

Tourism destination image as an antecedent of destination loyalty: The case of Linz, Austria

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Abstract

The concepts of destination image and tourists' loyalty are sufficiently discussed in the literature; however, due to the multi-dimensional character of these two concepts, the existing studies fail to shed light on the multifaceted linkage between destination image and loyalty. This research displays an innovative way of measuring tourists' loyalty by creating a composite loyalty index that represents both behavioural and attitudinal loyalty. The index allows for a distinction between different levels of tourists' loyalty to be made in order to establish the impact of both cognitive and affective destination image dimensions on loyalty. The findings reveal that the better the image, the higher the composite loyalty. Specifically, destination's affective image is more influential on tourists' loyalty than destination's cognitive image.

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Introduction

Over the past decades, many small and medium sized towns believed to have found a "savior" in the form of tourism development as a major source of economic benefits, along with improved local communities' quality of life (Dumont *et al.*, 2010). However, establishing a place as a competitive and attractive tourist destination on the highly overcrowded with popular tourism "bastilles" map is a demanding activity. In this competitive environment, visuality is seen as a key issue and destination marketers invest much effort and resources in

creating an image that would establish a destination as attractive in tourists' minds (Dumont *et al.*, 2010; Kneesel *et al.*, 2010).

Loyalty in the tourism literature in general is linked to customers' repeat purchases or recommendations to friends and family and is argued to be a crucial element for the success and sustainability of any destination (Bodet, 2008; Korte, 1995; Lee, 2003).

Despite the fact that the process of eliciting the factors influencing revisit intentions is a

challenging task, recognized as such by Woodside and Dubelaar (2002), Vassiliadis *et al.*, (2013) and Chi & Qu (2008), an extensive research has been carried out on this topic. The majority of studies mainly address the impact of visitors' satisfaction (Chi & Qu, 2008; Mahasuweerachai & Qu, 2011; Suhartanto *et al.*, 2015; Sun *et al.*, 2013; Yuksel *et al.*, 2010); perceived quality or quality related constructs (Chen & Gursoy, 2001; Sun *et al.*, 2013), previous experience (Alegre & Cladera, 2006), cultural dissimilarity (Chen & Gursoy, 2001), and place attachment (Lee *et al.*, 2007; Simpson & Siquaw, 2008, Yuksel *et al.*, 2010). Still, there are insufficient studies that adequately address the relationship between destination loyalty and other tourism-related constructs such as destination image (Assaker *et al.*, 2011; Chang *et al.*, 2015; Chen & Phou 2013; Chi & Qu, 2008; Lee *et al.*, 2007; Ramseook-Munhurrin *et al.*, 2015) despite its well-recognized influence on visitors' preferences as it is widely acknowledged in the tourism literature that travellers make their decisions based on the mental images they have of places (Cronch, 2011; Leisen, 2001; Stepchenkova & Eales, 2011). The purpose of the present study, therefore, is to explore the relationship between two complex and multidimensional concepts - destination image and tourist loyalty - in order to provide further insights into this rather grey area of tourism research. The paper has the following objectives: 1) to compare and contrast the different types and nuances of tourist loyalty, 2) to design and implement a composite loyalty index consisting of both behavioural and attitudinal loyalty and 3) to explore the nature of the relationship between cognitive and affective destination image dimensions and visitors' composite loyalty.

The destination investigated in this research is Linz – the third biggest town in Austria situated astride the Danube River. Recently, the mixture of stable local economy, modern technology and culture has become the trademark of Linz (Lewonig, 2007), but despite Linz's diverse cultural life, the recently built museums for modern art (e.g. Lentos, Ars Electronica) and three big hallmark festivals (the "Cloud of Sound", the "International Street Artist Festival" and the "Ars Electronica Festival"), Linz is still

staying in the shadow of Vienna and Salzburg. 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. After 1945 the main concern of Linz's authorities was to distance themselves from Nazi's culture and Hitler, in particular, while highlighting traditionally humanist cultural values (Cultural Development Plan, 2000). However, traces of Nazi's past are still part of everyday life in Linz – in the appearance of the so-called "Hitlerbauten" (cheap homes that Hitler built for industrial workers) and in the materials used for buildings construction that raise an embarrassing point: Mauthausen (a concentration camp close to Linz) granite was paid for with the lives of concentration camp prisoners (Linz European capital of culture, 2009, cited in Iordanova-Krasteva *et al.*, 2010).

Conceptual Framework

Defining and Conceptualizing Destination Image

Destination image is presented as a vital and influential factor in various conceptual frameworks elucidating the travellers' decision making process (Lee *et al.*, 2005; Molina & Esteban, 2006; Ramkissoon *et al.* 2011; Yüksel & Akgül, 2007) since it is believed that travellers make their buying decisions based on the mental images they have of places (Cronch, 2011; Leisen, 2001; Stepchenkova & Eales, 2011).

