

UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA
SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS

MASTER'S THESIS

DORU AVRAM

EUROPEAN MASTER IN TOURISM MANAGEMENT

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN DENMARK
SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS, UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA
FACULTY OF TOURISM, UNIVERSITY OF GIRONA

MASTER'S THESIS

A THEORY ON SERENDIPITOUS DESTINATION BRANDING

Ljubljana, July 2019

DORU AVRAM

AUTHORSHIP STATEMENT

The undersigned Doru Avram, a student at the University of Ljubljana, School of Economics and Business, (hereafter: SEB LU), author of this written final work of studies with the title "A THEORY ON SERENDIPITOUS DESTINATION BRANDING", prepared under supervision of Professor William Gartner and co-supervision of Professor Tanja Mihalič.

DECLARE

1. this written final work of studies to be based on the results of my own research;
2. the printed form of this written final work of studies to be identical to its electronic form;
3. the text of this written final work of studies to be language-edited and technically in adherence with the SEB LU's Technical Guidelines for Written Works, which means that I cited and / or quoted works and opinions of other authors in this written final work of studies in accordance with the SEB LU's Technical Guidelines for Written Works;
4. to be aware of the fact that plagiarism (in written or graphical form) is a criminal offence and can be prosecuted in accordance with the Criminal Code of the Republic of Slovenia;
5. to be aware of the consequences a proven plagiarism charge based on the this written final work could have for my status at the SEB LU in accordance with the relevant SEB LU Rules;
6. to have obtained all the necessary permits to use the data and works of other authors which are (in written or graphical form) referred to in this written final work of studies and to have clearly marked them;
7. to have acted in accordance with ethical principles during the preparation of this written final work of studies and to have, where necessary, obtained permission of the Ethics Committee;
8. my consent to use the electronic form of this written final work of studies for the detection of content similarity with other written works, using similarity detection software that is connected with the SEB LU Study Information System;
9. to transfer to the University of Ljubljana free of charge, non-exclusively, geographically and time-wise unlimited the right of saving this written final work of studies in the electronic form, the right of its reproduction, as well as the right of making this written final work of studies available to the public on the World Wide Web via the Repository of the University of Ljubljana;
10. my consent to publication of my personal data that are included in this written final work of studies and in this declaration, when this written final work of studies is published.

Ljubljana, July 31st, 2019

Author's signature:



Table of Contents

1	Introduction.....	1
2	Literature review.....	3
2.1	Role of brands in marketing	3
2.2	Consumer-based product brand equity and dimensions.....	4
2.2.1	Brand loyalty.....	5
2.2.2	Brand awareness.....	5
2.2.3	Brand perceived quality	6
2.2.4	Brand associations and brand image	6
2.3	Consumer-based destination brand equity and dimensions.....	7
2.3.1	Destination awareness	8
2.3.2	Destination image.....	8
2.3.3	Destination quality	9
2.3.4	Destination loyalty	9
2.3.5	Destination brand assets.....	10
2.3.6	Additional thoughts on the concept of brand value and its applicability for destination brand equity.....	11
2.4	Destination branding, destination image-identity complementarity and destination personality	12
2.4.1	Destination branding	12
2.4.2	Relationships between brand image and brand identity.....	13
2.4.3	Additional thoughts on brand associations	13
2.4.4	Brand personality and its adaptability to destinations	14
2.5	Cultural assets in the brand assets dimension of destination brand equity	15
2.6	Role of events on destination brand equity	15
2.6.1	Impact of events on the destination brand equity dimensions and destination positioning	17
2.7	Gaps in the literature	17
3	Research methodology.....	18
3.1	Philosophical foundations	18

3.2	Study context.....	20
3.3	Data collection and data analysis	21
4	Results.....	23
4.1	Presentation of Results	24
4.1.1	The Context.....	24
4.1.2	The Strategy	35
4.1.3	Strong brands	40
4.1.4	Summarized mind-map of the coding process and the results.....	44
4.2	Discussion of Results	44
4.2.1	A serendipitous process.....	45
4.2.2	Link with the dimensions of brand equity.....	46
4.2.3	Identity versus Image	51
4.2.4	Strength of cultural assets in destination branding	52
4.3	Implications	53
4.3.1	Emerged theory	53
4.3.2	Limitations and scope for further research.....	55
5	Conclusion	58
6	References.....	60

List of Tables and Figures

Table 1:	List of interviewees.....	23
Table 2:	A few online articles about Tbilisi and its clubs, from 2016 to 2019.....	33
Table 3:	Historical evolution of electronic music in Georgia	37
Table 4:	Spring and Summer Major Electronic Music Festivals in Georgia in 2019	41
Figure 1:	Mind-map representing the coding process of the data collection and analysis	44
Figure 2:	Simplified model of the brand's serendipitous emergence	46

Appendixes

Supporting quotes

1 Introduction

On May 11th 2018, “the focal points of Tbilisi's thriving dance music scene, were raided by armed police early Saturday morning” (Resident Advisor, 2018). The day after the raids, 15,000 people gathered in front of the Parliament on Tbilisi's main street, to engage in the first pacifist, dancing and raving riots that probably ever happened. They were protesting for freedom and tolerance. The demonstrations of May 12th were streamed more than a million times on online social media. Supporters from all around the world joined the movement. In 2018, the capital of Georgia was already acknowledged as an international hub for alternative electronic music and youth lifestyle. The purpose of this master thesis is to determine the motives and dynamics behind a very special case of destination branding.

The array of academic literature on branding could easily take one's entire life to comprehensively read, considering the 819,000 offered results when simply typing “branding” into the well-known Google Scholar web search engine. The adaptation of branding to the destination context has also been extensively studied, yet, the 13,100 results leave place for some exploitable gaps. Indeed, destination branding as a unique conceptual theory strongly depends on contextual perspectives. An emergent alternative and avant-garde cultural trend impacted, unprecedentedly, the future of modern Georgia, the post-Soviet country at the edge of Europe and Asia. For the very first time, the country started to no longer get confused with its American state homonym.

The following statistics are relevant to understand the tourism growth context of Georgia and the perspective undertaken in my master thesis. In 2017, the number of international traveler trips in Georgia grasped a record of 7,902,509, translating an annual growth rate of 17.6% (Georgian National Tourism Administration, 2017). Neighboring countries' share of international visitor trips decreased from 81.9% to 78.5% (Georgian National Tourism Administration, 2017). Therefore, other countries increased their share and totaled 1,295,641 trips. Moreover, European Union visitors reached 283,312 trips, representing an increase of 23.5% (Georgian National Tourism Administration, 2017). Germany experienced an increase of 28.7%, the United Kingdom – 44.7%, France – 31.7% and the Netherlands – 32.9% (Georgian National Tourism Administration, 2017). The main purpose of international visitor trips was Holiday, Leisure and Recreation (37.7%) (Georgian National Tourism Administration, 2017). The capital city of Georgia, Tbilisi, was the travel destination of 50% of international trips (Georgian National Tourism Administration, 2017). Finally, Served Food

and Drinks represent a share of 25.6% of total expenditure, while Cultural and Entertainment Services represent 18.5% (Georgian National Tourism Administration, 2017).

Since the seminal brand equity studies of D. A. Aaker (1991, 1996), D. A. Aaker & Keller (1990) and Keller (1993, 1998), literature has shown deep interest for strategic destination branding and the creation of brand value through rigorously planned and detailed branding strategies (D. A. Aaker, 1996; Blain, Levy, & Ritchie, 2005; Kladou, Kavaratzis, Rigopoulou, & Salonika, 2017; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014b; Ooi, 2004; Pritchard & Morgan, 1998). Initially, the original marketing concept of consumer-based brand equity and the dimensions of consumer-based brand equity have originated from product marketing and management studies rather than from tourism studies (D. A. Aaker & Keller, 1990; Keller, 1993; Lassar, Mittal, & Sharma, 2003; Pappu, Cooksey, & Quester, 2005; Vázquez, Ríó, & Iglesias, 2002; Washburn & Plank, 2002). Nevertheless, tourism researchers have been willing to transfer those product branding concepts into the destination context, creating an ecosystem of literature surrounding the concepts of destination brand equity and destination branding (Blain et al., 2005; Boo, Busser, & Baloglu, 2009; Dimanche, 2002; Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011; Hosany, Ekinici, & Uysal, 2006; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014b; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Pike, 2005; Ryan & Gu, 2008; Tasci, Gartner, & Cavusgil, 2007). However, the literature on destination branding and destination brand equity has not intimately covered specific contexts such as developing countries or post-Soviet countries. It appears that some potential for research exists within those frameworks. Moreover, branding has always been considered as a strategic mean, but the study context of this research revealed a characteristic about destination branding that is quite uncommon and led to the emergence of an approach that has never been precisely studied.

Cities have witnessed destination branding processes under many variations. The destination brand can often be the result of a thorough and strategic destination branding plan. However, it seems that in the case of Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, who has recently become a modern fashionable worldwide cultural destination brand for alternative electronic music, the specific destination brand initially just appeared surprisingly and unexpectedly. In their early ages, Berlin (Garcia, 2016) and Detroit (Che, 2008), two renown electronic music cities, have experienced similar processes, and both could nowadays easily be considered pioneers and meccas for this specific segment and social niche. Why is Tbilisi's current situation being constantly and internationally compared with the story of those two cities? (House, 2016; Wilson, 2018). Can it be, that the destination branding processes of these three cities have something in common?

My research will focus on the unusual destination branding approach towards a developing destination, through the study of the emergence of an artistic, musical and cultural alternative trend in Tbilisi, the capital city of Georgia.

During the process, I followed Charmaz's (2014) grounded theory approach through a dominant qualitative research method with in-depth interviews, completed by basic quantitative analysis when it appeared necessary.

The master thesis is structured as followed.

Firstly, it offers an extensive review of branding literature, historically introducing concepts from the original works on branding to brand equity, brand equity dimensions, applications to the destination context, destination branding, brand image, brand identity, brand personality, the role of cultural brand assets and the impact of events in destination branding. The goal of the literature review is to give the theoretical underpinnings and concepts to the reader to further understand the approach undertaken through the concurrent data collection and analysis processes, and to comprehend the results constructed from the data.

Secondly, it introduces the concept of Ground Theory as a methodology, explains its philosophical foundations, practicalities and their coherence within the study context.

Thirdly, it presents the results of the field research, the three core categories and their subcategories, that were all grounded in the data. Then, it further discusses profoundly how the findings are situated on the previously reviewed literature and critically puts concepts into perspective. The implications close this chapter, by detailing the emerged theory and commenting on the theoretical, methodological and contextual limitations, and to finally introduce gaps for further research.

Lastly, it concludes by restating my research's main purposes, approaches and findings.

Overall, each chapter was aimed to bring together the fundamental elements necessary to answer the following question: How can destination branding occur through unusual procedures as a result of influential emergent alternative cultures?

2 Literature review

2.1 Role of brands in marketing

As a short introduction to the literature review, it is mandatory to briefly explain why brands matter. In the marketing literature, brands have been established as fully implicated in strategic differentiation and positioning (Kapferer, 1998; Keller, 2008; Pappu et al., 2005; Tasci et al., 2007). Keller (1998), in his seminal research in the field of marketing, describes a brand as a

concept extended from the brand's image. A powerful brand has an effective differentiation advantage compared to the rest of the market, simplifies the search process for potential consumers, decreases the risk linked to the purchase decision, and enhances the overall perceived quality of the brand (Hosany et al., 2006).

2.2 Consumer-based product brand equity and dimensions

Historically, brand equity literature focused on the product brand. Aaker's definition of a brand as a "distinguishing name and/or symbol intended to identify the goods or services of either one seller or a group of sellers, and to differentiate those goods from those of competitors" (Aaker, 1991, p. 7), has been widely accepted and used in literature. Also, D. A. Aaker (1991) characterizes the general concept of brand equity as the brand's assets and liabilities, such as its name or symbol which impact holistically the overall value generated from that brand, referring to the product, service, firm and consumer. The notion of consumer-based brand equity just translates the marketing approach to brand equity (Keller, 1998). The consumer-based approach to brand equity allows firms to measure the strength of their brands (D. A. Aaker, 1991, 1996; Keller, 1993), hence Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) can also perhaps use this approach to capture the performance of their destination brand. Aaker's seminal research (1991) also suggested the most commonly used criteria for defining the dimensions of brand equity which includes brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations/image and brand assets. In branding literature, these criteria are often referred to as the brand dimensions. Kotler & Armstrong (2010, p. 246) mention that "brands have higher brand equity to the extent that they have higher brand loyalty, name awareness, perceived quality, strong brand associations and other assets". In other seminal work on the brand concept, Keller (1998, p. 477), outlines the brand equity construct as "a multidimensional concept and complex enough that many different types of measures are required. Multiple measures increase the diagnostic power of marketing research". Keller (1993) similarly mentions in his work the concepts of brand awareness and brand associations, which are participating in the creation of what he calls brand knowledge. Some related ideas have emerged from Shocker & Weitz (1988), on loyalty and image elements. Regarding product branding, Hankinson & Cowking (1993) and Kladou & Kehagias (2014b) argue that a brand can be defined and identified as a product or service that positions and differentiates itself through unique personality and values. In brand management and marketing, brand equity has been broadly researched through different generations, which enables a variety of perspectives and definitions (D. A. Aaker, 1991; Boo et al., 2009; Keller, 1993; Lassar et al., 2003; Motameni & Shahroki, 1998; Yoo & Donthu, 2001). However, it is commonly agreed that brand equity reflects the value of a brand in the consumer's mind during his decision-making process (Vázquez et al., 2002). Additionally, consumer-based brand equity measurement has become a very researched topic in branding literature (Boo et al., 2009; Lassar et al., 2003; Pappu et al.,

2005; C. S. Park & Srinivasan, 1994; Vázquez et al., 2002; Washburn & Plank, 2002; Yoo & Donthu, 2001). The literature review will now introduce the different dimensions of brand equity.

2.2.1 Brand loyalty

The seminal work of Aaker on brand dimensions and equity refers to brand loyalty as “the attachment that a consumer has to a brand” (D. A. Aaker, 1991, p. 39). Brand loyalty is also considered as fundamental for powerful brand equity (D. A. Aaker, 1991). Loyalty to a brand reflects the confidence consumers address towards specific brands over others, increasing the monetary value they are ready to dedicate to the concerned brands (Lassar et al., 2003). Previously, Guadagni & Little (1983), in their marketing quantitative analysis on ground coffee purchases, wrote about the behavioral tendencies of brand loyalty. For them, “a promotional purchase affects subsequent buying through brand loyalty” (Guadagni & Little, 1983, p. 40). In the early 2000s, Yoo B. & Donthu (2001) argued that brand loyalty can also be described as being loyal to a principal brand, meaning that the brand would have priority over secondary ones in the mind of the consumer. Loyalty has been emphasized as playing a major role in the consumer-based brand equity system (Keller, 1993). In broader management contexts, “the ability to create customer loyalty is a major goal” (Boo et al., 2009, p. 222). In common research, brand loyalty seems to refer to either attitudinal or behavioral dimensions (Odin, Odin, & Valette-florence, 2001). Indeed, Odin et al. (2001) explain that loyalty is a behavior according to the supporters of the stochastic approach. This perspective considers loyalty as a very complex and inexplicable process incorporating a large number of variables (Odin et al., 2001). Oppositely, brand loyalty is considered an attitude according to the determinist approach, that defines a reduced number of variables and focuses on the psychological dedication of the consumer (Odin et al., 2001). However, the same researchers agree that the nature of brand loyalty still remains unclear since no specific measurement practices have been established as successful (Odin et al., 2001).

2.2.2 Brand awareness

Recognized as the most important brand dimension, D. A. Aaker (1991, p. 61) refers to brand awareness as “the ability for a buyer to recognize or recall that a brand is a member of a certain product category”. In addition, according to Keller (1993), brand awareness is the combination of brand recognition and recall. Finally, awareness is also often considered as the strength of a brand in the minds of the targeted consumers (D. A. Aaker, 1996). Without it, there can be no brand purchase and hence value.

2.2.3 Brand perceived quality

In her research, Zeithaml (1988, p. 3) describes perceived quality as “the consumer's judgment about a product's overall excellence or superiority”. This definition can be interpreted as the consumer’s personal subjective feedback and evaluation concerning the product’s overall quality. The terms *perceived quality* and *brand quality* in the context of brand equity are usually both used, referring to the same concept (D. A. Aaker, 1991; Zeithaml, 1988). Generally it is accepted that quality is an important dimension of brand equity (D. A. Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1993; Lassar et al., 2003). Boo et al. (2009, p. 221) reviewed Keller's (1993) seven dimensions of brand quality: “performance; features; conformation quality; reliability; durability; serviceability; and style and design”. Brand performance appears to be the most valuable and major dimension of perceived quality and therefore, of brand equity holistically (Boo et al., 2009; Keller, 1993). Perceived quality seems to be central in increasing the value consumers’ perceive when purchasing the concerned product (Low & Lamb Jr, 2000). Also, perceived quality has a direct positive correlation with brand loyalty (Cretu & Brodie, 2007; Michell, King, & Reast, 2001).

2.2.4 Brand associations and brand image

Finally, D. A. Aaker (1991, p. 109) suggests that brand associations are “anything linked in memory to a brand”. He continues by introducing brand image as “a set of associations, usually in some meaningful way” (Aaker, 1991, p. 109). Brand image can mirror value, personality, quality and feelings of the brand associations (Kapferer, 1998; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014a). The combined works of D. A. Aaker (1991), D. A. Aaker & Keller (1990) and Keller (1993) conceptualize the brand associations by level of strength, reflecting the consumer’s perceptions. D. A. Aaker (1991) emphasizes the link to a brand is stronger when connected to many experiences. Often, brand image is linked to the consumer’s emotions about a particular brand (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990; Keller, 2008). Various studies exist on the measurement of brand image (Lassar et al., 2003; Low & Lamb Jr, 2000). However, according to Martínez & de Chernatony (2004), there is yet no agreement on how to measure brand image considering its multi-dimensionality. The reason could perhaps be the presence of many different definitions, creating some confusion (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990). Brand image tends to impact positively not only the value and equity of a brand, but also the loyalty of the consumer (Cretu & Brodie, 2007; Michell et al., 2001). Overall, brand image is accepted as being an indispensable element of successful brands (D. A. Aaker, 1996; Kapferer, 1998).

To conclude this section, brand dimensions are integral to the brand equity system, whose purpose has been explained as followed: “brand equity also provides value to the firm by

enhancing efficiency and effectiveness of marketing programs, prices and profits, brand extensions, trade leverage, and competitive advantage” (Yoo B. & Donthu, 2001, p. 2).

2.3 Consumer-based destination brand equity and dimensions

Most academic literature would argue that consumer-based product brand equity theory cannot be directly applied to services (Aaker, 1991; Boo, Busser, & Baloglu, 2009; Keller, 2008; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). Cai (2002) argues that destinations, different from products and services, cannot change their name, the latter being related to the geographical context of the destination. However, the knowledge transfer from product brand equity to services can serve industries such as tourism, hospitality and travel (Buhalis, 2000; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Woodside, Cruickshank, & Dehuang, 2007). Therefore, the destination brand is usually studied through its tourism attributes and features (Boo et al., 2009; Buhalis, 2000; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; Tasci et al., 2007). Destination brands in tourism studies can be linked back to conceptual marketing practices, where tourists consider a destination as a product for which cognitive and affective evaluations are undertaken (D. A. Aaker, 1991; Blain et al., 2005; Boo et al., 2009; McCleary & Baloglu, 1999). Dredge & Jenkins (2003) further argue that the uniqueness of destination brands results in the combination of three types of elements: functional, symbolic and experiential. The consumers’ process of decision-making while planning their travels implicates highly the destination brand, creating a consumer-based approach towards destination brand equity (Boo et al., 2009; Morgan, Pritchard, & Piggott, 2002; Ooi, 2004). The growing interest for tourism, travel and hospitality stakeholders to establish powerful consumer-based brand equity has led researchers to produce literature on consumer-based destination brand equity and its measurement (Boo et al., 2009; Kim & Kim, 2005; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007; J. Lee & Back, 2008; Prasad & Dev, 2000; Yoo & Donthu, 2001). Regarding the destination brand equity context, the same four dimensions, previously discussed, have been considered and studied, with considerable adjustments (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014a, 2014b). Indeed, in the new brand equity system, awareness would be related to the destination’s name and characteristics, whereas brand associations and image are linked with the destination’s value and personality (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014a, 2014b). As Gartner & Ruzzier (2011, p. 472) argued, “there are significant and critical differences between product brands and destination brands”. They continue by informing how destinations, differently from brands, are fixed places, that still continuously keep transforming and developing themselves through time. Indeed, Gartner & Ruzzier’s study (2011) introduces the experiential factor, meaning the experience of consuming the tourism product is genuinely different for each person. According to Pike (2005), destinations embrace a larger multi-dimensional façade compared to standard goods and services. However, it can be argued that all dimensions resemble themselves (Low & Lamb Jr, 2000). Therefore, Konecnik & Gartner (2007) made the link between the previously identified and discussed dimensions of product brand equity (Aaker

& Keller 1990; Aaker 1991; Guadagni & Little 1983; Keller 1993; Yoo B. & Donthu 2001; Zeithaml 1988) and destination brand dimensions, for which they recognized the destination awareness, image, quality, and loyalty dimensions. Boo, Busser, & Baloglu (2009) then completed this destination brand perspective by adding the dimension of destination brand value to the previous already validated components. Moreover, Gartner & Ruzzier (2011) and Boo et al. (2009) have also pursued linking the theory about product brand dimensions with destination brand dimensions by giving further explanations and reviews about the various elements. The dimensions of destination brand equity are introduced next.

