings or emotions.

The majority of respondents mentioned that Linz is in Austria and near the River Danube, which means that Linz, on the one hand, benefits from its "umbrella mark", Austria, as being a popular and favourite destination for many people; and suffers, on the other hand, from being overshadowed by the "big names" in Austria - Vienna and Salzburg. For example, one Bulgarian respondent wrote: "*I associate Linz mainly with music and with the New Year concert of the Vienna philharmonic orchestra*". Other concurring respondents stated: "*... Linz is in Austria, usually they have lots of monuments and museums, therefore, I associate it with cultural and historical heritage and of course traditions!*"; "*I associate it with nothing else but with Austria...*". This coin has a reverse side, however, as respondents wrote: "*Linz is small, old-fashioned Austrian town, nothing else!*", and "*Linz is nothing else than a small town near the Danube*".

Linz's richness of monuments and museums, Pöstlingberg (a mountain), culture, history and traditions also emerged as spontaneous associations with Linz in respondents' minds. They, however, failed to mention any particular museum or monument. Traditional cuisine as part of Linz's culture found its place in the answers: "*I associate it with delicious chocolate and Austrian traditions, and probably with provincial lifestyle...*", and "*with its symbol – the Linzer Cake*". Only two respondents (Austrians) wrote that the European Capital of Europe 2009 represents their association with Linz.

Music also contributed to the spontaneous associations with Linz: one respondent said that Linz is "*...a centre of live music and arts...*" and another associated Linz mainly with Anton Bruckner³ and Dennis Russel Davies⁴.

Indications that Linz is still paving its way from an industrial to a high-tech cultural city could be found in some of the answers: "*unfortunately my first association with Linz is with the steel industry in the town...*". It is of particular interest that the steel industry was mentioned only by Austrian respondents.

Two domestic and two international respondents mentioned Hitler as the first association with Linz and its dark history - a woman from France wrote: "*the first word that comes to my mind is Hitler?*", and a man from Austria: "*I think, I associate this town mainly with Hitler and his "view" of the world...*".

The next question sought to elicit information about the feelings and emotions evoked by Linz as a tourist destination. The main reason for this question was the authors' concern that

³ Anton Bruckner is a famous composer born in Linz

⁴ Dennis Russel Davies is an American conductor and pianist currently working in the Brucknerhaus in Linz.

the physical characteristics of a place are evoked and instilled into an individual's mind more easily than affective associations (Echtner and Ritchie, 1993) and therefore would probably prevail in the answers to the first question and so distort the paper's findings.

For 22 of the respondents (9 Austrians and 13 international), Linz does not arouse any feelings or emotions and the answers were neutral at best: "...*nothing, even though I live in Austria I do not know much about Linz*".

However, to the majority of respondents, Linz brings to mind more positive than negative feelings or emotions. Linz evokes feelings and emotions in tonality: "...*beautiful, modern and enjoyable*", "*one single word – home, sweet home...*", "...*love, happiness, party*", "...*nostalgia for my childhood*", "*day-dreaming*", "*joy, pleasure*", and even "*curiosity*" and "*wish to visit it*".

On the other hand, more negatively oriented answers were given by a few respondents, who sketched a profile of Linz as being boring, cold, unpleasant, and "...*darkness and poverty like in the books of Dickens...*". The assumption that Linz benefits or bears negative consequences from the "umbrella" of Austria was further evidenced by some respondents: "...*Austrian order, therefore unpleasant feelings*", "*unpleasant emotions, order and discipline*", and "*I cannot really say...probably Austrian?*". It is interesting to note that respondents who mentioned Hitler as a spontaneous association had more positive than negative feelings about Linz. Respondents who did not have any other associations with Linz apart from being an Austrian town near the Danube, mentioned negative feelings and emotions such as boring, dark, and unpleasant.

The final question was asked to elicit some of the attractions of Linz based on respondents' knowledge about Linz. 27 of the international respondents said that they do not have any particular knowledge about Linz, and some of them added also that they have never been there, whereas only one Austrian wrote: "*nothing particular in fact*". For others, the ancient origin of Linz, Hitler, and its culture are linked: "*...originated in the place of the ancient Rome town Lencia, it should become Hitler's capital city*" and their knowledge about Linz is "*...Austria, Hitler and rich in cultural events*".

21 international respondents mentioned different cultural events in Linz (Bruckner festival, Cloud of Sound, International Street Artist Festival), museums (Lentos, Ars Electronica Center). Frequently used words/phrases include; cultural life, cultural heritage and/or historical heritage and traditions. The number of respondents who mentioned Hitler increased to 7 (only one was Austrian), thus making the assumption that knowledge of Linz's association with Hitler is not necessarily a negative factor in the formation of the overall image of the town. Two respondents (one international and one Austrian) mentioned the European Capital of Culture 2009, and one Austrian wrote: "*Linz is the European Capital of Culture 2009 and I am sure they will show the beauty of Linz!*". The River Danube also found a place in the answers: "*...it's perfect for chilling out in the sun at the Danube...*", and "*the old Danube, playing with the sunset*".

Although the sample was small, the open ended questions, although online and with limited space for answering, offered the researchers more than a glimpse of the unadulterated Linz through the eyes of its potential tourists. Through these answers, the authors were able to elicit Linz's unique characteristics and to understand its individuality. This is based on a mixture of Hitler, the steel industry (whose roots can be traced back to the Nazi's period), the Ars Electronica Centre, the Lentos museum, the Postingberg, Anton Bruckner and the

Brucknerhaus, live music and modern arts, the River Danube, Linzer Cake and chocolate, the amazing architecture and the well-preserved old town, as well as its ancient origin and cultural and historical heritage. These unique characteristics of Linz appear to influence Linz's affective image components, making it for the majority of respondents a pleasurable, enjoyable and modern place.

CONCLUSION

What emerged from this limited study suggests that there is a difference between the projected image of Linz as promoted by the officials and its perceived image as seen by the respondents. This tentative finding suggests that better understanding of destination image can be reached by listening to the "vox populi" rather than relying on a predefined set of answers which reduce respondents' opinions to several ticks.

It can also be said that the official image monitoring survey failed to identify the strengths and weaknesses of Linz's image, as the list of attributes used by the officials did not include sensitive issues such as the Hitler's "heritage". The survey also failed to capture the uniqueness of Linz, its "soul", mainly because Linz's officials did not consider its image to be a multi-dimensional phenomenon that includes not only beliefs or knowledge but also individuals' feelings towards the destination. These gaps in their knowledge, expressed mainly in the lack of understanding of the tourists, means they might not reap the full benefit of the ECC, designed to change Linz's image; it might also lead to inconclusive results of a short-term nature.

Another critical issue in the official image monitoring survey is the fact that the officials of Linz did not include international tourists in their sample and relied on Austrians only. The online survey of this study, however, showed that

international tourists' knowledge about Linz is rather limited; nevertheless, it is apparent that Linz evokes feelings and emotions mainly by benefiting from the image of Austria, and this should be capitalized on.

The findings of the online survey also suggest that despite the Cultural Development Plan 2000 and the buzz about the European Capital of Culture in 2009, Linz in the minds of its potential tourists has a meagre rather than pompous image; the reason why Linz was selected to host the ECC.

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