The multifaceted concept of image has been analysed from a variety of perspectives, where "different aspects are covered by different disciplines" (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2011: 105) and in tourism studies, there is still a considerable diversity of definitions and conceptualizations of destination image. This observation would indicate that either there is a substantial level of uncertainty towards what constitutes tourism destination image and how it is formed amongst the researchers fascinated by this topic, or that destination image is so "multidimensional and complex" (Gallarza *et al.*, 2002, p. 56) that can be explained by all these competing definitions.

Moreover, just recently tourism researchers started to perceive destination image as constantly evolving and to embrace its dynamic

structure (Campo-Martinez *et al.*, 2010; Iordanova, 2015; Kim & Morrison, 2005; Yüksel & Akgül, 2007), while previously the majority of researchers used to define destination image as a static construct (Hunt, 1975; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Bigne *et al.*, 2001). This study allies with the former point of view and perceives destination image as a complex output of a process that requires various stimulus to occur. Therefore, Iordanova's definition (2015, p. 49) of destination image as "...a construct consisting of impressions, beliefs, ideas, expectations and feelings accumulated towards a place over time gathered from a variety of information sources and shaped through an individual's socio-demographic and psychological characteristics" was adopted as it appeared to be most appropriate for the purposes of this research.

Another inconsistency in the literature is linked to the construct of destination image. Some scholars recognize an internal, even though sometimes loose structure (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991), whereas others (Crompton, 1979; Reilly 1990) support the idea that there is no recognized structure in destination image and it should be approached as one inseparable whole. Consequently, Lai & Li (2012) distinguished three different models of destination image within the stream of research - Baloglu & McCleary's (1999) "cognitive-affective-overall model", Gartner's (1993) "cognitive-affective-conative model" and Echtner & Ritchie's (1991) "three-dimensional model". In tourism studies, cognitive image components are linked to "...awareness, knowledge or beliefs, which may or may not have been derived from a previous visit" (Pike & Ryan, 2004, p. 334) and memories, evaluations and interpretations and decisions (Tasci *et al.*, 2007). Affective image components, on the other hand, are defined as "the appraisal of the affective quality of environments" (Hanyu, 1993, p. 161) or as emotional reactions, (excitement, pleasure, etc.) (Walmsley & Young, 1998), responses (Pocock & Hudson, 1978) and feelings towards tourist destinations (Russel, 1980).

There seems to be an agreement in the literature that destination image is a subjective interpretation of reality made by the tourists

(Bigne *et al.*, 2001) and both cognitive and affective evaluations are equally important in the process of destination image formation (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Kim & Richardson, 2003). This point of view is supported by the increased amount of destination image studies focused on both cognitive and affective image components (Baloglu & Love, 2005; Hosany *et al.*, 2006; Hyun & O'Keefe 2012; Kastenholz, 2004; Kim & Perdue 2011; Pike, 2006; Pike & Mason, 2011; Martin & Bosque, 2008; Sonmez & Sirakaya, 2002; Wang & Hsu 2010).

The "cognitive- affective-conative model" proposed by Gartner (1993) and further tested by Chen & Phou, (2013), Pike & Ryan, (2004) and Tasci *et al.*, (2007) supports a layered sequence in image formation, where cognitive image appears first, followed by its evaluative dimension and cognition, which represents the "decision stage" of image formation and depends on the cognitive and affective stages. In sharp contrast to the above discussed models is Echtner & Ritchie's model (1991) as it depicts destination image as a combination of three continua - attribute-holistic, functional-psychological and unique features such as iconic events, feelings or auras.

This study supports the cognitive-affective composite nature of destination image and recognizes that while in everyday life, people do not resolve image into cognitive and affective components unless they are asked to do so (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997), from a theoretical point of view, the decomposition of image into cognitive and affective parts gives better understanding of its structure and supports in-depth statistical analyses (Bagozzi & Burnkrant, 1985).

Defining and Conceptualizing Tourist loyalty

It has commonly been assumed in the marketing literature that consumer loyalty is linked to customers' repeat purchases or recommendations to friends and family (Chang & Tseng, 2013; Floh *et al.*, 2013). One of the prominent definitions of brand loyalty is provided by Oliver (1999, p. 34) and describes loyalty as "a deeply held commitment to re-buy or re-patronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand set purchasing, despite situational influences and

marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviour". A number of tourism studies borrowed the concept of customer loyalty from the general marketing literature and incorporated it into studies explaining travellers' loyalty towards tourism products, destinations and leisure/recreation activities (Backman & Crompton, 1991; Baloglu, 2001; Iwasaki & Havitz, 1998; Lee *et al.* 1997; Mazanec, 2000; Selin *et al.*, 1988; Yoon & Uysal, 2005) since loyalty is perceived as an issue of a major importance (Chen and Phou, 2013; Darnell & Johnson, 2001; Lee, 2003) for the overcrowded and increasingly competitive tourism market. Loyal holidaymakers provide stable profit and reduced marketing costs as it is cheaper to retain existing customers than to target new markets (Eagles, 2001; Korte, 1995; Lee, 2003; Wong *et al.*, 2014). Also, loyal visitors are considered to be less likely to switch to competitors regardless of the availability of comparable options (Wickham, 2000). Despite the fact that recent research not only suggests that identifying and satisfying consumers' needs might not be sufficient enough for a company to survive fierce competition (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006), but also gives evidence that having satisfied customers is not always equal to having loyal customers (Mittal & Lasar, 1998) there are still insufficient studies on destination loyalty and its relations to other central constructs such as destination image (Assaker *et al.*, 2011; Bigne *et al.*, 2001; Chang *et al.*, 2015; Chen & Phou 2013; Ramseook-Munhurrin *et al.*, 2015).