2.3.1 Destination awareness

According to the two researchers, “awareness is an essential brand equity dimension. It is the first step in building and increasing brand value” (Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011, p. 473). Concerning destination brand awareness and its impact on brand equity, some researchers (Goodall & Ashworth, 1988; Woodside & Lysonski, 1988) already defined different levels of awareness, from the strongest to the weakest: dominant, top of mind, familiarity, and knowledge. Thus, Gartner & Ruzzier (2011, p. 473) argue that “awareness is the first step in creating brand equity, but it must be of a positive nature before brand equity and ultimately value is enhanced”. The importance and leading role of the destination awareness dimension for hospitality and tourism has been researched by Kim & Kim (2005), Kladou & Kehagias (2014a) and Lee & Back (2008). Also, destination awareness has been often linked with the stage of destination selection in the tourist’s purchasing process (Boo et al., 2009; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014a; Yoo & Donthu, 2001). Therefore, the destination awareness dimension plays an important role in destination brand equity, mainly by creating value to achieve higher performances (Kim & Kim, 2005; Motameni & Shahrokhi, 1998).

2.3.2 Destination image

To continue the relationship between product brand dimensions and destination brand dimensions, researchers on brand equity explain that brand associations can be translated into destination image, when it concerns the destination brand equity context. Since the seminal work of Hunt (1975), researchers have dedicated a great deal of importance to destination image, relatively more even than to destination brands themselves (Boo et al., 2009; Cai, 2002; Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011; Hankinson, 2005; Hosany et al., 2006; Tasci & Gartner, 2007). Gartner & Ruzzier (2011) contributed to the literature by positioning destination image as the features a destination is supposedly offering. All dimensions of destination brands seem to be somehow linked, as the researchers continue to mention how the destination brand image can be the essence of awareness creation and even contribute in reducing purchasing risks during the consumption process (Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011). Crompton (1979) defines destination

image as an attitudinal process combining the beliefs, ideas and impression a visitor has about the concerned destination. This establishes destination image as an important factor in the decision process of the tourist, whether his/her beliefs are accurate or not (Crompton & Um, 1990). The theoretical understanding here is that the concept of image seems to appear as a strong promotional tool for destinations to emphasize its positive attributes while allowing for the negative ones to fade away. Researchers also explained destination brand image as the combination of a cognitive and an affective aspect (McCleary & Baloglu, 1999). The cognitive part referring to personal opinions and individual familiarity of a tourist for a destination, whereas the affective aspect is related to the strength of the emotions the tourist has for the destination's attributes (McCleary & Baloglu, 1999). As all dimensions of destination brand equity are interfering and interrelating during the process, destination image is a key factor of successful destination loyalty (Hosany et al., 2006).

2.3.3 Destination quality

To maintain a logical evolution of the dimensions framework, Gartner & Ruzzier (2011) descriptions of the elements will be once again reviewed. They argue that brand quality is a very subjective characteristic, harder to measure, and as an element that transforms a lot during an individual's life and experiences (Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011). Their paper discusses further that the complexity of the destination system involving different dimensions, stakeholders and businesses, challenges a destination to be consistent in its performance (Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011). Branding specialists confirm the importance of quality in the realization of strong brand equity, but also mention the instability of individual businesses and the lack of control a destination has on them (Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011). When considering the quality of a destination brand, quality can refer to the result of combining organizational effectiveness, atmosphere and experiences (D. A. Aaker, 1996; Boo et al., 2009; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014a). The perceived quality of a destination has a direct positive effect on the overall value of the concerned destination brand equity (Deslandes, 2003; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007).

2.3.4 Destination loyalty

There is no exact and generally agreed definition of destination loyalty in the destination brand equity context (Baloglu, 2002; Boo et al., 2009; Oppermann, 2000). Nevertheless, Dimanche (2002, p. 78) describes destination loyalty as "the tourist's conscious or unconscious decision, expressed through intention or behavior, to revisit a destination". Furthermore, once again, Gartner & Ruzzier (2011) explain how the destination loyalty can be interpreted as the ratio of repeat visitors and utilize the concepts of behavioral or attitudinal loyalty, already mentioned by a number of researchers (D. A. Aaker, 1991; Boo et al., 2009; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014a; Yoo & Donthu, 2001). On one side, behavioral loyalty strongly depends on the business climate

of the destination and on past experiences of the consumer, connecting obviously the loyalty dimension with the emotions of the visitor, and amplifying the impact of these emotions on brand equity development (Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011). On the other side, a high attitudinal loyalty is based on the attributes and benefits of the place, and how the traveler's interactions with those attributes fulfill and satisfy his expectations, needs and wants (Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011). In a destination branding study case of Slovenia, brand loyalty was shown to be particularly important in the establishment of a consumer-based brand equity model (Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). Oppermann (2000) emphasized his work on the importance of destination brand loyalty in the contribution to brand equity. His research revealed gaps in longitudinal studies regarding destination choice (Oppermann, 2000). The role of loyalty in destination branding, especially for hospitality and tourism, refers to a multidimensional affective, conative and cognitive approach regarding the concerned brand (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014a; Parks & Back, 2003). Parks & Back (2003, p. 431) discussed that "satisfied customers will tolerate lower price elastics, will be more insulated from competitive situations through battles about lower prices, and will generate more profit when they have a strong commitment level (conative brand loyalty), strong favoritism (affective brand loyalty), and strong beliefs about the superiority (cognitive brand loyalty) of a brand". In the destination branding context, the measurement of loyalty is frequently processed through repeat visitation analysis (Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014a). Concerning hospitality and luxury travel, brand loyalty has a direct positive impact on a brand's performance (Kim & Kim, 2005). Moreover, Boo et al. (2009) state in their research that "a significant relationship between brand value and brand loyalty" (p. 222) exists. In similar words, Dimanche (2002, p. 78) discusses that "brand loyalty occurs when the destination offers value".

2.3.5 Destination brand assets

The sometimes-studied brand assets as fifth dimension of brand equity is less used in the destination branding literature. The complexity of a destination by incorporating various tangible and intangible components, such as culture, makes it harder to directly measure the brand equity of a destination through financial and market indicators, such as for a normal consumer product (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014a). However, the brand assets dimension is still sometimes used, especially in cultural brands and events literature (Dimanche, 2002; Getz, 2008; Getz & Page, 2014; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014a, 2014b; Richards & Wilson, 2004). Kladou & Kehagias (2014b) exposed in their research the implication of cultural brand assets for the brand equity of cultural destinations. Their study, revealing the five dimensions perspective to brand equity, helped participate in reinforcing the under-researched concept of cultural brand assets (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014b). Their findings included that cultural brand assets can benefit the creation of valuable brand assets, through a consumer-based approach in tourism contexts (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014b). Therefore, the cultural brand assets are

significant for the destination brand equity (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014b). Moreover, the relationship between brand assets and other dimensions of brand equity such as quality and loyalty has been researched (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014b). Indeed, Kladou & Kehagias (2014b) mentioned that cultural brand assets have an impact on the loyalty dimension.

Furthermore, in a sports marketing context, H. J. Lee & Jee (2016) researched the interrelationships between brand assets and brand loyalty. Their study discovered that brand assets have a significant impact on other dimensions of brand equity (H. J. Lee & Jee, 2016). Indeed, perceived quality, brand image, and brand awareness seem to be influenced by brand assets (H. J. Lee & Jee, 2016). Those dimensions of brand equity impact directly brand loyalty (H. J. Lee & Jee, 2016). Therefore, their study concludes that brand assets have a significant impact on brand loyalty (H. J. Lee & Jee, 2016).

To conclude the sections on the dimensions of consumer-based destination brand equity, Gartner & Ruzzier (2011) advise that to improve the dimensions' effectiveness and increase destination brand equity, destination marketers need to rigorously distinguish each dimension and conduct a strategy to build strong destination brand dimensions separately one from another.

2.3.6 Additional thoughts on the concept of brand value and its applicability for destination brand equity

Some researchers like Boo et al. (2009) used the idea of brand value as part of the dimensions in the general consumer-based brand equity context but also applied it for destinations. Consumer value is a concept that does not have a widely accepted definition (Flint, Woodruff, & Gardial, 2002; Parasuraman, 1997). However, most often it has been described as being related to the price and utility of a product (Lassar et al., 2003; Sweeney, Soutar, & Johnson, 1999). In Aaker's (1996) seminal work, it has been established that brand value possibly reflects the consumer's reaction towards a value for price ratio and results in the choice of that specific brand over another. Boo et al. (2009) worked on Aaker's (1996) and Sweeney & Soutar's (2001) definitions of brand value to extend the concept of functional brand value to consumer-based destination brand equity. Research has shown a correlation between a brand's perceived value and the behavior of a consumer during his purchase decision process (Sweeney et al., 1999; Teas & Laczniak, 2004; Woodruff, 1995). Other interrelations can be made between value and the specific loyalty dimension of brands as a concept, and of destination brand equity in its entirety (Chiou, 2004; Grewal, Levy, & Lehmann, 2004; Kwun & Oh, 2004; Zeithaml, 1988).

2.4 Destination branding, destination image-identity complementarity and destination personality

2.4.1 Destination branding

Joining D. A. Aaker's (1991) perspective on brands, the action of branding can be related to the ability of a destination to push forward its uniqueness by differentiating itself from the competition (Qu, Kim, & Im, 2011). The term destination uniqueness is often understood as the identity of a destination. As mentioned in diverse destination branding literature, destinations must be analyzed as different processes rather than products, since they can be described by their non-materialistic and strongly experiential related consumption (Florek, 2005; Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011; Konecnik & Gartner, 2007). Not only is a destination a broad mix of various tangible and intangible components, but its effect on visitors will also differentiate according to the targeted segment, increasing branding complexity and the need for specific targeting (Cai, 2002; Dredge & Jenkins, 2003; Fan, 2006). David Allen Aaker (1996) and Keller (1993), in their seminal works, already set the importance of differentiation in identity building through the necessary use of points of difference associations to generate positive evaluation and uniqueness. Destination branding has also been defined as “what images people have of the state and what kind of relationship they have with it” (Nickerson & Moisey, 1999, p. 217). According to Cai (2002, p. 722), destination branding can be defined as “selecting a consistent element mix to identify and distinguish it through positive image building”. However, Qu et al. (2011, p. 465) argue that “consumers are generally offered various destination choices that provide similar features such as quality accommodations, beautiful scenic view, and/or friendly people. Therefore, it is not enough for a destination to be included in the evoked set; instead the destination needs to be unique and differential to be selected as a final decision”. This emphasizes the importance for destinations to develop unique identities from the target’s perspective, and to distinguish their brand from market alternatives (Qu et al., 2011). Cai (2002) adds that destination branding essentially relies on differentiation, by creating positive impressions through its image and identity. Furthermore, Blain, Levy, & Ritchie (2005, p. 337) argue that destination branding is “the set of marketing activities that (1) support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that readily identifies and differentiates a destination; (2) consistently convey the expectation of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; (3) serve to consolidate and reinforce the emotional connection between the visitor and the destination; and (4) reduce consumer search costs and perceived risk”. Therefore, the practice of destination branding is essential for DMOs, since the tourists have more and more choices of places to travel to, increasing consequently the competition and the complexity to effectively differentiate (Pike, 2005). Thus, various concepts and theories have been established as how to brand a destination with efficiency and

effectiveness (Cai, 2002; Hankinson, 2005; Morgan et al., 2002; Ooi, 2004; Woodside et al., 2007). As shown destination branding should not only be attached to the process of destination image formation (Hem & Iversen, 2004) which dominated destination perceptual research since the 1970's.

2.4.2 Relationships between brand image and brand identity

Image and identity are two fundamental elements for effective destination branding (Cai, 2002). Cai (2002) explains that image formation is not enough for branding. Indeed, the building of an image for a destination is part of the branding process but it is not sufficient, as it lacks the brand identity (Cai, 2002). The distinction between image and identity has been explained by the source of provenance of the impression, the image referring to a perception received, whereas identity is used for a perspective that is created and transmitted (Florek, Insch, & Gnoth, 2006; Kapferer, 1998). However, some interrelations can be made between brand image, brand identity, brand associations and even other elements of the brand dimensions' theoretical underpinnings. As an example, brand identity is referred to as the result of a contribution of the different brand elements to brand image and awareness (Keller, 1998). Furthermore, in later research, Keller (2008) argues that from a consumer's point of view, brand image is the reflection of the brand associations that a consumer develops through his experiences with the concerned brand, the souvenirs, and the memories he remembers the best. Hence the marketers of a destination are the ones who develop and disseminate the destination brand identity to specific target market segments thereby differentiating themselves from the competition although the target markets are the ones who receive and then develop a particular brand image about the place (Florek et al., 2006; Qu et al., 2011). The brand identity and brand image are then always interrelating in a certain manner, the identity trying to build the image, and the image being the reflection of the projected identity (Cai, 2002; Florek et al., 2006; Qu et al., 2011). Therefore, the positivity of the sent identity and the positivity of the received image have a reciprocity relationship of, always trying to influence each other to develop an overall stronger destination brand by the creation of emotions and brand associations in the brand equity system (Qu et al., 2011). Destination brand image and identity seem to therefore radically depend one each other and only both together can enable an effective destination branding process (Hem & Iversen, 2004).

2.4.3 Additional thoughts on brand associations

In his works, Keller (1993, 1998) categorizes brand associations as attributes, benefits and attitudes. Firstly, the attributes can be understood as the thoughts a consumer has about the brand itself and the different consequences of its purchase (Qu et al., 2011). Secondly, the benefits represent the value that the consumption of the brand and its attribute will bring to the

consumer (Qu et al., 2011). Lastly, the attitudes would be the reasons why the consumer chose that specific brand over another, (Qu et al., 2011). Once again, relations between brand associations and destination image can be made, the image being one of the first steps in a tourist's process of building expectations and further being a strong element leading to consumption and behavior (Ryan & Gu, 2008). Also, destination image is the result of the combination of two features, the cognitive and the affective indicators, both participating and impacting directly the brand associations dimension of destination branding (Baloglu, 1996; Baloglu & Brinberg, 1993; McCleary & Baloglu, 1999; Pike, 2009). The expected outcome of a rigorous application of branding theories aims to properly discern the image and uniqueness of the brand in the market's mind, powerfully accentuating the strength of overall destination brand equity (Buhalis, 2000; Chon, Weaver, & Kim, 1991; Fan, 2006; Go & Govers, 2000; Mihalic, 2000; Qu et al., 2011). Qu et al. (2011) even suggest that the uniqueness of a brand image should be included in the brand associations.

2.4.4 Brand personality and its adaptability to destinations

A definition of brand personality can be "the set of human characteristics associated to a brand" (J. L. Aaker, 1997, p. 347). J. L. Aaker (1997) also established the Brand Personality Scale (BPS), a model of five dimensions: "sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness" (Hosany et al., 2006, p. 639). Since J. L. Aaker's (1997) work, different industries have used the BPS to measure the power of a brand's personality (Hosany et al., 2006). However, regarding the tourism industry, no such research had been done until Hosany et al. (2006, p. 639), who describe destination personality as a "multidimensional construct", defined as "the set of human characteristics associated to a tourism destination". Both brand image and brand personality have been accepted as major elements of the brand loyalty dimension of brand equity and of the brand's general positioning (Keller, 2008; Plummer, 2000). Marketing has always mentioned, fruitfully, the concept of brand image, but the link of image with personality has always seemed a little vague (Patterson, 1999). To emphasize this, Patterson (1999) analyzed 27 definitions of the brand image concept, and 12 definitions of the brand personality concept (Hosany et al., 2006, p. 639). The main findings are that, over time, literature has theoretically described brand image with notions of brand personality, however the concepts have also been often interchanged (Gardner & Levy, 1955; Graeff, 1997; Hendon & Williams, 1985; Hosany et al., 2006; Plummer, 2000). Nevertheless, destination brand image is often interpreted as closely linked to brand personality, reflecting social attributes in the minds of the consumers (D. A. Aaker, 1996; Boo et al., 2009; Grace & O'Cass, 2005; Hultman, Pitt, Spyropoulou, Abratt, & Opoku, 2006; Kapferer, 1998; Lassar et al., 2003). However, extensive research defends that literature concerning brand image suggesting that brand personality and brand identity are repeatedly muddling the different concepts (Patterson, 1999). Hosany et al. (2006) were among the first to conduct a study aimed at empirically relating brand image with

brand personality, particularly in a destination branding context. Indeed, at that time, branding techniques were not yet very popular among destination branding researchers (Pritchard & Morgan, 1998).

2.5 Cultural assets in the brand assets dimension of destination brand equity

Kladou & Kehagias (2014a) have worked on integrating the concept of culture into the traditional destination brand equity literature. Their research introduces the role of the cultural assets, and their interrelation with brand equity and brand dimensions for cultural destination brands (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014a). Literature on cultural brands is not extensive. Nevertheless, some research has been done. Indeed, Dimanche (2002) and Richards & Wilson (2004) worked on the impact of events on brand equity and brand image. Cultural assets can be understood as powerful means in the development of a cultural destination brand, and thence are highly implicated in the positioning and successful differentiation of the concerned destination brand (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014a). To achieve such results, uniqueness of the cultural brand is a major factor, directly enabling the branding process through remarkable cultural brand assets (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014a). Cultural brand assets are strongly linked with the brand equity dimensions and impact powerfully the competitive advantage a cultural destination can have on its competition by pushing forward an overall better-developed brand equity in the tourists' perceptions (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014a). As mentioned, the relation between cultural assets as part of brand assets has been researched in the past (Dimanche, 2002; Getz, 2008; Getz & Page, 2014; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014a, 2014b; Richards & Wilson, 2004). The branding process making tourists being attracted to one destination for its unique cultural specificities enhances the role of cultural assets as part of brand assets (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014a). An extensive study on cultural assets in destination brand equity has led to consider, as cultural assets, only "entertainment/nightlife, cultural festivals, traditions, cultural events and street culture" (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014a, p. 8), putting aside "museums, monuments/ heritage sites, art centers, cuisine and world heritage sites" from the destination brand equity cultural asset dimension (Kladou & Kehagias, 2014a, p. 8).

2.6 Role of events on destination brand equity

Dimanche (2002) focused his research on the role of special events on destination brand equity. For him, events can be powerful tools for promoting, positioning and branding in the tourism destination context (Dimanche, 2002). Getz (1997, p. 6) mentioned during his work the benefits of large events on destinations, by enabling "tourism, media coverage, prestige, or economic impact for the host community or destination". Dimanche (2002, p. 74) specifies that also

smaller destinations seem to profit from local events, since event tourism helps by “putting their destination on the map”. For the potential tourists and consumers, events can be described as an occasion for “leisure, social, or cultural experiences outside the normal range of choices or beyond everyday experience” (Dimanche, 2002, p. 74). The event system includes everything from festivals to businesses, including sport and art events, and basically any type of gathering that is organized to charm and please potential tourists (Dimanche, 2002). Events are considered the reflection of the consumer’s needs, since they are easily accustomed towards certain target groups according to various trends (Dimanche, 2002). Furthermore, events can be used to develop destination brands by directly contributing to the destination’s image (Dimanche, 2002). According to Dimanche, DMOs are overthinking the promotional activities in their marketing strategies instead of dedicating efforts on positioning, segmentation and differentiation, through destination branding (Dimanche, 2002). Indeed, tourists seemingly are not directly impacted by the characteristics of a destination, but are sensitive to feeling emotionally linked to the destination brand’s attributes (Crompton, 1979). An evolution of this statement could be that tourists are actually attracted by the experiences they will enjoy in a specific destination rather than the destination as a product itself, creating the need for destination marketers to more likely adapt a destination’s attributes to the needs of the targeted tourists (Dimanche, 2002). Therefore, he argues that events can be strong tools in destination marketing, especially in the process of developing successful destination brands by effectively contributing to the consumer-based destination brand equity (Dimanche, 2002). Moreover, events are very flexible and adaptative, regrouping diverse types of activities and experiences, creating powerful targeting products and services (Dimanche, 2002). The role of events in marketing is rapidly growing, especially through the various sponsorships companies can use to establish their brand’s position (Dimanche, 2002). Indeed, for example, by sponsoring an underground culture and music event, a company tries to install a close emotional relationship with the event’s consumers, by branding itself as supporting that same alternative culture. The same understanding can be applied to destinations. If a destination is hosting many underground events, it will more likely be perceived as an underground destination in the minds of their target group. This supports the suggestion that events are marketing tools to promote, position and brand a destination (Dimanche, 2002). C. W. Park, Jaworski, & MacInnis (1984) explain this phenomenon as the concept of fortification strategy. Indeed, they explain how destinations can link their destination brand image to the image of other product brands such as, in this case, events (Dimanche, 2002; C. W. Park et al., 1984). The principal idea of the fortification strategy is that the various brands of a destination reinforce each other, by increasing the power of the overall destination brand equity, simply by coordinating themselves through shared image, identity and personality (Dimanche, 2002). The situation of a fortification strategy should benefit each of the destination’s product brands’ equity individually and increase the strength of the main destination brand equity, in the shape of a win-win situation (Dimanche, 2002). In

brief, a fortification strategy brings consistency and product complementarity to a destination's image and brand (Dimanche, 2002).