A major challenge in the literature on visitors' loyalty is the way of measuring it and it is often linked to the behavioural intentions of people who have visited a particular place in terms of their intention to revisit it or recommend it to others (Moore *et al.*, 2013; Rodger *et al.*, 2015; Tian-Cole *et al.*, 2002; Weaver & Lawton, 2011). For instance, Tian-Cole *et al.* (2002) and Weaver and Lawton (2011) relied on both the intention to revisit and to recommend the destination to other travellers in order to explore and measure visitors' loyalty. Tourists' recommendations about places they have visited is referred in the tourism literature as attitudinal loyalty (Correia Loureiro & Miranda Gonzalez, 2008; Fournier, 1994; Hawkins *et al.*, 1989; Lee *et al.*, 2007, Li & Petrick, 2008;

Mechinda *et al.*, 2009; Opperman 2000; Yoon & Uysal, 2005), whereas behavioural loyalty refers to tourists' behavioural outcome such as actual visits and repeat visits (Correia Loureiro & Miranda Gonzalez, 2008; Lee *et al.*, 2007; Li & Petrick, 2008; Mechinda *et al.*, 2009; Opperman 2000; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Even though only visit times should be used as a measurement of behavioural loyalty, there are studies arguing that repurchase intention is an indicator of behavioural loyalty as it is the pre-stage of actual repeat visits (Fan *et al.*, 2009) and could be used to evaluate travellers' behavioural loyalty (Horng *et al.*, 2011; Kaplanidou & Gibson, 2010). An alternative view is the combination of the above discussed approaches, which presents customer loyalty as a multidimensional concept comprising of relative attitude and repeat purchase (Backman & Crompton, 1991; Dick & Basu, 1994; Iwasaki & Havitz, 1998; Oliver, 1999; Opperman 2000; Suhartanto *et al.*, 2015). In tourism studies composite loyalty includes travellers' revisit intention and intention to recommend a place to fellow travellers (Baldinger & Rubinson, 1996; Bowen 2001; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Nevertheless, there are still some studies that consider loyalty as either a one dimensional construct consisting of either intention to recommend (Chen & Gursoy, 2001; Simpson & Siquaw, 2008) or intention to revisit (Alegre & Cladera, 2006; Alexandris *et al.*, 2006; Campo-Martinez *et al.*, 2010; Jang & Feng, 2007; Um *et al.*, 2006).

Relationship between Destination image and Visitors' loyalty

The concepts of destination image and visitors' loyalty could be seen as having similar roots into the attitude theory proposed by Bagozzi (1992), which proves the importance of unravelling the complexity of the relationship between them. The attitude theory implies that appraisal could trigger emotions which, in turn, affect people's behaviour and also suggests that cognitive and affective reactions and behaviour happen in a consecutive order (Bagozzi, 1992). This argument finds support in Oliver's proposition (1997, 1999) that loyalty could be seen as a continuum of different levels of loyalty and the "cognitive-affective-conative model" of destination image formation

proposed by Gartner (1993) (discussed above) and tested by Chen & Phou, (2013), Pike & Ryan, (2004) and Tasci *et al.*, (2007). The loyalty continuum starts with cognitive loyalty and goes through affective loyalty, conative loyalty and action loyalty. Cognitive loyalty is considered to be the weakest type of loyalty mainly formed based on the product information available to the customer (Pedersen & Nysveen, 2001). Affective loyalty, on the other hand, is rooted in the consumers' minds and is less susceptible to changes (Oliver 1997, 1999). Conative loyalty, referred as consumers' behavioural intention to keep using the brand, is the strongest type of loyalty and the most robust one in terms of predicting behavioural loyalty (Pedersen & Nysveen 2001). A few recent tourism studies (Yuksel *et al.*, 2010; Forgas-Coll *et al.*, 2012; Lee, 2014; Wong *et al.*, 2014.) have adopted Oliver's proposition (1997, 1999) and depicted loyalty as consisting of cognitive, affective and conative elements. Still, albeit the partial research on this topic, there is some evidence that there is a relationship between destination image and tourist loyalty, but there is still no consensus regarding the nature of this relationship (Alcaniz *et al.*, 2009; Bigné, *et al.*, 2001; Bosque & Martín, 2008; Castro *et al.*, 2007; Chang *et al.*, 2015; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Chi & Qu, 2008; Court & Lupton, 1997; Faullant *et al.*, 2008; Lee *et al.*, 2008; Sun *et al.*, 2013; Um *et al.*, 2006; Mahasuweerachai & Qu, 2011; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). For example, some studies suggest that destination image directly affects tourist loyalty (Binh, 2015; Bosque & Martín, 2008; Lee *et al.*, 2008), or that the relationship is indirect (Castro *et al.*, 2007; Chi & Qu, 2008; Lee, 2009; Pandža Bajs, 2013; Ramseook-Munhurrin *et al.*, 2015), whereas others argue that destination image has the ability to affect tourist loyalty directly or indirectly (Assaker *et al.*, 2011; Bigné *et al.*, 2001; Chen & Tsai, 2007). These rather contradictory results could be due to the various ways destination image and loyalty could be conceptualized and operationalized. Indeed, a meta-analysis carried out by Zhang *et al.*, (2014) on 66 articles in English and Chinese languages published in the last two decades on the proposed link between destination image and destination loyalty, revealed that out of the 66 articles, 23

measured tourists' attitudinal loyalty, 35 dealt with behavioural loyalty and 27 studied composite loyalty. However, the cognitive and affective image components are addressed in 5 of the articles focused on attitudinal loyalty (Lobato *et al.* 2006; Lin *et al.* 2007; Lee *et al.* 2008; Fang 2008; Qu *et al.* 2011), whereas only 8 articles discuss the link between behavioural loyalty and destination image (Baloglu, 2000; Lobato *et al.* 2006; Lee *et al.* 2008; Yang *et al.* 2009; Li *et al.* 2010; Fang 2008; Qu *et al.* 2011; Zhu 2011). Surprisingly, a very restricted amount of these studies (Nadeau *et al.* 2008; Hu, 2010; Shen, 2012) attempt to link the multidimensional concepts of both destination image and destination loyalty and to explain the link between both cognitive and affective components and composite loyalty, which mirrors the main aim of this research. This research, therefore, endeavours to contribute to the existing literature on visitors' loyalty and destination image by a) presenting an innovative method of measuring tourists' loyalty in the form of a composite loyalty index representing both revisit intentions (behavioural loyalty) and recommendation intentions (attitudinal loyalty) and b) by exploring the nature and the nuances of the relationship between cognitive and affective destination image dimensions and visitors' composite loyalty which still remains unclear until now.

Methodology

A critical evaluation of the existing literature on tourism destination image formation suggest that no single research method could elicit "the multidimensional, complex, relativistic and dynamic" (Gallarza *et al.*, 2002, p. 56) nature of destination image and its determinants.

The research described in this paper is a sequential one – with second quantitative, explanatory phase building on a qualitative and exploratory first phase. The reason for collecting qualitative data initially originated from the fact that the image components existing in the literature are used, to a certain extent, in a unified manner and do not represent the spirit and auras of Linz. The selected research design was also influenced by Jenkins's (1999) model of destination image research. She argues that the use of qualitative

research to elicit the constructs from the population being studied reduces the peril of pushing respondents to reply to a standardized framework, which might be a reflection of the destination image held by the researcher, but not by the population of interest. Even if there are similarities between destinations, the way of transferring a set of destination image dimensions from one destination to another without attaching importance to the unique features of a destination, results in simplistic and partial understanding of the process of destination image formation. Moreover, unless the list of attributes is thoroughly selected, some or even all of them might be completely irrelevant or there could be gaps in the list of destination image attributes (Jenkins, 1999). The advantages of using this mixed method approach were highlighted also by Echtner and Ritchie (2003) and O’Leary & Deegan (2002).

Questionnaire design, sampling technique and data collection

First phase

The first phase of this study represented a qualitative exploration of Linz’s image where Linz’s image dimensions were elicited from the answers of a group of potential visitors (74), using an online survey with several open-ended questions and free elicitation technique. The term “potential visitor” is used as a cumulative portrait of repeat and first-time domestic and international visitors of Linz. It was assumed that selecting a sample of only one of the groups, for example first-time visitors or visitors who have previously requested information about Linz, would deprive the results by leading to missing important image components of Linz that could be captured only by individuals that had experienced the destination.

The utilized sampling technique at the first stage was convenience sampling since no population framework was available for the population of interest (potential visitors to Linz, Austria) and no cut-off date was predetermined, but at the same time the collected data was monitored and analysed on a weekly basis. After the first couple of weeks signs of repetition among respondents’ answers started to slowly appear and after two months the online data collection was

discontinued in view of the fact that it appeared to have reached its “saturation point” (see Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Kumar, 2005) or redundancy in regard to information where no new insights about Linz could be collected.

A series of open-ended questions based upon the questions used in Echtner & Ritchie’s study (1993) together with a set of demographic questions was incorporated into the explorative, qualitative phase that aim to capture the image of Linz from visitors’ perspective. The questions were slightly modified in order to fit the purposes of this particular research. The first question focused on respondents’ spontaneous associations with Linz and was designed to allow respondents to freely share their overall spontaneous associations with Linz. The aim of the second question was to gain an insight into respondents’ feelings and emotions in relation to Linz and attempted to capture the affective aspect of Linz’s image. The final question sought to elicit respondents’ knowledge of Linz and to determine some of its unique attractions.