2.6.1 Impact of events on the destination brand equity dimensions and destination positioning

Dimanche (2002) argues that events have a large contribution to destination brand awareness, either through advertising strategies, enormous media coverage, or simply by proper cultural targeting on a national or regional level. Similarly for the perceived quality dimension, successful events can reflect professionalism and excellence, increasing strongly the desirability of a destination (Dimanche, 2002). Events also contribute in the creation of positive brand associations, including “imagery, destination attributes, associations, brand personality, or symbols” (Dimanche, 2002, p. 78). Finally, he explains that successful events are also creating loyal visitors for destinations, since those events can possibly be the reason for a first time visit to a destination, and thus they could be enabling the event-tourist to also visit the destination itself, and conceivably become a repeat visitor year after year (Dimanche, 2002). However, about short duration cultural festivals, Mckercher et al. (2006, p. 55) criticize that “tourism attraction systems’ theory reinforces the importance of awareness building prior to departure and suggests that in-destination awareness creation is ineffective in generating demand for these types of events, especially among short stay tourists”.

Positioning is part of general marketing theory. In a destination context, it consists of knowing which of the concerned destination's attributes are perceived as stronger than the rest of the market's attributes, and emphasize those attributes that allow the destination to differentiate itself from its competitors (Dimanche, 2002). These attributes may already exist, or be the result of destination marketers' initiatives (Dimanche, 2002). Events are unique in time and space and are directly linked to the precise destination in which they take place. Therefore, a successful event itself can be considered an attribute for the destination and help to ameliorate the positioning of it (Dimanche, 2002). As an example, events such as festivals, clubs and artistic venues can help emphasize the positioning of a destination as a festival, cultural, or clubbing destination. The events then consequently contribute to the overall branding process of the destination.

2.7 Gaps in the literature

The above literature review has established the existence of gaps regarding the concepts of alternative emergent cultural trends related to destination branding in developing countries. Therefore, my research will pursue an understanding of how these concepts are or are not linked. Moreover, literature about unusual or unplanned destination branding processes has not

been a common topic of research. The existent literature on the previously reviewed theoretical underpinnings and empirical evidences will help to relate to the case study presented in this thesis.

3 Research methodology

3.1 Philosophical foundations

My research has been conducted following the Grounded Theory (GT) methodology. GT was first introduced publicly in the field of medical sociology, through the seminal work of Glaser & Strauss (1967). In their book, they described GT as: “the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 2).

After their book was published, researchers continuously elaborated, commented and reviewed the methodology, until Glaser and Strauss themselves started to progressively disagree about methodological fundamentals of GT in the 1980s. The book “Basics of Qualitative Research” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) marked the official separation of the renowned collaborators. Glaser answered with “Basics of Grounded Theory: Emergence vs Forcing” (Glaser, 1992), where he comments and criticizes the approach of Strauss & Corbin. Since this academic confrontation between Glaser and Strauss, GT has been divided into two separate methods, the Glaserian GT and the Straussian GT. Nowadays, when researchers decide to use GT as a methodology, they are obliged to contrast both methods and profoundly review GT’s historical evolution to make sure they choose the appropriate approach to their research. To answer modern criticism in the GT context, a third version of GT has appeared and has been widely used. Indeed, “Constructing Grounded Theory” (Charmaz, 2006), proposes a constructivist approach to GT. This approach, loyal to constructivism, emphasizes the interrelationship between the researcher and the research itself, shaping the importance of the interactions with the various participants and incorporating the researcher’s perspective into the process (Charmaz, 2006, 2008).

In its essence, GT has been mostly positioned in qualitative research, which has been defined as “a complex, interconnected family of terms, concepts and assumptions that cuts across disciplines, fields and subject matter” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 3). Nevertheless, Glaser and Strauss also disagree on this matter. The first considers GT as totally free, able to consider everything as usable data (Glaser, 2003). For him, GT can be embracing both qualitative and quantitative methods if the research itself at the beginning requires them both or if during the study, the researcher stumbles upon the need to use one or the other (Glaser, 2003). Strauss

believes GT is only incorporating qualitative methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Furthermore, Locke (2000) refers to qualitative research as incorporating a confusing wide range of paradigms. Therefore, in the literature, GT has been described from numerous different philosophical perspectives. For example, Weed (2017) argues that the three GT variants regarding ontology and epistemology are the realist-positivist (Glaser, 1992), the post-positivist (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and finally the constructivist-interpretivist (Charmaz, 2006). Even though the different methods propose their own philosophical foundations, the essence and aim of GT remains the same: to expose and reveal elementary social processes, relationships and behaviors (Glaser, 1978). Moreover, all GT variations have the same observations regarding the purpose of developing in-depth social understandings grounded in collected data (Weed, 2017). However, the Glaserian GT is historically the commonly used method, as it is the closest to the original version of GT (Locke, 2000). Nevertheless, recently, in a modern context, the approach proposed by Charmaz is more successful considering that it is adapted to modern methodological materials and contemporary approaches to qualitative research (Charmaz, 2008).

This research resembles the Charmaz (2006) approach to a constructivist-interpretivist GT, that she calls the constructionist approach (Charmaz, 2014). In the recent edition of her book “Constructing grounded theory” (Charmaz, 2014), she places reality as “a function and outcome of interpretation and human interaction around a given phenomenon” (Singh & Estefan, 2018, p. 3), establishing an interpretive approach to GT. In opposition to the ontological and epistemological views of realist-positivist Glaser (2003) and post-positivists Strauss & Corbin (1990), Charmaz (2014) sees that GT is ontologically relativist and epistemologically subjectivist. Therefore, GT can hold multiple contextually influenced realities (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2017). She pushes the researcher forward into interacting with the different participants of the research in order to engage with the different possible perspectives (Charmaz, 2014). Moreover, for her, reality is dynamic and “people construct local meaning about reality to understand and act on it within their immediate context” (Singh & Estefan, 2018, p. 3).

To summarize, the philosophical foundations of the constructionist approach to GT can be stated as follows: “(1) Reality is multiple, processual, and constructed—but constructed under particular conditions; (2) the research process emerges from interaction; (3) it takes into account the researcher’s positionality, as well as that of the research participants; (4) the researcher and researched co-construct the data—data are a product of the research process, not simply observed objects of it” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 402).

3.2 Study context

Georgia is an extremely interesting destination to study through a branding perspective considering multiple factors. To avoid the typical descriptive analysis, this section will try to explain with criticism why Georgia and especially Tbilisi are great contexts to test destination branding concepts.

Lack of financial resources is generally present in developing countries. Lack of financial resources also often translates into poor destination branding efforts. However, in the last five years, an unforeseen phenomenon started to appear through a very niche and precise perspective. Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, slowly transformed into a globally notorious acknowledged dreamland for alternative electronic music enthusiasts. Why has a small country of South-Caucasus, surrounded by Russia, Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan, suddenly become one of the most respected clubbing and nightlife party scenes in the world? Why is Tbilisi nowadays so often compared to the techno music mecca, Berlin?

Youngsters and especially millennials from all around the world are now aware of Tbilisi. They know where Georgia is on the globe, thanks to Tbilisi. They all talk about, and intensely desire to visit Tbilisi to experience the capital's lifestyle.

My research was essentially born from a strong desire to understand how and why such a powerful and global destination brand was created through emergent alternative culture.

All the previously reviewed destination branding concepts such as consumer-based brand equity dimensions, brand image, brand identity, but especially cultural brand assets and events are extremely interesting concepts to compare and relate in the contexts of developing countries. The study context of Georgia and its capital city just appeared as a very fascinating case of destination branding and my research will try to explore ways to explain this specific destination branding process.

Moreover, the choice of the study context also justifies the decision to follow Charmaz's (2014) approach to GT. Indeed, she encourages that the researcher already previously possess personal and professional experiences and knowledge in the researched fields and contexts to put into perspective various points of views and critically assess the newly studied phenomenon (Charmaz, 2014). I have previously visited Tbilisi and I have personal and professional experiences in the festival management and electronic music event planning industries. Moreover, during the research process, I have engaged in collaborating with various event organizations to obtain a deeper understanding of the context's dynamics. Furthermore,

Charmaz's (2014) view on GT is particularly aimed for local phenomena that transform over a certain time scale as contextual conditions evolve (Singh & Estefan, 2018). Tbilisi is experiencing a very rapid and positive transformation since the country's last war in 2008. Therefore, in the case of this study, I saw an immense value and engaged with personal and professional experiences into the inquiry process.

3.3 Data collection and data analysis

All grounded theories have certain features in common (Charmaz, 2006). The principal characteristic of GT is that the data collection and data analysis processes happen simultaneously. The interpretivist-constructivist researcher states that the processes are iterative and that interactions of researchers and participants with the data and the emergence of theory should be intimate in order to obtain a co-constructed development of GT (Charmaz, 2014). During the GT method, induction and deduction are utilized to process the obtained data (Singh & Estefan, 2018). Moreover, and especially accurate for my research's context, abduction is also a tool encouraged by Charmaz (2014) to enable creativity and intuition to "explain unanswered or unexpected observations" (Singh & Estefan, 2018, p. 5), and to ameliorate the co-construction of theory and the overall processing of data. Abduction is in alignment with the previously explained researcher being personally and professionally well informed before and during the GT method, as it improves the construction of theory (Singh & Estefan, 2018). Indeed, Charmaz (2014) explains that by having a higher level of expertise, the researcher has the capacity to ask more valuable questions and increase theoretical sensitivity, which is defined as "the ability to see, define, and express phenomena and their interrelationships in abstract form" (Singh & Estefan, 2018, p. 5). Charmaz (2014) also encourages the use of other analytical tools, which made me proceed in a methodological combination of strongly dominant qualitative methods with the use of simple quantitative methods since they have been perceived helpful in completing the co-construction of theory during my research.

The rest of the GT process is very practical.

Regarding data collection, my research mainly undertook 10 in-depth interviews, face-to-face, in Tbilisi, with participants who were familiar with the studied branding process or had an opinion about it. The questions were open-ended and were sometimes modified interview after interview to test previously collected data. The questions were usually narrowing down to my fields of interest and the ones of the participants, to understand the components of the theory. After the 10th interview, theoretical saturation had been reached.

The particularity of GT is that during the data collection, data analysis is also occurring, they are concurrent. Indeed, interview after interview, the data has been analytically coded. The coding process and my immersion in the data followed the principle of theoretical sensitivity, which can be understood as the translation of giving labels to specific sets of data, in order to construct inductively abstract categories and theory from that data during the collection, and then to relate them to theoretical concepts, instead of directly creating a theory from previously established predetermined models (Glaser, 1978).

During the initial coding process and analysis, I have been continuously writing analytical notes about the interactions with data, called memos. The memoing activity has been supporting the emergence of the social processes in the collected data.

Moreover, a set of actions has been utilized as my research advanced, such as the theoretical sampling to refine the categories as soon as key concept have emerged, and the practice of constant comparison within the data which helped to understand and identify data saturation. Constant comparison has been applied to keep the codes active by constantly questioning what is actually happening in the study context, what are the conditions for it to happen and what category is this data belonging to (Glaser, 1978).

To summarize, the ongoing initial coding process helped to simultaneously understand, evaluate and synthesize the data collected on the field by breaking down the findings into smaller categories of concepts, which together construct the outcoming theory (Charmaz, 2014).

The analysis then entered the selective coding stage which ended after the 10th interview, when the refining of the data finally resulted in data saturation, defined as the moment when “no new properties, dimensions, or relationships emerge during analysis” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). At this stage of the analysis, the emerged categories, subcategories and various abstract concepts have interrelated and have been translated into theory through certain figures and models. Finally, the process of data collection and data analysis then stopped, since the developed theory emerged, data saturation was reached, and all the data made sense together.

However, during the GT process, I have used other research methods to prove specific points. The use of simple quantitative analysis has been necessary to help confirm and design certain categories of data. Therefore, according to Glaser's (2003) perspective, “all is data”, on the use of any research method in GT, I have decided it would enhance the quality of the study to combine a mainly qualitative research with some basic quantitative analysis.

4 Results

The Grounded Theory method has helped my research to pursue a deeper understanding of the dynamics around the local emergence of an electronic music trend and its resulting internationally relevant cultural scene in Tbilisi. At the very beginning of the research process, the literature review has exposed concepts such as consumer-based brand equity, destination brand dimensions, destination image and identity, cultural assets, role of events in branding, etc. (the reader can refer to the literature review). However, interview after interview, more concepts have been discovered as crucial in the study. The newly revealed perceptions will be presented and further discussed in comparison with the previous literature review. Briefly, the Grounded Theory method helped us confirm the existence of an emergent electronic music cultural scene and a youth lifestyle environment in Georgia, and especially in Tbilisi. Therefore, the following pages will try to reveal how such a movement is born, and why it affects mainly the city, but also the country, on a branding perspective, in a developing environment. In order to ensure that the participants of the research remain anonymous, the Table 1 introduces the interviewees as Participants A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, their age, the date of their interview, their job and finally their citizenship.

Table 1: List of interviewees

Name	Age	Date of interview	Job	Citizenship
Participant A	28	3/4/2019	Youth Hostel Marketing Manager	Georgia
Participant B	22	3/5/2019	Music Producer	Georgia
Participant C	25	3/14/2019	Music Producer	Georgia
Participant D	29	3/15/2019	Sociology Teacher	Belarus Canada
Participant E	27	3/16/2019	Festival Manager / Band Manager	Georgia
Participant F	42	3/17/2019	International Disc Jockey (DJ) & Producer	Latvia
Participant G	26	3/18/2019	Art & Culture Strategist	Georgia
Participant H	29	4/11/2019	Journalist	Georgia
Participant I	31	4/15/2019	Journalist	United Kingdom Georgia

Participant J	51	4/16/2019	Special Adviser to the Mayor of Tbilisi	Georgia Germany
---------------	----	-----------	---	--------------------

Source: own work

The people that have been interviewed created a sample of various perspectives. As shown in Table 1, most of the participants are either Georgian or Georgian dual-citizens, as I decided that interviewing people from outside the country, or people that have never been to Georgia, would not be very informative. Similarly, the interviewees have specifically been chosen for reasons, as they are based in Tbilisi and are either related musicians, alternative event organizers, cultural strategic decision-makers, and even relevant lifestyle journalists. Moreover, in my research process, it has been common that one participant had been recommended to me during a previous interview, creating a very rational order of interviews through the Grounded Theory approach.

4.1 Presentation of Results

4.1.1 The Context

The 10 conducted interviews have led to various revealed categories. First, the circular back-and-forth coding process of the Grounded Theory method helped to establish the emergence of **The Context** as the main core category. Moreover, within this category, which is the largest, many sub-concepts have been perceived as pertinent. These sub-concepts have been gathered and will be presented accordingly to their coherence, in subcategories.

4.1.1.1 *Politics, Soviet History, Europeanization and Identity Crisis*

The political context and history of Georgia has played a major role in the creation of the actual music scene. The first interview was addressed to Participant A, a young female marketing coordinator of one of the trendiest hubs of Tbilisi, an avant-garde hostel, where internationals and locals gather in open spaces in which they can enjoy various drinks, foods, alternative music, skate shops, street art and other fashionable shops. She stated: “We are the new generation, we are born and raised in the independent Georgia. We grew up with totally new legislations and governments, everything became related to politics. Even clubs.” (Participant A, 2019). What is understood through her words, is that her generation lives in a totally different political context than their parents and grandparents.

The next interviewee, Participant B, a young Electronic Dance Music (EDM) producer, explains: “The wars, past and politics of Georgia are directly connected to the music we produce

nowadays.” (Participant B, 2019). Basically, the soviet history of Georgia and its recent parliamentary democratic political system have created an identity crisis among the new generation. Participant A and B explain that their era is trying to identify themselves and to find answers to existential questions: “Given the historical perspective of authoritarian governments, now everyone tries to create their new identity. You do not really know who you are. You know you come from a soviet environment, but that is not your identity [...]. They (the new generation) think about who they are as a nation.” (Participant A, 2019). Therefore, Participant B emphasizes: “This country has been very traditional, very conservative and had strong rules. Now if you talk with older generations, they do not really understand today’s situation. We must break the old rules to be free. Today’s situation is very interesting as there are two types of people living together, the traditionalists and the avant-garde otherwise referred to as the post-independence generations and the older soviet minds.” (Participant B, 2019).

Another interviewee, Participant E, an event manager for a main festival in Tbilisi and band manager of a successful music band, expressed very similar feelings: “Twenty years ago, there was poverty, misery and starvation in Georgia. [...] We progressed a lot in 10-20 years but there are still lots of things to change. We have lots to catch-up. Soviet attitude is still very present, in the mindset. It affects Georgia as a brand.” (Participant E, 2019). Participant E introduces a new perspective as well, on the role of the clubbing scene in the actual political context. He explains that clubs, especially the most famous one, that my research will name Club A, has been created by strong leftist activists, and that the people who go and dance there also somehow support those politically progressive statements: “Club owners are heavily involved in the protests. For example, a progressive young political movement was created by activists, who are also the creators of Club A. With the rise of the club’s popularity, their ideology also started to spread.” (Participant E, 2019). The progressive young political movement is pushing forward the liberal society, supports the queer community, labor rights and working class.

Participant F, a 42-year-old Latvian international disc jockey (DJ) and producer, living in Tbilisi also comments: “Georgia has a good base to create alternative cultures. The country was closed for so long because of wars, a bit like in Berlin, Germany. All Soviet Union just blew up and fell apart. I grew up at those times. Nobody knew how to live. Everybody grew up in a system where everything was planned and controlled, and suddenly, nothing! It was very easy to organize underground events.” (Participant F, 2019). Her words resemble the previous interviewees, supporting the idea that Soviet history, the political context and the identity quest are concepts behind the birth of the electronic music boom in Georgia.

Participant H, a Georgian journalist that previously worked in United Kingdom but now moved back to his home town, Tbilisi, shares another interesting perspective on the context. For him,

since centuries, Georgia was trying to cope with its geographical limitations of being surrounded by Persian, Arabic and Russian cultures. He understands Georgia as a country that always claimed a spot in Europe, as he told the story about how a Georgian monk went to talk to the former French king Louis XIV, who did not take the monk seriously and thought he was getting fooled. For him, the political context has always been to get closer to Europe: “Nearly everything in Georgia seeks to resemble Europe, especially when it comes to social values. The overall political idea has been and will always be to get closer to the European Union (EU) and be a more popular destination among Europeans. I would say that today’s hipsterfication is the continuation and result of those ideologies, combined with a higher quality of education. Clubbing is also a way to reach Europe.” (Participant H, 2019). A popular hostel’s marketing coordinator, Participant A, also supports this statement: “Georgia was always keeping on track towards EU values. The political priority has been to be part of EU. The cultural initiatives helped develop and push forward progressive ideologies regarding the lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual and queer (LGBTQ) communities and drug policies.” (Participant A, 2019).

Participant G, an activist, artist, exhibition creator and cultural strategist confirms that the political post-soviet context of Georgia has to do with the emergence of alternative institutions. He also brought up the political strategy of tightening relations with Europe and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO): “From a broader perspective, this is all happening because Georgia is going towards Europe and NATO. The ministries are following the agenda from the governmental strategy. They want to create the image of Georgia as a more cultural and democratic country. Therefore, they make association agreements with the involvement of the EU.” (Participant G, 2019). His criticism and perspective on today’s situation offered another reality of Georgia’s cultural and artistic heritage: “There is a lack of cultural strategy. Nowadays there is a huge dissonance between our label of innovative, cultural and opened democracy, in comparison to our public cultural institutions that are way behind and stagnating. In the last 30 years, nothing happened regarding art museums, nothing since the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) has been documented in art. Before, during soviet times, it was an obligation.” (Participant G, 2019). His opinions must be heard with some criticism as well, considering he is a strongly politically implicated artist, who tends to be anti-system in most of the statements he was making. However, the conclusions he made helped push forward how the recent artistic initiatives in Georgia are part of a rebellion, a protest: “Because of that [*the lagging of the public cultural institutions since the collapse of USSR*], alternative small institutions started to grow, independently. Few people managed what hundreds could not, and with less money. Just because they had a vision. Older big institutions still have a soviet mentality and vision.” (Participant G, 2019). Participant E had very similar views on the protest aspect, but directly linked it to techno music, the most popular music genre played in most of the capital’s clubs: “Techno music is escapist, it is a protest music genre, like

rock or metal. It is very aggressive and energetic, and energy is always directed to something. In Georgia, the techno cultural became a protest. Clubbers have solid views about what they like about their country and lives, and about what they do not like. Techno goers here are protesting socially and politically, for their survival.” (Participant E, 2019).