The reason for eliciting the image components from the population of interest and not from official sources of Linz lies in the way the term image is used in the literature: a) the advertised and promoted image of a place and b) the beliefs and expectations of visitors (Mazanec & Schweiger, 1981), which suggests that there might be significant differences between them. Linz’s image was found to have been created through the mixture of Linz Nazi’s past, the heavy industry, its well-preserved old town and architectural beauty; of the modern face of Linz presented by its museums for Modern Art (Ars Electronica Centre, the Lentos Museum), its hallmark events (The Cloud of Sound, The Bruckner Festival, The International Street Artist Festival), of the natural and eternal beauty of Postingberg and the River Danube. Linz was mainly described as a pleasurable, enjoyable, beautiful, admirable and modern place. The data collected from the first phase was then content analysed by identifying Linz’s image elements and counting their frequencies of appearance in respondents’ answers.

Second phase

The findings from the qualitative phase were used to construct a questionnaire, which was

initially designed in English and piloted with 23 undergraduate students studying business, tourism and sport studies. The pilot study did not reveal any confusing and unclear questions or flops in its structure. The questionnaire was then translated into German and tested again with German native speakers.

The questionnaire was utilized to collect quantitative data from 400 visitors in Linz. To study Linz's image components elicited in the first phase, respondents were asked to rate their agreement/disagreement with those components on a 5-point Likert Scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". Twenty nine cognitive evaluation items and fourteen affective items were generated from the first phase. Questions about intention to return and recommend a place to friends and/or relatives are considered as adequate to measure tourist loyalty towards a place (Bigne *et al.*, 2001; Chi & Qu 2008; Yoon & Uysal 2005).

Since accurate data on the size and location of the population of interest were not available and there were financial and time limitations, non-random convenience sampling technique was applied. Even though non-random samples are described as non-representative, these techniques are quite popular in tourism researches (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Lee *et al.*, 2005; Martin & Bosque, 2008) where no "hard facts" concerning the population of interest are available. It is still possible, however, to assess representativeness by comparing the sample with known population characteristics (Gilbert, 2001) and as long as the nature of the sampling is made clear, the reader can judge himself "the extent to which the statistics are appropriate and useful as a guide to the nature of the population" (Sapsford, 1999, p. 91). Therefore, once the required data was collected the sample profile was compared with the characteristics of Linz's visitors in terms of their nationality. According to statistical data published on TourMIS foreign visitors accounted for between 51- 53% and domestic visitors for 47% - 49 %. It could be concluded that almost a perfect match was assured between the collected data and the official statistics on Linz's visitors' nationality, which contributed significantly to the research representativeness.

Also the sample size is directly linked with the statistical accuracy sought and the number of variables used. Sample size considered as adequate for data analysis requirements should have around 8-10 respondents per item used in an attitudinal questionnaire (Ryan, 1995) and as a general rule for factor analysis (the statistical technique used in the data analysis) the sample should be four or five times as many observations as there are variables to be analysed (Hair *et al.*, 1987) which was the case in the current study.

The representative quality of the sample was assured as a degree of randomness on the selection of respondents by controlling the places ("sampling of places" – different venues, events, attractions) and times of data collection ("sampling of time" – data was collected at different times of the day).

Data analysis and results

Data Reduction

Principal Component Analysis was used for data reduction purposes for both cognitive and affective image dimensions of Linz. The Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy had values of 0.749 for the cognitive components and 0.743 for the affective components respectively and both domains had Barlett's Test of Sphericity values of .000, thus proving that the data set is suitable for factor analysis (Pallant, 2007).

The factor analysis for the cognitive components revealed the existence of seven factors with eigenvalues exceeding 1, which explain 60.19% of the variance with component 1 contributing 18.95%, Component 2 – 10.57%, Component 3 – 8.07%, Component 4 - 7.37 %, Component 5 - 5.60 %, Component 6 - 5.05% and Component 7 - 4.67%.

Varimax rotation was used and factor loadings below 0.45 were excluded (four components) following the recommendations of Comrey & Lee (1992, in Pett *et al.*, 2003).

The computation of Cronbach α indicates that all factors are stable with substantially high internal consistencies (α for Factor 1=0.786, α for Factor 2= 0.842, α for Factor 3 = 0.757, α for Factor 4 = 0.701, α for Factor 5 = 0.677, α

for Factor 7 = 0.611) except Factor 6 ($\alpha=0.484$). It was, therefore, accepted that 6 factors were well above the “criterion-in-use” (.60 or higher, Peterson, 1994), and therefore acceptably reliable. In total, 21 cognitive image components managed to be included into the factor analysis as they all showed factor loadings above 0.45.

The first factor appears to represent “Pastime” in Linz and includes for example the snowy Alps, museums and monuments. The second one reflects Linz’s “Blemish” heritage - its’ dark Nazi history and heavy industry. The third factor groups Linz’s presenters of contemporary culture. Factor IV seems to represent Linz’s “Eventness”, or in other words, its cultural life by including the two major

festivals taking place in Linz and the Austrian composer Bruckner. The penultimate factor is called “Aesthetics” includes Linz’s old churches, architecture and old town. Postlingberg (a mountain nearby Linz) was in the final factor called “Relaxation” together with Linz’s shopping facilities.