4.1.1.2 Emotional attribute, artistic history, creativity and entrepreneurship

A very interesting and unexpected concept that appeared a lot during the interviews, is the genuine emotionality and behavior of Georgians. It seems that the deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) of Georgians has a lot to do with the way the electronic music scene emerged and boomed. It has also emerged that Georgians have always been very creative people, and that the current context is propitious for creation and entrepreneurship.

Participant C is a 25-year-old woman, experimental live music producer and a student at a creative education studio in Tbilisi. She first explains that in Tbilisi, where many people have problems, music, arts and dance are essential tools for expression (Participant C, 2019). Moreover, to be able to let go and express all the emotions Georgians have kept inside, free safe spaces became a need for the people: “To cope with their everyday problems, Georgians create music, art, and they dance. Spaces for us to express ourselves did not always exist. Thanks to inspiring venues such as Club A or another club [*that my research introduces now as Club B*], there is now many spaces one can go to. Those two clubs really did a huge work in the process.” (Participant C, 2019). This idea of a true necessity for those type of places really came up several times during the interviews: “The whole South Caucasus needed free artistic places. That need exists since Soviet times, when some people wanted to defy the system, to be different, to be socially free.” (Participant H, 2019). The post-chaos and oppressive history explained in the previous section was truly part of the beginning of the creation of these spaces: “People in Georgia needed safe spaces where they could do whatever they want without getting judged. Artistic venues became the place for youngsters to gather and express a different lifestyle than the older generations. Especially for minorities and LGBTQ communities, those safe places were very relevant.” (Participant D, 2019). But in this context, the need was not the only factor leading to an emergence of various artistic spaces. The very favorable environment and easiness to start cultural projects also played a role: “In the beginning of Tbilisi’s boom, it was just about the power of the people. If you loved music, you could create music. If you loved dancing, you could create an incredible club. It was all about finding yourself.” (Participant A, 2019). This statement also directly links to the identity crisis that enables Georgians to express and create. Participant C emphasizes and explains the remarkable increase of popularity of the creative education studio: “When the studio was created 6 years ago, the members were only 11 passionate friends. Now they have more than 500 students.” (Participant C, 2019). It is

important to specify that the creative education studio is situated in the huge hub of a very popular hostel, with other artistic concept-stores and co-working areas.

The various concepts forming the context are all interrelated, as even when speaking about Georgia's history, it emerged that the country was famous in the Soviet Union for being a very artistic and creative place. In fact, Georgia was the country hosting the most theaters. Indeed, Participant D, a young Belarusian Sociology university lecturer points out: "Historically, Georgia was already famous for its cultural strength. During the USSR, Georgia possessed the most theaters." (Participant D, 2019). To pursue the idea of Georgia being a creative land, he explains that also other cities of Georgia were involved in culture: "Kutaisi also was always famous in the past for its music scene. Creativity was always present in Georgians, as we can see in their very original polyphonic singing traditions and folkloric dancing." (Participant D, 2019). Participant G brings up some very convincing arguments about Georgia's artistic history and the reasons behind today's boom: "Georgia, 100 years ago, had its modernism peak time. In 1920s. That period was a golden age for our country's poetry, Dadaism, visual art. Everything was parallel to major influential cities. We can compare with what is happening now. It is the same path of the lifecycle. What happens now is a response to stagnation. Lots of cultural forms/places are emerging. Perhaps Georgians also want to create a distance with the very traumatic past, by creating alternative new realities, spaces where this past can be digested." (Participant G, 2019). Once again, a relationship between Georgia's historical context and the artistic boom has been made. Participant G also underlines how creative Georgians have always been, and how the politics, war history and trauma have been activators of such creativity and willingness to express emotions through art forms. Being very emotional human beings just enabled Georgians' need to have those safe creative areas where they could set their emotions free. It is understood that art, creativity and the historical trauma and conflict context are strongly linked.

It also appears that the emotional attribute of Georgians impacts their behavior on the dancefloor: "When a person is angry and full of energy, he goes to the club to release. He only leaves the clubs when he is empty, and when no more energy is left." (Participant B, 2019). The fact that Georgians went through a difficult past, created some anger that has been accumulating for ages. Dancing in the clubs is for them a way to let that energy go. When discussing about Club A and Georgia's raving scene in general, DJs and club goers always mentioned how special the crowd is in Georgia. The artists can feel a high amount of energy transmitted by the public. This was apparently already the case during the USSR period, when many international theatre troupes would play in Georgia: "The performers would always be amazed by how responsive the Georgian public was. They could keep clapping for hours." (Participant H, 2019). The atmosphere of the clubs seem to be part of the brand, of the experience the visitor is seeking when entering those dark and underground spaces. Participant E tells the story of his

friends going there every weekend since the creation of Club A, approximately 5 years ago: “It just trains so much energy. Physically and mentally. They enjoy it so much; they dance till morning like crazy. The atmosphere is incredible. Club goers are very intense here.” (Participant E, 2019). The fact is, that DJs and club goers have mentioned repeatedly that the ambiance of Georgia’s venues is simply something different.

Indeed, the emotional attribute seems to go back to Georgian’s DNA. According to Participant F, Georgians’ behavior is very favorable for the development of nightlife and alternative cultures: “The people of this nation, as in especially southern nations, are usually more open and really want to entertain. People here want to go out all the time, they prefer to sit out, go out, be out. It gives a lot to the nightlife.” (Participant F, 2019). In addition, it also affects directly the easiness in the marketing process of attracting people outside of their homes: “On a marketing point of view, it is very easy here to attract people. They stay out later and wake up later. Everything happens at night. The tempo of the lifestyle is like that, which is a great basis to promote alternative culture.” (Participant F, 2019). Once again, the political and social context shows itself as a great starting point for the development of the emergent cultural trends.

4.1.1.3 Novelty, exoticism and hype

The rising popularity of Georgia and its capital has also been strongly impacted by three concepts that I labeled as Novelty, Exoticism and Hype. It has been repeated that western countries have a pleasure for seeking the undiscovered, the still unknown, the mysterious, the remote, the exotic and finally the hyped places. The same process occurs in the music and tourism industry. For many people around the world, traveling in Georgia is still something uncommon. Experiencing the nightlife here became something very hyped worldwide in the techno scene. Participant G explains that “the arts and technological development are happening; the processes are accelerating” (Participant G, 2019). Everything seems to be developing, growing, evolving. However, for Participant A (2019), Georgia is still a country not well known and poorly mediatized in most aspects, except in the electronic music and youth lifestyle trendiest medias. She observed that: “Georgia is still considered “exotic”, even though here we hate that word. Some people I met still think Georgia is a new country.” (Participant A, 2019).

Georgians have been described a few times as trend followers (Participant B, 2019; Participant C, 2019), or as trying to copy already existing underground scenes, like Berlin (Participant F, 2019). The fact that techno’s popularity worldwide is strongly increasing, slowly becoming a pop-music genre, influenced Georgia and Tbilisi to offer techno. The reaction of techno-travelers and underground culture travelers was obvious: Tbilisi became the new accessible and affordable cool place to visit. The novelty aspect of tourism in Georgia is an important success

factor, and the fact that “everything is relatively new” (Participant B, 2019), makes it quite attractive for the tourists. Tourists always search for “the new Berlin”, and online articles refer to Tbilisi as that place (House, 2016; Williams, 2016; Wilson, 2018).

The combination of these factors with the secrecy and mysteriousness creates the perfect destination for a young western hipster in quest for the fashionable holiday. Or, as Participant C simply summarizes: “the underground here is real” (Participant C, 2019). The same process has been remarked for festivals: “International techno festival goes like the cool unknown events, and Georgia is perfect for that. Festivals here are not overcrowded and there is a local special atmosphere.” (Participant E, 2019).

Participant D confirms that the novelty is always a strong value to attract and promote culture: “Newness was always a key to success and trendiness.” (Participant D, 2019). The fact the new techno scene is more recent than what can be found in older popular clubbing places, makes it more special and attractive for the purists seeking for the most recent, yet famous and avant-garde venues. The clubs of Tbilisi resemble these characteristics, they are all in very underground places, Club A situated under the national football stadium, in an old soviet swimming pool, and Club B being inside a bridge. Even two other clubs, that my research will name Club C and Club D, are in very distinctive buildings. This additional charm and authenticity adds to the clubber’s experience an underground feeling, a sensation of participating in something alternative, different from the regular clubbing cultures.

4.1.1.4 Price factor

The price of traveling in Georgia and the price of starting a new business have been comments often repeated among the interviewees. In April 2019, Tbilisi ranked 409th out of 448th cities in the world regarding the cost of living index (NUMBEO, 2019). Considering this fact, it is relatively cheap for tourists to travel and enjoy their stay in Georgia. The price factor is determinant in traveling options, specifically for millennials, who usually do not have substantial financial resources. Participant F really insisted on that: “For people around the world, Tbilisi has great clubs, great lineups, great vibes, bars, house music laces, cool hostels, everything is good and cheap. For tourism it is a super nice place, especially for youngsters because it is cheap.” (Participant F, 2019). In comparison with other European capitals, considering the vibrancy of the electronic music scene in Tbilisi and its new very qualitative reputation, it seems nearly logical for one to prefer experiencing the same quality events in Georgia rather than the already well-known scenes in Berlin, Barcelona, London or Paris. Participant F further states: “People could save a year to go to Paris, whereas here, it is so easy and affordable.” (Participant F, 2019). Tbilisi’s hype is partly due to that; which makes it clear,

for her, that if Tbilisi had a similar cost of living and cost of traveling commensurate with big European cities, it may not have experienced today's boom with the same intensity.

The cheapness of Georgia is partly due to high inflation, creating an increasing difference between the Georgian Lari and the American Dollar or the Euro, meaning that purchasing power for Europeans in Georgia is just getting stronger, and Georgia is overall getting cheaper for them. Participant B explains very rationally this process: "If we consider that people who travel often look for small prices, they figure out Georgia is very good and very cheap, and just come visit or even sometimes live here." (Participant B, 2019). In addition to this, flying to Georgia got cheaper since a low-cost airline settled down in Kutaisi's airport. It became very inexpensive to fly from most of the European countries, as Participant D mentions: "Since cheap flights have arrived in Kutaisi, tourism has been very positively impacted. It allowed a wider range of people to come and travel here. Every process of Georgia's Touristification are connected." (Participant D, 2019).

Moreover, the previously explained crave for entrepreneurship and for the creation of new artistic and alternative venues is also linked to the labor prices in Georgia. Considering the country's economy, it is moderately cheap and affordable to hire workers and build an idea or a physical infrastructure in a low amount of time (Participant D, 2019). These statements are always made in comparison to the European countries and cities that Georgia and Tbilisi aspire to become.

4.1.1.5 The Raids

The 11th of May 2018 was a very historical night for Georgia. On that date, Club A, one of the most worldwide acknowledged techno club, and Club D, the very first popular electronic music club in Tbilisi, were invaded by an army of special forces and policemen equipped with heavy weapons (Resident Advisor, 2018). The Club A, that hosts more than 2000 people each weekend, is the place for many Georgians and internationals to safely gather and escape from their daily routine. As explained previously Club A, is a very iconic and symbolic venue that represents more than just electronic music (Participant E, 2019; Participant G, 2019). The political activism of that club impacted the life and ideology of many (Participant E, 2019; Participant G, 2019). The raids, that pretended to aim for the arrest of a few drug dealers, are actually a reaction to the political fight between Soviet mentality thinkers and progressive youth activists (Resident Advisor, 2018).

The impact of the raids resulted in unprecedented events. The response of the youth was emblematic of the strength of the present electronic music scene in Georgia. The next days following the raids, thousands of Georgians gathered on the capital's main avenue to throw

what is still called today the rave revolution (Demytrie & Ram, 2018). The clubbing event that was supposed to happen in Club A the next day was transferred to the front of the Parliament, on Rustaveli avenue, where sound systems and dancers reunited to protest in the most pacific way (Lynch, 2018). This rave revolution became a national political and social statement for many club supporters, not only in Georgia (Boiler Room, 2018). The movement went viral, resulting in massive online social media campaigns, such as the famous *We dance together, we fight together* (Boiler Room, 2018).

Participant E, who was part of the protesters, described his perspective and insights with a lot of emotions: “The main street was blocked; it was a huge peaceful and passive demonstration through music. For us it is a once in a lifetime event. We will never forget it and it changed who we are and what we do today.”; he continues: “That much people hadn’t gathered like that for many years. It really transformed into a massive event. The streets became a huge party. It was beautiful, protesting through dancing.” (Participant E, 2019). The political and demographic context and the emotional attribute of Georgians, analyzed previously, are also a major factor on why that kind of protest happened: “It was also about the new generation showing what they were capable of. Those were very emotional days, full of sincerity.” (Participant E, 2019).

The fast sharing of information in the internet era helped the raids and riots to get livestreamed on social media, and then to get massively shared all around the world at an uncontrollable speed, it all went viral in a few days (Participant E, 2019). In the electronic music community around the world, it became the main topic of conversation. Participant E explains that: “People who club in Tbilisi or anywhere else on Earth have something in common. The process occurs like a tribal approach.” (Participant E, 2019). In the end, the raids had somehow a positive impact, looking at the awareness they created: “The world started to look at Georgia and Tbilisi. We suddenly received lots of attention.” (Participant E, 2019). Participant I, a British journalist living in Tbilisi for 10 years is a close friend of event organizers and club owners in Tbilisi. Therefore, he also wrote a lot about the nightlife and especially about Club A and their special queer nights. For him, the raids were an unfortunate event but also provided an opportunity, since it was traumatizing for many, but had such an immense impact on Tbilisi’s club culture and especially its visibility and awareness towards the world (Participant I, 2019).

4.1.1.6 *Organic media exposure*

It appears that the whole idea of Club A started around 2013, when the co-founders started to organize pure techno parties in the country’s capital, and in 2014, they officially launched the club (Ravens, 2019).

There are countless articles on internet talking about Tbilisi’s club culture and its clubs, especially starting from 2016. My research gathered 22 articles that appeared in various online influential medias. The keywords used for the web search were “Club A”; “Tbilisi + Club A”; “Tbilisi + rave”; “Tbilisi + raids”; “Tbilisi + techno”.

Table 2: A few online articles about Tbilisi and its clubs, from 2016 to 2019

Media	Title	Date
Resident Advisor	Tbilisi and the politics of raving	8/15/2016
The Guardian	Clubbers, forget London and Berlin – the place to dance is eastern Europe	9/21/2016
Wmagazine	Deep Inside Club A, the Darkest Underground Club in the World	5/16/2017
Vice	Is This Georgian Club the New Berghain?	7/19/2017
Indie Mag	ON THE RISE: HOW TBILISI COINS COUNTER- AND CLUB-CULTURE	10/12/2017
Calvert Journal	Horoom Nights: inside the secretive queer night at Tbilisi's world-famous Club A club	1/18/2018
The Guardian	Art, beats and fashion: an inside view of Tbilisi's creative boom	4/11/2018
Electronic Beats	Georgian Techno Club “Club A” May Be Forced To Close	5/11/2018
Mixmag	TBILISI CLUB “Club A” IS BEING THREATENED WITH CLOSURE	5/11/2018
The Guardian	Georgian techno fans and extremists clash in Tbilisi in fight for club culture	5/14/2018
Calvert Journal	We dance together: in their own words, Tbilisi's creative community on why Club A matters	5/17/2018
RFERL	Club At Center Of Tbilisi Raids Mixes Raves, Social Change In Conservative Georgia	5/17/2018
YODA	DANCE FOR FREEDOM- SOLIDARITY WITH Club A	5/22/2018
DJ Mag	TBILISI CLUB “Club A” TO REOPEN FOLLOWING ENFORCED CLOSURE	5/24/2018
Mixmag	WE WENT TO GEORGIA TO INVESTIGATE THE THREAT TO THE COUNTRY'S CLUB SCENE	8/14/2018
Huckmag	Georgia’s rave revolution, four months on	9/5/2018
Forbes	Berlin Is Out, Tbilisi Is In: Georgia's Capital Is This Year's Most Exciting City	9/5/2018

Dazed	How techno became the sound of protest in Georgia	9/14/2018
Metro news	Cultural enterprise and a whole lot of techno is transforming the Georgian capital	11/18/2018
i-D	meet the faces of tbilisi's legendary techno club	12/11/2018
The Guardian	Club A: the Tbilisi techno mecca shaking off post-Soviet repression	1/22/2019
Monument	THE SOUND OF REVOLUTION: HECTOR OAKS ON GEORGIA AND Club A	2/15/2019

Source: own work

Table 2 reveals that since the raids of May 11th, there has been a concentration of online articles talking about either the raids and riots that followed, or simply about the capital’s electronic music scene overall. This small quantitative study confirms the sayings of the interviewees about how those protest events got an international media coverage thanks to the information sharing fastness of nowadays online communities and social networks. The information reached millions of people from around the world and kept being shared virally during the times following the unfortunate but somehow lucky events. Internet and its associated media are therefore partly responsible for the increase of awareness about Georgia and Tbilisi’s clubbing vibrancy and created a famous and extremely fashionable hype inside its community.

This little analysis was used to confirm Participant E’s perspective on how the raids that happened on May 11th accelerated the mediatization of the city’s club scene and protest through a dancing mindset. Table 2 shows indeed that after May 11th, a concentration of articles have been written. Participant C also mentions: “Internet played an important role for the world’s awareness, and even for locals. Many Georgians are not in the scene but discovered it through internet. The interviews, articles and videos on internet helped a lot. And Georgians are really active on social media.” (Participant C, 2019).

Participant G explains that Georgia needed something big and explosive in order to obtain the visibility worldwide. For him, the club raids were a fortunate event since it offered the world a spectacle and put Georgia’s music scene under the spotlight.

None of the online medias chosen for the analysis were Georgian. This study examines, on purpose, the role of international medias to explain the very strong vibrancy and exposure of the club scene in Tbilisi.

All the previously mentioned concepts that helped define **The Context** as the main core category of Georgia’s recent development, are closely interrelated and all create an ecosystem of various features that participate in co-branding the new destination identity that the country

and its capital are creating. Therefore, politics, Soviet history, Europeanization, identity crisis, emotional attribute, artistic history, creativity, entrepreneurship, novelty, exoticism, hype, price factor, the raids and finally organic online media popularity are what constitute **The Context**, which is favorable for the emergence of the powerful alternative culture establishing in Georgia and Tbilisi for the past few years.

4.1.2 The Strategy

The second leading category that emerged through the research process is **The Strategy**. **The Strategy** refers to the development of the emergent cultural trend as part of planned decision-making and refers directly to the vision and monitoring of the growing alternative artistic scene.

4.1.2.1 Tourism as a priority and cultural strategy

It has been mentioned a few times during the interviews that after the Russo-Georgian War of 2008 and the re-election of a controversial politician as President of Georgia, tourism development became a priority and constituted a very important part of the President's election promises (Participant A, 2019; Participant G, 2019). The beginning of tourism occurred as explained: "Georgia was strongly affected by Russia. Only after the last war in 2008, the recently elected President gave the foundation for tourism. Then the Georgian Dream party understood the potential, and the real development plan started. Many people abandoned their jobs to jump into the tourism industry. That attitude is unsustainable, it does not build the new image of Georgia." (Participant G, 2019). Therefore, it seems that the tourism process started on relatively poor initiatives in terms of sustainability and vision. The goal was short-term focused, as people saw fast economic growth potential. The social, cultural and sustainability concepts were not the most popular at those early days. Tourism was really perceived as an easy-money making industry: "It is easy to make money from tourism; all you need is to build the infrastructure. There has been lots of emphasis on tourism, we can easily say that the Touristification process is at core of the strategy." (Participant G, 2019).

However, for the very first time, the new generation, the post-independence youth were growing-up in a tourism development focused Georgia. Participant A explains that: "People got interested in developing our country through artistic expression." (Participant A, 2019). The most important aspects of tourism development, entertainment and hospitality, had a huge increase of quality, creativity and innovation, thanks to the artistic boom and the willingness to express through arts (Participant A, 2019).

Another perspective of tourism as a priority and cultural strategy is linked to the increased easiness to travel in and out of Georgia. Indeed, the visa policies to travel inside Georgia have

become extremely flexible. As of the current situation during this research, 98 countries' citizens are allowed to live in Georgia for 1 year without a visa (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, 2019). Among these countries are all the European Union members. For Participant D, this is a main factor of the recent touristic boom: "Tourism became fully part of the strategy when the visa policies got so easy and flexible. Outbound like inbound, it is so easy for foreigners to visit Georgia, and it got simpler for Georgians to travel abroad. This also made it easier for DJs and artists to travel in and out Georgia." (Participant D, 2019). The government is trying to attract as many tourists as possible each year, but also to allow Georgian citizens to explore the world and bring back inspiration and creativity from abroad.

Furthermore, another critical view from Participant E suggests that the government has tried to invest directly into culture, as it did when trying to save a specific festival, that used to happen in Crimea. The geopolitical context forced this festival to change location. The Georgian government at that time made agreements with the owner of the brand and moved it to Georgia, at the border of the complex and conflicted Abkhazia region (Participant E, 2019). The interchange was geopolitical and strategic, but unfortunately the festival was a huge failure: "Our country had a very strict legislation; it was very tradition and religion based. That festival created many protests and was not even close to what people were expecting." (Participant E, 2019). The government lost a few million US dollars because of this action. The outcome of this story is that even in early stages, the government tried to use culture and music for political and economic reasons (Participant E, 2019). Therefore, the success of today's music scene and cultural development in Georgia mainly started organically, independently from the government (Participant E, 2019).

4.1.2.2 Night Time Economy

The last interview has been kept quite silent on purpose until now. It had been decided that the 10th interview of the data collection of this research was going to be the last interview. Indeed, theoretical saturation was starting to occur even earlier, but the very fortunate and inspiring meeting with Participant J, who is a very important figure of Georgia's music and media history added further context to the research question. Today he is the direct and special adviser of Tbilisi's mayor. The interview with him gave my research the last useful information in order to further pursue the analysis. This section, called Night Time Economy, will tend to close the cycle of information gathered through **The Context** and **The Strategy** categories of the Grounded Theory coding process.

Participant J shared his own perspective about the history of music in Georgia, since the late 80s. His storytelling is summarized in the Table 3.

Table 3: Historical evolution of electronic music in Georgia

Time scale	Evolution of the electronic music scene
Late 80s/Early 90s	Certain music bands switch to electronic equipment, synthesizers and computers.
Early 2000s	Many artists want to leave their band and start a solo career, with electronic instruments.
	Beginning of awards to promote Georgian innovative music.
2002	Opening of the first big upscale club, with a strong business perspective.
	Release of a Georgian compilation, promoting 10 new Georgian artists at a huge label in Germany.
2004/2005	The first big upscale club moved to Batumi, many clubs are created independently in Tbilisi, but only few could survive.
2010	The electronic music scene starts to significantly grow with clubs like Club D.
2014/2015	The big switch happened with clubs like Club A, Club B, Club C. New generation clubs, with new locations and great sound systems.
2016	Beginning of Georgian important labels and artist residencies, who start to tour around the world and promote Georgian producers and DJs abroad.
12 May 2018	The big riots on Rustaveli attracted platforms and media from all around the world. Electronic music got closely linked to social issues. The dance and fight movement got very appealing for the world and got many supporters.

2019	Tbilisi and Georgia are established as islands of freedom in a geopolitically complex region of the world.
------	--

Participant J (2019)

Table 3 helps to explain and understand where Tbilisi’s and Georgia’s local electronic music scene are situated and how the process evolved through the past 40 years.

Participant J being an active stakeholder of that evolution, became the City Hall representative for the development of the Night Time Economy. This new concept, the Night Time Economy is very avant-garde and is just becoming accepted as a new challenge for the development of cities. Few major music cities around the world already have a “Night Time Mayor”, such as Paris, Amsterdam or even Nantes. The three last-mentioned, among other influential international Night Time Economy stakeholders, have all been invited to a unique international Night Time Economy forum created by Participant J and the Mayor of Tbilisi himself.

Participant J defines his role as “the middleman between night time businesses and the government”; his goal is to “develop Tbilisi and Georgia culturally, socially and economically” (Participant J, 2019). He continues: “We are policy makers, nightlife managers and help to ameliorate the communication with the citizens and especially stakeholders of the Night Time Economy. That means whatever happens between 8 pm and 8 am.” (Participant J, 2019).

The challenges involved in the development of this new City Hall team, is to help Tbilisi find and brand its own identity, “its own spice” as Participant J calls it. Georgia has always been branded, but Tbilisi has not been branded separately. It appears that Tbilisi is truly becoming something unique regarding electronic music, and there could be branding opportunities and development capacity resulting from this trend. According to Participant J, the main objective for now is “to create new jobs and employ young people through the creation of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs)” (Participant J, 2019). The development of Night Time Economy also occurs through building infrastructure around already existing hubs, like Club A or the very popular hostel. The ecosystem around the nightlife needs to be monitored and developed (Participant J, 2019). A very important impact of nightlife on the city urbanization is the decentralization, since most of the clubs are situated in old buildings with history, away from the city center. In this sense, the night life contributes to the empowerment of neighborhoods and the refurbishment of buildings (Participant J, 2019).

Most interviewees agree that nightlife and tourism as linked concepts are very beneficial economically. When the potential of nightlife had been understood, it just became rational and obvious for everyone to acknowledge that the electronic music enthusiasts also have quite high

purchase power and are willing to pay higher prices for products and services. Participant B explains: “On my social media feeds, I see new clubs, bars and events opening every day. So many new tourists are arriving, it is very good economically. There is not a day without a music event.” (Participant B, 2019). Therefore, the power of night life in terms of tourist spending, city development and employment seems extremely strong for the future of Tbilisi.

Concerning the very popular hostel, which is known for being a model in terms of youth hosteling lifestyle around the world, they also have a very vibrant court yard full of bars, restaurants, concept stores and co-working areas. They are an important player when it comes to Night Time Economy. The place is always full, as Participant A confirms: “The hostel and hub have so many travelers. But also, a huge number of Georgians come here, it is really a mix of international tourists and the city’s inhabitants. Honestly, the income is very good.” (Participant A, 2019).

According to Participant F, who has seen the capital change through a DJ’s perspective, the capital is not even really considered cheap anymore. For her, locals and investors realized that Night Time Economy is very profitable: “People understood they can make money out of night life and cultural trends, especially considering the hype around Tbilisi.” (Participant F, 2019). It may also have some counter-effects, the fact that millennials and tourists spend so much money made the economic perspective of night life so obvious that perhaps majority of club culture is now purely a business (Participant F, 2019).

The confirmation that Night Time Economy is a very successful financial asset (Participant D, 2019) was linked with the fact that perhaps the social progress of creating safe spaces for the LGBTQ community was simply part of a thought-through business initiative, as “they were just a very interesting market to target and are very loyal customers” (Participant H, 2019). Participant C argues that the economic advantages of the underground night life, as strong marketing tool that attracts many tourists is well understood. She insists, with humor, on the awareness impact as well: “Thanks to our clubs, now we are no longer mistaken with Georgia in the United States of America.” (Participant C, 2019).

It seems very rational that Participant J got his position at the City Hall of perhaps a “Night Time Mayor”, even though he did not seem to really like that title, as he sees himself more as a project manager. The concept of Night Time Economy really appears as the result of the emergence of avant-garde electronic music in Tbilisi. **The Context** and **The Strategy** are now linked, as all the concepts creating **The Context** had for outcome organic online media popularity that can be further monitored through a real tourism and development strategy based on night time initiatives.

4.1.3 Strong brands

The concepts of branding or even overall marketing have not been the most mentioned during the interviews, however some useful patterns about the current successful brands of the recent cultural scene have been spotted and allow my research to evolve on the use and role of branding in the development of Tbilisi. Four subcategories have emerged.

4.1.3.1 *The clubbing scene*

The clubbing scene is what really emerged as the most influential aspect of Tbilisi's recent boom, and Georgia's overall tourism industry increase. The previous presented results allow us to understand how Georgia became a recently trendy new destination to visit, especially for people interested in modern arts, electronic music, youth lifestyle and the well-known nature-based or even gastronomy tourism.

The fact that a few clubs situated in Tbilisi became internationally famous, took over the highest ranks in best clubs of the world charts, and got mediatized online in most of the popular related platforms, had an unprecedented impact on the shaping of a unique clubbing scene brand.

This phenomenon of Georgia becoming a "country of events, clubs, festivals, producers, DJs and underground lifestyle" (Participant B, 2019), partly occurred thanks to a few specific independent club brands. The role of the Club A in the process must be emphasized. It has been repeated that "Club A impacted the electronic music world, but even more, it impacted locally" (Participant F, 2019). The results previously explained how clubbing in Club A became more than dancing, but transformed into social activism, into participating in the progressive revolution of Georgia. It became about the new generation rebelling against the older Soviet mindset and all the authoritarian and oppressive gestures and thoughts that could occur under such governments. The fact the Club A brand became so representative and powerful for a globalized music movement truly impacted the country and especially the capital's image. As Participant G simply says, "Club A reached a higher level with the social phenomenon" (Participant G, 2019).

Thanks to Club A's rise as a worldwide clubbing institution, and more specifically, "a worldwide brand" (Participant E, 2019), other clubs also started to get attention, such as Club B, which also has a very particular location, a great sound system and hosts many international DJs along with Georgian residents. The role of both clubs, considered the two hippest dancing spots of the capital, has been pushed forward: "Club A and Club B are doing a huge work for the process of branding Tbilisi as the new best techno-clubbing destination." (Participant C, 2019).

According to Participant H: “Georgia’s clubbing scene became part of the country brand. However, it was not part of the government strategy, it was a commercial and cultural initiative, a grassroots process. It was a lucky coincidence that occurred thanks to very good entrepreneurs.” (Participant H, 2019). This helps to emphasize how important the clubbing scene is in Tbilisi, and how non-governmental, but strongly economic the whole process was.

4.1.3.2 Festivals

There are numerous festivals directly linked to the electronic music movement in Georgia. It has been previously underlined how festivals can contribute to destination branding, and moreover, how they can represent strong brands (Che, 2008; Mckercher et al., 2006; O’sullivan & Jackson, 2002). Therefore, it was interesting for this study to collect quantitative data about the coming festival season and to understand its importance simply by the quality of their line-ups and the high amount of festivals considering the size of the country.

Table 4: Spring and Summer Major Electronic Music Festivals in Georgia in 2019

Festival Name	Dates
4GB Festival	17-18 May & 25-26 May
eZo Festival by Mzesumzira	14-15 June & 13 July
EYESTAGE at Tbilisi Open Air	21-23 June
Mountain Set: Kazbegi	28 June – 01 July
EchoWaves Festival	22-25 August

Source: own work

As seen in Table 4, a couple of major festivals have released first line-ups and official dates for the 2019 festival season in Georgia. The artistic directions of these festivals resemble festivals that can be found all around western and eastern Europe. This only confirms Georgia’s willingness to position itself as European and specially to prove the country can now organize and manage high quality festivals. The majority of these festivals are in their early years but can easily aspire in the future to become meeting points for techno and house music enthusiasts from all around the world, considering their extremely affordable prices and outstanding production quality. The combination of the established clubbing scene in Tbilisi and the emergent diversity of festivals around the country, only reinforces the branding of Georgia and mainly Tbilisi as a place to visit for alternative music fanatics and international party goers.

4.1.3.3 Brand fortification

The concept of the brand fortification strategy (C. W. Park et al., 1984) reviewed previously mentions how different types of brands can support themselves by cooperating on various abstract levels. Especially when coming to events, strong event brands can be powerful tools in the successful branding of destinations (Dimanche, 2002). My research helped understand how the various brands surrounding the emergent trendy artistic cultural hype in Georgia and especially Tbilisi are highly contributing to the overall powerful branding and positioning of Georgia on the map. Thanks to the success of clubs like Club A or Club B, that represent extremely powerful brands in their specific markets, Tbilisi as a destination became one of the hippest places in the world for clubbing and raving. The start of this branding process was “all natural, not a classic top down approach. Those creators had excellent taste, perfect understanding of the global trends and of what Georgians wanted. They had a vision and used good timing” (Participant H, 2019). Therefore, the city benefited from already existing successful brands, to brand itself, by deciding to accept and follow the organic branding of those clubs. Thanks to the concepts presented until now, it appears clearly how Georgia as a country and Tbilisi as a city have been accidentally branded as party destinations, clubbing destinations, alternative lifestyle destinations, youth hipster destinations, and underground exotic holidays for millennials in research of the trendiest and edgiest destinations.

The combination of all these concepts participated in the appearance of the strong clubbing brands, with the overall cultural ecosystem benefitting from several festival brands and successful hospitality brands. This ecosystem represents and approves the brand fortification process in Georgia and Tbilisi, between product brands and destination brands, through the confirmation of shared personality, image and identity (Dimanche, 2002).

By interviewing decision makers such as Participant J, the study helps to realize what are the challenges and dynamics around this accidental and fortunate branding, that occurred through a series of unplanned events and separate successes.

4.1.3.4 Tbilisi, a music city brand

It has come more than relevant for my research to focus specifically on Tbilisi’s branding, as most of the previous elaborated concepts were directly or indirectly linked with the country’s capital. Tbilisi really stands out in Georgia, as an avant-garde Europeanized contemporary youth-friendly and surprisingly affordable music event city. For Participant H, “Tbilisi is getting rebranded as a hipster hangout destination” (Participant H, 2019).

It also has been mentioned that Georgia has for a long time been branded very broadly, mixing up all the tourism products (Participant A, 2019). For her, the branding of Georgia has always been “like if there is many things to show, but no real focus” (Participant A, 2019). She would recommend that the policy makers and government should focus on nowadays highlights and trends, to understand better what is selling Georgia as a touristic destination today and more importantly what makes Georgians proud (Participant A, 2019). Participant C also has the feeling that “there is a need for better and more focused branding” (Participant C, 2019).

The answer to these remarks is mentioned profoundly by Participant J. As an influential decision-maker of the cultural and tourism Georgian sphere, he confirms: “We never promoted Tbilisi, we always promoted Georgia on famous international TV channels, blogs, very classical channels and means of communication.” (Participant J, 2019). The recent years have completely changed the image of the capital, as he mentions: “In terms of branding, Tbilisi got positioned internationally very recently and very spontaneously, as this new location somewhere at the Black Sea, in between Turkey and Russia, where people are dancing, having fun, but also fighting.” (Participant J, 2019).

Therefore, Tbilisi aspired to become its own destination brand, unique, that needs a proper marketing focus. Participant J and the Mayor of Tbilisi are in the process of creating a separate Tourism Department for Tbilisi, as he explains: “Tbilisi must be branded. We can create millions of new stories for Tbilisi.” (Participant J, 2019). He briefly tried to pitch how they want to brand the capital in the future: “Tbilisi unites, it is a place where young people from all around the world can meet each other. Azeris and Armenians can only meet in Tbilisi. Tbilisi is really the hub of this region, the freest space. It unites different cultural genres, medias, platforms, festivals, the creative industry is very strong.” (Participant J, 2019). The Grounded Theory method helped to understand that Tbilisi is on the way to become a separate brand, with its own dimensions.

4.1.4 Summarized mind-map of the coding process and the results

Figure 1: Mind-map representing the coding process of the data collection and analysis



Source: own work

4.2 Discussion of Results

The research process provided a context to discover new elements and new levels of understanding concerning the theoretical underpinnings reviewed in the first chapters. When at first, the concepts of branding, destination branding, brand equity, brand dimensions, brand value, destination image and identity, personality, cultural assets and the role of events in

destination branding appeared to be the main concepts and foundations of my research, many new concepts emerged as the interviews evolved. However, those concepts are not reducing the importance of the previously studied literature, but rather, they complement the literature review and help to better understand what exactly is happening in Tbilisi. These interviews have also informed my thoughts regarding the theory of development Tbilisi is undergoing thanks, in large measure, to the club and music scene. Furthermore, the discussions will focus on the new Tbilisi destination brand, rather than on Georgia as a whole, as my research naturally pointed towards the creation and need for strategic branding concerning this newly successful music city brand.

4.2.1 A serendipitous process

First, a very unexpected but important idea that emerged from my research is that the branding of Tbilisi appears to be totally serendipitous. In opposition to popular historical and original branding theories (D. A. Aaker, 1996; Hankinson & Cowking, 1993; Kapferer, 1998; Keller, 1998; Nickerson & Moisey, 1999), and in the modern process of the study context's branding, it seems like there was no preliminary strategy behind the success and rise of the brand. This allows us to understand that branding can be organic, unplanned and unexpected. As Participant E mentions: "Club A wanted to be a local popular club, but the worldwide recognition was accidental and unplanned. Thanks to the internet era." (Participant E, 2019). This is not opposing the existing well planned and strategic branding perspectives, rather it shows how branding is a larger concept that can start serendipitously and then develop in a strongly monitored and managed process. Moreover, there seems to be no current literature about serendipitous branding, unplanned branding or unexpected branding. The rareness of the phenomenon makes it even more interesting to study the reasons, outcomes and opportunities resulting from such an organic process.

The branding evolution of Tbilisi through the electronic music is in its early stages. Now the challenges are about the management and development of the emerging brands. Participant J mentioned that Tbilisi was branded spontaneously, thanks to the succession of fortunate events, sometimes tragic like the raids, but the final outcome is definitely some sort of random luck (Participant J, 2019).

The data analysis showed how a very specific **Context**, completed by a **Strategy** and some **Strong Brands**, can lead to the emergence of a serendipitous destination branding process.

Figure 2: Simplified model of the brand's serendipitous emergence



The filled central section represents the creation of the serendipitous destination brand

Source: own work

My research will further try to connect the new unexpected brand with the well-known and accepted consumer-based brand equity dimensions.

4.2.2 Link with the dimensions of brand equity

In order to enhance the theoretical understandings of destination branding in my research, the previously reviewed main consumer-based destination brand equity dimensions will be linked with the newly born brand of Tbilisi. The purpose is to accept or not that the main dimensions are accurate in a serendipitous branding process, and to observe which dimensions are standing out in this context.

4.2.2.1 *Quality as the main dimension*

First, the quality in the clubbing scene of Tbilisi really appeared to be the first element that represented the creation of the brand. Out of all dimensions, quality stands out and occupies the strongest position among the others.

However, Participant E strongly emphasizes the outstanding quality of only one club, Club A. He explains: “When Club A changed location in 2016, the quality skyrocketed to a new level. It was so immersed, so convincing, the lights, everything was perfect! They really bet on quality artists and parties.” (Participant E, 2019). The study understands that one club in the country’s capital stands out as occupying a leading position among the club scene. Indeed, the quality seems to be incredibly amazing: “They reach quality levels that were never reached before in Georgia. They have international quality. Really the quality is just too good!” (Participant E, 2019). The strength of the quality dimension in the club’s brand is even creating discrepancies in the clubbing scene: “Other clubs just seem less good compared to Club A.” (Participant E, 2019). The quality dimension has also been stated by Participant I: “The thing with Club A or Club B is the outstanding quality. No one can take that from them. Everyone can appreciate a night out there because it is just perfectly arranged. The quality is unreal.” (Participant I, 2019). Not only consumers, but also DJs and producers agree that the main clubs of Tbilisi have outstanding quality (Participant F, 2019).

Literature has identified the quality dimension in destination branding as very subjective and transformative through the evolution of time (Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011). The role of the consumer’s perception on the quality dimension creates a challenging context and makes consistency uncertain (Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011). To some extent, the context of Tbilisi relates to what was found in the literature. The dependency on the quality of a few clubs, and especially on the quality of Club A connects with the instability of the quality dimension and its dependency on certain independent product brands, two concepts that have been well researched (Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011). Therefore, the actual research helps to question the stability of Georgia’s capital’s clubbing scene, especially in a serendipitous process. If the major product brands that fortify Tbilisi’s destination brand would decrease in popularity or just simply disappear, it could affect the branding of the capital. However, so far, it seems that this issue is not yet relevant: “After a year or two, we thought the popularity would decrease. But we were wrong, it just got more and more popular!” (Participant E, 2019). Nevertheless, in a longer period, this could become a challenge to consider.

Overall, the fact that the quality dimension has been known to be the result of organizational effectiveness (D. A. Aaker, 1996; Boo et al., 2009; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014a), is confirmed

in the study case, as the individual club brand of Club A seems to have been implementing important efforts in the creation of an unprecedented quality club for the city.

4.2.2.2 Image as the second major dimension

Tbilisi's destination brand image is the sum of the associations created when the concerned consumers consider traveling to Georgia. Image has been, since original research, considered as a very important criterion in the decision process of a potential visitor (Hunt, 1975). The image of Tbilisi today is the combination of the various features that are offered to the tourist, which relates to existing previous studies (Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011).