The affective image components of Linz were also factor analysed and a set of five factors was identified with eigenvalues exceeding 1 and explaining 68, 55% of the variance. One of the factors (Tranquillity) showed Chronbach α less than 0.6 and was eliminated from further analysis.

The first factor appears to group the most unappealing and unsympathetic feelings arisen

Table 1. Summary of the PCA for Linz’s cognitive image components

Image Factors and Dimensions	Factor Loading	% of Variance Explained	Cumulative % of Variance Explained	Factor Alpha Value
Factor I: Pastime		18.860	18.955	0.786
Alps	0.829			
Snow/Winter	0.742			
Monuments	0.701			
Museums	0.614			
Bicycle Paths	0.539			
Ancient Origin	0.5000			
Factor II: Blemish		10.577	29.437	0.842
Heavy Industry	0.929			
Steel Industry	0.898			
Hitler	0.757			
Factor III: Contemporary Culture		8.076	37.513	0.757
Lentos	0.852			
Modern Art	0.780			
Ars Electronica Center	0.777			
Factor IV: Eventness		7.368	44.881	0.701
International Street Artist Festival	0.781			
Bruckner Festival	0.780			
Bruckner	0.633			
Football	0.487			
Factor V: Aesthetics		5.591	50.472	0.677
Old Churches	0.814			
Old Town	0.722			
Architecture	0.713			
Factor VI: Traditions		5.051	55.523	0.484
Cultural Heritage	0.680			
Austrian Cuisine	0.537			
Factor VII: Relaxation		4.670	60.193	0.611
Postlingberg	0.807			
Shopping	0.769			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization
Rotation converged in 10 iterations

by Linz's image – dark, cold and poor. In contrast, the next one groups more encouraging and positive feelings such as modern, interesting and enjoyable and was consequently called “encouraging”. Factor III reflects Linz's boredom and unattractive elements and was labelled “discouraging”, whereas the final one, the “exquisite”

dimensions included for example “admirable” and “beautiful” as parts of Linz's image.

Respondents profile

The whole sample consisted of 400 respondents, 188 of which were Austrians (47% of the total sample) and 212 were Internationals (53% of the total sample) from 22

Table 2. Summary of the PCA for Linz's cognitive image components

Image Factors and Dimensions	Factor Loading	% of Variance Explained	Cumulative % of Variance Explained	Factor Alpha Value
Factor I: Unsympathetic		29.416	29.416	0.764
Dark	0.862			
Cold	0.851			
Poor	0.672			
Factor II: Encouraging		13.281	42.698	0.733
Modern	0.812			
Interesting	0.803			
Enjoyable	0.659			
Factor III: Discouraging		9.757	52.455	0.642
Unpleasant	0.831			
Boring	0.794			
Factor IV: Exquisite		8.736	61.191	0.736
Admirable	0.876			
Beautiful	0.801			
Factor V: Tranquillity		7.363	68.554	0.597
Calm	0.843			
Neat	0.794			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
 Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization
 Rotation converged in 6 iterations

Table 3. Respondents' demographic profile

		Frequency	Percent
Nationality	Austrians	188	47
	Internationals	212	53
Gender	Female	215	53.8
	Male	185	46.3
Age group	18-25	34	8.5
	26-30	42	10.5
	31-35	41	10.3
	36-40	48	12
	41-45	46	11.5
	46-50	73	18.3
	51-55	45	11.3
	56+	71	17.8
Professional Status	Full-time employed	230	57.5
	Part-time employed	65	16.3
	Students	29	7.3
	Retired	62	15.5
	Other	14	3.5
Education	Primary	29	7.3
	Secondary	142	35.5
	University	229	57.3

different countries. In terms of gender 54 % of the respondents were female and 46 % were male. The age distribution was almost equal across the different age intervals, however, two of the groups 46-50 and above 56 represented in total almost 40 % of the whole sample. The majority of the respondents were in full-time employment (58 %) and with a university degree (57%).

Relationship between Linz’s destination image and respondents’ level of loyalty

The variables “recommendation” and “revisit” were dummy variables with yes or no as possible answers. Destination loyalty index was calculated as a composite of intention to return to Linz (yes/no) and intention to recommend it (yes/no) following Baloglu’s (2001) way of calculating a familiarity index. The answers were grouped into two subcategories for each of the variables – a score of 0 was used to code the “no” answers and a score of 1 was given to the “yes answers”. By cross-tabulating the recommendation and revisit dimensions the following table was produced:

The revisit and recommendation dimensions scores were added for each individual, which resulted in a destination loyalty index ranging from 0 to 2. The respondents with a score of 0 were brought into a “low loyalty” group, those with a score of 1 into a “medium loyalty” group and finally “high loyalty” group included respondents who received a score of 2.

To assess the destination loyalty group differences across the image components of Linz a Multivariate Analysis of Variance was utilized. The multivariate significance tests (Pillai’s Trace, Hotellings’s Trace, Wilks’ Lambda and Roy’s Largest Root) produced by MANOVA were all significant at 0.01 level and thus showed that there were significant differences between the three different groups

of destination loyalty. Consequently, a post-hoc Scheffe test was conducted on univariate statistics (ANOVAs) in order to identify which image dimensions differentiate the three groups. The table below shows the mean scores of Linz’s image dimensions for each group.