It seems that in the case of Georgia's destination image, which was the only existing destination brand before the recent emergence of a brand for Tbilisi, the brand image has mostly been composed of "churches, mountains, gastronomy, ski, wine" (Participant A, 2019). This image has been confirmed by many of the interviewees. Participant I, who has a passion for history and architecture, mentions: "The image of Georgia remains in its ancient culture, which is undeniably unique and incredibly rich. The combination of that ancient heritage with the new trendy modernism creates some special and very appreciated vibe in the country and its capital." (Participant I, 2019). Participant J, who works intensively on the new branding of Tbilisi shares that Georgia has always been promoting a very classical and archaic image, showing principally heritage, traditional symbols and old legends (Participant J, 2019).

The appearance of alternative music in the destination image is a very recent process. For Participant B, music producer, "Music is the most important aspect of our country today. And the combination of trendy music with the heritage and nature is the image we should have." (Participant B, 2019). Participant C, who is also a music enthusiast confirms: "Mountains and music connect very well. The link between mountain tourism and events is obvious." (Participant C, 2019). The fresh image of Tbilisi being a clubbing place is also creating pride among the locals, who strongly appreciate that foreigners do not consider Georgia anymore as only a mountain and food country (Participant H, 2019). To mark the point, Participant G simply states that: "Clubs, events and festivals are shaping the new image of Georgia." (Participant G, 2019). These interventions sum-up the previous destination brand image of Georgia and introduce the newly created destination brand image of Tbilisi.

Crompton (1979) explained the image creation process as an attitudinal process depending on beliefs, ideas and impressions. Therefore, nowadays destination brand image of Tbilisi depends on the creation of awareness (Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011), and reflects a combination of old promotional practices showing a mountainous, nature, gastronomical and perhaps folkloric

context, with newly emergent alternative and youth perspectives built around modern culture, electronic music and events. In order to maintain a consistent brand image, Crompton & Um (1990) explain the importance of the accuracy of these beliefs. A potential tourist of Tbilisi, in order to reach the expectations of his beliefs, ideas and impressions, must, if desired, also experience the city's alternative cultural attractions and the clubbing scene is a dominant part of it. The proximity of Tbilisi with mountain regions and its high number of restaurants, makes it favorable and simple for the city to reach its tourists expectations. If successful, the process of a powerful destination brand image should help decrease the importance of more negative aspects of the city and country and increase the place of the positive attributes.

To summarize the link between destination brand image and the specific study context, the approach of the cognitive and affective process by McCleary & Baloglu (1999) can be used: when visiting Tbilisi, a tourist is possibly familiar with the clubbing scene of the city (cognitive), and is perhaps a clubbing enthusiast (affective), reflecting the impact of a destination brand image on the decision of the tourist. In our context, destination brand image is the second strongest consumer-based brand equity dimension, after destination brand quality.

4.2.2.3 Awareness, a great complement to Quality and Image

As explained by Gartner & Ruzzier (2011), the destination brand awareness is the first step in building a strong brand value. The importance of awareness in a pre-consumption decision stage has also been reviewed by Boo et al. (2009), Kladou & Kehagias (2014a) and Yoo & Donthu (2001).

The process of brand awareness for Georgia before the boom of Tbilisi, was mainly directed through traditional broadcasting, such as popular TV channels, radio channels or blogs, "it was a very classic awareness strategy" specifies (Participant J, 2019). Nowadays, Participant C explains: "Internet played an important role for the world's and locals' awareness. Most people discover our scene through internet." (Participant C, 2019). It seems that the vitality of the protests that occurred after the clubs' raids of May 11th 2018, played an important role in the very recent trendiness of Tbilisi's clubbing scene: "Millions of people were watching the protests live on social media, and sharing the information." (Participant E, 2019). Therefore, thanks to online social media and popular internet platforms, Tbilisi's clubbing scene received a very strong coverage in the past few years, and especially since the raids. This online coverage has a major role and impact on today's destination brand. Thanks to quality, and image but also awareness, "Club A is a worldwide brand" (Participant E, 2019). In addition to the famous clubs and the post-protests internet awareness, it appears that international events and festivals, especially with popular international line-ups have an important impact on awareness creation,

considering the events have connections with popular youth trendy medias and give a strong exposure to the country (Participant B, 2019).

Therefore, in the context of this study, the awareness as a consumer-based destination brand equity dimension participated in the initial step of the brand value building process. Awareness, through the modern approach of this case with the use of webzines, online platforms and social media, could be at the core of a young consumer's decision to visit Tbilisi. However, accordingly to the different levels of awareness (Goodall & Ashworth, 1988; Woodside & Lysonski, 1988), the importance of this perspective of Tbilisi's destination brand will occupy a different position in the overall awareness, of being a dominant, a top-of-mind or simply a familiar aspect. The complementarity with strong dimensions such as quality and image is undeniably part of today's successful branding of Tbilisi, and as mentioned in literature, helps create brand value and improve the destination brand's performance (Kim & Kim, 2005; Motameni & Shahrokhi, 1998).

4.2.2.4 Loyalty towards certain clubs

The last dimension studied in this chapter is the brand loyalty destination. Loyalty in the study context has been the less mentioned dimension during all interviews. Therefore, it will be considered the least important destination brand dimension in my research.

Indeed, even though it has not been very defined in destination branding literature, Dimanche (2002) mentions it can be perceived as the decision to revisit a destination. This definition goes along with the accepted measure of destination loyalty, which is the ratio of repeat to renewal visitors (Gartner & Ruzzier, 2011). In the study context of Tbilisi, this approach towards a destination brand has not been researched, since the data were simply lacking.

However, this part of the paper will emphasize the loyalty of consumers towards some of Tbilisi's clubs, and especially towards Club A. Participant E mentions: "Some people go to Club A every weekend since the opening of the club, four years ago. Most club goers in Tbilisi are regulars. Anyone who wants to be fashionable goes out once a week." (Participant E, 2019). My research helped to understand that the habitants and regular visitors of Tbilisi are very loyal towards their clubs, and Club A really appears as being a place of frequent gathering for many. Indeed, Participant C also mentioned: "Club A has mostly regular customers." (Participant C, 2019). Therefore, the process of brand loyalty applies totally towards the major clubs of Tbilisi, as product brands, but my research could not determine if they apply as well to the destination city brand. However, by deduction through the brand fortification process, it would be that the loyalty towards the clubs' product brands reflects a possible destination brand loyalty towards Tbilisi.

Considering the literature usually separates destination loyalty into both attitudinal and behavioral attributes (D. A. Aaker, 1996; Boo et al., 2009; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014a; Yoo & Donthu, 2001), it is possible to imagine that club goers repeat their visits to the venues because of positive emotional past experiences that occurred in those clubs (behavioral) and because the clubs' attributes satisfy them and are then beneficial to them (attitudinal). The financial impact of club loyalty has been stated by Participant H: "The clubbing community of Tbilisi is mainly constituted of loyal customers, making it very benefic economically." (Participant H, 2019). This also emphasizes the strength of the previously discussed Night Time Economy.

Moreover, the loyalty towards the clubs' product brands is creating brand value in the destination brand of Tbilisi, which emphasizes the relationship between brand value and brand loyalty that has been previously researched by Boo et al. (2009) and Dimanche (2002). To summarize, the product brand value of Club A and other popular clubs, is at the essence of brand loyalty towards those products, and within a brand fortification framework, this process affects the overall destination brand loyalty towards Tbilisi.

4.2.3 Identity versus Image

The relationship between destination identity and destination image has been very relevant during my research. As most of the interviewees were local inhabitants of Tbilisi in order to ensure the accuracy and consistency of my research, it was a natural process to understand their perspective as insiders of the emergent alternative movement music scene in Tbilisi. The relationship between their perspective, and the academically defined and accepted sent identity and received image (Florek et al., 2006; Kapferer, 1998) have been recurrent subjects during my research.

A very important aspect of the results of this research, **The Context**, may be quite abstract for short-stay tourists to comprehend. It is important to mention that the essence of the electronic music culture in Tbilisi, emerging from a historically and politically painful context, is not what a casual tourist would notice (Participant F, 2019). Tbilisi is full of trendy hip cafes, bars, clubs, and hangouts (Participant F, 2019). Through the eyes of an uninformed tourist, Tbilisi could easily be the newest and freshest place for any young tourist to visit. However, the consumer's tourism and lifestyle experiences in Tbilisi could occur without putting any considerations into the reasons behind the creation of such an attractive environment. For Participant F, "tourists would never know the insiders' perspectives, such as the internal fight between Club A and Club B" (Participant F, 2019). She also comments on the contested regions between Georgia and Russia: "Some tourists do not even know about the complex situation and relation with Russia." (Participant F, 2019).

Therefore, this study puts into consideration some theoretical concepts. Considering that the branding of Tbilisi started serendipitously, it is hard to imagine that any local DMO had planned a strategy on the identity they wanted to send to the world regarding the birth of a powerful electronic music dancing scene. After interviewing a couple of Georgians, it appears that for them, **The Context**, as explained previously, is very important. Indeed, it is the reason why they started to go to clubs, the reason why they went into electronic music. However, for the tourist, it is only about great quality bars, clubs and line-ups, completed by a cheap and extremely entertaining youth lifestyle, which would then become their definition of the brand image of Tbilisi, considering that brand image is the reflection of associations (Keller, 2008). To make it simple, since the movement was unplanned, the image(s) that the tourists receive, and what is sent by the identity makers, have not been interrelating as much as literature on the subject would suggest. Instead, because in the early stages of the branding process, there was no focus on this identity or building a branding perspective based on what has emerged (Cai, 2002; Florek et al., 2006; Qu et al., 2011). The fact that image and identity are essential for effective destination branding (Cai, 2002), it is important to note that in this very precise situation of unintended organic branding, perhaps the role of the identity building played in the early stages is a minor one compared to the image created in the eyes of the world through the spontaneous generation of Tbilisi's music scene. As depicted previously, Georgians were trying to find their own identity, as humans of a post-war and post-trauma nation. There was absolutely no focus on branding Tbilisi as an electronic music and youth lifestyle destination at that time (Participant J, 2019). For Tbilisi, the image was created by independent entities, such as through the use of social media, alternative music medias and influential DJs or producers. What emerged was spontaneous and without any direction from government. Nowadays, that the movement is already big and spreading worldwide, identity building has become something more relevant, as recently, many bars, clubs and hotels became owned or were merged with bigger entities. Indeed, as the scene is growing, more and more cultural identity building strategies are implemented around this alternative musical trend, joining Cai's (2002) and Hem & Iversen's (2004) perspective on how image alone is insufficient, without identity, for longer-term effective destination branding. The point is, that the very relevant role of the history and the background in the serendipitous branding process, is initially disconnected with the actual capitalization of the electronic music trend and the perceived destination image.

4.2.4 Strength of cultural assets in destination branding

My research has reinforced how valuable cultural assets can be for destination branding. In the same alignment as Kladou & Kehagias' (2014a) works on introducing culture into brand equity, by defining cultural assets as components of cultural destination brands, Tbilisi, as an electronic music and youth lifestyle destination, can be considered a cultural destination brand. Indeed, in the study case, the serendipitous destination branding process helped position and differentiate

Tbilisi on the destination market, and consequently impacted the development of not only the brand, but the city, and country itself.

Moreover, as it has been explained, Tbilisi has seen the emergence of very powerful and remarkable individual cultural brand assets. Cultural product brands such as Club A, Club B or even the very popular hostel, have helped to create the essential uniqueness needed for effective destination branding. Therefore, my research confirms the previous studies on the relationship between cultural assets and brand assets (Dimanche, 2002; Getz, 1997, 2008; Getz & Page, 2014; Kladou & Kehagias, 2014b, 2014a; Richards & Wilson, 2004). Cultural brand assets have probably been the main factor of development of Tbilisi's actual destination brand as an electronic music city, and especially convenient travel destination for youth lifestyle enthusiasts.

Furthermore, the previous literature on the role of events in destination brand equity and destination image (Dimanche, 2002; Richards & Wilson, 2004), helps to also emphasize the role of the numerous festivals in the strengthening of Tbilisi's destination brand equity and image. To summarize, Tbilisi's successful destination branding context is a perfect example for Kladou & Kehagias' (2014a) conclusions, that especially entertainment, nightlife and festivals can be considered among the most significant cultural assets for powerful destination brand equity, and overall destination branding.

4.3 Implications

4.3.1 Emerged theory

My research helps to understand that destination branding can originate in more than one way. The traditional strategic destination branding could be the most commonly studied case, but the findings in the study context of Tbilisi leads us to accept that the destination branding process is not as classic and normal as previously identified in the literature. By first reviewing extensively the literature about branding, destination branding, brand equity, destination brand equity, consumer-based approaches, brand equity dimensions and their application to destinations, cultural assets, and events in the role of destination branding, etc., the data collection and analysis through a Grounded Theory methodology helped to develop even more these theoretical concepts and foundations but in an entirely different context.

The principal and essential finding is that the process of Tbilisi's branding was serendipitous. Indeed, it emerged from a totally unplanned and uncoordinated series of individual and independent events and proceedings. With this understanding, the perspective on the previously

reviewed concepts changed. The interviews allowed for the examination of the process of destination branding for the city of Tbilisi through the perspective of the emergent alternative cultural trends, into a triple-based model, with **The Context**, **The Strategy** and **Strong Brands** as the three main core pillars of its development. Each pillar played a significant role in the creation of a serendipitous powerful destination brand for the country's capital.

Moreover, the findings emanating from these different categories, through coded data, emphasized the importance of each of them.

First, **The Context** of the destination in which the branding procedure is happening is itself at the essence of the process and influences extremely the normal course of action of destination branding. **The Context** should be part itself of the branding. Regardless of its nature (historical, social, geopolitical, cultural, environmental, etc.), **The Context** should be a great starting point for destination branding. Indeed, the original context reflects the real identity of the destination, more than any eventual strategically planned identity building process. Using the original context as pillar and starting point of the destination branding creates a perceived image of authenticity. In the case of Tbilisi, a post-Soviet, post-war and post-trauma capital of a quite poor and developing country in a very specific and conflicted region of the globe, the emergence of this alternative cultural lifestyle trend was meant to happen, especially when combined with such an organic online media exposure.

Second, **The Strategy** of placing tourism as a development priority and the willingness to develop a Night Time Economy, created the perfect environment for the development of the destination brand. The combination of unplanned and planned strategic actions helped to unleash creative young entrepreneurs into shaping a solid clubbing and festival scene for their capital. So, for now, **The Context** combined with **the right Strategies** and some unforeseen events (i.e. social media buzz) resulted in an already successfully developing destination brand becoming even more well known. But this destination brand would not have that much value without specific cultural **Strong individual Brands**.

Third, the existence of independently originated worldwide cultural brands such as Club A and numerous festivals, increased the awareness and image of the destination brand. This was supported by high levels of quality and strong loyalty from the locals. As studied, nightlife combined with festivals are a powerful combination to increase destination brand equity through the process of brand fortification by linking cultural brand assets and the destination brand itself.

To summarize and explain the creation of theory from data, my research helps us understand that in a specific original context, with the application of a fortuitous strategy and strong product

brands, serendipitous destination branding can occur. Since serendipitous destination branding occurred for Tbilisi, it could mean that applying such an approach to destination branding, in other destinations, could lead to similar results. However, since the process was serendipitous, any destination branding efforts would, by definition, be without direction. Therefore, the resulting branding effort would initially be undirected and unrealized.

4.3.2 Limitations and scope for further research

4.3.2.1 Theoretical limitations

The destination branding approach towards my research restricts the study to a marketing-based analysis. Indeed, by introducing and reviewing branding concepts and theories, the study makes observations and considerations through specific perspectives and relates them to the destination and tourism literature. Therefore, by limiting my research to a destination branding approach, the results obtained are somehow incomplete.

Indeed, the study case approach utilized in this study should lead us to realize that economics, geopolitics, history, musicology and anthropology have been very present and key elements of my research.

However, through the chosen perspective for the completion of this research, those other concepts helped establish the framework of the destination branding emerging theory this study proposes.

4.3.2.2 Methodological limitations

The methodological limitations are easy to identify.

It was not a simple process to recruit participants and convince them in engaging with my research considering their work schedules, availabilities and the fact that I needed to be in the country of the study case in order to pursue the interviews.

Therefore, the in-depth interviews were scheduled depending on the availability of the participants and me. The time needed to arrange and fix a meeting with a participant, and then collect and analyze the data was constantly challenging the rhythm of my research, which sometimes was very slow.

The analysis was somewhat complex. Indeed, considering the process of recording and then writing the transcripts of the in-depth interviews, that very often ended up in passionate conversations, it was quite hard to analyze rigorously each piece of data.

I am strongly passionate and implicated into the electronic music scene and festival management industry. This could have also possibly biased the study by influencing the results towards a certain direction.

The sample size being relatively small (10 participants), could introduce as well certain generalization limitations.

4.3.2.3 Contextual limitations

The specificity of Tbilisi and Georgia, on all perspectives, is already questioning the ability to generalize the study's findings. In fact, by stepping back and considering each country and city as an extremely unique context, it could be hard to imagine the process that happened in Tbilisi, occurring somewhere else in the exact same manner. However, my research does not restrain the study to only the emergence of alternative musical trends and cultures, it goes wider and proposes a model that could fit contexts and branding processes on a broader level.

Another contextual limitation is the demography of the country and city. The specific musical emergence, the clubs, the events, are all limited somehow to the Georgian middle and upper-class. Georgia is a country of discrepancies, inequalities and enormous gaps between social classes. Hence, the question of generalization also appears on a local scale, internally. Indeed, it may not be accurate to suggest that the outcoming trendy and fashionable serendipitous branding of Tbilisi is perceived the same way by the working class or by people living at poverty levels. Furthermore, Tbilisi has always been a city of immigration. The capital of Georgia hosts many different ethnicities, and not all of them are aware of the new electronic music and event scene, and some may not even be accepted into it because of discrimination issues. Finally, politically Georgia is also quite divided. Considering that the topic of my research mainly concerns the youth, millennials and Georgians raised after independence, the gap of generations has led to very different political perspectives. Indeed, the concerned people in my research are sharing very progressive and modern mindsets, such as fighting for LGBTQ rights, workers' rights and drug decriminalization. These subjects are perceived through opposite perspectives by other political groups. The members of those groups are perhaps against this new branding of Tbilisi and prefer the older image and older set of values for their country and capital city. The generational and political gap must certainly expose destination brand identity contradictions. Therefore, the readers should then consider my research with caution, as it may

concern only a minority of people living in Tbilisi and a minority of tourists, both parts possibly representing only a very specific social category.

Moreover, the tourism industry is expanding rapidly in Georgia and Tbilisi, and many Georgians are dropping their previous jobs to enter the tourism market. This could have strong impacts on the evolution of the scene, and an unsustainable authenticity issue could appear in the future, or maybe has already appeared. Besides, the recent hype of Tbilisi is attracting many investors from abroad, who are showing strong interests in the event and electronic music industries. Thus, what was at the beginning a serendipitous creative movement led by local entrepreneurs could transform into pure commercial and business special interests.

4.3.2.4 Scope for further research

Thus, the study suggest the following four possibilities for further academic research.

Firstly, the same ecosystem of research, meaning the study case of Tbilisi's recent electronic music scene and youth lifestyle popularity, could also be potentially approached through other fields of academic studies such as economics, geopolitics, history, musicology and anthropology.

Secondly, the question of validity and generalization issues when theory emerges out of specific contexts could be researched for the destination branding literature. Moreover, the impact of demographics on the creation of theory has potential for further research. The study context emerged limitations concerning social class gaps, ethnicity gaps and generational gaps, means that for many segments of a population, destination branding concepts and larger categories of concepts can conceivably be refutable.

Thirdly, the disconnect mentioned between original destination identity, sent destination identity and perceived destination image have potential for further destination branding research. Indeed, it could be interesting for tourism researchers to understand how to cope with specific violent, traumatizing and chaotic pasts being at the essence of a serendipitous destination branding process, while simultaneously capitalizing on this new brand through a creative emergent cultural boom.

Lastly, future research could certainly explore the managerial aspect of maintaining and sustainably developing serendipitous successful brands without losing the authenticity and pureness that was at first a criterion for attractiveness.

5 Conclusion

My research comes to an end. What was supposed to be at the beginning a destination branding-focused master thesis turned out to be a lot more than that. This research pushes the theoretical knowledge on destination branding one step further as it mixes disciplines. It intertwines with tourism, anthropology, sociology, musicology, history, geopolitics and obviously branding. The step-by-step process of the Grounded Theory methodology helped to engage in very iterative procedures, meticulously decrypting grounded data in order to make sense of it and to further co-construct a social theory.

This study particularly aimed to understand an unforeseen and unique phenomenon happening in the South Caucasus, in the capital of the small-sized country of Georgia. It must be remembered that Georgia has a very special geographical location on the globe, surrounded by countries currently coping with internal crisis and external conflicts. Georgia is at the edge of Europe and Asia. It is exotic for Westerners, yet not that far to reach and especially cheap to visit. Described by many as an island of freedom situated in a highly conflicted region of the world, Tbilisi is a safe space for many. The youth, who have been actively implicated in the creativity boom of their capital, have transformed Tbilisi's landscape forever. The branding of Georgia has never been as successful. Indeed, using only in the past very traditional marketing means, the country has been unknown as a tourism destination for the world for so many years, because of its chaotic and traumatizing history.