Significant differences between the groups were found for four (out of six) cognitive image dimensions and for all affective image domains. “Pastime” was found to significantly differentiate two of the destination loyalty groups (p=0.011, less than 0,05) – the higher the loyalty index, the higher the level of agreement with “pastime” as image dimension of Linz. The next cognitive image domain “Blemish” (p=0.030, less than 0.05) also demonstrated that there are significant differences between the “low” and “high” destination loyalty groups - the higher the loyalty index the higher the level of disagreement. “Contemporary Culture” was found to also significantly (p=0.021, less than 0.05) differentiate all the groups, where the “low destination loyalty” group was giving the lowest level of agreement and the rest two groups were almost equal at 1.52 and 1.54 on average.

In relation to the affective image components, there is a clear, statistically significant positive trend - the higher the composite destination loyalty index, the higher the level of agreement with Linz’s positive affective image components such as “Encouraging” and “Exquisite”. Consequently, the lower the destination loyalty, the higher the level of agreement with Linz’s negative image characteristics (unsympathetic, discouraging). It could be concluded that Linz’s image perceived by the “high destination loyalty” group seems to be significantly more positive than the image of Linz held by the respondents allocated to the “low and moderate destination loyalty” groups.

Table 4. *Cross-table between tourist attitudinal loyalty and behavioural loyalty*

Revisit Dimension	Recommendation dimension	
No (0)	No (0) 29 (0+0)	Yes (1) 149 (0+1)
Yes (1)	6 (0+1)	216 (1+1)

Table 5. Results of univariate analysis of variance with post-hoc Scheffe test on respondents' loyalty level and its relationship with Linz's image

Image Dimensions	Low destination loyalty n=29	Moderate destination loyalty n=155	High destination loyalty n=216	F-value	Significance
Pastime	3.511a	3.206	3.049a	4.531	0.011
Blemish	2.678a	3.084	3.199a	3.540	0.030
Contemporary culture	1.897a,b	1.523a	1.543b	3.913	0.021
Eventness	3.509	3.434	3.324	0.592	0.554
Aesthetics	1.287	1.211	1.199	0.756	0.470
Relaxation	1.724a	1.503	1.449a	4.179	0.016
Unsympathetic	4.460a	4.652	4.727a	3.724	0.025
Encouraging	2.609a,b	1.961a	1.890b	27.552	0.000
Discouraging	3.759a,b	4.816a	4.838b	63.036	0.000
Exquisite	2.845a,b	1.913a	1.808b	31.325	0.000

^a Mean scores with different letters are significantly different at 0.05 probability level from each other.

Discussion and Conclusion

A variety of travellers' decision making models have already recognized the importance of destination image in choosing the right place to visit (Gartner, 1989; Lee *et al.*, 2005; Molina & Esteban, 2006; Ramkissoon *et al.* 2011; Yüksel & Akgül, 2007). The importance of tourist loyalty in terms of intention to revisit and recommend is vital for any destination (Korte, 1995; Lee, 2003) since loyal holiday-makers are generally perceived as stable profit providers (Eagles, 2001; Korte, 1995; Lee, 2003) and destinations' ambassadors. Yet, very little was found in the literature on the link between these two crucial concepts and this area of research appears as rather neglected in the existing tourism literature. Despite the significant number of researches on destination image and tourist loyalty, the multi-dimensional nature of their constructs makes establishing a clear link between them a difficult task (Zhang *et al.*, 2014). There are only three studies (Nadeau *et al.* 2008; Hu, 2010; Shen, 2012) that attempt to clarify the link between cognitive and affective components and composite loyalty, which is the combination of attitudinal and behavioural loyalty. This study, therefore, set out with the aim of exploring the relationship between destination image constructed as consisting of cognitive and affective elements and composite loyalty which embraces attitudinal and behavioural loyalty. Knowing how to use the image of a place to convert first-time visitors into loyal holiday-makers and destination ambassadors and how

to strengthen attitudinal and behavioural loyalty is crucial for destination marketers.

The current study implies that people with a positive image of Linz are more likely to have a higher composite loyalty index which could lead to revisits or recommendations. This finding complements previous studies that have also suggested a positive relationship between destination image and loyalty (Alcaniz *et al.*, 2009; Bigné, *et al.*, 2001; Bosque & Martín, 2008; Castro *et al.*, 2007; Chen & Tsai, 2007; Chi & Qu, 2008; Court & Lupton, 1997; Faullant *et al.*, 2008; Lee *et al.*, 2008; Mahasuweerachai & Qu, 2011; Sun *et al.*, 2013; Um *et al.*, 2006; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). For example, respondents with high composite loyalty levels (e.g. willing to recommend and to revisit Linz) had more positive attitude towards Linz's "Contemporary Culture" and "Pastime" and thought of Linz as a an exquisite and enjoyable place to visit. Also, the results point at the importance of "Contemporary Culture" to act as a magnet for re-visiting and recommending Linz as it had significant influence over the respondents' loyalty towards Linz. This finding suggests that Linz's authorities should endeavour to retain these features of its image in order to transform first-time visitors into repeat visitors and destination ambassadors. This could be achieved by improving the cultural life in the town by focusing on contemporary art exhibitions and performances and by developing and offering existing activities in the town and its surroundings for visitors to enjoy.

The results also provide indications that there are significant differences between “low” and “high” composite destination loyalty groups in terms of the way they perceive Linz’s “Blemish” domain - the higher the loyalty index, the higher the level of disagreement with “Blemish”, which leads to the proposition that Linz’s dark past is not a factor that would mar its visitors intention to recommend it or to revisit it. One of the issues that emerged from these findings is that destinations struggling to refine their image should encourage destination loyalty among their visitors as visitors’ with high or even moderate composite loyalty tend to “forgive” image imperfections and still revisit and recommend the place.

However, with regards to the role cognitive and affective image components play in the process of developing destination loyalty, some discrepancies among the very limited number of studies on this issue became noticeable. From the overall data analysis it appears that both cognitive and affective destination image characteristics are almost equally influential on visitors’ composite loyalty (see Table 9 below). For instance, Alcaniz *et al.*, (2009) and Chen & Tsai (2007) have pointed out that the cognitive destination image has a direct effect on tourists’ behavioural intentions, which was confirmed by the current study as three out of six cognitive image elements were found to be in a significant relationship with level of loyalty. In contrast, White (2003), and Yu and Dean (2001), however, argued that the affective image components are better predictors than the cognitive ones, and thus evaluation of affective qualities of destinations might be of a higher importance than evaluation of the objective, perceivable properties of places (Kim & Richardson, 2003), which was also supported in this study by all affective image components and the respondents’ loyalty towards Linz. It could, therefore, be suggested that when it comes to increasing visitors’ composite loyalty, destination marketers should not neglect visitors’ feelings; attachment and attitude towards the destination since destination’s affective image appear to be slightly more influential on tourists’ behavioural intentions than destination’s cognitive image. Therefore, the suggestion that both cognitive and affective image components have an

important impact on tourists’ composite loyalty has its merits.

This research has contributed to the body of knowledge on destination image and tourist composite loyalty in several ways. Firstly, it discussed and empirically proved the positive relationship between destination image and tourist composite loyalty by integrating their multi-layered dimensions. Secondly, the composite tourist loyalty was measured by calculating a loyalty index consisting of two dimensions – revisit intentions and recommendation intentions. The novelty of this index allows for a precise distinction between different nuances of composite tourist loyalty – “low”, “moderate” and “high” to be made, which enabled in-depth statistical tests to be conducted and to establish the impact of destination image on these different levels of loyalty. Thirdly, the conceptualizing of destination image and the findings related to the impact of both cognitive and affective image components on composite loyalty also deserve explicit attention as there are still not sufficient studies on destination image that acknowledge its cognitive-affective nature. Fourthly, the results provide some justifiable evidence that affective image components exert stronger influence on the composite tourist loyalty compared to the cognitive ones.

The findings of this study have several practical implications too. Knowing and appreciating the impact of positive image on visitors’ composite loyalty would enable more focused destination image development strategies and marketing campaigns. A place with a positive image is more likely to be revisited and recommended to fellow travellers. The type of feelings and emotions a place evoke in its visitors also deserve managerial attention and inclusion into promotional activities as it was proved that the impact they have on visitors’ loyalty is greater than the impact of knowledge, beliefs and expectations about it.

Despite the effort to follow strict scientific criteria throughout this research, it clearly has certain conceptual and methodological limitations. While this research aimed at exploring the relationship between visitors’ composite loyalty and destination image, the

destination in question was a small European town and other types of destinations (e.g. islands, countries, rural destinations) were not included in the research and the emerged findings must be interpreted with caution. Results generalization could, therefore, be seen as another research limitation since the research of a destination allows the results to be generalized only for the research sample and the destination in question. It also needs to be mentioned that the sample was perceived as mainly homogenous in terms of distance (country of origin) from Linz as the majority of respondents came from other European countries and only a small fraction of the sample represented the rest of the world. Also, the study attempted to mainly explore the link between destination image and composite loyalty and did not take into consideration other variables such as satisfaction or socio-demographic characteristics and their potential impact over this relationship. The above mentioned limitations do not invalidate the key findings of the research, but only slightly compromise their external validity.

A profound understanding of the link between destination image and visitors loyalty is of a significant importance for destinations striving to improve and strengthen their positioning in the holiday market. This work addressed relevant, but still under-researched issues that play an important role in the process of promoting and managing destinations and presently there are still some questions that remain unanswered. It will be, therefore, worthwhile to replicate this research at a different destination and in a different context to prove and validate the established link between destination image and tourists composite loyalty. Also a second order factor analysis and a discriminant validity analysis could be applied to prove the reliability of the suggested relationship. A further study with more focus on destination image, composite loyalty and satisfaction could also be suggested.

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