Personally, I first heard of Georgia five years ago, from a DJ and producer who had recently played in Club A. The DJ's review of that night was so intense, interesting and beautiful that, since then, I developed a curiosity to understand why such an avant-garde cultural music trend is developing in that specific context. Since that day, the movement became so much more important in its size, its influence and its reputation. This research tried to give an answer to that question, under the form of an academic mainly qualitative inquiry process enabled through a destination branding perspective.

The findings are the following.

Tbilisi's destination branding process was at first serendipitous. Nobody in Georgia was expecting such a fast development and internationally leading positioning for the city's alternative electronic music destination brand. Repeatedly compared with Berlin in the early 90s, Tbilisi's branding also mainly occurred thanks to a very specific **Context**. Indeed, the background and roots of the country and capital played a major role in shaping the youth's behavior and attitude nowadays. Within **The Context** main core category, many sub-concepts

have emerged as extremely relevant in the branding process of the city: politics, soviet history, europeanization, identity crisis, emotional attribute, artistic history, creativity, entrepreneurship, novelty, exoticism, hype, price factor, the raids, and organic media exposure.

To support **The Context**, the second core category of the findings is **The Strategy**, in which two sub-concepts have appeared: tourism as a priority and a strategy, and night time economy.

And finally, the third and last core category is **Strong brands**, inside which the following four sub-concepts exist: the clubbing scene, festivals, brand fortification, and Tbilisi, the music city brand.

Together, these core categories and their several sub-concepts helped us understand that destination branding is not necessarily a strategically planned process operated by DMOs or tourism institutions. Destination branding can be serendipitous, it can be accidental, yet beneficial.

Researching the emergence of an alternative, underground, avant-garde, trendy electronic music culture was an incredibly exciting journey. I strongly hope my master thesis will help enlarge the branding discipline's inquiry possibilities. Unusual procedures are surrounding the historically accepted and normalized branding studies. The tourism ecosystem is, more than ever, becoming one of the main challenges for the sustainable development of our societies. The social phenomenon behind Tbilisi's recent hype is unique. However, the processes that enabled such extraordinary destination branding are not inimitable. By establishing serendipitous destination branding, developing destinations can now aspire to alternative branding forms. The positioning of Tbilisi, and Georgia, radically shifted from being an unknown and unpopular tourism destination for Western youngsters to becoming the cultural and fashionable destination it is today. The development opportunities the capital's serendipitous destination branding process brought to the country are amazing and unprecedented.

My master thesis, through the co-construction of the data using grounded emergent theory suggests that destination branding can serendipitously occur within the following framework: **a unique specific context, a thought-through tourism and night time strategy and individual independent strong brands.**

6 References

- Aaker, D. A. (1991). *Managing Brand Equity: Capitalizing on the Value of a Brand Name*. New York: Free Press.
- Aaker, D. A. (1996). *Building Strong Brands*. New York: Free Press.
- Aaker, D. A., & Keller, K. L. (1990). Consumer Evaluations of Brand Extensions. *Journal of Marketing*, 54(1), 27. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1252171>
- Aaker, J. L. (1997). Dimensions of Brand Personality. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 34(3), 347–356.
- Baloglu, S. (1996). An empirical investigation of determinants of tourist destination image. *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*.
- Baloglu, S. (2002). Dimensions of Customer Loyalty: Separating Friends from Well Wishers. *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, (February), 47–59.
- Baloglu, S., & Brinberg, D. (1993). Affective Images of Tourism Destinations. *Journal of Travel Research*, 11–15.
- Blain, C., Levy, S. E., & Ritchie, J. R. B. (2005). Destination Branding: Insights and Practices from Destination Management Organizations. *Journal of Travel Research*, 43(MAY), 328–338. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287505274646>
- Boiler Room. (2018). TBILISI: WE DANCE TOGETHER, WE FIGHT TOGETHER. Retrieved April 18, 2019, from <https://boilerroom.tv/session/boiler-room-georgia-bassiani>
- Boo, S., Busser, J., & Baloglu, S. (2009). A model of customer-based brand equity and its application to multiple destinations. *Tourism Management*, 30(2), 219–231. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2008.06.003>
- Buhalis, D. (2000). Marketing the competitive destination of the future. *Tourism Management*, 21, 97–116.
- Cai, L. A. (2002). Cooperative branding for rural destinations. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 29(3), 720–742.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Sage.
- Charmaz, K. (2008). Constructionism and the Grounded Theory Method. In J. A. Holstein & J. F. Gubrium (Eds.), *Handbook of Constructionist Research* (pp. 397–412). New York: The Guilford Press. <https://doi.org/10.1089/ten.tea.2010.0678>
- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.
- Che, D. (2008). Sports, music, entertainment and the destination branding of post-Fordist Detroit. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 33(2), 195–206. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2008.11081305>
- Chiou, J. (2004). The antecedents of consumers' loyalty toward Internet Service Providers. *Information Management*, 41, 685–695. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.im.2003.08.006>
- Chon, K. S., Weaver, P. A., & Kim, C. Y. (1991). Marketing Your Community: Image Analysis in Norfolk. *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, 31(4), 31–37. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001088049103100414>
- Cretu, A. E., & Brodie, R. J. (2007). The influence of brand image and company reputation where manufacturers market to small firms: A customer value perspective. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 36(2), 230–240. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2005.08.013>
- Crompton, J. L. (1979). An Assessment of the Image of Mexico as Vacation Destination and

- the Influence of Geographical Location Upon That Image. *Journal of Travel Research*, (Spring), 18–23.
- Crompton, J. L., & Um, S. (1990). Attitude Destination in Tourism Destination Choice. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 17, 432–448.
- Demytrie, R., & Ram, E. (2018). *Georgia's rave revolution*. Georgia: BBC News. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-44999599/georgia-s-rave-revolution>
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2008). *The landscape of qualitative research*. Sage.
- Deslandes, D. D. (2003). *Assessing consumer perceptions of destinations: a necessary first step in the destination branding process*. Florida State University.
- Dimanche, F. (2002). The contribution of special events to destination brand equity. *European Cities Tourism's International Conference*, (October), 73–80. <https://doi.org/10.13140/2.1.1520.3529>
- Dobni, D., & Zinkhan, G. M. (1990). In Search of Brand Image: A Foundation Analysis. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 17, 110–120.
- Dredge, D., & Jenkins, J. (2003). Destination place identity and regional tourism policy. *Tourism Geographies*, 5(4), 383–407. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461668032000129137>
- Fan, Y. (2006). Branding the nation : What is being branded ? *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 12(1), 5–14. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356766706056633>
- Flint, D. J., Woodruff, R. B., & Gardial, S. F. (2002). Exploring the phenomenon of customers' desired value change in a business-to-business context. *Journal of Marketing*, 66(4), 102–117.
- Florek, M. (2005). The country brand as a new challenge for Poland. *Place Branding*, 1(2), 205–214.
- Florek, M., Insch, A., & Gnoth, J. (2006). City Council websites as a means of place brand identity communication. *Place Branding*, 2(4), 276–296. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.pb.6000036>
- Garcia, L. M. (2016). Techno-tourism and post-industrial neo-romanticism in Berlin's electronic dance music scenes. *Tourist Studies*, 16(3), 276–295. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468797615618037>
- Gardner, B. B., & Levy, S. J. (1955). The Product and the Brand. *Harvard Business Review*, (March-April), 33–39.
- Gartner, W. C., & Ruzzier, M. K. (2011). Tourism Destination Brand Equity Dimensions : Renewal versus Repeat Market. *Journal of Travel Research*, 50(5), 471–481. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287510379157>
- Georgian National Tourism Administration. (2017). *Georgian Tourism in Figures*. Tbilisi.
- Getz, D. (1997). *Event management & event tourism*. Cognizant, Elmsford, NY.
- Getz, D. (2008). Event tourism: Definition, evolution, and research. *Tourism Management*, 29(3), 403–428. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2007.07.017>
- Getz, D., & Page, S. J. (2014). Progress and prospects for event tourism research. *Tourism Management*, 52, 593–631. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2015.03.007>
- Glaser, B. G. (1978). "Theoretical sensitivity." *Advances in the methodology of grounded theory*.
- Glaser, B. G. (1992). *Basics of grounded theory analysis: Emergence vs forcing*. Sociology press.
- Glaser, B. G. (2003). *The grounded theory perspective II: Description's remodeling of grounded theory methodology*. Sociology press.

- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Go, F. M., & Govers, R. (2000). Integrated quality management for tourist destinations: A European perspective on achieving competitiveness. *Tourism Management*, 21(1), 79–88. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177\(99\)00098-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177(99)00098-9)
- Goodall, B., & Ashworth, G. (1988). *Marketing In The Tourism Industry: The Promotion of Destination Regions*. New York: Routledge.
- Grace, D., & O’Cass, A. (2005). Service branding: Consumer verdicts on service brands. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 12(2), 125–139. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2004.05.002>
- Graeff, T. R. (1997). Consumption Situations and the Effects of Brand Image on Consumers ’ Brand Evaluations. *Psychology & Marketing*, 14(1), 49–70.
- Grewal, D., Levy, M., & Lehmann, D. R. (2004). Retail Branding and Customer Loyalty: an overview. *Journal of Retailing*, 80, ix–xii. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretai.2004.10.001>
- Guadagni, P. M., & Little, J. D. C. (1983). A Logit Model of Brand Choice Calibrated on Scanner Data. *Marketing Science*, 2(3), 203–238. <https://doi.org/10.1287/mksc.1070.0331>
- Hankinson, G. (2005). Destination brand images : a business tourism perspective. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 19(1), 24–32. <https://doi.org/10.1108/08876040510579361>
- Hankinson, G., & Cowking, P. (1993). *Branding in action: cases and strategies for profitable brand management*. McGraw-Hill Book Company Limited.
- Hem, L. E., & Iversen, N. M. (2004). How to Develop a Destination Brand Logo : A Qualitative and Quantitative Approach. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 4(2), 83–106. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15022250410003852>
- Hendon, D. W., & Williams, E. L. (1985). Winning the battle for your customer. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 2(4), 65–75.
- Hosany, S., Ekinci, Y., & Uysal, M. (2006). Destination image and destination personality: An application of branding theories to tourism places. *Journal of Business Research*, 59(5), 638–642. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2006.01.001>
- House, A. (2016). Clubbers, forget London and Berlin – the place to dance is eastern Europe. Retrieved April 16, 2019, from <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/sep/21/clubbing-london-berlin-eastern-europe-closure-fabric>
- Hultman, M., Pitt, L. F., Spyropoulou, S., Abratt, R., & Opoku, R. (2006). What I say about myself: Communication of brand personality by African countries. *Tourism Management*, 28(3), 835–844. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2006.06.003>
- Hunt, J. D. (1975). Image as a Factor in Tourism Development. *Journal of Travel Research*, 13(3), 1–7.
- Kapferer, J.-N. (1998). *Strategic brand management: Creating and sustaining brand equity long term*. London: Kogan Page.
- Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Managing Customer-Based Brand Equity. *Working Papers (Faculty) -- Stanford Graduate School of Business*, 57(1), 46p. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1252054>
- Keller, K. L. (1998). *Strategic brand management: building, measuring, and managing brand equity*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Keller, K. L. (2008). *Strategic brand management: building, measuring, and managing brand equity*. Kogan Page.

- Kim, H., & Kim, G. W. (2005). The relationship between brand equity and firms' performance in luxury hotels and chain restaurants. *Tourism Management*, 26, 549–560. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2004.03.010>
- Kladou, S., Kavaratzis, M., Rigopoulou, I., & Salonika, E. (2017). The role of brand elements in destination branding. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 6(4), 426–435. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2016.06.011>
- Kladou, S., & Kehagias, J. (2014a). Assessing destination brand equity: An integrated approach. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 3(1), 2–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2013.11.002>
- Kladou, S., & Kehagias, J. (2014b). Developing a structural brand equity model for cultural destinations. *Journal of Place Management and Development*, 7(2), 112–125. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPMD-03-2013-0007>
- Konecnik, M., & Gartner, W. C. (2007). Customer-based brand equity for a destination. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 34(2), 400–421. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2006.10.005>
- Kotler, P., & Armstrong, G. (2010). *Principles of Marketing* (13th ed.). Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Education.
- Kwun, J., & Oh, H. (2004). Effects of Brand, Price, and Risk on Customers' Value Perceptions and Behavioral Intentions in the Restaurant Industry. *Journal of Hospitality & Leisure Marketing*, 11(1), 31–49. <https://doi.org/10.1300/J150v11n01>
- Lassar, W., Mittal, B., & Sharma, A. (2003). Measuring customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 12(4), 11–19.
- Lee, H. J., & Jee, Y. (2016). The impacts of brand asset of domestic screen golf playing systems upon brand trust and brand loyalty. *International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship*, 17(4), 320–332. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSMS-11-2016-021>
- Lee, J., & Back, K. (2008). Attendee-based brand equity. *Tourism Management*, 29, 331–344. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2007.03.002>
- Locke, K. D. (2000). *Grounded theory in management research*. Sage.
- Low, G. S., & Lamb Jr, C. W. (2000). The measurement and dimensionality of brand associations. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 9(6), 350–370.
- Lynch, W. (2018). Tbilisi club community stages protest rave at Parliament Of Georgia. Retrieved April 18, 2019, from <https://www.residentadvisor.net/news/41732>
- Martínez, E., & de Chernatony, L. (2004). The effect of brand extension strategies upon brand image. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 21(1), 39–50. <https://doi.org/10.1108/07363760410513950>
- McCleary, K. W., & Baloglu, S. (1999). A model of destination image formation. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 26(4), 868–897.
- Mckercher, B., Mei, W. S., Tse, T. S. M., Mckercher, B., Mei, W. S., & Tse, T. S. M. (2006). Are Short Duration Cultural Festivals Tourist Attractions? *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 14(1), 55–66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669580608668591>
- Michell, P., King, J., & Reast, J. (2001). Values related to industrial products. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 30, 415–425.
- Mihalic, T. (2000). Environmental management of a tourist destination A factor of tourism competitiveness. *Tourism Management*, 21, 65–78.
- Mills, J., Bonner, A., & Francis, K. (2017). The Development of Constructivist Grounded

- Theory. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 5(1), 25–35. <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690600500103>
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia. (2019). GEORGIAN VISA INFORMATION. Retrieved April 22, 2019, from <https://www.geoconsul.gov.ge/HtmlPage/Html/View?id=956&lang=Eng>
- Morgan, N., Pritchard, A., & Piggott, R. (2002). New Zealand, 100% Pure. The creation of a powerful niche destination brand. *Brand Management*, 9(4–5), 335–354.
- Motameni, R., & Shahrokhi, M. (1998). Brand equity valuation: a global perspective. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 7(4), 275–290.
- Nickerson, N. P., & Moisey, R. N. (1999). Branding a state from features to positioning: Making it simple? *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 5(3), 217–226. <https://doi.org/10.1177/135676679900500302>
- NUMBEO. (2019). Cost of Living in Tbilisi. Retrieved April 17, 2019, from <https://www.numbeo.com/cost-of-living/in/Tbilisi>
- O’sullivan, D., & Jackson, M. J. (2002). Festival tourism: A contributor to sustainable local economic development? *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 10(4), 325–342. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669580208667171>
- Odin, Y., Odin, N., & Valette-florence, P. (2001). Conceptual and operational aspects of brand loyalty An empirical investigation. *Journal of Business Research*, 53, 75–84.
- Ooi, C. (2004). Poetics and Politics of Destination Branding: Denmark. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 4(2), 107–128. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15022250410003898>
- Oppermann, M. (2000). Tourism Destination Loyalty. *Journal of Travel Research*, 39(1), 78–84. Retrieved from <http://jtr.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/39/1/78>
- Pappu, R., Cooksey, R. W., & Quester, P. G. (2005). Consumer-based brand equity: improving the measurement – empirical evidence. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 14(3), 143–154. <https://doi.org/10.1108/10610420510601012>
- Parasuraman, A. (1997). Reflections on gaining competitive advantage through customer value. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 25(2), 154–161.
- Park, C. S., & Srinivasan, V. (1994). A Survey-Based Method for Measuring and Understanding Brand Equity and Its Extendibility. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 31(2), 271–288.
- Park, C. W., Jaworski, B. J., & MacInnis, D. J. (1984). Strategic Brand Concept-Image Management. *Journal of Marketing*, 4(50), 135–146. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1251291>
- Parks, S. C., & Back, K.-J. (2003). A brand loyalty model involving cognitive, affective, and conative brand loyalty and customer satisfaction. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 27(4), 419–435.
- Participant A. (2019). *Personal interview*. Tbilisi.
- Participant B. (2019). *Personal interview*. Tbilisi.
- Participant C. (2019). *Personal interview*. Tbilisi.
- Participant D. (2019). *Personal interview*. Tbilisi.
- Participant E. (2019). *Personal interview*. Tbilisi.
- Participant F. (2019). *Personal interview*. Tbilisi.
- Participant G. (2019). *Personal interview*. Tbilisi.
- Participant H. (2019). *Personal interview*. Tbilisi.
- Participant I. (2019). *Personal interview*. Tbilisi.
- Participant J. (2019). *Personal interview*. Tbilisi.

- Patterson, M. (1999). Re-appraising the concept of brand image. *Journal of Brand Management*, 6(6), 409–426.
- Pike, S. (2005). Tourism destination branding complexity. *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, 14(4), 258–259. <https://doi.org/10.1108/10610420510609267>
- Pike, S. (2009). Destination brand positions of a competitive set of near-home destinations. *Tourism Management*, 30(6), 857–866. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2008.12.007>
- Plummer, J. T. (2000). How Personality Makes a Difference. *Journal of Advertising Research*, (November-December), 79–83.
- Prasad, K., & Dev, C. S. (2000). Managing hotel brand equity: a customer-centric framework for assessing performance. *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, June, 22–31.
- Pritchard, A., & Morgan, N. (1998). “Mood marketing” - The new destination branding strategy: A case study of “Wales” The Brand. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 4(3), 215–229.
- Qu, H., Kim, L. H., & Im, H. H. (2011). A model of destination branding: Integrating the concepts of the branding and destination image. *Tourism Management*, 32(3), 465–476. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2010.03.014>
- Ravens, C. (2019). Bassiani: the Tbilisi techno mecca shaking off post-Soviet repression. Retrieved April 19, 2019, from <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2019/jan/22/bassiani-tbilisi-techno-nightclub-georgia>
- Resident Advisor. (2018). Police raid Georgian nightclubs Bassiani and Café Gallery, arrest Bassiani owners. Retrieved April 18, 2019, from <https://www.residentadvisor.net/news/41730>
- Richards, G., & Wilson, J. (2004). The impact of cultural events on city image: Rotterdam, cultural capital of Europe 2001. *Urban Studies*, 41(10), 1931–1951. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0042098042000256323>
- Ryan, C., & Gu, H. (2008). *Destination branding and marketing: The role of marketing organizations. Handbook of Hospitality Marketing Management* (Sixth Edit). Oxford: Elsevier Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-045080-3.50017-2>
- Shocker, A., & Weitz, B. (1988). *A perspective on brand equity principles and issues*.
- Singh, S., & Estefan, A. (2018). Selecting a Grounded Theory Approach for Nursing Research. *Global Qualitative Nursing Research*, 5, 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2333393618799571>
- Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research*. Sage publications.
- Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Thousands Oaks: Sage publications.
- Sweeney, J. C., & Soutar, G. N. (2001). Consumer perceived value : The development of a multiple item scale. *Journal of Retailing*, 77, 203–220.
- Sweeney, J. C., Soutar, G. N., & Johnson, L. W. (1999). The role of perceived risk in the quality-value relationship: a study in a retail environment. *Journal of Retailing*, 75(1), 77–105.
- Tasci, A. D. A., & Gartner, W. C. (2007). Destination Image and Its Functional Relationships. *Journal of Travel Research*, 45(May), 413–425. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287507299569>
- Tasci, A. D. A., Gartner, W. C., & Cavusgil, S. T. (2007). Measurement of destination brand bias using a quasi-experimental design. *Tourism Management*, 28, 1529–1540.

- <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2007.02.009>
- Teas, R. K., & Laczniaik, R. N. (2004). Measurement process context effects in empirical tests of causal models. *Journal of Business Research*, 57, 162–174. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0148-2963\(01\)00300-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0148-2963(01)00300-9)
- Vázquez, R., Río, A. B., & Iglesias, V. (2002). Consumer-based Brand Equity : Development and Validation of a Measurement Instrument. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 18(1–2), 27–48. <https://doi.org/10.1362/0267257022775882>
- Washburn, J. H., & Plank, R. E. (2002). Measuring brand equity: an evaluation of a consumer-based brand equity scale. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 10(1), 46–62.
- Weed, M. (2017). Capturing the essence of grounded theory: the importance of understanding commonalities and variants. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 9(1), 149–156. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2016.1251701>
- Williams, G. (2016). The California of the Caucasus. Retrieved April 16, 2019, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/18/t-magazine/travel/tbilisi-georgia-guide.html>
- Wilson, B. (2018). Berlin Is Out, Tbilisi Is In: Georgia’s Capital Is This Year’s Most Exciting City. Retrieved April 16, 2019, from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/breannawilson/2018/09/05/berlin-is-out-tbilisi-is-in-georgias-capital-is-this-years-most-exciting-city/#27ccd4dc479d>
- Woodruff, R. B. (1995). Customer Value: The Next Source for Competitive Advantage. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 25(2), 139–153.
- Woodside, A. G., Cruickshank, B. F., & Dehuang, N. (2007). Stories visitors tell about Italian cities as destination icons. *Tourism Management*, 28(1), 162–174. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2005.10.026>
- Woodside, A. G., & Lysonski, S. (1988). A General Model Of Traveler Destination Choice. *Journal of Travel Research*, Spring, 8–14.
- Yoo, B., & Donthu, N. (2001). Developing and Validating a Multi-dimensional CBBE scale. *Journal of Business Research*, 10(1), 61–67. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0148-2963\(99\)00098-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0148-2963(99)00098-3)
- Zeithaml, V. A. (1988). Consumer Perceptions of Price, Quality, and Value: A Means-End Model and Synthesis of Evidence. *Journal of Marketing*, 52(3), 2. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1251446>

Appendixes

Supporting quotes

“We are the new generation, we are born and raised in the independent Georgia. We grew up with totally new legislations and governments, everything became related to politics. Even clubs.” (Participant A)

“The wars, past and politics of Georgia are directly connected to the music we produce nowadays” (Participant B)

“Given the historical perspective of authoritarian governments, now everyone tries to create their new identity. You do not really know who you are. You know you come from a soviet environment, but that is not your identity [...]. They (the new generation) think about who they are as a nation.” (Participant A)

“This country has been very traditional, very conservative and had strong rules. Now if you talk with older generations, they do not really understand today’s situation. We must break the old rules to be free. Today’s situation is very interesting, there are two types of people living together. The post-independence generations and the older soviet minds.” (Participant B)

“Twenty years ago, there was poverty, misery and starvation in Georgia. [...] We progressed a lot in 10-20 years but there is still lots of things to change. We have lots to catch-up. Soviet attitude is still very present, in the mindset. It affects Georgia as a brand.” (Participant E)

“Club owners are heavily involved in the protests. For example, White Noise Movement was created by activists, who are also the creators of Club A. With the rise of the club’s popularity, their ideology also started to spread.” (Participant E)

“Georgia has a good base to create alternative cultures. The country was closed for so long because of wars, a bit like in Berlin, Germany. All Soviet Union just blew up and fell apart. I grew up at those times. Nobody knew how to live. Everybody grew up in a system where everything was planned and controlled, and suddenly, nothing! It was very easy to organize underground events.” (Participant F)

“Nearly everything in Georgia seeks to resemble Europe, especially when it comes to social values. The overall political idea has been and will always be to get closer to the European Union and be a more popular destination among Europeans. I would say that today’s hipsterfication is the continuation and result of those ideologies, combined with a higher quality of education. Clubbing is also a way to reach Europe.” (Participant H)

“Georgia was always keeping on track towards EU values. The political priority has been to be part of EU. The cultural initiatives helped progressive polities towards LGBTQ communities and drug policies.” (Participant A)

“There is a lack of strategy. Nowadays there is a huge dissonance between our label of innovative, cultural and opened democracy, in comparison to our public cultural institutions that are way behind and stagnating. In the last 30 years, nothing happened regarding art museums, nothing since the collapse of USSR has been documented in art. Before it was an obligation.” (Participant G)

“Because of that, alternative small institutions started to grow, independently. Few people managed hat hundreds could not, and with less money. Just because they had a vision. Older big institutions still have a soviet mentality and vision.” (Participant G)

“Techno music is escapist, it is a protest music genre, like rock or metal. It is very aggressive and energetic, and energy is always directed to something. In Georgia, the techno cultural became a protest. Clubbers have solid views about what they like about their country and lives, and about what they do not. Techno goers here are protesting socially and politically, for their survival.” (Participant E)

“From a broader perspective, this is all happening because Georgia is going towards Europe and NATO. The ministries are following the agenda from the governmental strategy. They want to create the image of Georgia as more cultural and democratic country. Therefore, they make association agreements with the involvement of the EU.” (Participant G)

“To cope with their everyday problems, Georgians create music, art, and they dance. Spaces for us to express ourselves did not always exist. Thanks to inspiring venues such as Club A or Club B, there is now many spaces one can go to. Those two clubs really did a huge work in the process.” (Participant C)

“The whole South Caucasus needed free artistic places. That need exists since soviet times, when some people wanted to defy the system, to be different, to be socially free.” (Participant H)

“In the beginning of Tbilisi’s boom, it was just about the power of the people. If you loved music, you could create music. If you love dancing, you could create an incredible club. It was all about finding yourself.” (Participant A)

“When the studio was created 6 years ago, the members were only 11 passionate friends. Now they have more than 500 students.” (Participant C)

“Historically, Georgia was already famous for its cultural strength. During the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), Georgia possessed the most theaters.” (Participant D)

“Kutaisi also was always famous in the past for its music scene. Creativity was always present in Georgians, as we can see in their very original polyphonic singing traditions and folkloric dancing.” (Participant D)

“Georgia, 100 years ago, had its modernism peak time. In 1920s. That period was a golden age for our country’s poetry, Dadaism, visual art. Everything was parallel to major influential cities. We can compare with what is happening now. It is the same path of the lifecycle. What happens now is a response to stagnation. Lots of cultural forms/places are emerging. Perhaps Georgians also want to create a distance with the very traumatic past, by creating alternative new realities, spaces where this past can be digested.” (Participant G)

“When a person is angry and full of energy, he goes to the club to release. He only leaves the clubs when he is empty, and when no more energy is left.” (Participant B)

“Even back in soviet times when Georgia was welcoming many international theatre troupes, the performers would always be amazed by how responsive the Georgian public was. They could keep clapping for hours.” (Participant H)

“The people of this nation, as in especially southern nations, are usually more open and really want to entertain. People here want to go out all the time, they prefer to seat out, go out, be out. It gives a lot to the nightlife.” (Participant F)

“It is easy to bring someone out of his house; it is in his DNA. Especially young people, it is easy to bring them to alternative places. On a marketing point of view, it is very easy here to attract people. They stay out later and wake up later. Everything happens at night. The tempo of the lifestyle is like that, which is a great basis to promote alternative culture.” (Participant F)

“Some people we know go there every weekend for the past 4 years. It just trains so much energy. Physically and mentally. They enjoy it so much; they dance till morning like crazy. The atmosphere is incredible. Club goers are very intense here.” (Participant E)

“The arts and technological development are happening; the processes are accelerating.” (Participant G)

“Georgia is still considered “exotic”, even though here we hate that word. Some people I met still think Georgia is a new country.” (Participant A)

“Our people are often following popular western trends; it is not really about the music. Therefore, techno is very popular now.” (Participant C)

“The most popular genre is techno; everybody listens to it in Tbilisi.” (Participant B)

“Everything is relatively new.” (Participant B)

“The underground here is real.” (Participant C)

“The scene here is trying to be a copy paste of Berlin.” (Participant F)

“International techno festival goes like the cool unknown events, and Georgia is perfect for that. Festivals here are not overcrowded and there is a local special atmosphere.” (Participant E)

“Newness was always a key to success and trendiness.” (Participant D)

“People in Georgia needed safe spaces where they could do whatever they want without getting judged. Artistic venues became the place for youngsters to gather and express a different lifestyle than the older generations. Especially for minorities and LGBTQ communities, those safe places were very relevant.” (Participant D)

“It is easy to create something in Georgia; labor is very cheap.” (Participant D)

“For people around the world, Tbilisi has great clubs, great lineups, great vibes, bars, house music laces, cool hostels, everything is good and cheap. For tourism it is a super nice place, especially for youngsters because it is cheap.” (Participant F)

“People could save a year to go to Paris, whereas here, it is so easy and affordable. Tbilisi’s hype is partly due to that.” (Participant F)

“Georgia is also obviously very cheap. There is a high inflation in Georgia. The difference between the Georgian Lari and the American dollar or Euro is just getting bigger, meaning that the Georgian Lari is getting cheaper. If we consider that people who travel often look for small prices, they figure out Georgia is very good and very cheap, and just come visit or even sometimes live here.” (Participant B)

“Since cheap flights have arrived in Kutaisi, tourism has been very positively impacted. It allowed a wider range of people to come and travel here. Every process of Georgia’s Touristification are connected.” (Participant D)

“Thanks to the internet era, the protests got livestreamed and shared all around the world. It just went viral so fast.” (Participant E)

“The raids became the common topic for people of the scene around the world. People who club in Tbilisi or anywhere else on Earth have something in common. The process occurs like a tribal approach.” (Participant E)

“The riots created huge awareness. The world started to look at Georgia and Tbilisi. We suddenly received lots of attention.” (Participant E)

“The main street was blocked; it was huge peaceful and passive demonstration through music. For us it is a once in a lifetime event. We will never forget it and it changed who we are and what we do today.” (Participant E)

“That much people hadn’t gathered like that for many years. It really transformed into a massive event. The streets became a huge party. It was beautiful, protesting through dancing.” (Participant E)

“It was also about the new generation showing what they were capable of. Those were very emotional days, full of sincerity.” (Participant E)

“The raids somehow helped Tbilisi’s scene, by the internet impact it had. Now we can see many tourists traveling here for the club scene.” (Participant I)

“Internet played an important role for the world’s awareness, and even for locals. Many Georgians are not in the scene but discovered it through internet. The interviews, articles and videos on internet helped a lot. And Georgians are really active on social media”. (Participant C)

“We always needed something big, explosive. That is what happened with the May 12th riots spectacle and the music scene overall.” (Participant G)

“We had cycle of governments that last 2 to 9 years. It is easy to make money from tourism; all you need is to build the infrastructure. There has been lots of emphasis on tourism, we can easily say that the Touristification process is at core of the strategy.” (Participant G)

“Georgia was strongly affected by Russia. Only after the last war in 2008, the President gave the foundation for tourism. Then the Georgian Dream party understood the potential, and the real development plan started. Many people abandoned their jobs to jump into the tourism industry. That attitude is unsustainable, it does not build the new image of Georgia” (Participant G)

“Tourism became fully part of the strategy when the visa policies got so easy and flexible. Outbound like inbound, it is so easy for foreigners to visit Georgia, and it got simpler for Georgians to travel abroad. This also made it easier for DJs and artists to travel in and out Georgia.” (Participant D)

“Entertainment and hospitality are the main tools for the tourism industry development.” (Participant A)

“For us the new generation from the independent Georgia, government stated that tourism was the priority, for the very 1st time. People got interested in developing our country through artistic expression.” (Participant A)

“Our government invested in tourism and made agreements with the brand owner of a specific festival, a very developed brand of a free autonomous land for a month-long festival and intense partying.” (Participant E)

“Our country had a very strict legislation; it was very tradition and religion based. That festival created many protests and was not even close to what people were expecting.” (Participant E)

“The government did not want to lose the infrastructure and investment and tried to develop there a business center. But the location is at the border of an occupied region, called Abkhazia, which was supposed to be strategic but, in the end, they just lost 4-5 million USD investment.” (Participant E)

“Government’s investments into electronic music failed quite a lot. Most of today’s successful scene happened independently from the government.” (Participant E)

“Electronic music started in Georgia in the late 80s, beginning of 90s, when certain groups start to switch to electronic equipment, synthesizers and computers.” (Participant J)

“At the beginning of 2000s, many artists wanted to go solo, wanted to change from the bands. They could distance themselves from what was going outside. There were not many rehearsal rooms, so they would start to make music alone thanks to machines and computers.” (Participant J)

“We started some awards to promote innovative forms of pop culture, we did not specify electronic music, it was for anything contemporary.” (Participant J)

“In 2002, a business man approached me to create the first big club. The idea was to bring in international artists, to show Georgians what was happening around the world. But also, this club had a strong business perspective. We slowly started to bring more types of electronic music and the scene started to grow. But we were still very unhappy because we never had our own Georgian artists and producers. Our main goal was to develop producers.” (Participant J)
“In 2002, we also released a compilation with 10 new artists and wanted to bring it to an influent label in Germany. International platforms finally heard that Georgian electronic music existed.” (Participant J)

“After two years the first big club moved to Batumi. After 4-5 years we noticed that we had more and more artists, and more clubs that opened independently. However, most clubs would not survive.” (Participant J)

“Starting 2010, it started to establish. With clubs like Club D, artists grow, production grows, different media were used. People were not only musicians, they were artists.” (Participant J)

“The big switch happened when Club A, Club B, Club C appeared, in 2014/2015. The development was very interesting. They started to look for unusual surroundings clubs and to focus more on the sound quality itself. The first big club was upscale. Club A and the new generation clubs got more affordable, with a very special vision on how to attract people, by keeping it secret and closed, resembling an underground culture development.” (Participant J)

“3-4 years ago, these clubs started to invest into the development of their own artists, their resident artists, which was a big step. The clubs would support Georgian artists going abroad, with media connections with influential platforms. Lots of platforms got interested, especially after the events of May 12th. The club scene started to represent the social issues of the country. The connections with the progressive young political movement, who were fighting for decriminalizing drugs and supporting workers. The whole electronic music scene went social. These events and movements mean a lot to the western world. The slogan “We dance together. We fight together” is very appealing and very sympathetic for the global supporters of the scene. It has been a very complicated situation but the outcome for the Georgian scene was very good,

on a pragmatic perspective. The power of the pictures was there. The events had an enormous role to bring our scene outside, to reach foreigners from all around the world.” (Participant J)

“Tbilisi and Georgia are also the place for people from not so democratic countries to have a chance to come and spend time with other youngsters. Some nearby countries, like Iran, do not have clubs. Many people come here on the weekend. It is an island of freedom in a very complicated region. You rarely see this around the world. The situation is very unlucky and complicated, but country-wise we represent ourselves in a very good way, as very progressive.” (Participant J)

“I am the middleman between night time businesses and the government. The goal is to develop Tbilisi and Georgia culturally, socially and economically. We are policy makers, nightlife managers and help to ameliorate the communication with the citizens and especially stakeholders of the night time economy. That means whatever happens between 20pm and 8pm.” (Participant J)

“Tourism development is a goal, as we founded the International Night Time Economy Forum with guests from Amsterdam, Berlin, Paris, etc.” (Participant J)

“Tbilisi needs to find its own spice. The bigger goal is to create new jobs and employ young people through the creation of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs). But also, to build around the already existing infrastructure and create the ecosystem around the nightlife.” (Participant J)

“Most clubs are in old building with prehistory, this attracts people. It also helps to decentralize the city and avoid noise pollution problems. It empowers neighborhoods and refurbishes buildings.” (Participant J)

“On my social media feeds, I see new clubs, bars and events opening every day. So many new tourists are arriving, it is very good economically. There is not a day without a music event.” (Participant B)

“the hostel and hub have so many travelers. But also, a huge number of Georgians come here, it is really a mix of international tourists and the city’s inhabitants. Honestly, the income is very good.” (Participant A)

“Tbilisi is not even that cheap anymore. It is slowly getting expensive, people understood they can make money out of night life and cultural trends, especially considering the hype around Tbilisi.” (Participant F)

“Club culture became a huge business, maybe a bit too much money-driven. The economic aspect of night life and clubs is obvious here. Youth and tourists spend a lot of money.” (Participant F)

“Night time economy is very successful financially.” (Participant D)

“The success of LGBTQ community nights in clubs can also be considered an economic initiative. They were just a very interesting market to target and are very loyal customers.” (Participant H)

“Underground culture is weirdly very good economically. For awareness, night life is a great tool, it really attracts tourists. Thanks to our clubs, now we are no longer mistaken with Georgia in the United States of America.” (Participant C)

“Georgia is now a country of events, clubs, festivals, producers, DJs and underground lifestyle.” (Participant B)

“Club A impacted the electronic music world, but even more, it impacted locally.” (Participant F)

“Club A reached a higher level with the social phenomenon.” (Participant G)

“I think Club A I is a worldwide brand.” (Participant E)

“Club A and Club B are doing a huge work for the process of branding Tbilisi as the new best techno-clubbing destination.” (Participant C)

“Georgia’s clubbing scene became part of the country brand. However, it was not part of the government strategy, it was a commercial and cultural initiative, a grassroots process. It was a lucky coincidence that occurred thanks to very good entrepreneurs.” (Participant H)

“The branding was all natural, not a classic top down approach. Those creators had excellent taste, perfect understanding of the global trends and of what Georgians wanted. They had a vision and used good timing.” (Participant H)

“Tbilisi is getting rebranded as a hipster hangout destination.” (Participant H)

“Georgia as a brand has been very mixed and broadly branded, like if there is many things to show, but no real focus.” (Participant A)

“The government should figure out the current highlights, what sells us, what makes us proud.” (Participant A)

“There is a need for better and more focused branding.” (Participant C)

“In terms of branding, Tbilisi got positioned internationally very recently and very spontaneously, as this new location somewhere at the Black Sea, in between Turkey and Russia, where people are dancing, having fun, but also fighting.” (Participant J)

“We never promoted Tbilisi, we always promoted Georgia on famous international TV channels, very classical channels and means of communication.” (Participant J)

“Now we are working on creating a department of tourism just for Tbilisi, Tbilisi must be branded. We can create millions of new stories for Tbilisi.” (Participant J)

“Tbilisi unites, it is a place where young people from all around the world can meet each other. Azeris and Armenians can only meet in Tbilisi. Tbilisi is really the hub of this region, the freest space. It unites different cultural genres, medias, platforms, festivals, the creative industry is very strong.” (Participant J)

“Even gastronomy, in Georgia the food is a mix of European and oriental, which is a unique crossroad.” (Participant J)

“Club A wanted to be a local popular club, but the worldwide recognition was accidental and unplanned. Thanks to the internet era.” (Participant E)

“When Club A changed location in 2016, the quality skyrocketed to a new level. It was so immersed, so convincing, the lights, everything was perfect! They really bet on quality artists and parties.” (Participant E)

“After a year or two, we thought the popularity would decrease. But we were wrong, it just got more and more popular!” (Participant E)

“They reach quality levels that were never reached before in Georgia. They have international quality. Really the quality is just too good!” (Participant E)

“Other clubs just seem less good compared to Club A.” (Participant E)

“The thing with Club A or Club B is the outstanding quality. No one can take that from them. Everyone can appreciate a night out there because it is just perfectly arranged. The quality is unreal.” (Participant I)

“Quality is high.” (Participant F)

“Clubs, events and festivals are shaping the new image of Georgia.” (Participant G)

“The newly fresh image of Georgia is also very important for the government.” (Participant G)

“Georgia is a package of churches, mountains, gastronomy, ski, wine, alternative music and a lot more.” (Participant A)

“The image of Georgia remains in its ancient culture, that is undeniably unique and incredibly rich. The combination of that ancient heritage with the new trendy modernism creates some special and very appreciated vibe in the country and its capital.” (Participant I)

“The classical image of Georgia is very archaic; it shows traditional symbols and old legends! The focus has always been heritage: mountains, churches, food and wine.” (Participant J)

“Music is the most important aspect of our country today. And the combination of trendy music with the heritage and nature is the image we should have.” (Participant B)

“A certain pride developed of not only being a mountain and food country, but also a good clubbing place.” (Participant H)

“Mountains and music connect very well. The link between mountain tourism and events is obvious.” (Participant C)

“International events with great line-ups have a really good impact on the awareness creation. Those events have good connections with media and give exposure to Georgia” (Participant B)

“Club A is a worldwide brand.” (Participant E)

“Internet played an important role for the world’s and locals’ awareness. Most people discover our scene through internet.” (Participant C)

“We were just used to promote Georgia on international popular medias... it was a very classic awareness strategy.” (Participant J)

“Millions of people were watching the protests live on social media and sharing the information.” (Participant E)

“Some people go to Club A every weekend since the opening of the club, four years ago. Most club goers in Tbilisi are regulars. Anyone who wants to be fashionable goes out once a week.” (Participant E)

“The clubbing community of Tbilisi is mainly constituted of loyal customers, making it very benefic economically.” (Participant H)

“Club A has mostly regular customers.” (Participant C)

“Tourists would never know the insiders’ perspectives, such as the internal fight between Club A and Club B.” (Participant F)

“For people around the world, Tbilisi has great clubs, line-ups, bars, vibes, hostels, where everything is good quality and cheap. They do not completely understand how this movement is born, where it comes from and how painful the past was.” (Participant F)

“Some tourists do not even know about the situation and relation with Russia.” (Participant F)